
Vol. : XXXVII No. 24

ISSN 0254-7996

Fortnightly Publication of South Asian Press Clippings

Selections From Regional Press

Coverage : **December 16 – 31, 2021**

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Review

- India is seeking to increase its diplomatic presence across the globe that would eventually be transformed into political, economic and security domains. The foremost challenge in this regard is to ensure the balancing between the US and Russia. Putin's visit to India in December 2021 might have contributed to the Indian balancing strategy, however, as the tensions with China are still in place, India might find it difficult to side with both the US and Russia as Russo-Chinese ties are bolstering while Sino-US relations have been witnessing the sharp dip. Furthermore, as India is making inroads in the Middle East, its partnership with UAE is being consolidated as PM Modi is set to visit the country in January 2022. The activation in the bilateral ties is the result of a new informal alliance between the US, Israel, UAE and India, which is termed as "Middle Eastern Quad".
- Sino-US relations have witnessed the new friction as the US has imposed sanctions on numerous Chinese institutions and items, hence, further intensifying the trade war between the two countries. This development is the outcome of the US bill related to Xianjiang and Uygher Community which reflects the US stance of human rights violations and forced labour. While completely rejecting the US claims and legislation, China termed the US as an interferer in the internal affairs of China.
- Iran has responded to the anti-Iran UN Resolution on Human Rights, submitted by Canada by arguing that the western models are not universal. It was in response to the western apprehensions about the capital punishment in Iran. In another multilateral arrangement, a senior MP has spoken to the public by saying the negotiations on lifting up of sanctions have been complicated by a number of factors. He argued that Central Bank of Iran is a non-militarized entity but it is put under the anti-terrorism sanctions list of the US and hence, it makes the matter more complicated in coming to the joint conclusion.
- Pakistan's outreach to the western capitals have been increasing as with Germany, Pakistan has signed the 13.5 million euro project for the Phase I of Billion Tree initiative. Furthermore, while speaking to the UK-Pakistan Business Council, the British MP, Anum Qaiser, has expressed the interest in increasing Pak-UK bilateral trade to 10 billion pounds from the current 3 billion pounds. Lastly, Pakistan has also signed a MoU with Argentina, hence, further consolidating the ties between the two countries. It is noteworthy that Argentina had supported Pakistan during the 1971 War with India.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 24-12-2021

In 2021, India Did a US-Russia Rebalance as China Remained Brazen and Afghanistan Collapsed

MAHA SIDDIQUI

Tackling China in Eastern Ladakh was the biggest immediate concern with which India stepped into 2021. The friction was over six months old by then. India had warned Beijing of an adverse impact on the overall bilateral relations due to the ongoing tension. Eight rounds of Corps commander-level talks and almost an equal number of diplomatic-level talks had taken place by the end of 2020 but to no avail.

The first breakthrough came in February 2021. Out of the over five friction points, the two sides agreed to disengage at Pangong Lake. In his statement in Parliament, defence minister Rajnath Singh said, “Disengagement in the Pangong lake area envisages that both sides will cease their forward deployments in a phased, coordinated and verified manner... These are mutual and reciprocal steps and any structures that had been built by both sides since April 2020 in both the North and South Bank area will be removed and the landforms will be restored.”

However, this development did not ensure a swift follow-up on other friction points. The build-up of troops on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) remained and there were no signs of de-escalation. With a stubborn China indicating that it would brazen it out, the first-ever QUAD summit, though virtual, came as a welcome counter for India.

The-then new US President Joe Biden, who too wanted to keep the pressure on China like his predecessor Donald Trump, not only ensured the first summit in March but also a follow-up with an in-person meet in Washington DC in September.

However, between the two summits came the announcement of a military alliance AUKUS between the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and Australia and the chaos and collapse of Afghanistan with the military pull-out by America.

It is these two events, and largely the latter, that made India once again bring back its focus on the relationship with its old and trusted ally, Russia.

First, let’s break down the role of AUKUS in the possible strategic rebalancing. In a surprise announcement on September 15, the White House said that as part of the effort to maintain security and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, “we are announcing the creation of an enhanced trilateral security partnership called ‘AUKUS’ — Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.”

In a move that greatly miffed France, the White House read-out also added, “We will leverage expertise from the United States and the United Kingdom, building on the two countries’ submarine programs to bring an Australian capability into service at the earliest achievable date.” The announcement of Australia getting nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS meant that the France-Australia diesel-electric sub deal fell through. This sparked a parallel diplomatic stand-off with French President Emmanuel Macron deciding to ask the American and Australian envoys to leave.

For India too, the announcement came as a bit of a surprise – and it was mostly the timing – barely a week before the first in-person QUAD meeting. As a result, questions were raised about whether it diluted the QUAD. India dismissed these observations with foreign secretary Harshvardhan Shringla explaining that “QUAD and the AUKUS are not groupings of a similar nature”.

He said the QUAD has adopted a positive proactive agenda. “This includes dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, including the supply of vaccines to the Indo-Pacific region, it includes working on new and emerging technologies, it includes working on issues like climate change, infrastructure, maritime security, education, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.” On the other hand, he added that the AUKUS was a security alliance between three countries. As per the ministry of external affairs, from India’s perspective it was neither relevant to the QUAD nor will it have any impact on its functioning.

The analysis by experts was also split. Some were of the clear view that the QUAD was undermined with the announcement of AUKUS, leaving it toothless in countering China. Others believed that it would help India as it need not be part of a military alliance against China that would irk Beijing further. However, the emergence of AUKUS certainly put a question mark on how proactively India would be supported in countering China henceforth.

Secondly, the fall of Kabul and the rise of the Taliban as the US left in a hurry most certainly forced India to up its engagement with Russia in 2021. As former US President Donald Trump started to press for an exit from Afghanistan, India had been conveying to the United States the possible security fallout in the region of any such move. However, America was actively negotiating a deal through Pakistan with the Taliban. This culminated in President Biden setting a date for America's swansong in Afghanistan as August 31.

While all sides continued to believe that the Afghanistan government wouldn't fall, the rapid pace of the Taliban takeover proved everyone wrong. It came as bad news for India since it had been unable to establish any top-level communication with the Taliban yet. Within days, it appeared, India's \$3 billion investment in the country over the last two decades was reduced to nothing. Moreover, an emerging Pakistan stranglehold over the Taliban government has India worried.

Here's where old ally Russia, which had been in touch with the Taliban but also wary of a security fallout in the region, came into play. The Russian NSA travelled to India twice over a period of two months. Nikolai Patrushev travelled to India to meet his counterpart Ajit Doval in early September. He came again in November to attend the Regional Security Dialogue hosted by India in which the crucial central Asian countries too participated.

Capping this off was a short but very significant visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin himself. Putin travelled to India for precisely six hours but this was his only visit abroad in the last year and a half since the pandemic broke out. The only other time he left Russia was for a meeting with US President Joe Biden in Geneva.

President Putin himself mentioned in his opening statement that he was concerned about terrorism and drug trafficking, including in the context of the situation in Afghanistan. The foreign secretary said, "They decided to continue close consultation and coordination between India and Russia on the situation in Afghanistan, including for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan with an inclusive government that represents all sections of society. Both sides were also very clear that Afghanistan territory should not be used for sheltering training or planning, financing any acts of terrorism."

However, the thrust of the visit seemed to be on defence equipment sales. Despite the threat of the US imposing CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), India has stood by its S-400 missile defence system deal with Russia. The first of the deliveries has started. By sealing more deals like the manufacture of six lakh AK-203 assault rifles with technology transfer from Russia over ten years, India has sent a two-pronged message to another strategic partner, the US, as well. Not only will it maintain sovereignty over defence purchases but will continue to balance relations between old friends and new.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 28-12-2021

Modi to visit UAE in Jan to bolster bilateral ties: Officials

India and the UAE will be commemorating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties next year, and the visit is expected to focus on both deepening cooperation and looking for new areas for collaboration, the above-mentioned people said.

By HT Correspondent, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to make his first foreign visit in 2022 to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in early January to chart a course to take forward the burgeoning relations between the two countries, people familiar with the matter said on Monday.

India and the UAE will be commemorating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties next year, and the visit is expected to focus on both deepening cooperation and looking for new areas for collaboration, the above-mentioned people said. Several agreements in different areas are likely to be signed during the visit.

The dates for what is anticipated to be a brief visit are yet to be finalised by the two countries, though it is expected that the prime minister could travel to the UAE around January 6, the people said. Modi is also expected to visit the India Pavilion at the Dubai Expo, which has attracted more than 604,000 visitors in nearly three months.

The pavilion has showcased the Indian start-up ecosystem through initiatives such as "Elevate", which displays unconventional solutions created by 500 Indian start-ups, and also highlighted investment opportunities in sectors such as new and renewable

energy, space, urban and rural development, oil and gas, textiles and education.

India and the UAE are also engaged in negotiations for a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) and are hoping to complete the talks by March next year. The issue is expected to figure during the prime minister's visit, the people said.

The strong bilateral ties between India and UAE got a boost when Modi visited the Emirates in August 2015, marking the beginning of a new strategic partnership between the two sides. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and deputy supreme commander of the UAE armed forces, was the chief guest at the Republic day celebrations in January 2017.

India and the UAE are also now part of a new grouping, which includes the US and Israel and is working on economic and business collaboration. The foreign ministers of the four countries are expected to hold their first in-person meeting in March to take forward an agenda focused on economic and infrastructure projects.

The UAE is home to more than three million Indians who are a key source of remittances. India has been pushing countries in West Asia to facilitate the return of Indian workers who had come home at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Defence and security ties between India and the UAE have also grown in recent years. The Indian Army chief, Gen MM Naravane, made the first-ever visit by an army chief to the UAE in December last year, followed by Indian Air Force chief, Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria, who visited the emirates in July this year.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 18-12-2021

U.S. attempt to use Xinjiang to contain China will never succeed: spokesperson

BEIJING, Dec. 17 (Xinhua) – The United States has reached a point of hysteria in suppressing Chinese institutions and enterprises but its attempt to use Xinjiang to contain China will never succeed, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said Friday.

Spokesperson Wang Wenbin made the remarks when answering a query concerning the recent U.S. sanctions against several Chinese firms over alleged human rights violations and the passing of a bill by U.S. Senate banning imports from Xinjiang.

Wang said the U.S. has wantonly suppressed Chinese institutions and enterprises by overstretching the concept of national security and abusing export control measures under various excuses.

"The U.S. has reached a point of hysteria and would not stop at nothing to do so," Wang said.

U.S. actions have seriously undermined the principles of the market economy and international economic and trade rules, and harmed the interests of Chinese institutions and enterprises, the spokesperson said.

"China deplores and rejects this," Wang said.

"We urge the U.S. side to immediately correct its mistake. China will take all necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese institutions and companies," he added.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 19-12-2021

China urges U.S. to stop bullying with anti-China economic, trade sanctions

BEIJING, Dec. 18 (Xinhua) – China strongly protests and firmly opposes the bullying of the United States, and urges the U.S. side to immediately stop its wrong practices, said a spokesperson with the Ministry of Commerce (MOC).

The spokesperson made the remarks in response to a media query on the recent series of U.S. economic and trade sanctions against China, including putting a number of Chinese institutions and companies on "entity list" and passing a Xinjiang-related bill to ban imports from the region.

Under the guise of so-called "human rights" and fabricated reasons without any factual basis, the United States has repeatedly abused export control and investment restrictions and prohibited Xinjiang-related imports to continuously suppress relevant Chinese entities, imposing restrictions on normal economic and trade cooperation between enterprises of the two countries, said the MOC spokesperson.

Such political manipulation by the United States undermines market principles, violates WTO rules and economic regulations, and damages the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies as well as the interests of U.S. companies and investors, said the spokesperson, adding that such actions are not conducive to the stability of global industrial and supply chains and world economic recovery.

The United States has also imposed sanctions on Chinese medical research institutions, ignoring the spirit of science and violating humanitarian principles and the common values of humankind.

The spokesperson called on the United States to stop meddling in the normal economic and trade cooperation between Chinese and U.S. enterprises, stop infringing on the rights to subsistence and development of people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang and return to the right track of win-win cooperation.

The spokesperson warned that China will take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and security and the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 25-12-2021

‘Mind your own forced labor problem’:

Xinjiang regional govt refutes

US Uygur bill

By Fan Lingzhi

China's Xinjiang regional government on Saturday called the US signing of the so-called Uygur forced labor prevention act as an open interference in China's internal affairs with a purpose to contain China. The regional government also said it shows the US bullying logic and revival of a Cold War mentality.

Xu Guixiang, the Xinjiang regional government spokesperson, made the remarks at a press conference held on Saturday in Beijing, which came closely after US President Joe Biden signed a legislation which bans products made in China's Xinjiang, citing "oppression" of the Uygurs and other minorities.

On Friday, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress also said that China will take firm and strong countermeasures if the US insists on acting arbitrarily.

Xu told the media that the US bill seriously distorted the actual situation in Xinjiang. The region has been earnestly implementing relevant laws in the region and strictly forbid any forced labor.

Xinjiang upholds the concept of enabling the people to lead a better life, and earnestly respects and protects the legitimate rights and interests of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Xinjiang firmly opposes any form of ethnic discrimination and strictly prohibits any form of forced labor, ensuring that people of all ethnic groups work decently, the spokesperson said. The so-called Uygur forced labor prevention act seriously violated the international laws and norms of international relations. Based on Forced Labour Convention, Xinjiang does not have the "forced labor" problem. This is a typical "long-arm jurisdiction". Their devil's claws stretched too long and has gone beyond the scope of the law to become a kind of political manipulation and a parody, Xu added.

According to Xu, since the end of 2018, the region has received visits by official delegation from the UN, envoys from Africa, Latin America and Arab States as well as foreign religious organizations, scholars and internet influencers from more than 100 countries and regions. They have seen the labor situation in Xinjiang with their own eyes, and they spoke highly of the regional labor policy.

The US is pointing fingers at Xinjiang labor affairs based on false information, rumor and lies, using holding ideological bias, which is unjust and irresponsible, Xu criticized.

In fact, the US itself has the centuries of histories of trafficking, abusing and discrimination against slaves, the Xinjiang official pointed out.

Xu listed at the Saturday event that from receiving the first batch of slaves in 1619 to 1865, the southern plantations of the American continent became the main place where blacks and other minorities became forced labor. In order to ensure a sufficient labor force, even during the prohibition of the international slave trade from 1783 to 1808, American traders still used various means to transport about 170,000 slaves to the US. This figure was one third of the total number of slaves imported to North America since 1619.

"It can be said that forced labor is a stain that will never be erased from the American history. The US, which started from the bloody slave trade, is still a country of

modern slavery, and the issue of forced labor in the US cannot be denied," Xu said.

Xu concluded that the so-called US Uygur bill will not affect the development of Xinjiang, but it just exposes the US' malicious intent of using fake human rights to secure true hegemony.

The US might as well mind its domestic forced labor problems and formulate a Native American forced labor prevention act, as the American history is filled with the expulsion, slaughtering and forced assimilation of the Native American people, who have become a "disappearing ethnicity," Xu noted, while urging the US to reflect on its own problems.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 25-12-2021

Xinjiang products 'out of stock' shows brand in dilemma amid US govt coercion

By GT Staff Reporters

Angry Chinese customers have vowed to suspend their membership cards after they found that US retailer giant Walmart has removed Xinjiang-produced commodities from its Sam's Club, the high-end membership stores of Walmart.

Their anger comes after US chip giant Intel apologized for a high-profile statement to boycott products from Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and US President Joe Biden on Thursday signed a bill banning goods from Xinjiang, citing so-called forced labor.

"Why have you taken Xinjiang products off the shelves?" Netizens asked under the official Sina Weibo account of Sam's Club, after they found that Xinjiang products, mostly fruits, became unavailable online.

The Global Times searched for products related to Xinjiang in Sam's app and found although there were entries displayed, the search results were empty. Some typical Xinjiang products such as dates, cantaloupes and apricots are still available, but they are not produced in Xinjiang.

For example, the first result of dates is made in Shenzhen, South China's Guangdong Province, and black raisins in Langfang, North China's Hebei Province.

A similar phenomenon could be seen at Walmart supermarket's online store.

The move triggered backlash from netizens, and some said that they will terminate their membership cards for Sam's Club. Some commented that, "if you have business in China, then you should follow China's rules, or get out of China."

The hashtag "#Sam's Club, Xinjiang" has been high on the most searched terms list on Friday, with the number of searches hitting more than 1.7 million times.

Global Times reporters found cantaloupes at a Sam's Club in Beijing but they are originated from South China's Hainan Province, and there are no Xinjiang dates. A shop assistant said that Xinjiang jujube have been "out of stock" recently. When asked why users cannot find Xinjiang products, an online customer service agent of Sam's Club told the Global Times that, "the delisting of goods is arranged according to our inventory, and we have many other similar products for choosing." When asked if it is out of stock, the answer was, "here is what can't be found."

The Global Times found there were still some cantaloupes from Xinjiang in a Walmart supermarket in Beijing's Haidian district, no Xinjiang dates or raisins were sold.

Walmart's Xinjiang raisins have not been on the shelves since May, nor have they been restocked, according to a salesperson in the Haidian store, and they did not know why, nor did they know exactly when the goods would be replenished. The employee said that, "this is the responsibility of Walmart's procurement sector."

Sources told the Global Times that Sam's Club has stopped selling Xinjiang products in the last two days.

A spokesperson from supermarket chain Carrefour told the Global Times on Friday that "It only takes three or four days from ordering Xinjiang goods to putting them on the shelves of supermarkets in Beijing and Shanghai."

Carrefour sells a wide range of Xinjiang products, including bergamot pears, walnuts, jujubes, apples, and textile products made from Xinjiang cotton. The spokesperson said the company has set up a direct sourcing base in Xinjiang to bring convenience for such purchases.

Products from Xinjiang such as prunes, apples, cantaloupes and bergamot pears are very popular, and they account for "a considerable amount" of the supermarket chain's business of fresh fruits.

The spokesperson said that Xinjiang paper-skinned walnuts accounted for 52 percent of Carrefour walnut sales, Xinjiang dates accounted for 93.5 percent of its total sales, and all its raisins are produced in Xinjiang.

"The portion is almost the same for the retailing industry," the person said.

Although Walmart China's expansion slows after a pandemic-led boom, Sam's Club's business in China has grown rapidly — the number of new members in the second quarter of 2021 more than doubled the same period last year, according to Walmart's financial reports. The brand anticipated there will be 40-45 stores nationwide either operational or under construction by the end of 2022.

Analysts said thousands of US companies are now kidnapped by Washington's political aim and ideological confrontation with China, and have to face a dilemma: show a political gesture by complying with the bill, or risk angering and losing 1.4-billion Chinese consumers.

"US firms are all aware that this is a complete political agenda and has nothing to do with economic issues," Wang Jun, chief economist with Zhongyuan Bank, told the Global Times.

But analysts cautioned that US firms need to think twice before making a clear public stance, given how Intel's "Xinjiang stance" enraged Chinese people and led to widespread calls of boycott against the US firm.

Walmart entered China in 1996 and opened its first store in Shenzhen. So far, it has opened more than 400 supermarkets and more than 20 distribution centers in over 100 cities across the country.

IRAN NEWS, TEHRAN 18-12-2021

Tehran Criticizes UN for Anti-Iran Human Rights Resolution

TEHRAN (Iran News) – Iran's Deputy Head of Judiciary for International Affairs says the UN adopts an anti-Iranian resolution submitted by Canada. At the same time, more than 400,000 Iranians have been

barred from consular services by Ottawa due to political issues.

Attending a press conference on Thursday, Kazem Gharibabadi referred to recent resolution the UN issued against Iran and said that the U.S. has acknowledged that it has imposed the most unprecedented sanctions against the Iranians, but the UN resolution shows no trace of the condemnation of the very unilateral and illegal sanctions:

"Are human rights just concerned with the rights of a few prisoners, who are protected by Western countries, for crimes against their own people or their own country? Aren't the rights of millions of Iranians the very human rights, being violated as a result of unilateral sanctions, lack of medicine, medical equipment and other things?"

Gharibabadi continued: "In the region, there are some countries that know nothing about democracy and elections, but they are fully cooperating with these ostensibly Western human rights advocates and are given impunity against any criticism, resolution or reporting mechanism."

He said that because of the political approaches to human rights and exclusivism in the Human Rights Council and other international human rights mechanisms, it is not allowed to file a case or report or issue a human rights resolution against the very regional countries.

Gharibabadi continued: "We believe that even if we do not have international obligations, we are obliged to protect the rights of the people because of the country's regulations and religious and Islamic requirements."

Stating that the principles of the recent resolution were far from the existing facts, he said that the resolution criticizes the volume of executions in Iran, it should be noted that the issue of banning the death penalty was a Western phenomenon:

"If the death penalty is abolished in Western law, should it be extended to all countries and become a universal standard? At least 55 countries still retain the death penalty in their laws. The fact that Western countries are pursuing the universality of their standards is not human rights."

Statistics published by Westerners through their press and human rights NGOs also indicated that the death

penalty in Iran had been significantly reduced, but the fact was not highlighted.

The top Iranian Human Rights official referred to the medicines embargo on children with EB and asked:

“EB children in Iran, who have difficulty accessing the medicines needed and lose their lives due to lack of access to medicine, do have any rights? Why are there no statements issued in support of these children?! For one thing, they launch wide-ranging international propaganda against Iran, but they remain silent to kill thousands of children, both in Iran and in other countries.”

Gharibabadi referred to the false claim of the recent resolution on the torture of detainees in Iran and stated the prohibition of torture is constitutional in Iran.

“There is a convention called the Convention against Torture to which we are not a party, but our laws are much more sublime in this regard than the convention, and there are few countries that have provided the prohibition of torture in their constitution.”

He stressed Iran always demanded everyone who claims to be tortured should refer to the relevant judicial authorities and the human rights headquarters so that they would follow up the issue seriously, but the so-called UN special rapporteur has not yet provided Iran with any evidence to substantiate his claims about torturing prisoners in the country.

He said that the new resolution is not based on facts but on purely politicizations, adding that Iran would continue its activities to promote human rights and would not be influenced by other countries’ political actions and mechanisms.

“We will boast these political and dual-standards approaches to human rights advocates and recall to them that human rights are not a political issue in the service of their dual standards that they want to use as a tool against some countries, and in some cases, other countries are forced to remain silent to the violation of the rights of their people,” the Deputy

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 19-12-2021

Senior MP elaborates on some aspects of Vienna talks

TEHRAN — Speaking on a live TV program on Friday night, head of the National Security and Foreign Policy

Committee of the Iranian Parliament touched on many issues, including the Vienna talks.

Vahid Jalalzadeh said one of the issues that were raised by the Europeans in the new round of negotiations in Vienna was the previous six rounds of talks that were conducted between April and June.

“First of all, we do not believe in the previous six rounds of the Vienna talks. These talks are a new negotiation. Why? Because the new government has a new instruction,” he said.

He added that the Europeans insisted on starting the negotiations from where it was left off in June and just discuss the remaining parentheses.

“The parentheses are where either we or the 4+1 had concerns. They told us not to deal with other cases. In other words, in the previous negotiations, we accepted things that the new government does not accept now, and even contradict the parliament’s law on Strategic Action and Lifting of the Sanctions,” he noted.

The senior MP then went on to explain that Iran presented three lists: One was the “red” list that Iran said these cannot be negotiated. The next one was a middle list that Iran labeled as “yellow” and could be negotiated in the sense that for example if the 4+1 won’t accept the paragraph 2 of the yellow list, Iran would not accept paragraph 4 as well in response to this request or demand. The next one was a “white” list that Iran said could be bargained over if it is very good and beneficial, if not, we will not fight over these issues.

He then elaborated, “For example, according to [United Nations Security Council] Resolution 2231, the conventional arms embargo should have been lifted around December last year. The Americans do not accept this.”

Jalalzadeh said on the American red list 1,500 sanctions remain on individuals and legal entities and this is a “political scam” by the American side.

According to the MP, the previous American administration knew that the next government, if a Democrat, would want to return to the JCPOA, so they re-labeled some of the nuclear sanctions under “terrorism sanctions.”

“The new government says that the central bank is no longer nuclear, but it is in the terrorism sanctions list, so if you want to remove the central bank [from the list of sanctions], you have to negotiate on the terrorism

sanctions list as well. We have warned the negotiators the same thing before, that you know that Trump did the same thing and that it [the CBI] has nothing to do with terrorism and human rights, but they approved (it as an entity under terrorism list) and they do not let it go... Sometimes the European troika said that we finished 90, 95% of the work, look at the volume [of the work], what was the remaining 5%?"

New government wants to maximize JCPOA benefits

The senior MP said that the new Iranian government and the new delegation is seeking to use all the capacities to maximize the benefits of the 2015 nuclear deal.

"The new government's strategy is to maximize the benefits of the forthcoming negotiations; the other side has also received this message in full. When Mr. Amir Abdollahian went to the annual United Nations General Assembly in New York, the Americans had sent a message that we were ready - with the same lexis - to give you 15% more than before!" Jalazadeh said without giving further details.

He added that therefore, the Americans had requested that the secretary of state meet with his Iranian counterpart in the United States, but the request was turned down by Amir Abdollahian as he had neither instructions nor permission to negotiate directly with the U.S.

"So they received the message that the officials are united, so the main strategy is that we can serve the interests of the country in these negotiations," he noted.

He then referred to the fact the new negotiators may have initially opposed the JCPOA upon its signing, but now they are trying hard to reach an agreement on the basis of it.

"I myself have some concerns about the 2015 nuclear deal, but we are committed to what the government of Iran has accepted. The Leader of the Islamic Revolution extended nine requirements to the implementation of the nuclear pact when the JCPOA was signed. Take this into consideration that we are now negotiating on the JCPOA," he remarked.

He then expressed hope that the result of the new round of negotiations, which should not be protracted at all, are not "talks for talks" at all, as demanded by the

president from the negotiating team. He then added that other side is looking for the prolongation of the talks.

Bagheri negotiates on the basis of the JCPOA

Jalalzadeh also said that Iran's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani entered the negotiations despite all his objections to the JCPOA.

"[The JCPOA] is the format on which he [Bagheri Kani] goes forward and negotiates. So I think this is more of a psychological war from the other side (that Bagheri opposed the deal in the past). The foreign minister mentioned this point and some other people said that too. We also told Mr. Bagheri that this is just some words and this is a psychological war," he added.

He then went on to discuss the Leader's opinion, asking, "What did the Leader say? Lifting of sanctions, verification, and then, a full return of the Islamic Republic to its obligations. The issues we have with the Europeans, and especially with the Americans, are the second step: verification. They say that we will give you one day to verify us, the previous government wanted to agree on the one-day period."

The senior MP then criticized the "long day" proposal, saying that it is impossible to verify the sanctions-removal process in 48 hours.

"They say it is a 'long day'; but what does long day mean? They do not want to back down from one day, then they say, well, let's say a long day! We say long day means what they say, which is a 48-hour span. In 48 hours, can we receive a bank check, sell our oil, get the money, put it in a bank account, then turn it into a commodity and import it? They say about their own SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) system that the software you (Iran) have is old. They say the banking transactions and the SWIFT software training takes two months," he elaborated.

Jalalzadeh elaborated on Iran's response to the "long day" proposal, saying that the Leader rejected the premise.

"We said: do you think we are a child? The Leader says that the verification is not possible in short term. The Europeans were not faithful to their promise. What commitment has the Europeans made to the JCPOA? Even when Trump left, the Europeans sent us a quick message and told us not to get angry, as we will fulfill

all American commitments! Someone needs to fulfill the commitments of the Europeans!” he noted.

Later in the talk show, the senior MP explained about the IAEA surveillance cameras.

“The cameras installed based on the Additional Protocol (to the NPT) were recording offline, in the sense that they have memory cards and it was stored, but the [International Atomic Energy] Agency inspectors came to replace the memories, to put new ones,” he noted.

He added that the cameras are now recording, but the memories will not be given to the Agency.

“These are stored in our own storage units. Why does this happen? One reason was the one Mr. Grossi gave, and I thought it was rational, that if the negotiations came to an end and these cameras were cut off and not filmed, it would be an excuse for the enemies of Iran that these two, three, or six months, or even one year in which no recording was made, what happened in Iran's nuclear facilities?”

Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian announced on Wednesday that Iran has reached an agreement with the IAEA.

“Last night, we reached a good agreement with the Agency that could dispel some of the alleged concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear program and lead to continued mutual cooperation with the Agency,” Amir Abdollahian told the last day of the conference of the heads of Iranian diplomatic missions in neighboring and regional countries.

However, the foreign minister criticized the Agency for resorting to the technical issue to "affect the Vienna negotiations" on some occasions.

According to sources, the agreement that Iran and the IAEA have reached is to replace the cameras in the Tesa centrifuge assembly site near Karaj.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 27-12-2021

Artificial deadlines hamper progress at Vienna talks

TEHRAN – After a period of consultations in capitals, negotiators from Iran and the remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal are expected to gather in Vienna on Monday to resume talks on how to remove U.S. sanctions against Iran.

The latest round of talks was concluded more than a week ago with an agreement on some broad principles based on which the next round of the talks would proceed. The last round of talks faced many ups and downs due to Western refusal to take into consideration the change Iran had undergone in the past months in terms of the election of a new president.

The new negotiating team of Iran led by Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani went to Vienna with a set of new proposals on the nuclear and sanctions spheres. The team brought to Vienna many proposals and it managed to present the proposals in stages. Two of the proposals, one related to nuclear measures and the other on sanctions removal steps, were given to the other side.

While Iran underlined that its draft proposals are subject to negotiations, the U.S. and the E3 -France, Britain, and Germany – chose to portray Iran as an uncooperative and unserious negotiating partner. They even hinted at the failure of the talks based on a figment of their imagination.

On the other side, Iran underlined its seriousness to reach a good and swift deal. In a recent phone conversation with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stressed that a good deal is within reach. He said, “We believe that a good deal is at hand but it requires a shift by some parties away from the language of threat to the language of cooperation and mutual respect that would be also result-based.”

Amir Abdollahian further noted on Twitter that such a deal is at hand if the West shows goodwill.

While Iran has conditioned making a good deal on Western goodwill, the Europeans and their American colleagues showed no interest in pursuing negotiations in good faith. Drawing on the Trump administration's playbook, they used everything in their power to use the Vienna talks as a “starting point” for further negotiations with Iran. In other words, the Western negotiators are not in Vienna to simply return to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Instead, they want to impose a really flawed version of the JCPOA on Iran while retaining large swaths of U.S. sanctions for follow-on negotiations. This aim runs counter to the terms of the JCPOA.

For instance, the U.S. has divided its sanctions on Iran into three main categories: red sanctions that are not subject to negotiations, yellow sanctions that are negotiable and ultimately green sanctions that are supposed to be lifted once the deal is revived.

In addition, the U.S. seeks to use the yellow sanctions to “strengthen and lengthen” the JCPOA.

Iran, however, has rejected this categorization, arguing that all the sanctions imposed on Iran since 2015 are primarily meant to scupper the JCPOA and thus inconsistent with the JCPOA. This is while the U.S. has sought to perpetuate some of its sanctions under the pretext that they are consistent with the deal.

In short, Iran seeks to revive the JCPOA and the U.S., together with the E3, wants to revisit the 2015 deal.

With the Vienna talks kicking in again, the U.S. and Europe sought to create a sense of urgency on the talks and set artificial deadlines in a bit to pressure Iran. Western diplomatic circles are now talking of an early-February deadline to conclude the talks.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has recently claimed that the window is closing to resuscitate the 2015 deal. “I’m not going to put a time limit on it or give you the number of meters remaining on the runway, except to say, yes, it is getting very, very, very short,” Blinken said.

U.S. special envoy for Iran Robert Malley set the time frame to save the JCPOA at “weeks.” Malley pointed that if the Iranians “continue at their current pace, we have some weeks left but not much more than that, at which point, I think, the conclusion will be that there’s no deal to be revived.”

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 18-12-2021

Pakistan, Germany ink agreement worth 13.5 million euros

Imran Ali Kundi

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and Germany on Friday have signed agreement worth 13.5 million euro for Billion Tree Afforestation Support Programme (Phase-1)

Ministry for Economic Affairs and KfW Development Bank of Germany signed financing agreement for Billion Tree Afforestation Support Program (Phase-1).

Mian Asad Hayaud Din, Secretary Economic Affairs Division, and Sebastian Jacobi, Country Director, KfW signed the agreement in Islamabad. Government of Germany, through the KfW Development Bank, will provide a grant of 13.5 million euros to the Government of Pakistan for the project. With the funds provided by the German government, KfW Development Bank will support the efforts of government of Pakistan to reduce the impacts of climate change by planting 10 billion trees, introducing best practices on native and invasive plant species, training on firefighting techniques and provision of equipment, and women/youth engagement and empowerment. The project will result in a clean and green environment through reduction in carbon emissions and also bring about socioeconomic benefits to local communities.

While addressing on the occasion, Sebastian Jacobi, Country Director KfW, stated that KfW is actively supporting the government of Pakistan in the energy and climate sector with an active portfolio of more than 300 million euros. KfW has provided funding for construction and rehabilitation of three hydropower projects, construction of power substations, installation of micro-hydel power plants, and also providing micro-financing for solarization of the homes in off-grid areas. These efforts will result in bringing sustainable and lasting positive impact in the lives of the deserving communities in the country and help mitigate the risks of climate change.

Mian Asad Hayaud Din, Secretary, Economic Affairs Division expressed gratitude to the government of Germany for supporting the flagship project of the government of Pakistan. He further highlighted that the government of Pakistan has set ambitious targets to mitigate the impact of climate change. In this regard, continued support of Germany is highly commendable. This investment will lead to a better and healthy future for the generations to come.

The government of Germany is also considering providing another 20 million euros for the next phase of the project. Together, these investments will, result in sustainable forest management by the government institutions and create jobs especially for women and youth. The signing of this agreement coincides with the celebrations for 60 years of development cooperation between the two countries.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 23-12-2021

Time to take stock of Pakistan-Argentina agreements, MoUs: Envoy

PR

KARACHI - It's time to take stock of multiple agreements and MoUs signed between the two countries, says the Ambassador of Argentina.

Leopoldo Francisco Sahores addressed a webinar organised by Karachi Council on Foreign Relations (KCFR) under the chairmanship of Ikram Sehgal. The envoy said that a number of agreements and MoUs have been signed between the two governments and it was time to take stock of them, saying that all those agreements and MoUs, especially in the field of trade and economy, to the benefit of the two peoples of Argentina and Pakistan need to be acted upon.

He reminded of Argentina's support at the UN, during Pak-India War in 1971 which finally brought in a cease fire under the auspices of UN. He also acknowledged and thanked Pakistan for Pakistan's support for the resolution for the negotiation between the Argentina and the United Kingdom. He added that this existing institutional framework of MoUs and agreements would prove successful only when it comes to its implementation; that we needed to increase people to people contacts especially to diversify the bilateral trade which has a lot of potential. He added that 70 years of diplomatic relations had been celebrated where the foreign minister was the chief guest. He said that trade between the two countries was negligible. Argentina is very competitive agriculture county and Pakistan though a huge agriculture player, yet depends heavily on food imports to meet the local demands which is a consequence of absolute machinery and technology and scarce use of biotechnology, storage efficiency and in this respect a joint venture is being launched between PASCO with a help of Argentina experts technology that will help reduce the loss and damages to the grains.

He also mentioned that foots and mouth disease is of great concern for the beef industry and hinders the dynamic development of export oriented sector in Pakistan too. Argentina was ready for cooperating in vaccination of the cows. He proposed setting up of Spanish language centers which is one of the UN's

official languages and the second largest native language spoken in the world. Replying to a question, he said that there was a need to establish bilateral trading forums for increasing the bilateral trade between the two countries. In respond to another question, he said that like Pakistan Argentina has also been negotiating with IMF and had overcome the difficult times when his country had defaulted over return of IMF loans. He was certain that both countries with concerted efforts will overcome their problems with IMF.

The webinar was concluded by KCFR's Chairman Ikram Sehgal. He thanked for participation by his excellency and Ms Naela Chohan and said that there were a lot of common things between the two countries as stated by both of them and there was a lot of needed to be done beyond MoUs in the fields of trade and economic affairs, culture and education, tourism. He liked his excellency's proposal to advance in different fields but especially in agriculture whereas Pakistan was the 5th largest milk producing country but still was not producing exportable cheese that is value addition and welcomed the proposal given by H.E. He added that while Pakistan and Argentina had cooperated in the fields of aviation Pakistan is also producing one of the best tanks in the world which is AL-KHALID tank.

The webinar was moderated by the CEO KCFR Commodore (R) Sadeed A. Malik.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 27-12-2021

Bilateral trade volume between Pak, UK will be increased to £10 billion: UK MP

Agencies

ISLAMABAD - Member Parliament House of Commons UK Anum Qaiser Sunday said that the United Kingdom wants to increase bilateral trade with Pakistan from existing £3 billion to £10 billion in order to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Talking to chairman UK-Pakistan Business Council (UPBC) Mian Kashif Ashfaq here, she said that improvement in bilateral trade and economic relations between the UK and Pakistan would bring progress and prosperity to both countries.

She said that about 5,000 UK companies were doing business in the UAE, but only 150 companies were in Pakistan despite the fact that Pakistan was a huge market of over 220 million people. Ms Anum emphasised that Pakistan should focus on addressing the issues of red tape and other bottlenecks along with ensuring a predictable and growth-oriented tax regime to attract more investors from the UK and other countries. She said that the UK was focusing on four areas for close cooperation with Pakistan which included healthcare, education, green energy and infrastructure.

She said that the UK could also cooperate with Pakistan in agriculture, manufacturing, pharmaceutical and other sectors to make its economy more competitive. She added that the UK would try to provide preferential access for Pakistani products to its market, which would further improve its exports.

Talking about export of fruits and vegetables to the UK, Ms Anum Qaiser said that Pakistani exporters should work on meeting UK standards to gain better penetration into its food market. She stressed that Pakistani companies should focus on better marketing of their products as insufficient focus in that area was keeping them away from promoting exports up to their real potential.

She said that the UK had issued advisories for its citizens to encourage them to visit Pakistan. She said that the British Deputy High Commissioner in Karachi Mike Nithavrianakis had also recently visited Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry and assured the ICCI that he would cooperate with its delegation in trip to the UK and in connecting them with the right partners. Honorary Consul General of the republic of Moldova Mian Mahmood Ul Hassan, eminent scholar Dr Waqar Ch visiting faculty School of Communication Studies Punjab University and traders from Manchester Muhammad Azam Khan, Shaharyar Khan, Asfund Yar Khan and Mehr Khan were also present on the occasion.

Mian Kashif Ashfaq welcomed her on visit to Pakistan and said that there was great potential for promoting bilateral trade between Pakistan and the UK for which better connectivity between private sectors of the two sides was needed.

He said that Pakistan under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan was expanding its industrial base through the development of Special Economic Zones and added that UK companies should explore joint venture and investment avenues in such facilities.

He was of the view that close cooperation between UK and Pakistani companies would help in producing value added products. Those Pakistani companies which were supplying A-grade products should be connected with British firms to enhance their exports, he said.

Mian Kashif Ashfaq who is also former Chairman Faisalabad Industrial Estate Development and Management Company (FIEDMC) cited agriculture, industry, IT, mining and tourism as potential areas of cooperation between Pakistan and the UK. He said that the UPBC would connect the British High Commission with P@SHA to shortlist at least 200 Pakistani companies which could provide software products and services to the UK. He added that UPBC would also try to connect local businesses with UK companies to bring their franchises to Pakistan. He said that many UK companies in Pakistan were doing better business as compared to some other countries and more should come to capitalise on the emerging business opportunities in Pakistani market.

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Review

- As India is heading towards the state assemblies' elections in Feb-March 2022, Uttar Pradesh – the largest Indian state – is becoming the hotbed for the contesting parties. Despite of the speculated alliance between the Samajwadi Party and the Congress, both have announced that they'll be contesting on all the seats, hence, leaving no space for each other. On the other hand, PM Modi has inaugurated Rs 36,250 crore expressway in UP. These developments where divide the votes of the opposition, give momentum to the ruling party i.e. BJP. However, Allahabad Court has ordered the UP election commission to review the conduct of the elections owing to the threat of Omicron variant. Furthermore, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) has increased to over 14 percent which is highest till 2012 and showed discrepancy as compared to retail prices. The inflation has multiplied the effects of Covid and lockdown.
- Union Parishad Elections in Bangladesh have consistently facing violence. The chairman candidate for the Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar upazila have been killed by three to four masked men. Previously as well, reports of violence have been reported throughout November. Apart from violence, the irregularities in favour of the Awami League's candidates have been witnessed as well. The nomination papers of Iftikhar Hossein for Chandipasha union in Mymensingh's Nandail upazila have been accepted after the submission deadline. It clearly indicates that political freedom in Bangladesh is getting squeezed and the level playing field is vanishing.
- Despite having the trade war with the US, China's trade with other global actors have been increasing. In this regard, Russia is of utmost importance. China has been the top trading partner of Russia for the past 12 years and in 2021, the bilateral trade between the two countries have touched the mark of \$140 billion annually. Apart from economics, China has also framed the national security law for Hong Kong under which the election reforms bill was ratified by the Chinese lawmakers. The Legislative Council Elections in Hong Kong were conducted under this bill to improve the governance structure in the city.
- Iran's trade with the neighbours and the EU states have been witnessing the steady rise. With respect to the Europe, Germany has stood out to be largest exporting partner of Iran followed by Italy, Netherlands and Belgium. Such boosting of commercial ties reflects the essentiality of Iran for Europe. Moreover, Iran is also focusing on diversifying its economy away from oil and in this regards, its non-oil trade with the neighbours accounted for \$33 billion in the first 10 months of 2021.
- PTI government of Pakistan has surpassed the previous governments of PMLN and PPP in passing the most number of legislations during its tenure so far. One of this legislation is related to the local body elections. Under the new framework, KPK local body elections were conducted in which the ruling party PTI faced defeat in the phase 1. Where it questions the repute of the party, on the other hand, the acceptance of defeat also reflects the positive trajectory in the local politics as previously, the defeated candidates or parties used to put the blame of their defeat onto the irregularities.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 18-12-2021

Samajwadi Party, allies will contest all 403 Uttar Pradesh assembly seats, including Amethi and Rae Bareilly: Akhilesh Yadav

All the alliances that the SP has announced so far were firmed up after working out the seat-sharing formula with the partners, the former CM said

By Pankaj Jaiswal

Lucknow: The Samajwadi Party (SP) and its allies will contest all 403 assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh, including Rae Bareilly and Amethi, thereby not leaving any seats for the Congress in its two pocket boroughs, SP president Akhilesh Yadav said on Friday.

The state assembly polls are due in February-March next year.

All the alliances that the SP has announced so far were firmed up after working out the seat-sharing formula with the partners, Yadav told reporters at the start of the seventh phase of his Vijay Yatra (political rath yatra for 2022 polls) in Rae Bareilly.

“The SP, with its allies, will contest all the 403 assembly seats in the state, including Rae Bareilly and Amethi. (We) will contest the elections at full throttle and form the next government in the state,” Yadav said.

Rae Bareilly is the Lok Sabha constituency of Congress president Sonia Gandhi while Rahul Gandhi had been winning the Amethi Lok Sabha seat since 2004 till Bharatiya Janata Party’s Smriti Irani wrested it from him in 2019.

“Out of respect and courtesy, the SP and Congress had been leaving seats for each other (for each other’s top family members) in Lok Sabha elections. But these are the Vidhan Sabha polls, and SP had always contested assembly elections with full force. The SP had registered big wins in the assembly polls in these constituencies also,” Yadav said.

UP Congress spokesperson Zeeshan Haider said his party was also not leaving any seats in SP pocket boroughs —Etawah, Mainpuri. “Who cares? It’s their party, whatever they decide. We are also contesting all 403 seats and we too are not leaving any seats in Etawah, Mainpuri,” Haider added.

When asked about the alliance with his uncle Shivpal Yadav’s Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party-Lohia (PSP-L) and seat-sharing, the former Uttar Pradesh chief

minister said: “Each alliance was announced only after deciding seat-sharing with the allies. Our endeavour was to bring regional parties together, and his (Shivpal’s) party too is a regional party. The alliance will get seats in their respective regions of influence.”

The SP had allied with the Congress for the 2017 state assembly polls and with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, but this time, it steered clear of any big parties. Instead, the SP has tied up with several small and regional parties such as Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), Janwadi Party (Socialist), Apna Dal (Krishna Patel) in eastern Uttar Pradesh, the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) in western UP and Mahan Dal in the Rohilkhand region of the state.

Yadav also attacked the BJP government, saying people faced “dikkat, killat, zillat (adversity, scarcity, humiliation)” under its rule.

He alleged the Yogi Adityanath government has taken Uttar Pradesh to top position in the country in “custodial deaths, hunger index and farmer suicides”.

Addressing the people from atop the campaign bus, Yadav said, “Those who claim to make Uttar Pradesh number one in the country have actually taken it to the top position in custodial deaths, hunger index, farmer suicides, in selling public enterprises and banks and in burying cows alive. Can anyone imagine that cows can be buried alive?”

Alleging there is no “ease of doing business” in Uttar Pradesh, the former CM said there is “ease of doing crime” instead.

“In which area is UP in the number one position? In UP, there is no ease of doing business but ease of doing crime. Look at the condition of roads. If you smash a coconut on a newly-built road for inauguration, the coconut won’t break, the road would,” he said.

“This government has totally failed. People will not rest till they throw out the double-engine government in UP,” Yadav added.

He also hinted at unemployment allowance being made part of the party’s manifesto for the upcoming assembly polls. “People should wait for the SP manifesto, which might also talk about unemployment allowance and employment opportunities,” said Yadav.

He added that if returned to power in Uttar Pradesh, his government would give honorarium to former panchayat representatives.

BJP leader Abhishek Pandey 'Rupak' rejected SP chief's "dikkat, killat, zillat" allegations, saying, "Akhilesh ji knows the 2022 UP campaign is over and that is why he is talking nonsense. There is little point in responding to a politician who talks of country divider Jinnah in the same breath as one who kept country united Sardar Patel, who first makes a shocking remark against PM and then clarifies, who doesn't think it proper to admonish his party MP for making a shockingly irresponsible statement on increasing age of women."

"This leader talks of Covid vaccine as BJP's vaccine. I would advise him to take the same vaccine now. As for dikkat, killat, zillat charge, that happened during the days when Yadav's government was in power," he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 19-12-2021

Ahead of UP polls, Modi lays ₹36k-cr expressway stone

Laying the foundation stone of the ₹36,250 crore Ganga Expressway in Shahjahanpur district, Modi paid tribute to freedom fighters and underlined the benefits of a "double-engine" government, a reference to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) being in power both at the Centre and in the state.

By Manish Chandra Pandey, Shahjahanpur

Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday for boosting development and eliminating crime as he accused political opponents for obstructionism months before the high-stakes elections in the state.

Laying the foundation stone of the ₹36,250 crore Ganga Expressway in Shahjahanpur district, Modi paid tribute to freedom fighters and underlined the benefits of a "double-engine" government, a reference to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) being in power both at the Centre and in the state.

"UP plus Yogi bahut hai upyogi (UP plus Yogi is very useful)," Modi said. Adityanath is hoping to steer the BJP to a second consecutive term in India's most politically important state.

Poor law and order triggered an exodus of people from the state earlier, but Adityanath cracked down on criminals and the mafia, Modi said. "In earlier days, as the sun set, people with katta (country-made pistols) used to roam the streets and make the lives of people hell," the Prime Minister said. "That culture of katta ended under the Adityanath government."

This is the second high-profile expressway project Modi has inaugurated in the poll-bound state in the past 30 days. When completed in 2024, the 594km expressway will be the state's longest, passing through 12 districts and connecting Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh to Prayagraj in the east.

A 3.5km air strip to assist emergency take-off and landing of planes will also be constructed on the expressway in Shahjahanpur. At least one industrial corridor is proposed to be built along it.

The expressway will usher in opportunities, employment and growth, Modi said, stressing on the importance of the double-engine BJP government. "The kind of energy and vision required to run a state as big as UP is being shown by this double-engine government," he said. "This project will not only bring east and west UP closer, but would also reduce travel time between Delhi and Bihar."

Modi attacked political opponents, who had a problem with the country's "virasat aur vikas (legacy and development)". "They had a problem with virasat due to vote bank concerns and with vikas to ensure that the poor remained dependent on them," he said.

"These people have a problem with the construction of a grand corridor of Baba Vishwanath in Kashi and with the construction of a grand temple of Lord Ram in Ayodhya," Modi said. "These people have a problem with the swachhta (cleanliness) campaign of Ganga and these are the ones who question the army's action against terrorists. They also put the corona vaccine developed by Indian scientists in the dock."

He told the audience that power supply in the state was earlier limited to a few districts but has improved since then. The state government has provided eight million free power connections, Modi said.

"Earlier, big-ticket projects were announced only on paper so that these people (opposition) could fill up their treasury. And now, they are being announced to save your money and time," the Prime Minister said.

“Today when bulldozers raze unauthorised properties of mafias, the pain is felt by those patronising them.”

The country’s resources belonged to the people and not “a handful of families”, Modi said, while talking of how his government had provided houses to three million people and set aside ₹2 trillion for the purpose.

He paid glowing tributes to freedom fighters Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan and Roshan Singh, who were born in Shahjahanpur. “Tomorrow is the martyrdom day of Pandit Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan and Thakur Roshan Singh. These three sons of Shahjahanpur, who challenged British rule, were hanged on December 19. We owe a huge debt to such heroes who laid down their lives for the country’s freedom,” he said, adding that a grand memorial for the freedom fighters will be built in Shahjahanpur.

Soon after the foundation stone laying event, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati said people should be wary of such announcements closer to the elections. “Now, nearer to the elections, despite five years of a double engine government, meaning 10 years in all, the Ganga Expressway has been inaugurated after bifurcating it in two phases. For long would people continue to be duped by such selfish politics? People need to exercise caution as it is important to do so during elections,” she said in a series of tweets.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav tweeted, “Hathras’ daughter, Lakhimpur farmers, Gorakhpur traders, unsafe women, unemployed youth, daily and backwards all are saying the present government is ‘unupyogi (useless)’ than ‘up-yogi’.”

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 25-12-2021

Decision on UP elections after review next week: CEC

“The Commission will visit Uttar Pradesh next week during which it will analyse the situation there followed by necessary actions on the same,” chief election commissioner Sushil Chandra said.

By HT Correspondent, Dehradun

The election commission would examine the Allahabad high court’s observation to postpone Uttar Pradesh assembly polls after analysing the situation in the state,

chief election commissioner of India Sushil Chandra said on Friday.

“The Commission will visit Uttar Pradesh next week during which it will analyse the situation there followed by necessary actions on the same,” Chandra said, while addressing a press conference here.

The Allahabad high court on Thursday urged the election commission to consider postponing the polls in Uttar Pradesh considering the increasing threat of Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19. In case the elections could not be postponed, the high court requested the poll body to stop political rallies, which witness large gatherings, and to direct the political parties to campaign through Doordarshan and print media instead.

Assembly elections in five states, including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Manipur and Goa, are scheduled for early next year.

Chandra, along with election commissioners Rajiv Kumar and Anoop Chandra Pandey, was in Uttarakhand for a two-day visit to review preparedness for the elections to 70-member legislative assembly.

The CEC, citing the Covid-19 precautions, said the commission has identified various grounds and buildings where the candidates could hold their election rallies.

“To ensure that social distancing is maintained in the rallies amid Covid-19 scare, the commission has identified 601 grounds and 277 buildings across Uttarakhand for holding rallies. Their details would soon be put online so that the candidates can book them as per their requirement,” Chandra said, adding the venues would be given on first come first serve basis.

Chandra also announced that the commission has decided to increase voting period by one hour in Uttarakhand, considering the difficult terrain in the hill state.

“Under a move which would be commenced from Uttarakhand, the ECI has decided to increase the voting period by one hour due to the difficult terrain in many areas of the state posing difficulty for the voters to reach the polling booths. Under this the new voting period would be from 8am to 6pm instead of 8am-5pm,” Chandra said, after concluding the two-day visit to Himalayan state.

The CEC said candidates that have criminal background “will have to reveal details about the ongoing criminal cases against them before the public”.

“Those candidates would have to get the details of their cases published thrice in newspapers. They will also have to share the details on news channels. Besides, the onus will also be on the political parties to do the same exercise for their candidates having criminal background. They will have to inform the voters, the reason behind fielding a candidate with criminal background so that they know what sort of candidates are contesting before exercising their franchise,” said Chandra.

“Social media will also be strictly monitored to check posts related to hate speech or any sort of discrimination, if any, so that proper action can be taken by the commission.”

The poll body has also decided to take strict measures to stop liquor, drugs or freebies being offered to the voters to influence them, which “vitiate the election process”, the CEC said. He added that the commission would monitor all airports, airstrips and intra-and-inter-state crossings to curb such activities.

“Expenditure observers will also be appointed in the state during elections to monitor the expenditure by various candidates on poll campaign,” Chandra said.

The commission will also make arrangements to ensure each polling booth has a reduced capacity of 1,200 voters instead of 1,500 at present, the CEC said.

“This has been done to ensure proper social distancing during the voting. Due to this move the ECI will set up 623 more polling booths taking the total polling booths in the state to 11,447. With the total 81.43 lakh (roughly 8.14 million) registered voters in state, on an average, there would be at least 700 voters at each polling booth,” said Chandra.

Uttarakhand will also have 100 polling booths managed completely by women while five polling booths will be managed by differently abled officials, Chandra said.

“Of the total 81.43 lakh voters, 66,648 are differently abled, 1.43 lakh are above 80 years of age and 93,935 voters are servicemen,” Chandra said.

“Among them, the ones who are 80 plus, would be given a facility to cast their vote through ballot paper at their home only, for which the electoral officer would go to their places. The political parties will be informed

about it and proper videography will be done to ensure the secrecy and transparency of the whole process. Similarly, the servicemen voters would also be able to cast their votes through ballots,” Chandra said, adding that the “Commission will take all necessary steps to ensure an unbiased, transparent, free and fair elections”.

The CEC on Thursday had met representatives of different political parties in Uttarakhand, the state’s chief secretary and director general of police.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 22-12-2021

Behind the policy and politics around inflation

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI), which acts as a proxy for producer prices, grew 14.23% in November, the highest since April 2012, the earliest period for which WPI data is available under the current series.

By Roshan Kishore, New Delhi

Retail inflation in India rose 4.91% in November compared with a year ago. The rise was far from unprecedented. And of the 119 months for which data is available under the latest series of Consumer Price Index (CPI), inflation has been higher than 4.91% in 70 months.

That statistical comfort notwithstanding, there are growing concerns around price rise in the country. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI), which acts as a proxy for producer prices, grew 14.23% in November, the highest since April 2012, the earliest period for which WPI data is available under the current series.

There are valid reasons to be concerned about inflation, an HT analysis shows. What complicates matters even more is the fact that the current spike has come at a time when the economy has just recovered. Here are three charts that explain this in detail.

The growing CPI-WPI divergence and the policy ghost of a former Chief Economic Advisor’s argument

The past few months have seen a growing divergence between the retail and wholesale inflation. WPI growth was 9.32 percentage points higher in November. While there have been instances of divergence between CPI and WPI even in the past, the latest episode is a first when WPI has surged ahead of the CPI in such a big

way. In absolute terms, the difference is similar to at least two episodes for data under the current series (mid-2015 and mid-2020), when CPI was far ahead of WPI. It has to be kept in mind, however, that CPI and WPI are very different in their composition.

While the inflation-targeting framework mandates the central bank to maintain retail inflation within a band of two percentage points from 4%, the government's former chief economic advisor once tried to subtly argue in favour of a easy monetary policy by citing WPI. In July 2015, Arvind Subramanian, then the chief economic advisor to the Narendra Modi government, wrote an article in the Indian Express at a time when WPI was lagging the CPI to argue that in exceptional times, there was some merit in questioning the prudence of relying solely on CPI for the conduct of monetary policy. "The monetary policy agreement between the ministry of finance and RBI, as well as the Urjit Patel report, has argued, not inappropriately, that the inflation target/objective should be based on CPI. In normal times, that would be completely unobjectionable. But are these normal times, when the price indicators are, frankly, pointing in dramatically different directions?" Subramanian wrote.

If WPI lagging CPI then was good logic for a more accommodative monetary policy in the finance ministry, WPI surging significantly ahead of CPI now should suggest the reverse, namely, a reversal of the accommodative monetary policy stance in force for a long time.

At least one member in this month's monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting, Jayanth R Varma, expressed reservation on the part of MPC's resolution that asked for continuing with "the accommodative stance as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis and continue to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy."

Consumer perception about inflation has been rising

Economic sentiment need not always correspond with numbers. The latest evidence on consumer perception around price rise, as seen in RBI's Consumer Confidence Surveys (CCS), and the trajectory of the CPI, are a case in point. While headline inflation has actually declined in the past one year, consumer perception of it has taken an opposite trajectory. Net share of respondents who believe inflation has increased is at close to the all-time high seen in late

2012, the earliest year for which data is available in the surveys.

Pandemic's shock to incomes might have added to inflation's pain

There is another piece of evidence in the CCS that tells us why the inflationary pain could be greater than in the past, even though the numbers are far from their all-time high levels. It is because the latest price rise has been accompanied by a sharp fall in general income levels in the economy. This is best seen from the net sentiment metric on income levels in the CCS. While this value was positive in late 2012, when net perception about rise in inflation was the highest, it is minus 40.6% in the latest CCS round in November. This, when read with the evidence of a large increase in economic inequality after the pandemic and reports of the economic recovery being driven by profits rather than wages, suggests that a large majority of the population might still be facing an unprecedented double whammy of rising prices and falling incomes.

To be sure, CCS only measures urban sentiment, and we do not have a similar high-frequency indicator for rural areas. However, the fact that food inflation has been lagging non-food prices means that farm incomes are being subjected to squeeze in the terms of trade.

It is this ominous combination of inflation driven by non-food prices along with a widespread fall in income that might have increased the pain of the current inflationary environment. It also underlines the importance of political and not just economic management of inflation for the government, especially as it enters a critical state election cycle early next year.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 19-12-2021

Pre-polls Violence Masked men made gun attack that killed two

Staff Correspondent, Brahmanbaria

At least three to four criminals wearing facemasks made the gun attack that has left two people dead including the chairman candidate of the upcoming Union Parishad election in Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar upazila.

The dead are Badal Sarkar, 25, a resident of Nandura village, and Ershadul Haque, 35, a chairman candidate.

The attack took place around 10 pm on Friday when the two were returning from a religious gathering at the union's Kurighar Bazar area, according to their family and police.

Sarkar died on the spot, while Haque passed away around 1:45 am yesterday on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Morgue sources said Sarkar had a bullet wound on his head while Haque had two bullet hits: one on his neck and one in the face.

"My son was not able to speak but he gestured to me that there were three to four attackers and they had covered their face with a mask," Haque's father Abul Kashem, also the incumbent chairman of Natghar UP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

One Sohagh has been arrested and is under interrogation, said Nur-E Alam, inspector (investigation) of Nabinagar police station, said that they have managed to arrest.

Sohagh's identity is being kept hidden for the sake of investigation.

Natghar UP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

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It was a pre-planned attack as the attackers were waiting at the spot for Haque, according to Alam.

"We have some clues. We are hopeful of solving the mystery and arrest the responsible one soon," he added.

Following the murder, a tense situation has prevailed in the area.

Around 3 pm yesterday, Haque's supporters rounded off the residence of Abdul Malek, their political rival. The attackers allegedly looted valuables from Malek and his aide Humayun, Harun, Iron, Habib and Abu Naser's residence, according to locals.

Mollah Mohammad Shaheen, Brahmanbaria additional superintendent of police (administration and crime), said that they are remaining alert and an additional police force has already been deployed to avert any untoward situation.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 27-12-2021

UP polls campaigning abound with irregularities

It's shocking to see the Election Commission show such disdain towards election law

According to a report in this newspaper on December 26, 2021, the Election Commission, in clear violation of the law, accepted nomination papers after the stipulated time for union parishad election at Chandipasha union in Mymensingh's Nandail upazila. It is another condemnable but not surprising move taken by this commission, which has been mired in controversies throughout its tenure.

The report said that one Iftekhar Hossain had submitted nomination papers as an independent candidate on December 8, while the next day Amdadul Haque Bhuiyan submitted his with Awami League's recommendation attached. However, on December 10—the day after the final date for submission—Iftkhar submitted his nomination papers again, this time with the Awami League's recommendation. In complete violation of the law, the Election Commission accepted his new papers and cancelled his previous submission, while cancelling Amdad's nomination at the same time.

Locals have alleged that the union's poll officials had initially refused to accept the papers submitted after the deadline. However, local lawmaker Anwarul Abedin Khan put pressure on them to break the law. The fact that the Election Commission has been so willing to bend the law at the insistence of anyone is deplorable. The law is there for a reason.

A similar incident took place in Rajgati union in the same upazila, where another candidate submitted his papers with the ruling party's recommendation, while one Abdur Rauf submitted his independently. However, Rauf got the party candidacy and the other candidate's nomination was cancelled. According to the election authority's own circular issued on November 27, no political party can nominate more than one person for the chairman post in the union parishad polls. "If more than one person is nominated by a party, the nomination paper will be considered void," it wrote. Section 12 (7) of the local government (union parishad) law also states that if any person signs more than one nomination paper, all their papers except

the first one submitted will be cancelled. Then, on what basis has the Election Commission violated these rules?

The Election Commission owes the public an explanation. The fact that this commission has repeatedly failed to address election irregularities over the years has been bad enough. Now that it's breaking the law itself, it is setting a dangerously bad precedence for our democracy.

The matter has now reached the High Court, and we hope that the court will give its judgement as per the correct interpretation of the law. We also hope that the court will hold the election authority to account for its blatant disregard for the law, and ask it to answer for its disdain towards the people's right to participate in a free and fair election, where the laws are strictly followed by all concerned.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 17-12-2021

China-Russia trade to exceed new high in 2021: MOFCOM

By Global Times

China-Russia trade is expected to hit a new high of an estimated \$140 billion in 2021, China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) said on Thursday, while experts noting better cross-border links will facilitate close bilateral ties.

China remained Russia's largest trading partner for the 12th consecutive year, with bilateral trade hitting a new high in the first 11 months of \$130.43 billion, a year-on-year increase of 33.6 percent and 2.3 percentage points higher than China's average foreign trade growth, Shu Jueting, a spokesperson for MOFCOM, said at a press conference.

The China-Russia trading structure has improved and new business forms are booming, Shu noted.

"Cross-border e-commerce cooperation between China and Russia has developed rapidly, with the construction of warehouses and e-commerce platforms in Russia making steady progress to contribute to the sustained growth of bilateral trade," the spokesperson said.

Customs data showed that China-Russia trade in the first 11 months exceeded the level for all of last year. China's exports to Russia stood at 384.49 billion yuan (\$60.36 billion), an increase of 21.9 percent, while

imports from Russia reached 458.92 billion yuan, up 25.9 percent.

The economies of the two countries are highly complementary, with Russia rich in minerals and energy reserves and China advantageous in mineral processing, Song Kui, president of the Contemporary China-Russia Regional Economy Research Institute, told the Global Times on Thursday.

The soon-to-open China-Russia highway bridge, which spans the Heilongjiang River, will take bilateral trade to a new stage, Song said.

In the next step, China will continue to work closely with Russia to consolidate the trade of bulk commodities such as energy, minerals, agriculture and forestry, and expand new growth points in the digital economy, biomedicine, as well as cross-border e-commerce and services trade, Shu noted.

According to the customs data, energy and mineral products accounted for more than 70 percent of China's imports from Russia, with significant increases in coal and natural gas.

From January to November, China imported 298.72 billion yuan worth of energy products from Russia, an increase of 44.2 percent, and imports of metal ore hit 26.57 billion yuan, an increase of 21.7 percent.

Imports of crude oil totaled 232.81 billion yuan, up 30.9 percent, and imports of coal totaled 41.79 billion yuan, up 171.3 percent. Imports of natural gas rose 74.8 percent to 24.12 billion yuan and imports of iron ore rose 2.6 percent to 9.61 billion yuan.

From January to November, China exported 235.32 billion yuan worth of mechanical and electrical products to Russia, an increase of 28.9 percent, due to increased exports of auto parts, machinery equipment, and labor-intensive products.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 20-12-2021

LegCo election advances despite trivial noises, to bring HK into a new era

Sweeping out anti-China lawmakers, secessionists turn local governance into practical, effective phase

By Chen Qingqing, Bai Yunyi and Zhao Juecheng

No matter how hard some Western media outlets like The New York Times or the BBC tried to hype a

"controversial" or "unfair" Legislative Council (LegCo) election that took place in Hong Kong on Sunday, dozens of Hong Kong residents, local officials and experts who talked with the Global Times consider the new election format - the first since the implementation of the national security law for Hong Kong and the electoral reform, as a milestone to bring the city into a new era with better governance after years of political battling in a vicious circle.

After most polling stations opened at 8:30 am, Carrie Lam, chief executive of the HKSAR government, was among the first batch of senior officials to cast their votes. They also called on the public to vote as soon as possible despite online noise made by absconded former lawmakers and secessionists like Ted Hui Chi-fung and Nathan Law Kwun Chung to instigate blank votes - a major way of defying the legitimacy of the election.

"Today's election is the first since the electoral reform took effect, which has great significance. My husband and I voted this morning to fulfill our responsibility as citizens, which is also casting the vote of confidence for Hong Kong's future," Lam told reporters.

Compared to the concrete action of the Hong Kong residents on Sunday, noises were trivial. Some Western media and foreign observers described "the electoral reform with the implementation of the principle of only patriots governing the city" as a way of "sidelining" or "cracking down" on the pan-democracy camp, especially after dozens of lawmakers who had been charged with conspiring to subvert state power and the rest of the pan-democratic candidates decided not to run as a way of "boycotting" it, but some observers said there is no need to take this noise seriously.

As times goes by, Hong Kong will embrace a bright future after addressing the root causes of the social turmoil in the past, they said.

Voting in order

As of 9:30 pm, 13 hours since polling stations opened, about 29.28 percent of Hong Kong's voters - or some 1.31 million people - had cast their votes, according to the latest official figures.

The voting for the election concluded at 10:30 pm, and Lam said the HKSAR government is confident that the 7th LegCo election and the first after the electoral reform can help increase the effectiveness of local

governance, unveiling a new page for good governance.

She also thanked over 1.3 million voters, as every vote reflects their expectation for improving governance, and for authorities to better serve local economic development and social livelihoods improvement.

As there are no automatically elected seats for the first time in this election, every candidate competes with each other with their policy guidelines and 153 all have different backgrounds and political stances, which shows broad representation and balanced and fair participation.

Besides the absence of the pan-democratic candidates to the LegCo election, the relatively low turnout rate was cited by Western media and government critics as "evidence" showing that Hong Kong people "have little enthusiasm" as candidates from the opposition camp "were banned" from the election, reflecting its "unfairness."

"The turnout can be affected by many factors. When there are intense confrontations and social conflicts, or the public is unhappy with the government, the turnout could be relatively higher. Otherwise, it's not that high in a peaceful environment," Tam Yiu-chung, a Hong Kong-based member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, told the Global Times on Sunday.

China's top lawmakers unanimously approved the electoral reform plan for Hong Kong in March, another major step following the implementation of the national security law for Hong Kong in fixing the loopholes in the city's governance structure.

In May, lawmakers in Hong Kong finalized amendments for the election overhaul which increased the seats in the LegCo from 70 to 90, including 40 seats from the Election Committee, 30 from functional constituencies, and 20 which are directly elected.

"I cast my vote this morning, and I think this first election after the electoral reform took effect has great significance, as I could feel high spirits around me," Victor Chan Chi-ho, vice chairman of the Hong Kong Association of Young Commentators, told the Global Times on Sunday.

As the process of voting has been streamlined this year by introducing electronic ballot distribution and setting up special lanes for elderly people and those who need

special care, it only took a few minutes to cast his vote, Chan said.

Jack Ng, principal learner of Pui Kiu Middle School, cast his vote in his neighborhood at around 8:30 am. "The line was shorter than previous years," he said.

"Still, including myself, my friends have strong willingness to vote, as we all hope that the election would serve as a new page for Hong Kong," Ng told the Global Times on Sunday morning.

Due to COVID-19, it was also the first time that authorities set up polling stations at checkpoints on the Chinese mainland-Hong Kong border to facilitate the voting process for Hong Kong residents who live and work in the mainland.

Leon Xu Zuli, a Hong Kong resident who lives in the mainland, said he arrived at the border checkpoint around 10:30 am where there were about 200 people lined up to vote. "Some of my friends flew from Shanghai to Shenzhen to cast their votes despite some difficulties amid COVID-19, such as taking a 48-hour valid nucleic acid tests, but we're determined to do so for ourselves and for Hong Kong," he told the Global Times on Sunday.

It should be understood that the previous election method in Hong Kong was granted by the central government in accordance with the Constitution and the Basic Law, but problems emerged from the previous system given that LegCo went too far against the spirit of the Basic Law, becoming a stage for radical political wrestling, Fan Peng, a member of the Chinese Association of Hong Kong & Macao Studies, told the Global Times on Sunday.

"Those lawmakers abused their power to oppose to the country and to sabotage the rule of law, which wouldn't be tolerated in any country in the world," Fan said.

New LegCo

What will be the new LegCo look like? A number of former lawmakers including from the opposition camp, in addition to legal experts in Hong Kong and the mainland came up with a consensus that it should be a place with diverse voices and broad representation. More importantly, it is a place to find common ground and practical solutions for Hong Kong's economic and social development rather than making troubles, like some anti-government lawmakers did in the past to obstruct over 100 bills by filibustering.

Tik Chi-yuen, former vice chairman and founding member of the Hong Kong Democratic Party, told the Global Times in an exclusive interview that as a candidate from the opposition camp who had been nominated and supported by pro-establishment figures, his participation in the election fully shows that the central government is expecting a diverse LegCo with broad representation.

"Pan-democratic figures should realize that by continuing confrontation and challenging the central government's redlines, there's no way out," Tik told the Global Times.

Under the new electoral system, the lawmakers in the next LegCo would be those who carry out their responsibilities and are capable. The LegCo will function quite smoothly in advancing some of more urgent unfinished bills like Article 23, Tam said.

Some experts in the mainland recalled the social turmoil in 2019 as a bad example of practicing democracy. Whatever form of democracy is practiced in any place, national security cannot be jeopardized, and at that time, Hong Kong became a place for external forces to instigate color revolution by exploiting governance loopholes, they said.

"Those so-called pan-democratic figures were actually secessionists, if we let them go down that path, it would most likely lead to 'Hong Kong independence.' So there's only one way for Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong, that's patriots only," Tian Feilong, an associate professor at Beijing-based Beihang University's law faculty and a member of the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macao Studies who attended the forum, told the Global Times on Sunday.

IRAN NEWS, TEHRAN 19-12-2021

Iran Exports to Europe Up Dramatically in October

TEHRAN (Iran News) – Iran's exports to the European Union reached above 103 million euros in October, the highest since the end of 2018.

The latest figures published in Eurostat, the European Union's Statistics Center, show that Iran exported 736 million euros to the European Union in the first 10 months of this year, about 22 percent more than in the same period last year.

About one-third of Iran's total exports have been sent to Germany. Germany is also the largest exporter of goods to Iran among the 27 members of the European Union.

In the first 10 months of 2021, the country exported about 1.16 billion euros to Iran, equivalent to 37.5 percent of all EU exports to the Islamic Republic.

The total export of union members to Iran in the mentioned round was 3 billion and 88 million euros, which grew only 2 percent compared to the same period last year.

After Germany, Iran's most important trading partners are Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and, to a certain extent, France.

In the period before the U.S. sanctions, the European Union exported \$11 billion worth of goods annually to Iran, and similarly imported goods and oil from the Islamic Republic.

Meanwhile yesterday it was announced that the value of Iran's non-oil trade with its neighbors stood at \$33 million during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Ruhollah Latifi put the weight of non-oil trade with the neighboring countries at 110.284 million tons in the said time span, and stated that trade with the neighbors accounted for 52 percent of value and 62 percent of the weight of non-oil trade in the first eight months.

The official further stated that non-oil trade with the neighbors shows 45 percent rise in value and 19 percent growth in weight as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

As previously announced by the IRICA head, the value of Iran's non-oil trade rose 40 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi has said that Iran traded over 110.3 million tons of non-oil products worth \$63.1 billion with other countries in the mentioned period.

According to the IRICA head, the weight of trade in the mentioned period also grew by 43.5 percent in comparison to the figure for the previous fiscal year.

The official put the eight-month non-oil exports at 83.7 million tons valued at \$31.1 billion, with a 42-percent rise in value and 10.5-percent growth in weight.

Mir-Ashrafi noted that petrochemical products accounted for 43 percent of the total value of the exports in the said time span, with 39.8 million tons worth \$13.3 billion of the said products being exported to foreign markets.

He said major export destinations of the Iranian non-oil goods were China, Iraq, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Afghanistan.

The official further announced that the Islamic Republic imported 26.5 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$32 billion in the first eight months of the present year, with a 38-percent growth in value and a 21-percent rise in weight year on year.

The United Arab Emirates was the top exporter to Iran in the said period, followed by China, Turkey, Germany, and Switzerland, he stated.

According to the IRICA head, out of the total non-oil goods imported into the country in the first eight months of this year, 20.3 million tons worth \$12.4 billion were basic goods, which accounted for 38 percent of the total value of the imports.

Mir-Ashrafi has announced that the value of Iran's non-oil trade stood at \$73 billion in the past Iranian calendar year.

He has put the weight of non-oil trade at 146.4 million tons, and said that the figure shows a 25-million-ton annual decline, which is the result of sanctions and coronavirus pandemic.

IRAN NEWS, TEHRAN 20-12-2021

Non-oil trade with neighbors stands at \$33b in 8 months

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annual decline, which is the result of sanctions and coronavirus pandemic.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 17-12-2021

PTI govt makes record legislation

Javaid-ur-Rahman

ISLAMABAD - Despite facing issue of MNAs showing least interest in lawmaking and embarrassment over maintaining required quorum, the PTI government has made record legislation in the Parliament as compared to previous regimes [PML-N and PPP] till start of fourth parliamentary year.

The opposition has never missed any opportunity to blame the incumbent government for disrespecting the parliamentary norms by its action.

The lawmakers from treasury benches, in the matches of verbal attacks between the government and the opposition during the Parliament proceedings, never seemed shy to settle the score.

Unlike the previous government's parliamentary eras, the government benches have noticeably seen passing the bucks to previous governments on each governance-related matter.

The incumbent government, in its parliamentary performance, undoubtedly has made record legislation till start of the fourth parliamentary year as compared to previous regimes.

The lower house of the Parliament, despite stiff resistance by the joint opposition, has managed to approve 113 bills in its 38 sessions. In the tally of 113 bills which have been passed by the lower house of the Parliament, 14 private members bills are also included.

The previous PML-N government had passed almost half of the bills in total which have been passed by the PTI government in three years and around four months period. Likewise, the PPP-P in its government era had also not managed to secure 100 bills in the stated period.

The present government has recently set a new record of legislation by passing 33 controversial bills in a single day during the joint session of the Parliament.

The parliamentary history of the country has never seen such a heavy legislation in one day.

EMBARRASSMENT

The current government in the Parliament has also faced embarrassment due to disinterest of MNAs from treasury benches. The government is always held responsible for maintaining the required quorum [at least 86 MNAs] in the house to run the Parliament.

Taking advantage of the disinterested MNAs, the opposition has twice defeated the government in the Parliament over the legislative business. During proceedings of National Assembly, the present government has number of times faced quorum related issues.

It may be mentioned here that the opposition members have also not missed a single opportunity to point out of lack of quorum, which is also a record.

The opposition, with planning exercised the rule related to quorum, during various sittings of the House that caused embarrassment for the government to maintain the required quorum so the proceedings were halted.

The figures made available to this newspaper, prepared by independent entity [FAFEN], revealed a total of 755 bills appeared on agendas of the National Assembly during around three years till the 36th session of the House. Whereas, the ratio of passed bills with the bills which appeared on the agenda of the House is around 15 percent during the stated period.

From the session 1st to 36th of the National Assembly, a total of 755 bills appeared on agendas, 113 bills including 14 private members bills were passed by it during the stated sessions.

A total of 253 bills were referred to the respective standing committees while 95 bills were deferred and 22 bills were rejected during the same period, according to the available data. A total of 210 bills were not taken up and 14 bills were withdrawn till the 36th session of the House.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 22-12-2021

KP LG results: Blunders caused backlash, says PM

Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan Tuesday blamed the selection of wrong candidates as the major cause of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's poor

performance in the local bodies election in 17 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The prime minister vowed to personally oversee the local government election strategy of the ruling PTI in the second phase of electoral exercise in the province as well as across Pakistan. Premier Imran tweeted to show his reaction to the defeat of PTI in key districts and said, "PTI made mistakes in 1st phase of KP LG elections & paid the price. Wrong candidate selection was a major cause."

"From now on, I will personally be overseeing PTI's LG election strategy in 2nd phase of KP LG elections & LG elections across Pak. InshaAllah PTI will come out stronger," he maintained.

Prime Minister Imran, who is the Chairman of PTI, came up with an entirely different reason for his party's electoral loss in the LG polls, whereas members of his own federal cabinet and those in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had other reasons also for the setback.

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhry Fawad Hussain said, "In local bodies election, in every tehsil election there are two, three MNAs and three MPAs, unless they come together, the (PTI) vote bank cannot come together, it is difficult for them to come together in the system of local bodies election".

While emphasizing that a look at the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa LG elections and other election results, the vote bank of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is no different: "The popularity of Imran Khan and PTI is still there...that four people from PTI had participated in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elections as independent candidates in many places. However, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa local bodies election has proved that there is a vote bank of other regional parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa besides PPP and PML-N.

"PTI is competing with one party while in Sindh it is competing with another party and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it is competing with a third party. If the distribution of tickets in PTI is corrected and a candidate contests the election of PTI, then the vote bank will get the correct assessment that none of can compete with us...," he said.

Federal Minister for Science and Technology Senator Shibli Faraz cited the current wave of inflation, which he called a global phenomenon, and said that PTI candidates in most of constituencies contested aspirants of PTI tickets. He said the PTI has learnt a lot from this local bodies election and that the party will prepare well for the next election.

PTI KP Minister Shaukat Ali Yousafzai singled out price hike of commodities as one single major reason for poor performance of the party in the election. He was confident that inflation in country will be curtailed, as Prime Minister has realisation about the issue of price hike.

However, Yousafzai termed the conduct of polling an achievement of PTI government, saying grassroot-level elections are unprecedented in the history of Pakistan which have been fully participated by the people of the province. Two other members of KP government, Atif Khan and Shahram Tarakai, also mainly blamed the price hike as the major factor for PTI not performing so well.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Imran Khan Tuesday regretted the decision on Pakistan's participation in the US-led 20-year-long 'war on terrorism' in Afghanistan and said it was made not in the public interest but for dollars.

Speaking to officers at the Foreign Office here, PM Imran recalled to have been close to decision-makers at that time when it had to be decided whether Pakistan should join the war on terror. He said he was well aware of what considerations there were behind the decision. "Unfortunately, the people of Pakistan were not a consideration. The considerations, instead, were the same as in the 1980s, when we had participated in the Afghan jihad," he said referring to the Soviet-Afghan war.

He termed the war a self-inflicted wound for Pakistan and said, "However, we cannot blame anyone else for this outcome. We ourselves are responsible ... as we let others use us, sacrificed the reputation of our country for aid and made a foreign policy that went against the public interest and for money."

Prime Minister Imran Khan said, "We are responsible for the trouble in our country, we misrepresented Pakistan for aid. We have seen the image of Pakistan in

our lives. When the prime minister of Pakistan visited the United States, the president of the United States would greet him at the airport.

"Human life does not run on a straight line, and up and down come. We are responsible for the troubles in our country. No one else should be held responsible. We allowed ourselves to be used and sacrificed national reputation, made foreign policy against public interest only for money," he regretted.

He was speaking to the officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after it organised the 17th extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers on Sunday to address a likely humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Premier Imran congratulated and appreciated the Foreign Office for hosting the OIC session on Afghanistan last week in an admirable manner, and said that the response to the summit showed that Pakistan's image had improved globally. He acknowledged the fact that the FO had organised a summit of such a scale after a long time and noted that it was the result of teamwork with a significant contribution from law enforcement agencies. Envoys from 57 Islamic nations as well as observer delegations had participated in the summit.

The prime minister pointed out that the attendance at the summit and the appreciation of Pakistan's stance reflected that the country's image had improved and remarked, "We have achieved the objective behind hosting the conference."

Prime Minister Imran said Muslim countries' stance on the Afghan situation was the universal stance now and said that statements by Europeans showed, they were standing with us and the UN, too, has a clear stance. He also credited his government for an improvement in Pakistan's image.

He reiterated that the government faced the biggest financial crunch in Pakistan's history and that he did not think any other government was handed down such wide fiscal and current account deficits and then there was also the corona. "Yet, if you compare where Pakistan stands today to where it stood three years ago, if you conduct a survey, you will see that the country's image has improved," he emphasised.

Speaking on the prevailing situation in Afghanistan, he said it was a big atrocity on the human level that a man-made crisis was being created in the war-torn country even when it was known that unfreezing Afghanistan's accounts and infusing liquidity into the country's banking system will avert the crisis.

He again said that addressing the situation in Afghanistan was important not just because it was Pakistan's neighbour, but above all the country was facing a humanitarian crisis. "We have been saying this from day one, from August 15 that whether you like the Taliban government or not, the lives of 40 million people are on the brink of destruction. Pakistan would continue to provide assistance to Afghanistan in these difficult times. Time is of the essence and we must provide aid to Afghanistan expeditiously. The easiest way to end the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is to restore their assets and start a flow of money into their banking system," he said.

About the state of affairs in Pakistan, the prime minister contended that we only have to fix the system in the country and bring merit to the forefront; the most important thing is the rule of law, no nation can ever develop without the rule of law because the elites take over. If so, first of all the merit is lost, the mafias take control and the country cannot move forward.

"Our struggle is how to uplift our population, which has gone down due to the occupation of the elite. There is no shortage of talent in Pakistan, we are only facing the problem of current account deficit. As soon as we solve this problem, the country will develop rapidly," he contended.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 27-12-2021

Sindh ready to hold local govt polls in Feb-March: CM Murad

M.B. Kalhoro

LARKANA: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Sunday said he had conveyed to the Election Commission of Pakistan his government's intention of holding local bodies elections in the province in February or March.

"We are ready after legislation regarding LG elections. The PPP will form next government in Sindh as we

have done everything in the interest of the province," Mr Shah said while talking to media persons at the mausoleum of slain former prime minister Benazir Bhutto in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh where he laid wreaths and offered fateha.

He said Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari had called a meeting of the party's Central Executive Committee in the first week of January. He said the health of PPP co-chairman and former president Asif Ali Zardari did not permit him to participate in the death anniversary event of Benazir Bhutto on Dec 27 in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh.

In an apparent reference to Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's (PTI) defeat in the local government polls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he said it was the result of people's disapproval of Prime Minister Imran Khan's policies, adding that the people's reaction could be gauged from the volume of responses they had accorded to Asif Ali Zardari during his recent visits.

In reply to a question, CM Shah did not rule out the possibility of talks with various parties but said coalition with them in the past was a bitter experience. He said the PPP was ready to work with any party which served Sindh's interests.

He said Imran Khan could better answer why the PTI chose to form an alliance with the Muttahida Qaumi Movement.

About Green Line bus service, the chief minister said the Sindh government had also extended financial assistance to the project and provided land after amending laws in this regard as it was in the interest of Sindh. He said the federal government had in 2018 proposed that if the Sindh government distanced itself from the project, the Centre would complete it within three months, but till 2021 it was incomplete.

Mr Shah said the PTI government had destroyed the country's economy and people could hardly afford to have meals twice a day.

MNA Ramesh Lal, Naseeban Channa, PPP leader Shagufta Jumani and Larkana commissioner and deputy commissioner were present on the occasion.

III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Review

- India has seen a sharp rise in the communal violence as well as in Saffronization of its society. Since the passing of anti-conversion bill which was in response to allegedly missionaries' preaching, the attacks against the Christian community has increased. On the other hand, the brutal lynching of a man in Golden Temple this month also highlighted the growing fundamentalism and religious extremism in the Indian society. Members of Indian Punjab Assembly didn't openly condemn the act owing to their political considerations. However, assemblies of West Bengal, Rajasthan and Jharkhand have passed the bills on prevention of mob violence. Nevertheless, the Indian government where finds it challenging to control the Omicron virus as cases have increased to 10 percent, also fails to diffuse the communal violence since the rise of BJP.
- China is facing an emergency sort of situation in the city of Xian, the capital of Shaanxi Province. The primary task is to control the highly contagious Delta variant of Covid-19 which has alerted the health officials. Moreover, cases of deadly Hemorrhagic Fever have also been on rise in the city with official reported higher deaths as compared to the previous year. Since China is spearheading the vaccine production, it is also required to develop an effective drug on Hemorrhagic Fever as well.
- Iran has established the largest vaccine facility in the Alborz Province which has the capacity of producing 20 million doses annually. It is both significant and essential since Iran finds it difficult to purchase the vaccines due to US imposed sanctions. Furthermore, as Iran is the hardest hit country in the Middle East from Covid, domestic production of vaccine is a giant leap to ease the pressure on health sector.
- Throughout the month of December, the positive rate of Covid cases in Pakistan has remained below 1 percent. Nevertheless, with the rapid spreading of Omicron variant, it is feared that Pakistan might face yet another wave of Covid. However, Pakistan has performed well in containing the spread of Covid as compared to its neighbours. Still, it is necessary that the coordination among the various institutions through the NCOC platform remain functional to avoid any future catastrophe.
- Like China, Sri Lanka is also facing dual waves i.e. Omicron variant and dengue fever. Omicron is spreading at a fast pace in Sri Lanka, however, with regards to dengue, Sri Lanka had previously managed to control the outbreak as no wave was detected since 2017. In the current circumstances, it is expected that Sri Lanka might have to deal with the dengue outbreak alongside Covid, thus, it is required that Sri Lanka must tighten the health protocols.

III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 19-12-2021

Attacks on Christian groups expose fault lines in Karnataka

Activists have also drawn a parallel between the rise in attacks on the Christian community and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) push for an "anti-conversion" bill in Karnataka

By Arun Dev

Bengaluru: Karnataka has witnessed at least 39 incidents of attacks on Christian community members this year till November, according to data compiled by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCI), a human rights body. While official figures on attacks of Christians last year are not available, several activists have claimed the cases have increased this year.

Activists have also drawn a parallel between the rise in attacks on the Christian community and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) push for an "anti-conversion" bill in the state. The chief minister Basavaraj Bommai-led Karnataka government has created a draft "anti-conversion" bill to check "forced religious conversions" in the state, activists argued.

"Compared to now, there were fewer attacks. The increase in these attacks has happened especially after the new chief minister (Basavaraj Bommai) took over. The CM giving assurance to pass the anti-conversion bill has made it seem like Christians are a threat to the Hindu community," said B Rajasekhara, president of the Christian Forum for Human Rights.

Rajasekhara had filed multiple cases against the state government led by former chief minister BS Yediyurappa, for not taking action against multiple cases of attack on Christians between 2003 and 2018.

The Archbishop of Bengaluru, Peter Machado, also claimed the attitude of the government was a reason for the "increase in attacks" on the Christian community. "Certain behaviour or certain utterances from the government, certain attitude from the government is the reason that this (attacks) is allowed and tolerated. This can go on and is sad for us," said the Archbishop.

He added that earlier such incidents were reported from interior places where there were fewer members of the community and small churches. "But to happen in Hubballi, Dharwad, Bengaluru means people are taking the law into their hands," Machado said.

The issue of forcible conversions gained momentum after BJP legislator Goolihatti Shekar recently made an

appeal against the practice, claiming his mother was also a "victim" of it. In September, Shekar had said his mother was among those in Chitradurga district who was "brainwashed" by the "missionaries". He had claimed that people from "marginalised communities and even Muslims were being converted", or they were slapped with false charges, and around 15,000-20,000 people in his constituency were possibly converted. Shekar had presided over an event in which at least five families "were brought back" into the Hindu fold, including his mother, on September 11.

However, an investigation done by a tehsildar in Hosadurga debunked this claim. In his report, the tehsildar said all the "believers who attend prayers in the five churches in the Hosadurga taluk do so voluntarily and nobody has been coerced". In addition, the tehsildar also visited two areas where social media reports alleged forced conversions were being conducted. His report stated that while eight people who had converted to Christianity reconverted to their original religion, nobody complained of having been forced to convert.

The tehsildar was transferred without posting on December 16.

A report by the PUCI, titled 'Criminalizing the Practice of Faith', listed out the 39 incidents of hate crime against the Christian community stating that in some cases the "police department and some politicians colluded with right-wing organisations in carrying out these attacks".

Karnataka Director General of Police Praveen Sood, however, rejected the allegations. "We have been impartial in taking action against anyone who is indulged in such activities, irrespective of religion and caste. As reported by the media itself, there has been a considerable number of FIRs (first information reports) registered and people have been arrested. We have taken action," Sood said.

The PUCI report also highlighted the change in Christian population in India to deflate the claim of forced mass conversion. It said that according to the 1971 Census, Christians comprised 2.60% of the population of India. "In 1981, they [Christians] were 2.44%; in 1991, 2.33%; in 2001, 2.18% and at present, they are 2.30%," the report said. The document added that as per the 2011 Census, Christians accounted for 1.87% of the population in Karnataka. "Thus, the statistics do nothing to suggest that the Christian population is increasing," the report said.

Aakar Patel, author and former executive director of Amnesty International India, said “anti-conversion” laws being introduced in BJP-ruled states across the country was “part of a deliberate plan”.

“Post 2018, five BJP governments have passed these (anti-conversion) laws. The freedom of religion, particularly the fundamental right to propagate religion, has been taken away from the Christians over the years. Now Karnataka has become the first southern state to draft a bill for such a law. Since hate crime is not a category in the official records, we don’t have the exact numbers, but anecdotal evidence suggests that these attacks are on the rise. We can also assume that these (attacks) in concert with the passing of the laws are deliberate,” said Patel.

Similarly, Karnataka has also reported a rise in cases of vigilantism by Hindu groups, especially in coastal parts of the state. According to PUCL data, Karnataka witnessed at least 22 instances of moral policing by Hindu vigilantes in the 11 months this year till November, a 175% jump from eight cases reported in 2020.

Activists claimed an increase in such cases after Bommai took over as the chief minister in July. In October, Bommai stoked a controversy with his statements that appeared to justify incidents of moral policing and communal disharmony in the state.

However, the Karnataka BJP has rejected all allegations as baseless and a “fear-mongering” attempt by some “sections of a community”.

Former MLC Ganesh Karnik, who is the chief spokesperson for the BJP in Karnataka, said, “This is a propaganda by select sections of this (Christian) community, who wants to spread some fear-mongering within the minorities. There are issues within the community. In Mangaluru, a few years ago the Roman Catholic community had claimed that some Christian fringe elements were trying to convert within the Christian community. In the name of the prayer meetings, they are involved in the religious conversion. The organisation releasing studies should study this as well.”

He added, “Regarding allegations made against the senior leaders in the government and party, it is just an attempt to tarnish their image and divert attention from the work they are doing.”

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 22-12-2021 **COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Omicron 3 times more transmissible than Delta, Centre asks states to activate war rooms

States told to enhance surveillance, restrictions; district-level containment measures must wherever positivity rate is 10 per cent or more in the last one week

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, December 21

The health ministry on Tuesday asked states to enhance restrictions and surveillance in the light of rising cases of Omicron noting that Omicron was three times more transmissible than Delta.

“Based on current scientific evidence, the VOC Omicron is at least 3 times more transmissible than the Delta VOC. The Delta VOC is still present in different parts of the country. Hence even greater foresight, data analysis, dynamic decision making and strict and prompt containment action is required at the local and district level,” health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said in a letter to states as Omicron cases crossed 250.

The health secretary said district-level containment measures and restrictions must be put in place forthwith wherever test positivity rate is 10 per cent or more in the last one week and bed occupancy is 40 pc or more on oxygen supported or ICU beds.

In any area with 10 pc plus positivity the health ministry has recommended containment including night curfews, regulation of large gatherings, curtailing numbers in marriages and funerals, restricting numbers in offices, industries and public transport.

The health secretary has urged action on four areas – Containment, testing and Surveillance; Clinical Management, Vaccination and Covid protocols and asked states to activate war rooms to analyze trends and surges no matter how small.

“Regular reviews with field officers and proactive action in this regard will definitely control the spread of infection and flatten the curve,” Bhushan said.

He said in case of new clusters of Covid positive cases, prompt notification of Containment Zones, Buffer Zones should be done, strict perimeter control of Containment Zone ensured and all cluster samples sent to genome sequencing labs without delay.

The government has also asked states to ensure clinical management by way of increased bed capacity and logistics like ambulances for seamless shifting of

patients, operational readiness of oxygen equipment and buffer stock of drugs.

“Ensure stringent enforcement of home isolation as per extant guidelines,” the letter states, adding that aggressive vaccination.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 20-12-2021

Sacrilege attempt is heinous but leaders not calling lynching by its name shrinks space for conversations Punjab needs

If political players abdicate their responsibility to temper and mediate, if they let their strategic silences speak louder than their words, the sacrilege issue could end up consuming all other issues.

The sacrilege attempt, as per the video footage, at the Golden Temple on Saturday, is condemnable. But the silence on the crime that followed it, the lynching of the alleged culprit at the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, is chilling. From the SGPC chief to the Akal Takht jathedar, from a former five-time chief minister to the newest one, religious and political leadership across the spectrum and government officials have all denounced the attempt at sacrilege and called for a thorough probe. But, disturbingly, they have offered no words of horror or condemnation on those who clearly took the law into their own hands and beat the accused to death. This silence is not incidental. With elections only weeks away, parties and leaders are measuring their words on an issue that is seen to be emotive in a state where religion segues into politics in seamless, and sometimes precarious, ways. Significantly, the sacrilege at Bargari in 2015, following which two protesters were killed in police firing in Faridkot district, still resonates in the state's politics. It featured prominently in the campaign for the 2017 polls. More recently, Punjab Congress president Navjot Singh Sidhu invoked the lack of closure in the case on the watch of successive SAD and Congress governments to publicly target his colleague and then CM Captain Amarinder Singh, who has exited the party since.

And yet, if it is not broken, this silence on the other crime at the Golden Temple could take a heavy toll. After Amritsar, another lynching of a sacrilege accused has already been reported from Kapurthala. But while the possibility of the mob being emboldened by a climate of impunity to mete out instant vigilante justice is something that should worry everyone in a system governed by the rule of law, it is not the only danger that lies ahead. The government and political leadership of the state must call the lynching by its name and

urgently make attempts to lower the temperature on the issue also because of its possible impact on the approaching elections. If political players abdicate their responsibility to temper and mediate, if they let their strategic silences speak louder than their words, the sacrilege issue could end up consuming all other issues. It would mean shrinking the space for, if not putting an end to, conversations that Punjab desperately needs to have on so many gathering crises — from the problem in agriculture beyond the three repealed farm laws to the unchecked decline of industry, from the rampant joblessness to the exodus of the young abroad and the deep inroads of corruption in the state.

The upcoming elections provide another opportunity for Punjab to make a new beginning. But for that, all players, candidates and voters, must be free to speak out and argue with each other, to find the best ways forward. They must not feel constrained and overtaken by spectres that stoke suspicion and fears that cannot be named. In times when, even outside Punjab, mob violence and vigilantism has all too often challenged constitutionalism and the rule of law, the state and, especially, its Sikh community, which has on so many occasions set an example by the forthrightness and generosity of its spirit, must stand up against the second crime perpetrated in Amritsar with the same unambiguousness with which everyone has condemned the first.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 22-12-2021

Prevention of Mob Violence and Mob Lynching Bill passed in Jharkhand assembly

Third state in the country after West Bengal and Rajasthan to pass such a piece of legislation

Ranchi, December 21

The Prevention of Mob Violence and Mob Lynching Bill, 2021, was tabled in Jharkhand Assembly and passed by voice vote on Tuesday to check such incidents in the state, infamous for vigilantism.

The Bill was tabled in the House by the state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Alamgir Alam and passed despite opposition by the BJP.

Jharkhand became the third state in the country after West Bengal and Rajasthan to pass such a piece of legislation.

The bill envisages imprisonment for those who are found to be involved in mob violence and mob lynching for periods ranging from three years to life term,

besides fine and attachment of properties for those found guilty of violence. Those who are found responsible for sharing information in an irresponsible manner will be brought to book.

It provides for fine and imprisonment of up to three years for those creating a "hostile environment", the definition of which includes threatening or coercing the victims, their family members and witnesses or any person providing assistance to them. It also provides for financial compensation to the victim's family and free medical treatment of victims of mob violence and mob lynching.

The bill will be now be sent to the governor for his assent to become law in accordance with the constitutional norms.

Tabling the Bill in the House, Alam said its main objective is to provide "effective security" to the people, protect their constitutional rights and prevent mob violence.

During the debate on the bill, the main opposition BJP introduced several amendments which were sidelined by the government by voice vote.

BJP leader C P Singh accused the state government of bringing the bill "in a hurry for the appeasement of minorities".

There have been reports of many cases of mob violence in Jharkhand, but incidents of mob lynching in the state came to the fore in 2019 when 24-year-old Tabrez Ansari was tied and thrashed in Seraikela Kharsawan district on suspicions of theft of a goat. He died later due to the lynching.

There have also been incidents of mob lynching of those suspected to be practising witch craft in the tribal state.

Chief Minister Hemant Soren had denounced incidents of mob violence and promised to bring a legislation against it ahead of the 2019 state Assembly election.

Earlier this year, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led government had decided to set up district-level committees to deal with cases of mob violence and mob lynching after being rebuked by the high court. - PTI

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 23-12-2021

'Another storm coming'

WHO warns of Omicron surge in Europe; China puts 13m residents in lockdown over Covid outbreak

Agencies

The World Health Organization's top official in Europe urged governments to prepare for a "significant surge" in coronavirus cases across the continent due to the

Omicron variant, which is already dominant in several countries.

"We can see another storm coming," WHO Europe regional director Dr Hans Kluge said at a press conference in Vienna on Tuesday evening. "Within weeks, Omicron will dominate in more countries of the region, pushing already stretched health systems further to the brink."

Omicron has been detected in at least 38 of the WHO European region's 53 members, Kluge added, noting that it is already the dominant variant in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Portugal.

Last week, 27,000 people died from coronavirus in the region and an additional 2.6 million cases were reported, Kluge said. Although these cases include all variants, not just Omicron, he noted this figure is 40% higher than during the same period last year.

"The sheer volume of new Covid-19 infections could lead to more hospitalisations and widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services," he said.

Thus far, Kluge said 89% of those with confirmed Omicron infections in Europe reported symptoms common with other coronavirus variants, including cough, sore throat, fever. The variant has mostly been spread by young people in their 20s and 30s in the region, he added.

Although much remains unknown about Omicron, Kluge said it appears to be more infectious than previous variants, leading to "previously unseen transmission rates" in countries with a significant number of Omicron cases. In those countries, cases of the variant are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 20-12-2021

Beijing reports one COVID-19 case imported from Xi'an

By Global Times

Beijing has reported one COVID-19 case in the city's southeastern district of Tongzhou on Sunday, two weeks after the Chinese capital was cleared of all locally transmitted cases. The new infection was imported from Xi'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi Province, which suffered a new wave of cases in recent days.

The patient is a student at an art studio in Tongzhou district, local health officials announced on Sunday. The student arrived in Beijing from Xi'an on Tuesday and had already received nucleic acid test before entering the city, the studio later announced.

However, it has not been clarified whether the positive result came from the test was taken before or after entering Beijing.

The epidemic prevention and control team has arrived at the scene and is carrying out one-on-one nucleic acid tests to all personnel at the art studio, Beijing News Radio reported. The result is expected to be issued in a few hours.

The area in Tongzhou district where the art studio is located is currently undergoing COVID-19 screening for all residents, media reported.

The close and secondary contacts detected have been put under centralized quarantine.

The art studio has been in a "semi-closed-loop management" and therefore had limited personnel flows, the report said on Sunday.

Xi'an has reported a total of 30 locally transmitted COVID-19 cases since the latest flareup of the virus hit the city on December 9, according to the provincial health commission.

In efforts to curb the spread, Shaanxi has rolled out measures on transportation and urged local residents not to leave the city unless necessary. Authorities also announced a city-wide nucleic acid testing on Sunday. With less than 50 days before the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, Cai Qi, secretary of the Communist Party of China's Beijing Municipal Committee, urged residents of the city to have zero infections to ensure the success of the Games. According to Cai, the mobility of people should be reduced and gatherings should be minimized. Large-scale performances, exhibitions and sales promotions, sports events and other gatherings should be strictly restricted and online group activities are encouraged instead.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 21-12-2021
NW China's Xi'an faces dual epidemic
threats posed by COVID-19 and
hemorrhagic fever

By GT Staff Reporters

Dual epidemic threats are miring Xi'an, capital city of Northwest China's Shaanxi Province. As the city has been battling against the grave novel coronavirus, several reported cases of hemorrhagic fever, a natural epidemic disease with a high fatality rate, unnerved the public.

Local disease prevention and control departments and hospitals are facing challenges to combat the two

epidemics, both contagious to humans. But experts told the Global Times that addressing this wave of COVID-19, characterized by the highly contagious Delta variant, is still the most prominent task, as the medical response strategy for hemorrhagic fever, which is commonly seen every year, has matured and compared with COVID-19, it is easier to diagnose and much weaker in terms of viral transmission.

Since the first COVID-19 case was reported on December 9, the city has registered 49 confirmed and eight asymptomatic cases. Over 16.2 million residents were given nucleic acid testing and a fresh round of tests will start on Tuesday.

Domestically transmitted cases that may have been triggered by an imported case from Pakistan have been reported in multiple districts and also involve a university. Cases in Xi'an that link to Dongguan, East China's Guangdong Province continue to increase, and sporadic cases were found to spill over to other regions, including Beijing, the National Health Commission said on Monday.

Meanwhile, to contain the emerging hemorrhagic fever, local CDC workers and hospitals are busy treating patients and distributing vaccines, which are the most effective measure to address the disease, media reports said.

A worker from a local CDC department told the media that while Xi'an is ramping up efforts to screen out potential COVID-19 infections, it also keeps treating patients with hemorrhagic fever.

The staffer said that except for himself, the department had sent all of its workers to handle epidemics, some for COVID-19, some for hemorrhagic fever.

The Global Times learned due to the recent COVID-19 outbreak in Xi'an, many hospitals with infection units have temporarily stopped receiving patients and are only attending to patients infected with COVID-19.

It is unknown how many are infected with hemorrhagic fever, an acute infectious disease characterized by fever, bleeding and renal damage, which can lead to death.

Yang Zhanqiu, a deputy director of the pathogen biology department at Wuhan University, told the Global Times on Monday that the dual epidemic threats heighten the pressure on working staff of the local disease prevention and control departments and hospitals. But hemorrhagic fever shouldn't have any chance to emerge as a big outbreak, or pose a great challenge for the city to respond as it did with COVID-

19, as a mature medical response strategy has established.

Hemorrhagic fever is a common infectious disease that usually shows up in the winter in Shaanxi. Humans are generally susceptible to the disease, but it's usually confined to farmers or people who often work in the fields and the agricultural industry.

Human-to-human transmission is possible but rare, due to its weak viral transmission capability, Yang said.

Compared with COVID-19, which requires multiple tests to diagnose, hemorrhagic fever is easier to diagnose, after urine and blood tests, experts said.

Yang said although the infection chain in Xi'an is ambiguous and community transmission of COVID-19 has been reported, the city is able to cope, as it held virus-free National Games and has accumulated a mature COVID-19 response mechanism.

But Yang warned that increasing domestically transmitted cases, linked to imported cases, indicate that potential loopholes exist, meaning it's urgent to cut off transmission chains immediately.

Starting from Monday, all students in the city's kindergartens and schools stopped going to their classrooms, and for office workers to go their offices, a negative nucleic acid taken test within 48 hours must be presented.

Due to the huge number of visits the health code of Xi'an once collapsed on Monday for hours. The health code is an important gateway to check nucleic acid testing results.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 19-12-2021

Largest FMD vaccine production line launched

TEHRAN – The largest and most advanced production line of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) vaccine in the country started operation in Alborz province on Saturday.

With an annual production capacity of 20 million doses, the production line was set up in less than 10 months, IRIB reported.

The production of this vaccine will prevent the outflow of \$30 million annually, and with the completion of its capacity, and will bring the country \$20 million of foreign exchange per year.

In order to implement the FMD vaccine production site, 38 companies cooperated and with its full operation, 80 staff of biotechnology field will be recruited.

Foot-and-mouth disease or hoof-and-mouth disease is an infectious and sometimes fatal viral disease that

affects cloven-hoofed animals, including domestic and wild bovines. The virus causes a high fever lasting two to six days, followed by blisters inside the mouth and on the feet that may rupture and cause lameness.

Its containment demands considerable efforts in vaccination, strict monitoring, trade restrictions, quarantines, and the culling of both infected and healthy animals.

FB/MG

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 19-12-2021

Over 4,000 passengers tested for coronavirus in a week

TEHRAN – A total of 4,011 passengers have been screened for coronavirus by thermal tests at the country's official borders over the past week, Mehdi Valipour, head of Relief and Rescue Organization affiliated to the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), said.

During the aforesaid period, IRCS forces have conducted 812 PCR tests and 2,194 rapid tests, he said, IRNA reported on Saturday.

He went on to lament that individuals, who tested positive, will be temporarily quarantined, under a plan to rapidly identify suspected cases of coronavirus and prevent the spread of new strains.

A total of 471 members of the IRCS cooperate for carrying out the plan in 16 provinces across the country, Valipour concluded.

With the cooperation of ministries of health and transport, a plan is being implemented with the goal of rapidly identifying and testing incoming passengers and keeping them in quarantine facilities, if necessary. Thirty border checkpoints have been selected, including 18 land borders, nine air borders, and three sea borders, all incoming passengers will be tested and referred to the quarantine facilities in case of necessity. Around 8,000 individuals enter the country via borders on a daily basis.

Negative PCR mandatory

On August 22, Iran announced that all travelers must have a negative PCR test certificate or a health card to enter the country during the Covid-19 pandemic, IRINN reported.

By the emergence of a highly contagious Omicron variant, countries are adopting new regulations to prevent the transmission of the variant, so that the Iranian Health Ministry has taken measures in this regard.

Iran's National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control on November 27 banned arrivals from the African countries of Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Swatini reacting to the new variant.

There are no direct flights from Iran to South Africa and travelers are not allowed to enter Iran, Iranians who want to travel must also be quarantined at the border to have two negative PCR tests.

Foreign tourists must buy coronavirus insurance from authorized companies when entering the country, and if they suffer from the pandemic in Iran, they will be provided with a place and treatment for 14 days.

Inbound passengers must have coronavirus insurance, which differs from the routine insurance coverage purchased by all tourists before the coronavirus era.

FB/MG

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-12-2021

Nepal reports 269 new Covid-19 cases, three deaths

Post Report

KATHMANDU, Nepal on Friday reported 269 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours taking the nationwide infection tally to 825,445.

Five people tested positive in a total of 1,325 antigen tests, according to the Health Ministry. As of Friday, 4,758,719 PCR and 775,537 antigen tests have been carried out across the country.

A total of 7,691 PCR tests were performed in the past 24 hours, according to the Health Ministry.

In its regular situation report, the ministry did not mention the death toll over the past 24 hours. It, however, reported three Covid-19-related fatalities.

The countrywide death toll has now reached 11,570. The number of active cases stands at 5,522.

According to the ministry, 808,353 infected people have recovered from the disease so far; 270 of them in the last 24 hours.

Kathmandu Valley recorded 161 new infections in the past 24 hours. Of these, 111 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 30 in Lalitpur and 20 in Bhaktapur.

In the past 24 hours, 19 new infections were recorded in Province 1, 15 in Province 2, 185 in Bagmati, 24 in Gandaki, 18 in Lumbini, four each in Karnali and Sudurpaschim.

On Friday, 104 individuals infected with the virus were being treated in intensive care units across the country.

DAILY TIMES, ISLAMABAD 21-12-2021

270 new COVID cases reported in Pakistan

Web Desk

ISLAMABAD: Coronavirus has killed four more lives in Pakistan during the past 24 hours, lifting the death toll to 28,882.

According to the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), 270 more people were infected with the coronavirus.

A total of 42,506 samples were tested in the past 24 hours, out of which 270 turned out to be positive, showing an infection rate of 0.63 as compared to yesterday's 0.83 per cent.

At present, 643 critical patients have been admitted to hospitals across the country, the NCOC said.

On Monday, the NCOC decided to lower the age limit for eligibility of Covid vaccine's booster dose to 30 years.

According to the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) the facility of booster dose for 30 years of age and above will be available from January 1.

"Eligible persons could get inoculated with the Covid vaccine of their choice," according to the NCOC.

The National Command and Operation Centre in a session had considered the situation of coronavirus and mulled over the national vaccination strategy.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 17-12-2021

Three more Omicron cases detected

Get booster dose, specialists urge public:

More PCR tests to detect mutant strain:

Ishara Mudugamuwa

Sri Lankan Health Authorities yesterday confirmed three new cases of the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

Accordingly, a total of four cases of the Omicron variant have been detected so far in Sri Lanka.

Sri Jayawardhanapura University's Allergy Immunology and Cell Biology Unit Director Dr. Chandima Jeewandara said the number of individuals confirmed to have contracted the Omicron variant in Sri Lanka has increased to four as of yesterday.

The first case was an unvaccinated returnee from Nigeria. Authorities are probing how this person travelled abroad despite being unvaccinated. The individual is now being treated under home quarantine. Health authorities have warned that the number of individuals who contract the Omicron variant is likely to increase since it has already spread rapidly in more

than 77 countries. They fear a rapid spread of Covid during the festive season, as many people seem to disregard the Covid health guidelines and act as if the disease does not exist in the community.

They urge the public to get the booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible, which is now being given to over 20s at centres islandwide.

So far, more than 1.4 million persons have got the booster (third) dose of the vaccine. The booster is from Pfizer, regardless of the brand of the first two doses.

Sri Lanka's health authorities on Tuesday (14) began conducting Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests in the Colombo City to detect whether the Omicron variant had spread further in the community.

Officials from the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) said PCR tests were conducted on people in some areas of the City to test for the new Omicron variant through genomic sequencing.

Officials said this was the first time that swab samples were collected from the public to test for this mutant strain. Meanwhile, the Health Ministry has extended the COVID-19 prevention guidelines issued on December 1, 2021 for another 15 days - until the end of this year.

[Omicron variant multiplying 70 times faster than Delta - HK study]

A study from Hong Kong has revealed that the Omicron variant of coronavirus multiplies 70 times faster than the dominant Delta variant in human airways.

According to HK researchers who said their work provides the first information on how it infects people, Omicron replicates less well in human lung tissue compared with the original strain of the virus (Alpha), which researchers said could indicate a lower severity of disease.

A study done by researchers from the LKS Faculty of Medicine at the University of Hong Kong including Prof. Malik Pieris, revealed that the severity of disease in humans is not determined only by virus replication but also by the host immune response to the infection.

It is also noted that, by infecting many more people, a very infectious virus may cause more severe disease and death even though the virus strain itself may be less pathogenic.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 26-12-2021

Sri Lanka on threshold of dengue wave – NHSL physician

By Nadira Gunatilleke

It seems that Sri Lanka is on the threshold of another huge dengue wave after 2017. If you have flu-like symptoms such as fever, body ache and back pain, it can either be Covid-19 or dengue and it is very unlikely that it could be any other illness, a physician of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka (NHSL), Dr. Upul Dissanayake said.

Even if the NS1 (Dengue Virus Antigen Detection) test is negative, people should be vigilant because only 62 percent show a positive result when he or she gets dengue for the second time, he said.

He told a press briefing at the Health Promotion Bureau in Colombo on Wednesday that a huge dengue wave comes once in four years and the last wave hit Sri Lanka in 2017. At present, there are around 10 dengue patients at the National Hospital and 30 to 50 percent of them are in the Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever (DHF) stage which is fatal.

Dr. Dissanayake said that when people get dengue for the first time, the percentage of their NS1 test becoming positive is 98 percent and it is only 62 percent when they get dengue for the second time. Therefore, it is better to take bed rest and Paracetamol. He or she can drink 2,500 ml of liquid. Children should be given liquid on doctor's instructions.

Full Blood Counts should be checked regularly until the patient fully recovers. The reports should be taken within a few hours. No patient should stay at home when his or her Platelet Count goes down below 100. A dengue patient recovers within seven to 10 days. If there are dengue patients living around your house and you get a fever, it is dengue for sure, Dr. Dissanayake said.

Mosquito coils do not prevent dengue. Cleaning all dengue mosquito breeding sites is essential. Applying mosquito repellents and wearing clothes covering the body is helpful, he said.

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

Review

- General Naravane has taken the charge of Chief of Staff Committee, India as the major shuffling took place in the top hierarchy of Indian military. He is also eyeing to get promoted to Chief of Defense Staff (India's highest military rank) after the death of General Bipin Rawat. India has been focusing on strengthening its military muscle through reframing the military structure and upgrading its arsenal. In this regards, India has tested short-range Pralay ballistic missile while Indian Defense Minister has also conveyed it to the partner countries that defense equipment for India must be produced within the country. Furthermore, India is exploring new ways to interact with the Central Asian Republics like the domain of counter terrorism. It is significant because as per the US report, 66 ISIS terrorists have Indian citizenships while regions like Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir, Northeast India and Maoist areas have also witnessed the sharp rise in insurgency.
- Bangladesh is focusing on its maritime security and looking forward to enhance it after PM Sheikh Hasina announced the delivery of more warships to Bangladeshi Navy. It is essential as Bangladesh has been witnessing the rise in militants' activities as Al-Qaeda affiliated group, Ansar Al-Islam, has been active in conducting terror attacks in the country.
- Despite of the European Union strategy of cooperating with China in the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific region in general, the German warship has intruded into the territory of South China Sea. On the other hand, China has also increased its presence in the West-Pacific by conducting drills of Liaoning aircraft carrier group. It is noteworthy that the IR scholarship in recent years has pointed towards the Indo-Pacific as the next arena of global powers' competition.
- Iran is on its path of upgrading and modernizing its military arsenal. In this regards, Iran is one of the few states that have the military drone technology which is utilized in conducting attacks against the militants. Apart from the air space, Iran has also put into service the new home grown tank named Karrar. The indigenization of Iranian military arsenal is of utmost importance for Iran owing to the US sanctions in purchasing the latest technology from abroad.
- Pakistan is enhancing its defense ties with the friendly states and in accordance to it, Pakistan has participated alongside Turkey in the 13th 'Ayyıldız-2021' bilateral military exercise at Istanbul. Furthermore, in response to the Indian assertion in the region and Indian Ocean, Pakistan has successfully conducted the launch of Babur Cruise Missile 1B.

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

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THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 17-12-2021**Gen Naravane assumes charge as chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee**

Gen Naravane has been given the charge as he is the senior-most among the three service chiefs. IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari and Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar had taken charge of their respective positions on September 30 and November 30.

SNS | New Delhi

Army Chief Gen M M Naravane has assumed the charge as the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee consisting of the three service chiefs, according to sources.

This appears to be a stop-gap arrangement before the appointment of a new Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) following the demise of Gen Bipin Rawat in a chopper crash recently.

Earlier, the senior-most among the three service chiefs used to be the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

Gen Naravane has been given the charge as he is the senior-most among the three service chiefs. IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari and Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar had taken charge of their respective positions on September 30 and November 30.

Gen Naravane's name is already doing rounds for elevation as CDS. The post of CDS was created in 2019 on the recommendations of a committee of defence experts, headed by Lt General DB Shekatkar. The CDS also heads the Department of Military Affairs within the Ministry of Defence.

The CDS is responsible for coordination among the three services in equipment and arms procurement, training and staffing.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 20-12-2021**India, Central Asian nations to expand defence, trade, counter-terrorism ties**

Foreign Ministers call for connectivity based on local priorities

Sandeep Dikshit

New Delhi, December 19

India and Central Asian nations on Sunday resolved to take their ties to the "next level" in areas of commerce, connectivity, defence and counter-terrorism.

In a joint statement at the end of the third India-Central Asia Dialogue, the Foreign Ministers wanted

connectivity initiatives to be based on transparency, broad participation, local priorities, financial sustainability and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. These, incidentally, are the issues that India says are missing in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The ministers also condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reiterated that providing safe havens, using terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism and terror financing went against the basic principles of humanity and international relations.

They stressed that perpetrators should be held accountable and brought to justice in accordance with the principle of "extradite or prosecute". Earlier, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in his opening remarks said New Delhi was pleased at the state of the relations with Central Asia but knew that the potential was much more. The Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also delivered their remarks.

The Foreign Ministers later called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi while some of them held separate bilaterals with Jaishankar. The ministers felt interaction in defence and security was an important element of India-Central Asia cooperation and resolved to regularly hold consultations between their NSAs on terrorism and other emerging security challenges in the region.

They welcomed the proposal to include Chabahar Port within the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and flagged their interest in using Shahid Beheshti Terminal at Chabahar Port for trade with India and beyond.

They decided to continue providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and spoke against the country being used for planning terrorist acts and called for concerted action against all terrorist groups. They also sought an inclusive government, central role of the UN in providing humanitarian assistance and preserving the rights of women, children and other national ethnic groups.

It was also decided to jointly celebrate the 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic ties between India and Central Asia.

They also touched on utilising India's \$1bn line of credit for infrastructure development projects while Turkmenistan stressed the importance of the TAPI gas pipeline project.

THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 17-12-2021
ISRO to launch four foreign satellites
during 2021-23: Govt

ISRO through its commercial arm, New Space India Limited (NSIL), a Government of India company under the Department of Space (DOS), has been launching satellites belonging to other countries on-board Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), on a commercial basis.

SNS | New Delhi

ISRO has signed agreements with four countries for launching foreign satellites during 2021-2023, Union Minister Atomic Energy and Space Jitendra Singh said on Thursday.

In a written reply in the Rajya Sabha today, he informed that about 132 Million Euros would be earned through launching these foreign satellites on a commercial basis.

ISRO through its commercial arm, New Space India Limited (NSIL), a Government of India company under the Department of Space (DOS), has been launching satellites belonging to other countries on-board Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), on a commercial basis.

NSIL as on date has signed six launch service agreements with customers from four countries for launching foreign satellites into space on-board PSLV during 2021-2023. A total number of 124 indigenous satellites have been put into the earth's orbit, including 12 student satellites.

In another written reply, Jitendra Singh informed that starting from 1999 till date, a total of 342 foreign satellites belonging to 34 countries have been successfully launched on board Indian Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) on a commercial basis.

The Minister said that through launching of foreign satellites on-board Indian launch vehicles, India has earned foreign exchange revenue of about 35 million USD and ten million Euros during the last three years.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 19-12-2021
Military equipment to be produced on
Indian soil, Defence Minister conveys to
partner countries

Rajnath refers to Centre's decision to not import 209 army gears in order to promote the domestic industry

Staff Bureau, PTI | New Delhi

India has very clearly conveyed to the US, Russia, France and many of its partner countries that military

platforms and equipment required by the Indian armed forces to deal with myriad security challenges have to be manufactured in the country, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday.

Referring to regional geopolitical developments, Singh said that God has given India some neighbours who do not feel good seeing its growth and that the one born out of the partition is becoming weak worrying about India's development.

In an address at the annual convention of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), he said most of the countries in the world are friends of India, including the US, Russia and France.

In this context, he said, India, at the same time, made it clear to them that the military hardware required by the Indian armed forces will have to be produced in the country.

"We have told every friendly country that we want to produce the military platforms, weapons and ammunition in India itself keeping in mind the security of the country," he said.

"We have conveyed this message to the US, Russia, France and others as well and we do not hesitate to communicate this message," he added.

The defence minister said the message to the countries producing military equipment has been that: "Come Make In India, Come Make for India and Come Make for the world".

Citing an example, Singh said following his talks with French Defence Minister Florence Parly on Friday, it was agreed that a major French company will produce "an engine" in India by joining hands with an Indian company under the strategic partnership model. He, however, did not elaborate.

Singh said India will maintain friendship with these countries but at the same time will not hesitate to push for the production of key platforms on Indian soil.

"We will maintain the friendship but at the same time make it clear that whatever military equipment, weapons and ammunition are needed have to be produced in India," the defence minister said.

"I tell it very clearly and with confidence. And you will be happy to know that I get a positive response from them," Singh said.

The defence minister also referred to the government's decision to not import 209 military equipment under a staggered timeline to promote the domestic defence industry and indicated that the items under the list may touch 1,000.

"When I talk about 'India Beyond 75', I believe that this 'positive list' will be around 1000 items in this decade. I am very positive about this," he said.

The defence minister also talked about the need for "fair competition" between private and public sector companies and described the corporatisation of the over 200-year-old Ordnance Factory Board as the biggest reform in the defence sector after Independence.

"At present, India's defence and aerospace manufacturing market is worth Rs 85,000 crores. I believe it will increase to one lakh crore in 2022," he said.

The government has initiated a series of measures in the last couple of years to encourage the domestic defence industry.

In August last year, Singh announced that India will stop the import of 101 weapons and military platforms like transport aircraft, light combat helicopters, conventional submarines, cruise missiles and sonar systems by 2024.

A second list, putting import restrictions on 108 military weapons and systems such as next-generation corvettes, airborne early warning systems, tank engines and radars, was issued a few months later.

In May last year, the government announced increasing the FDI limit from 49 per cent to 74 per cent under the automatic route in the defence sector.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 23-12-2021

**Pralay missile successfully test-fired,
reached target with 'high degree'
accuracy: DRDO**

Test-fired off the Odisha coast, the missile met all its objectives, the Defence Research and Development Organisation said.

By hindustantimes.com, New Delhi

India on Wednesday successfully test-fired the surface-to-surface guided, short-range Pralay ballistic missile, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) said, adding that weapon met all its objectives.

"The missile, which can strike targets at a range of 150 to 500 kms, was test-fired off the Odisha coast. It followed the desired quasi ballistic trajectory, and reached the designated target with high degree accuracy, validating the control, guidance and mission algorithms," news agency ANI quoted DRDO officials as saying.

The missile, test-fired off the Odisha coast, has met all its objectives. The new missile followed the desired

quasi ballistic trajectory and reached the designated target with high degree accuracy, validating the control, guidance and mission algorithms: DRDO officials. Providing further details, officials informed that during the exercise, all sub-systems performed 'satisfactorily.' They said, "All sensors deployed near impact point across eastern coast, including downrange ships, tracked missile trajectory and captured all events. Pralay is powered with solid propellant rocket motor, and has many new technologies."

Defence minister Rajnath Singh, said DRDO, congratulated associated teams for the successful trial. Quoting Dr G Satheesh Reddy, Chairman DRDO, the agency said that upon induction, the missile, which is equipped with modern technology, would 'provide necessary inputs to the armed forces.'

Secretary DD R&D and Chairman DRDO, Dr G Satheesh Reddy appreciated the team & said that this missile is a new generation Surface-to-Surface missile equipped with modern technologies & induction of this weapon system will give necessary impetus to the Armed Forces: DRDO officials

Pralay can be fired from a mobile launcher, and its guidance system includes state-of-the-art Navigation System and Integrated Avionics, officials further stated.

The project to develop this missile was sanctioned in March 2015 with a budget of nearly ₹333 crore. The weapon is based on the Prithvi Defence Vehicle from the Indian Ballistic Missile Defence Program.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 18-12-2021

**ISIS has 66 known Indian-origin fighters:
US report on terrorism**

Commends NIA for anti-insurgent operations

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, December 17

There are 66 known Indian-origin fighters on the rolls of global terrorist group Islamic State and the country's National Investigation Agency (NIA) has done a commendable job in ensuring that budding modules were detected and disrupted in time, said the US State Department's annual report on terrorism.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in the 2020 Country Reports on Terrorism issued on Thursday, said India collaborated with the US on implementing the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2309. The resolution calls governments to meet their responsibility to keep citizens secure while travelling by air. The report said in 2020, there were multiple

reports in the media and from the NIA of suspected cases of online terrorist radicalisation, particularly in southern Indian states.

In addition, India continued to face terror threat from Pakistan, which failed to take action against known terrorists such as JeM's Masood Azhar and the 2008 Mumbai attack "project manager" Sajid Mir, both believed to be in Pakistan, it said.

Some madrasas in Pakistan continued to teach violent extremist doctrine, it said. The major groups targeting India were LeT, JeM, Hizbul Mujahideen, ISIS, al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, it said.

The report conceded, "Pakistan took steps in 2020 to counter terror financing and restrain India-focused militant groups from conducting attacks. Pakistan convicted LeT founder Hafiz Saeed and other senior LeT leaders in terror funding cases."

The US report was unstinting in its praise for the National Investigation Agency. "The NIA examined 34 cases related to ISIS and arrested 160 persons, including 10 alleged al-Qaeda operatives from Kerala and West Bengal, in September," it noted. However, no foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) was repatriated to India during 2020.

The report faulted the Union Home Ministry for not having a national policy for countering violent extremism (CVE) as a result of which efforts in this direction were "uneven" and led by local police departments. Five states — Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh — have CVE policies.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 18-12-2021
J&K, Northeast India and Maoist-hit
regions in central India hit by terror
activities in 2020: US report

Indian government had made significant efforts to detect, disrupt operations of major terrorist organisations but threats persist, says report

Washington, December 17

Terror outfits such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizbul Mujahideen, ISIS and Al-Qaeda continue to be active in the Indian subcontinent, with Jammu and Kashmir, Northeast India and Maoist-hit regions in central India being hit by terror activities, according to the latest report on terrorism released by the US State Department.

The Indian government had made significant efforts to detect and disrupt operations of major terrorist organisations within its borders, but threats persist, the report titled '2020 Country Reports on Terrorism' said. "In 2020, terrorism affected the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Northeast India and Maoist-affected regions in central India. Major terrorist groups have been active in India, including the Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizbul Mujahideen, ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent," the report, which is published annually, said on Thursday.

The report cites the example of crackdown by the Indian security agencies on several key members of Al-Qaeda-affiliated outfit Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind in Jammu & Kashmir.

In September 2020, the United States and India held the 17th meeting of the Counterterrorism Joint Working Group and Third US-India Designations Dialogue.

In December, India had proposed holding another Quad counterterrorism tabletop exercise along with the United States, Australia, and Japan, the report said.

Although insurgent groups continue to operate in the Northeast, levels of terrorist violence have decreased.

The report also examined the decreasing presence of Khalistan groups in the country.

"The many organisations involved in the Sikh separatist (Khalistan) movement have not engaged in significant recent activities within India's borders," it said.

Observing that the National Security Guard has improved its response time and reduced past dependence on other agencies for logistics, the US State Department report insisted that challenges including budget constraints and dependence on temporary details and volunteers from the armed forces remained.

Noting that Indian security agencies were effective in disrupting terror threats, gaps remained in inter-agency intelligence and information sharing, the report said.

In the absence of a National Counter Terrorism Centre, the Indian Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) collaborates with the United States on exchanging terrorist screening information and conducting real-time collation and sharing of intelligence among federal and state security agencies.

Several Indian states have established state-level MACs to disseminate terrorism information to law enforcement, it said.

“Indian security forces demonstrate limited capacity to patrol and secure extensive maritime and land borders. India is implementing UNSCR 2396 to improve detection and deterrence of terrorist travel by using watchlists, implementing biographic and biometric screening at ports of entry, and expanding information sharing,” the report added. — PTI

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 21-12-2021

Navy to get more warships, equipment: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government plans to include more advanced warships and war equipment for Bangladesh Navy as part of modernising defence.

She was addressing a function at Bangladesh Naval Academy (BNA) as chief guest, virtually joining from her official residence Gono Bhaban.

The event marked the “President Parade” of the passing out cadets of the Midshipman 2019 Alfa and Direct Entry Officer 2021 Bravo.

Hasina said the navy has been turned into a full-fledged, “three-dimensional” force through the inclusion of two submarines -- “BNS Navajatra” and “BNS Joyjatra” -- in 2017.

“The navy will be able to play a stronger role in ensuring the safety of the country’s vast and resource rich maritime areas, prevent human trafficking and smuggling, ensure

security of fishers and provide safe passage for merchant ships,” the PM added.

Besides, she said work is underway to build a permanent submarine base -- “BNS Sheikh Hasina” -- at Pekua in Cox’s Bazar to provide safe jetty facilities to submarines and warships at the harbour.

She mentioned that the government is also working to increase and streamline the organisational structure of BNA to ensure the best use of the sophisticated technologies.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 25-12-2021

Uproot militants from their dens

Extremist threats still persist

It is alarming to learn that militants belonging to the group known as Ansar Al Islam are being trained in secret hideouts within Bangladesh, with the nefarious plan to strike at the opportune moment. According to a report from the country’s intelligence agencies, this

terror group categorises progressive people and atheists as their “soft targets,” and organisations promoting Hindutva and foreign missions as “hard targets.” The masterminds, the intelligence reports say, have no plans to attack the law enforcers right away as it believes such attacks will ultimately lead to a major confrontation with the latter, which will weaken its strength.

This outfit, once known as Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), was banned under the Anti-Terrorism Act. It is known to be the Bangladesh chapter of al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which is finalising a list of its future targets. The outfit has been banned following its involvement in some attacks on secular bloggers and writers in the country. According to the law enforcers, during investigation, they found Ansarullah Bangla Team’s involvement in the killing of writer-blogger Avijit Roy in broad daylight—a despicable act that received wide international coverage. The ban came at a time when three more bloggers and writers were also killed within the span of less than three months.

We may recall that ABT was the sixth such organisation to be outlawed for militant and anti-state activities in the country. The other five are: Hizb ut-Tahrir, Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkatul Jihad Bangladesh (Huji), Jagrata Muslim Janata of Bangladesh, and Shahadat-e al-Hikma.

It is doubly distressing to learn that the banned outfits Hizb ut-Tahrir, JMB and Huji are still active in the country, secretly working with little-known militant organisations to reach their goals. The counterterrorism officials further revealed that the hiring and initial training of Ansar Al Islam were being done online, whereas advanced training for the outfit’s military wing is given in person in some remote areas of the country. The outfit considers Kashmir as a possible shelter and the Rohingya community in Bangladesh as a source for new members. The report also said a group of new Ansar Al Islam recruits tried to go to Afghanistan and Kashmir through the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Cox’s Bazar. The group plans to build dens in the Indo-Bangla border areas, so that they can operate smoothly from there.

It becomes evident from the intelligence reports that the recruits and trainers of the militant groups are conducting their activities inside the country. They cannot conduct training in remote areas all by themselves. It is obvious that they are being provided with shelter and basic logistics by people who sympathise with their cause. We believe, through

widening their intelligence network, our law enforcers should be able to apprehend the sympathisers and destroy the nexus with greater success.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 18-12-2021

Germany seeks more attention from China with Navy frigate Bayern crossing the South China Sea

By Hu Xijin

The German Navy frigate *Bayern* started to cross the South China Sea on Wednesday with the hype of Western media outlets, emphasizing that this is the first time a German warship has entered the South China Sea in the past 20 years, which was planned to express opposition to China's territorial claims.

Again, this is the Western public opinion and the tactics of political elites to unnecessarily hype a matter and magnify its meaning to boost the morale in the West to exert collective pressure on China. Chinese people must not be fooled by them. If current international affairs are a big banquet, then I would compare this matter to a piece of soybean among many exquisite dishes.

Up to now, the German Navy has almost never carried out a mission that has attracted global attention. If it were not for the fact that they are riding the wave of China, the German frigate on the surface would be quieter than a submarine underwater. This is an era of competition for international influence. Public opinion in the US, the UK and other countries are focusing on the navigation of this German warship hyped by media. This is just what the Germans want. Germany may as well enjoy such free publicity.

In fact, navigation in the South China Sea has always been free and the innocent passage of warships has never been blocked. The US' so-called "freedom of navigation" operations in the South China Sea deliberately create an image where China opposes free navigation in the area and stigmatize China's territorial claims and all of its South China Sea policies. At this time, the US particularly hopes that other Western countries can send warships to the South China Sea. This is because the US is like Don Quixote, which sees China as the windmill and attacks it with a spear. The US has a guilty conscience and needs other countries to come to the South China Sea to keep up its momentum. Germany's act is indeed opportunistic. But we should understand that Germany is not China's geopolitical opponent. Germany is radical in ideology and human

rights issues but it lacks reasons to really come to East Asia to join the China-US competition and take the US side.

The new German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock, comes from the Green Party and advocates transatlantic coordination. But she also speaks from an ideological and institutional position. They are not interested in Germany's really instigating animosity in the South China Sea.

When former German ambassador to China Michael Clauss was in Beijing, he invited me to dinner many times. From his complaints, I feel clearly that German people hope that China can pay as much attention to Europe as it pays to the US. Besides, they feel that China cannot produce everything, otherwise, Germany's advantageous industries may not be guaranteed. This is their concern.

The *Bayern* navigation in the South China Sea is another way of Germany calling China to "pay more attention" to the country. It is reported that Germany has requested permission to dock in Shanghai many times but China has refused because the message from this warship is too complicated. As far as I am concerned, it is good to give it a cold shoulder like this.

The author is a commentator with the Global Times.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 22-12-2021

Liaoning aircraft carrier group holds drills in 'strategically important' West Pacific

By Liu Xuanzun

After entering the Pacific Ocean through the Miyako Strait last week, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy's *Liaoning* aircraft carrier battle group reportedly conducted drills involving fighter jet and helicopter operations in waters east of Japan's Okinawa, a location Chinese analysts said on Tuesday is of strategic importance in safeguarding China's territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force on Sunday spotted six PLA Navy warships, namely the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier, a Type 055 large destroyer, a Type 052D destroyer, two Type 054A frigates and a Type 901 comprehensive supply ship, sailing in waters about 300 kilometers east of Kitadaitojima, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan's Ministry of Defense Joint Staff said in a press release on Tuesday.

Carrier aircraft including J-15 fighter jets as well as Z-9 and Z-18 helicopters conducted takeoffs and landings

during the carrier battle group's voyage, according to the Japanese press release.

A photo attached to the press release shows the *Liaoning* sailing in the ocean, with many J-15 fighter jets and Z-18 helicopters ready for operation on the flight deck, while another photo caught the moment a J-15 took off from the carrier.

Japan's Ministry of Defense Joint Staff later on Tuesday published a second press release, saying the Chinese carrier group continued similar activities on Monday.

Japan claimed it dispatched the *Izumo*, its de facto aircraft carrier, and fighter jets to monitor the Chinese naval activities.

The latest movement of the *Liaoning* carrier battle group comes after Japan's Ministry of Defense Joint Staff said in another press release on Friday that the group sailed through the Miyako Strait and entered the Pacific Ocean on Thursday.

The exercise was in the West Pacific outside the Miyako Strait, which is a strategically important gateway the PLA Navy needs to cross in order to reach the West Pacific, Song Zhongping, a Chinese military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

Holding drills there reflects the Chinese aircraft carrier's combat and support capabilities in the high seas, Song said, noting that the value of aircraft carriers lies in their ability to operate far away from the homeland.

Chinese military observers said West Pacific is also an important potential battlefield if foreign forces like the US and Japan interfere in the Taiwan question, as Chinese aircraft carriers could take positions here and fend off foreign forces, while also surrounding the island of Taiwan from its east.

The PLA Navy's second aircraft carrier, the *Shandong*, recently also embarked on a voyage and conducted realistic combat-oriented drills in the South China Sea, the People's Daily reported on Sunday.

IRAN NEWS, TEHRAN 19-12-2021

Iranian Drones Turn Into U.S. Nightmare By Hamid Reza Naghashian

TEHRAN (Iran News) – Iranian Drones Turn Into U.S. Nightmare. The Islamic Republic of Iran in recent years has turned into a nightmare for the U.S. and its allies as the more the country progresses in scientific and military fields, the more the Westerners get worried and angry.

Let's have a flashback at an amazing military achievement which happened almost ten years ago which was a turning point in Iran's scientific and military progress.

10 years ago, Iran captured a highly-sophisticated U.S. drone in the northeast of the country. RQ-170 was brought down with minimum damage by Iran's cyber warfare units. Iran managed to make a copy of the drone and add new features to it. Iran now has a wide-range of drones for different purposes.

And now Tehran has become one of the top ten drone manufacturers of the world so that even the U.S. fears of this progress and the future progresses of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

On Wednesday and in yet another move against Iran, the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee passed a bill to restrict the proliferation of Iran's military drones. This is while negotiations over the removal of anti-Iran sanctions are in progress in the Austrian capital Vienna. Tehran has time and again proven that its military prowess is purely defensive. So, how can Washington's move be justified when the US sells bombs and drones to other countries that use them in unjust wars to kill civilians?

Here a question is raised by the impartial politicians and political analysts: How can Washington's attempt to restrict the proliferation of Iran's military drones be justified when the U.S. sells bombs and drones to other countries that use them in unjust wars to kill civilians? A bipartisan group of leading members of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs just passed a bill aimed at restricting Iran's defensive military prowess. The Stop Iranian Drones Act bans the supply, sale, or transfer, of military drones to or from Iran under US law. The bill addresses, what the US claims to be, the growing threat of Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle program.

However, despite attaining self-sufficiency in the arms industry, making great progress in developing and manufacturing a broad range of military equipment in recent years, Iran has time and again proven that its military capabilities are purely defensive in the face of moves by the U.S. and its regional allies, who have been fomenting chaos and tension in the region.

Last month the Iranian army intercepted two U.S. unmanned aerial vehicles, which had penetrated Iranian airspace in an area where Iran was holding massive drills. They were sent on their way with a stern warning to stay away from the zone.

The ban imposed on the Iranian military drones comes amid ongoing talks over the removal of anti-Iran Sanctions between Tehran and the signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal in Vienna.

The U.S. baselessly accuses Iran of conducting drone attacks in West Asia, while Washington has well documented blood on its hands, having killed thousands upon thousands of innocent civilians by conducting their own hypocritical drone and air strikes in the region.

Iran has proved in recent years that it is determined to advance its scientific and self-defense military programs and sanctions are unable to stop the country and what the U.S. does is something in vain and Iranians do not even give a damn to such approvals and bans of the U.S. and they have proved the world that if there is a will, there is a way and Iranians have proved their will for progress to make ineffective the U.S. bans. Tehran is using the technology of drone in its civil sector and this is also another upset for the West that Iranians are gradually cutting their dependence to the West. There are several fields for taking advantage of the drones that Iran has tried to employ them.

According to reports, the use of drones in the Iranian farms has tripled this calendar year to nearly 460 units. Iran's agriculture ministry has said that it is encouraging the use of drones on farms across the country through offering cheap loans to farmers and launching information campaigns to boost the application of the technology.

Head of the ministry's Agriculture Mechanization Expansion Center said that demand and use of drones in the Iranian farms had risen three-fold since the start of the current calendar year in late March compared to the previous year.

The official said that 12 domestic companies have supplied 65 models and brands of drones for use in the Iranian agriculture sector, adding that the number of drones used in the farms has increased to reach nearly 460 units.

He also said drones are mostly used for spraying pesticide in the Iranian farms, adding that they have also been used to apply fertilizers, for pollination and for sowing seed in farms in remote regions.

This is just a simple example for using drone in the civil fields and Iran can expand its working on drone to improve this technology and make the world envy it.

So such unstoppable progresses can hurt the West and for this reason they have to resort to any tricks and pretexts as well as claims to stop Iran but Iran has set

its doctrine in 1979 when the Islamic Revolution emerged and the Islamic Republic of Iran was formed, and the doctrine of the country is to rely on own capabilities and to cut dependence no matter what the West and its allies say because any progress and achievement in Tehran is like a thorn in the eyes of them and such nonsense bans and threats are in vein.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 23-12-2021

Iran puts into service new advanced homegrown tank

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Ground Force has put a new upgraded combat tank dubbed Karrar into service on the third day of a massive military drill underway in southern Iran.

The drill, code-named the Great Prophet 17, included a showcase of Iran's newest homegrown arms and equipment. Various forces of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) began the military drill along the southern coastlines of the country on Monday.

In a press briefing on Monday, Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan, the IRGC's deputy chief of operations and spokesman for the drills, announced that various IRGC units such as the aerospace force and the cyber-electronic division would participate in the exercise.

On Tuesday, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami, accompanied by a number of senior generals, paid a visit to the location of the drill.

The drill featured real-time firing of smart bombs, ballistic and cruise missiles targeting fixed and mobile targets. In addition, combat drones dropped bombs with pinpoint accuracy and Su-22 warplanes bombarded mock enemy targets in close air support (CAS) operation.

On Wednesday, the Karrar tank was operationalized during the exercise. Karrar is an upgraded version of the T-72m tanks that come into service for the first time.

The version of Karrar used by the IRGC Ground Force is equipped with a camouflage system that provides concealment against thermal infrared radar detection, according to Tasnim.

It is also furnished with an electro-optical fire control system, laser rangefinders, and a ballistic computer.

The ongoing war game covers the coastlines of the southern provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr and Khuzestan.

During the drill, the IRGC forces also extensively used combat drones with upgraded capabilities.

IRGC Ground Force Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour said the assault and combat drones in possession of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) are capable of targeting any place and destroying any target.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of Payambar-e Azam 17 (The Great Prophet), the general highlighted the major advances in the military drones used by his forces.

The IRGC's tactical doctrine has changed and been updated proportional to the new threats, he noted, according to Tasnim.

Hailing the production of homegrown drones with advanced technologies, the commander said, "Our assault and combat drones can target any spot deemed necessary, in a way that hitting and detonating any target has become possible with such a tool and after a process in which such aircraft have developed and been equipped."

He also noted that the IRGC's technologies used for electronic warfare have improved quantitatively and qualitatively.

The drill came amid Israeli threats against Iran. Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz has said that he ordered the Israeli army to prepare for a military attack on Iran. Other Israeli intelligence, political and military officials have echoed the same threat. An Iranian security official has told Nour News, a media outlet close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, that relative progress made in the Vienna talks could reinforce Israel's motivation to make "malicious moves."

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 21-12-2021

Pak-Turk special forces conduct 'Ayyildiz-2021' exercise in Istanbul

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Special Service Group SSG(N) participated in bilateral Special Operations Forces (SOFs) Exercise 'Ayyildiz 2021' with Turkish Su Alt Taarruz (SAT) in Istanbul.

Both navies have been conducting bilateral exercises regularly since 1996 and this exercise is the 13th of the series, exclusively designed to exchange professional expertise in the SOF domain with an aim to build

synergy, strengthen military relationships and enhance interoperability between SOFs of both countries, a spokesman for Pakistan Navy said.

The exercise focused on anti-terrorism operations, sniper firing, frogman ops and Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) domains. The exercise concluded with a demo of coordinated VBSS operations involving ships, helicopters and fast speed boats along with SOFs elements.

The event was witnessed by high-level delegations. Exercise 'Ayyildiz-2021' proved professionally rewarding as SOFs elements of both countries remained actively engaged in rehashing contemporary tactics, techniques and procedures.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 22-12-2021

Pakistan conducts successful test launch of Babur cruise missile 1B

Staff Correspondent

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan on Tuesday conducted a successful test of an enhanced range version of the indigenously developed Babur Cruise Missile 1B.

The test launch was witnessed by Lieutenant General Nadeem Zaki Manj, Director General Strategic Plans Division Dr Raza Samar, Chairman NESCOM Lieutenant General Muhammad Ali, Commander Army Strategic Force Command, senior officers from Strategic Plans Division, Strategic Forces, scientists and engineers of strategic organizations.

Director-General, Strategic Plans Division, congratulated the scientists and engineers on achieving excellence in cruise missile technology and expressed confidence that this test will strengthen Pakistan's strategic deterrence.

President, Prime Minister, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Services Chiefs congratulated the scientists and engineers on the conduct of successful launch. The last time, Pakistan tested Babur 1A Cruise Missile on the 10th of February this year. Babur Cruise Missile is capable of engaging targets at land and sea with high precision. The first version of the Babur Cruise Missile was inducted into the service of the Pakistan Army in 2010.