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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 3-8-2024
**‘When New Delhi is ready for peace, it is
welcome to call Islamabad’**

Adya Goyal

PM Modi on Kargil War anniversary

At the 25th anniversary of the 1999 Kargil War (also known as ‘Vijay Diwas’), Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Kargil War Memorial and spoke at the Shradhanjali Samaroh in Dras, addressing the nation. He condemned Pakistan saying, “It is trying to keep itself relevant by supporting terrorism and proxy war.”

Daily Times (July 27) responded by saying that PM Modi should “step back from his usual hatred-laced rhetoric and for a change, give regional peace a chance.” The editorial adds that “Modi’s accusations have further strained the already fragile relationship between the two countries.”

Dawn (July 28) points out that regardless of India’s comments, “the Foreign Office has said that while Pakistan is ready to defend itself, ‘it remains committed to promoting peace’ in the region... When New Delhi feels that it is ready for peace, it is welcome to call Islamabad.”

Hamas leader Haniyeh’s assassination

In the early hours of July 31, Hamas’s Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh was killed by an “airborne guided projectile” while in his guesthouse room in Iran. Haniyeh was in the country for Iranian President Masaoud Pezeshkian’s inauguration ceremony. So far, Israel has not confirmed or denied allegations of being behind the attack. A few hours earlier, Israel launched an air strike targeting Hezbollah’s top leaders, which killed commander Fuad Shukr in Beirut, Lebanon. This spate of assassinations threatens to wreak havoc in the Middle East.

Dawn (August 1) speculates on the consequences of these attacks and believes that “with the Haniyeh assassination, the prospects of a ceasefire appear to have been buried for the foreseeable future. The US can still prevail upon Israel to wind down its murderous campaign. But in an election year, this will be highly unlikely as both contenders compete for the blessings of the Zionist lobby in Washington.”

Express Tribune (August 1) discusses the possibility of retaliation saying, “From Yemen to Lebanon and from Syria to Iraq, Iranian non-state actors are unlikely to sit idle, and a calculated rejoinder from Tehran cannot be ruled out.”

Pakistan’s monsoon woes

With Lahore experiencing heavy rainfall — the 44-year-old record of maximum rain in the city in one day was broken on August 1 — and incidents of death and devastation in the already-deprived northwestern area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the focus is back on infrastructure and protection measures in the country.

News International (August 2) suggests, “With the monsoon having reared its head, Pakistan also needs to

invest in green energy and take measures to deal with the record-breaking rains, flooding and other climate change-induced natural disasters on a war footing.”

According to *Daily Times* (July 30), “PM Sharif could have dared go beyond the usual and introspect the momentum of post-flood reconstruction and enhancing risk protection. Is today’s Pakistan better equipped to fight the wrath of Mother Nature or would we still wait for others’ consciences to step in during a crisis? Simply deploying troops and expecting them to whip miracles out of thin air is misleading.”

Overcharging for power

A few months ago, the public in Pakistan was protesting the outrageously high price of power supply. Turns out, according to a NEPRA (National Electric Power Regulatory Authority) report, all power distributors were overcharging customers for units they did not use. Given that helplessness in the face of mounting bills even led to suicides, there is much anger among the citizens.

The Nation (August 2) that the authorities concerned must use an “iron hand” to deal with this situation: “Beyond the immediate damage, corruption of this magnitude discourages people from paying bills and taxes, eroding their trust in the system and government. If government institutions or their subsidiaries are scamming people — scams that have led to deaths — there is naturally little reason left to trust the government’s administrative machinery.”

Dawn (August 2) mentions that last summer saw a similar situation but “none of these firms were penalised”. The editorial writes, “The outcome of this useless inquiry will not be any different... The prime minister has already given the affected consumers 10 extra days to pay their bills for July and August ‘in view of their difficulties’, instead of ordering the Discoms to right the wrong done to their customers... So much for the policy of zero tolerance and commitment to reforms.”

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-8-2024

**Resume cross-LoC trade & bus service:
Mufti to Shah**

Staff Correspondent

Srinagar, Former CM Mehbooba Mufti on Friday urged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to resume cross-LoC (Line of Control) trade and bus service in Jammu and Kashmir. She said these would serve as significant confidence-building measures for the people of J&K and mark a step towards restoring normalcy in the region. Raising the issue of traders participating in cross-LoC trade, Mufti claimed they were being served notices, demanding “tax payments on transactions that were non-monetary and tax-exempt at the time.” The Cross-LOC trade between India and Pakistan had started back in 2008 in Jammu and Kashmir through two routes, but was halted in March 2019. The Union

Government had taken this decision after receiving reports that the Cross-LoC trade routes were being misused by Pakistan-based elements for funnelling illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency, the Home Ministry had said in April 2019.

The trade was allowed through two trade facilitation centres located at Salamabad in Uri and Chakkan-da-Bagh, in Poonch. The trade was based on a barter system and conducted on a zero duty basis four days a week. Mufti stressed that the people of J&K had been adversely affected by the suspension of the Cross-LoC bus service and trade.

“While initiatives in 2005 and 2008 took shape during the UPA regime, it is crucial to acknowledge that the groundwork was laid by the NDA government under the Vajpayee ji’s leadership.”

THE HINDU, DELHI 9-8-2024

Change in Bangladesh, the challenges for India

New Delhi can capitalise on its strong development partnership with Dhaka and work closely with the interim government, the army, and the people

T.S. Tirumurti

With events in Bangladesh unfolding at a rapid pace, this writer recalls the events of February 2009 when (now former) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina faced a major crisis within two months of her taking over. The mutiny of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), a paramilitary force, where the rebels took over the BDR’s headquarters in Dhaka, left 74 dead, out of whom 57 were army officers.

The unrest spread to 12 other towns and cities and posed a direct threat to the fledgling democratically elected government of Sheikh Hasina.

Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon was called back from Colombo by the then External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, where this writer was also present, being the Head of Division for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Maldives. We took the only available flight, late at night, to Mumbai and then to Delhi to reach early the next morning. Within two hours, the Foreign Secretary began meeting Ambassadors of important countries to convey India’s concern about the unfolding crisis and seeking their understanding in case the situation got worse.

The mutiny failed. It was bound to fail since Ms. Hasina had just come to power riding on “clean” elections with huge backing from women and youth, and without the army’s interference. But in the 15 years of her tenure, all this seems to have been squandered.

A growing disconnect

The recent elections in 2024 were least inclusive with the Opposition’s boycott, dwindling democratic space, an erosion of human rights, a severe economic downturn and, even more significantly, high levels of unemployment among the youth — a segment of

support which had earlier benefited from the sustained economic growth under Ms. Hasina. And when the students’ protests broke out, led by the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, the fact that it was handled in a ham-handed manner — almost as if they were the enemies of the state, and which saw the use of violence — sealed Ms. Hasina’s fate.

Factoring in public opinion, challenges

However, Bangladesh Army chief, General Waker-uz-Zaman, has stepped into a situation that is quite different from what existed when Gen. Moeen U. Ahmed took over in 2007 in a coup. In 2007, one needed the army to bring the anarchy and the violence that was unleashed by both the major political parties under control, restore governance and facilitate elections. The situation demanded a strong man at the top. In 2024, the army is seen more as facilitating the will of the people by driving out a beleaguered Prime Minister and restoring the democratic process. This has also made the army more vulnerable and, therefore, more responsive to public opinion.

A sign of this vulnerability is the acceptance of the students’ choice of Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as the head of the interim government. Normally, coup leaders nominate lacklustre technocrats to run the country under their tight supervision, and not accept a popular leader who commands widespread respect, internally and externally. But then, the army’s vulnerability may well be the silver lining which Bangladesh is looking for. Mr. Yunus is seen as a passionate supporter of democratic values and the rule of law. He is a known Hasina-baiter, on account of how she treated him. While he did nurse political ambitions and wanted to start his own political party, he is not seen to be close to the two main parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Could this be the springboard he needs to launch a third force in Bangladesh?

However, selecting the interim government is not the only task right now. There is an equally serious issue — of the students’ agitation being hijacked by those suppressed under the earlier regime or who had boycotted the elections or supported from outside the country. They include not only the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the opposition but also the banned Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami which had unleashed Islamic jihadist violence in 2006-07. Violence against Awami League sympathisers and their properties continue, symbols of Bangladesh liberation including the statues of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman are being demolished, and the Hindu minority community is under attack. Accommodating such polarised forces in the interim government will weaken both Mr. Yunus and the army and, inevitably, give a fillip to anti-India forces. Will a weak army leadership be able to control these forces?

While India was the first country to flag “contemporary forms of religiophobia against non-Abrahamic religions” in the United Nations Security Council in 2021 and in the UN General Assembly in 2022, it has demurred, raising this more forcefully with its neighbours and the West, apart from the usual expression of concern. Recent events in Bangladesh have shown, yet again, that if India does not, nobody will.

Mirroring Myanmar and the Maldives

The situation in Bangladesh is akin to events unfolding in Myanmar rather than Sri Lanka. After three consecutive elections in Myanmar, the coup leaders are finding it difficult to retain control over the people and ethnic groups and may well collapse sooner rather than later. After four consecutive elections in Bangladesh, where peoples’ democratic aspirations have been raised, the military will find its role considerably circumscribed.

For India, the situation seems similar to what happened in the Maldives where it, inter alia, propped up President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih without building bridges to the other side and facing a backlash when the opposition came to power.

What is in its favour though, whether in the Maldives or Afghanistan or Sri Lanka, or now in Bangladesh, is the strong development partnership and projects it has built for the benefit of their peoples. India’s best bet is to work closely with Mr. Yunus and the army, and with the people.

T.S. Tirumurti was India’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York and, earlier, Head of Division for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Maldives

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 6-8-2024

Explained: The 50-year-old relationship between India and Sheikh Hasina

Shubhajit Roy

On Monday, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana landed in Delhi as jubilant crowds thronged the streets of Dhaka and roamed the rooms and grounds of the Prime Minister’s residence, and the army declared it was taking charge of the country.

In 1975, the sisters had taken refuge in India after soldiers assassinated their father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with seven members of the family, including Mujib’s 10-year-old son Russell (named after the British philosopher Bertrand Russell). Hasina escaped because she was then in Germany with her husband and Rehana.

Army in politics

The chequered history of Bangladeshi democracy has seen periodic interventions by the military. The army appointed Chief Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem as president in November 1975, and the country was ruled by a military junta.

In 1977, Gen Ziaur Rahman became president; he was assassinated in 1981 and his successor Abdus Sattar was removed in a coup in 1982. Army chief H M Ershad took control, but mass unrest led to his resignation in 1990.

The civilian governments of Khaleda Zia, widow of Gen Ziaur Rahman (1991-96 and 2001-06), and Sheikh Hasina (1996-2001) followed. In between, there was an attempted coup in 1996.

Following widespread unrest at the end of Khaleda’s term in 2006, the military asked the then president to declare an emergency. A caretaker government was in charge from January 2007 to December 2008.

After Hasina came back to power in 2008, she made sure that the army returned to the barracks. In 2010, the Supreme Court reduced the scope for military interventions through legal loopholes, and reaffirmed the secular principles of the Bangladesh constitution.

Hasina’s goodwill

Hasina’s regime brought political stability and economic growth to the country. India was one of the beneficiaries of her return, and a benefactor as well.

In 2009, the Manmohan Singh government reached out with humanitarian aid and assistance. It helped that Hasina had deep personal ties with the Gandhi family; Indira Gandhi had played a pivotal role in the liberation of Bangladesh. Hasina’s personal rapport with Sonia Gandhi, as well as Rahul and Priyanka, was evident when she visited India in June.

Former President Pranab Mukherjee acted as Hasina’s local guardian when, in the years after Mujib’s assassination, she lived on Delhi’s Pandara Road. Mukherjee’s wife Suvra is said to have introduced Hasina as her relative. Decades later, Hasina would attend both their funerals.

Protesters celebrate beside a defaced portrait of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after news of her resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (AP)

These early experiences left an indelible impact on Hasina, and she developed a deep gratitude for the Indian leadership and its people. She received bipartisan support in India — after assuming office in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also reached out to her. The core concerns of fighting religious extremism and countering terrorism was the strategic glue that bound successive Indian governments with Hasina’s regime.

With this bi-partisan support, the outstanding maritime boundary issue was resolved, followed by the land boundary agreement. As Bangladesh’s economy grew rapidly, India extended it billions of dollars in lines of credit, and supported its infrastructure and humanitarian requirements.

India’s attitude As Hasina won election after election — in 2013, 2018, and 2024 — she faced questions of legitimacy and alleged rigging, especially from the US and the West. But she could bank on India for full-fledged, no-questions-asked support.

This support was founded on India's experience during the BNP-Jamaat rule in 2001-06, when anti-India terror groups operated with impunity from Bangladeshi soil. On returning to power, Hasina went after these terror groups and their benefactor, the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. She extended her crackdown to the main opposition BNP as well — the war tribunal hanged Jamaat leaders for 1971 war crimes, jailed BNP leader Khaleda Zia for alleged corruption, and jailed hundreds of Opposition leaders and activists. As India looked the other way for its own national security and strategic reasons, Hasina's crackdown extended to the dissenting voices in civil society and media as well. People participate in a protest march against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government, demanding justice for the victims killed in the recent countrywide deadly clashes, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (AP)

As she landed in India on Monday — some say she may be headed to London — National Security Advisor Ajit Doval met her at the Hindon Air Force station. New Delhi will have to work towards ensuring her safety — even as it is likely to face some questions from the new regime in Dhaka about giving refuge to an unpopular leader. For New Delhi, Hasina will always be the leader who helped make its eastern borders quiet and stable.

The way forward

New Delhi has its diplomatic task cut out going forward. It shunned the BNP and Jamaat for the past decade-and-a-half, choosing Hasina's Awami League as its favoured party in Bangladesh. During these years, the Bangladeshi opposition viewed India as backing Hasina, and the West as being on their side.

There is a real risk of blowback from the Bangladeshi people as well. What attitude the new power centres in Dhaka — some of whom will carry past grudges — take towards India will be critical. The challenges encountered during the earlier BNP-Jamaat years could well resurface. New Delhi cannot afford to have another front open when the LoC and the border with Pakistan is hot again, and the Indian Army is in a long standoff with the PLA in eastern Ladakh. The Myanmar border remains extremely volatile, and the source of unrest in India's Northeast.

The army chief will play an important role. New Delhi has had robust links with the Bangladeshi security establishment due to the common threats from terrorism and extremism. Those ties might come in handy now, as "anti-India elements" take charge.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 13-8-2024

Too early for India to intervene in Bangladesh

New Delhi is currently in no position to influence the events in the neighbouring country

K. P. Nayar

THE best option for India in dealing with Bangladesh after the exit of Sheikh Hasina into exile is not to do

anything now. With a torrent of advice, suggestions, tips and hypothetical expertise flowing from the humble teashops of Siliguri in West Bengal to think tanks in New Delhi brimming with erudition, it is not easy for policymakers in the national capital to sit tight while an important neighbouring country is in turmoil.

The government was particularly vulnerable to criticism by the political class because Parliament was in session when Hasina left her country and arrived in India. Ministers and senior officials had to be seen as being responsive to the situation across the eastern border or face flak. Besides, the evolving national mood in India in the last decade has been one of assertion, be it in foreign policy or sports, to mention two spheres of activity that are currently dominating the 24-hour news cycle.

To borrow from the memorable phraseology of then US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq two decades ago, there is little point in discussing the 'known knowns' about Bangladesh. That has been the essence of public discourse in this country since student protests erupted in Bangladesh. What is important are the 'unknown unknowns' about Bangladesh. Rumsfeld had said in 2002 that these are "the ones we don't know that we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tends to be the difficult ones."

That being the case, India must pause until the unknown unknowns about Bangladesh — the domestic evolution there, its external dimensions, the fallout on India, etc — translate into the first category, that is, the known knowns. As a rule, governments and their image-makers are loath to accept inaction as policy. Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was an exception to this. He once famously remarked that "even not taking a decision is a decision." Rao practised this dictum in many spheres when he was the head of government in a fluid political environment, often with remarkable success. India's best recourse now is to follow this truism in dealing with the uncertain situation that has unfolded in Bangladesh. In any case, the stark reality is that India is currently in no position to influence the events there. Beyond urging restraint and perhaps making an issue of Hinduphobia at the United Nations, can India do anything to stop the attacks on minorities and prevent further destruction of Hindu temples in Bangladesh? Surely, the Indian Army is not going to march across the border to provide security to temples and preserve them! At television studios across this country, panellists who seek their 15 minutes of fame are not going to accept that India is helpless in this matter. Even if it were feasible, the Indian government is not foolhardy enough to resort to any such course. If there is a fundamental threat to India's national security, the Cabinet Committee on Security will surely act, as it has done many times before. But we are not there yet.

Incendiary rhetoric, a sadly familiar feature of Indian society now, must stop.

If India is to have a realistic Bangladesh policy once things settle down in Dhaka, it must not fall for fanciful depictions of how good things were in the neighbouring country during Hasina's rule. It is a safe assumption based on extended conversations and the fallout of public opinion from Kolkata to Kochi and from Gurugram to Gandhinagar that most Indians have come to believe that the best is behind for Bangladesh. And that it is now staring into an abyss of regressive forces and Islamic nationalists whose agenda is to destroy the friendship that Hasina struggled to create with successive Indian leaders. There is, of course, no polling or any scientific evidence to support this assertion.

No one will dispute that Bangladesh's performance in many sectors was worthy of emulation by other similarly placed nations. After all, how many other countries in our time have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and graduated out of the Least Developed Country rankings by global parameters? Dhaka would have done just that in two more years, but that outcome is now in doubt — unless its new, interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, can perform a miracle of creating national cohesion and sustaining human development alongside.

Even those who have only dabbled in foreign policy — though for decades — know that India has gone through this before. When the Shah of Iran had to flee his country in 1979, much like Hasina now, Indians were similarly sorry because he had tried to be friends with India in his later years as a monarch. He had downgraded relations with Pakistan in a zero-sum game. Most Indians failed to grasp the meaning of Iran's historic Islamic revolution. New Delhi had a tough time building bridges with Qom, and relations did not stabilise until Rao visited Tehran in 1993.

A serious mistake that Indians are making in forming their opinions about Hasina's troubles and Yunus' challenge is to conclude that Bangladesh was a peaceful country during the now-exiled Prime Minister's rule. Bangladesh was created because the blood of East Bengalis was being shed before Partition and after it became East Pakistan. Its bloodletting has continued throughout. If Hasina had not fled, she would have likely met the same tragic fate as her father.

Counting mutinies, revolts and coups d'état — all with fatalities — Bangladesh has encountered 15 attempts to change its governments by force. Two of its Presidents have been assassinated. In addition, the army has intervened to change governments peacefully. No other country in South Asia has experienced such violent transfers of power. By comparison, Pakistan has had only five successful coups. 'Wait and watch' is one of the more popular clichés in diplomacy, although in reality it has no meaning. It is to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's credit that he did not use this

worn-out cliché when he briefed Parliament on August 6 about developments in India's eastern neighbourhood. With formidable resources, both overt and covert, India will hopefully be in a position to act if the situation demands in a few months. Now is not the time to act.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 1-8-2024

'Constructive': India, China hold talks to resolve standoff at LAC

Express News Service

Less than a week after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, India and China held "constructive" and "forward-looking" conversations to resolve the border standoff between the two countries.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said restoration of peace and tranquillity, and respect for the LAC are "essential basis" for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations.

The bilateral meeting was held in Delhi under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC).

The MEA described the discussion at the meeting as "in-depth, constructive and forward-looking", adding both sides agreed on the need to jointly uphold peace and tranquillity on the ground in accordance with relevant bilateral agreements and protocols.

The Chinese delegation was led by Hong Liang, Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hong also called on Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, according to the MEA.

Misri has served as India's ambassador to China. The previous round of WMCC talks were held in Beijing in March.

"Further to discussions between the two foreign ministers in their recent meetings at Astana and Vientiane, the two sides reviewed the current situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with a view to finding an early resolution of the outstanding issues," the ministry said.

"Restoration of peace and tranquillity, and respect for the LAC are an essential basis for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations," it said.

"They agreed on the need to jointly uphold peace and tranquillity on the ground in the border areas in accordance with relevant bilateral agreements, protocols and understandings reached between the two governments," it said in a statement.

"The discussion at the meeting was in-depth, constructive and forward-looking. Both sides agreed to maintain the momentum through the established diplomatic and military channels," it said.

Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the MEA, Gourangalal Das, led the Indian delegation at the 30th meeting of the WMCC.

External Affairs Minister Jaishankar and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang held talks on July 25 in Vientiane on the sidelines of ASEAN-related meetings. The two foreign ministers also had a bilateral meeting in Astana on July 4 on the sidelines of the annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

India and China have been locked in a border standoff for more than four years now, as more than 50,000 troops on each side are stationed on both sides of the border.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 12-8-2024

India's deputy NSA in Kyiv ahead of PM Modi's visit

Rezaul H Laskar

Dy NSA Pavan Kapoor was on an announced visit to Kyiv, about a fortnight ahead of Modi's planned visit to Ukraine for a meeting with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

New Delhi: Ukraine hopes that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be able to join efforts to restore a "just peace" following the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian president's chief of staff Andriy Yermak told India's deputy national security adviser Pavan Kapoor on Saturday.

Kapoor was on an announced visit to Kyiv, about a fortnight ahead of Modi's planned visit to Ukraine for a meeting with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. There was no official word from the Indian side on the visit. Both India and Ukraine are yet to formally announce the visit, the first by a senior Indian leader since the launch of the Russian invasion in February 2022.

Yermak, who is the head of the office of the president, said on X that he met Kapoor and "emphasized the importance of restoring a just peace for [Ukraine] and [India's] participation in this process." He added, "Expressed hope that Prime Minister @narendramodi will contribute to these efforts."

A statement from the president's office said Yermak "described the situation on the frontline and the shelling of civilian infrastructure, in particular, the Russian attack on Kostyantynivka."

The statement reiterated the need for "restoring just peace for Ukraine and India's participation in this process." It quoted Yermak as expressing the hope that Modi "would be able to join in this effort."

India has so far refrained from publicly criticising Russia's invasion, though it has said that it will support all diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine. India has also ramped up the purchase of discounted Russian commodities, especially fuel and fertilisers.

The Indian side has also called for the cessation of hostilities and a return to the path of diplomacy and dialogue to find a solution to the conflict.

Modi's planned visit to Ukraine, especially after his trip to Moscow during July 8-9 for the annual India-Russia

Summit with President Vladimir Putin, is being seen as part of New Delhi's balancing act on the conflict. During his visit to Moscow, Modi reminded Russian President Vladimir Putin that a solution can't be found on the battlefield and peace talks can't succeed under the shadow of the gun.

Modi's visit to Russia was criticised by Zelenskyy as his arrival in Moscow coincided with a Russian strike on Ukraine's largest children's hospital. There was also outrage in the West since Modi chose Russia for his first bilateral visit in his third term, even at a time when the US was hosting Zelenskyy and leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for a summit aimed at shoring up support for Ukraine.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-8-2024

No inconsistency from Indian side: S Jaishankar on ties with US

Says country followed non-partisan policy for 3 decades
Ajay Banerjee

New Delhi, Amid stated 'unhappiness' by the US over PM Narendra Modi's visit to Russia (July 8-9), External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday cited the history of past three decades to suggest there had been 'no inconsistency' from the Indian side, rather, the Indian political class had been 'non-partisan' on improving ties with America. Delivering the Air Commodore Jasjit Singh memorial lecture, Jaishankar was asked about the Indo-US ties, to which he mentioned the tenure of PM Rajiv Gandhi (1984-89). He said: "I think structurally, we were too close to the Soviets for an attempt to improve India-US ties to really work...In fact, I would give more credit to Narasimha Rao (PM from 1991-96) as a person who in a way, you know, freed up our system."

"Subsequently, every government has built up on it. At least that's one policy which has not been inconsistent or partisan," the minister added. Explaining why the India-US ties were working, he said: "I think the world has changed. American interests have changed. The global competition has changed. Our value in the world is different for the world. But for the United States as well. America has a utility for us as well." Jaishankar said India-US relationship was a testimony to the changing world and brushed aside doomsday predictions on Indian foreign policy.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 2-8-2024

Vietnamese PM by his side, Modi takes dig at China: We don't support expansionism

Shubhajit Roy

With an eye on Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting Vietnamese PM Pham Minh Chinh Thursday underlined the importance of "non-militarisation and self-restraint

in the conduct of all activities” to avoid the escalation of disputes in the region.

With the Vietnamese PM by his side, Modi said India supports development and not expansionism — a thinly-disguised reference to Beijing’s belligerence in the Indo-Pacific. More than 55 per cent of world trade crosses through the South China Sea and New Delhi is concerned about potential disruptions.

“In our Act East policy and our Indo-Pacific vision, Vietnam is our important partner... We support development, not expansionism (Hum vistarbad nahi, vikasvad ka samarthan karte hain),” Modi said in Hindi in his statement.

Modi said that they have adopted a new plan of action to strengthen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

“New steps have been taken for cooperation in the field of Defence and Security... The agreement on a \$300-million credit line will strengthen Vietnam’s maritime security. We have also decided to emphasise cooperation on the issues of terrorism and cyber security,” Modi said.

The joint statement said that the leaders, underlining the link between prosperity and security, “reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace, stability, security and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, while pursuing the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), without resorting to threat or use of force.

”“Both leaders underscored the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, and avoidance of actions that could further complicate the situation or escalate disputes affecting peace and stability. Both leaders emphasised the legal framework set out by the UNCLOS within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, and that UNCLOS is the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over maritime zones,” it said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 13-8-2024

S Jaishankar's Maldives visit has a message for Dhaka

Shishir Gupta

The Maldives president has made it clear that he was following the same policy of prioritizing Maldives’ interests.

New Delhi: After External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar’s visit to Male, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu told the media that he would not allow anything that goes against the foreign policy of his government and that he was following the same policy of prioritizing Maldives’ interest.

President Muizzu was replying to a question on whether his government would allow the ‘India Out’ campaign launched by the ruling PNC-PPM coalition to grab

power last year. The Maldives President said that he had not changed the foreign policy of his country. The response came immediately after Minister Jaishankar left for India in a special aircraft after spending two days in Maldives and launching several projects.

Also read: Indian Navy approaches government for two nuclear attack submarines

During Jaishankar’s visit, President Muizzu and his ministers were all milk and honey with the visiting dignitary as if there was no friction between the two countries since Muizzu was sworn in last November 17. Behind this perceptible change was the fact that Maldives is in dire economic crisis and even communist China cannot bail out Male without quid pro quo. The fact is that Maldives is facing a budgetary gap running into a couple of hundred million USD with India already rolling over a payment of USD 50 million to SBI in May and another USD 50 million due in September. Maldives has to pay some USD one billion to the market in 2026 and the country faces a default.

While the Modi government is committed to helping out the Maldives as a neighbour, Maldives is also a message to strife-torn Bangladesh as only India has come forward to help these countries when in dire economic crisis. Not China, not the US or the West. This is despite Maldives President Muizzu trying for financial support from Turkey, China, the Middle East and big brother China, who normally gives loans through Exim banks at market rates.

President Muizzu’s decision to forge bilateral cooperation with India comes from his own assessment of the past year of assuming power and the realization that only India can deliver on development, security and financial stress. Despite the 28 island project and the Greater Male connectivity project being launched by India before Muizzu assumed power, these development projects are on the verge of fruition and in the interest of the Maldives and not any political party. In the past year, President Muizzu has also realized the security requirements of Maldives with drug runners, pirates and arms smugglers operating in the deep Indian Ocean. He realizes that without Indian security support, Maldives stands exposed to the dark forces. Finally, like Sri Lanka, Maldives also faces financial stress and India is willing to help out without any leverage as it has shown by rolling over repayments.

The Interim government in Bangladesh will also soon realize that it faces a crisis on the development, security and financial stress front and it is only India under Modi who is willing to help without extracting the proverbial pound of flesh.

Even though Bangladesh is currently going through a political crisis with Islamists targeting Hindu minorities in the name of supporters of the Awami League of ousted PM Sheikh Hasina, the fact is that Dhaka is facing an economic crisis and will have to come to India like Sri Lanka in 2022 for financial support. The same

would be the situation of Nepal but its currency is linked with the stable Indian Rupee.

The statement of President Muizzu is also welcome as it means that reality has dawned on Maldives and the rise of Islamists in Male is not in the interest of the new government. The fact is that Minister Jaishankar was given a red carpet treatment, more than the previous Ibrahim Solih regime. The neighbouring countries are getting the message that Modi's India cannot be trifled with.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 14-8-2024

Why can't India accept Bangladeshis toppled Sheikh Hasina?

Tanim Ahmed

The most striking feature of Indian foreign minister S Jaishankar's statement at the Lok Sabha on August 6 was the complete absence of the Awami League government's egregious violation of human rights, and the killings of over 400 people (as documented so far), including youth, since July 16.

He began setting up a context for the people's uprising saying that there had been "considerable tensions, deep divides and growing polarisation in Bangladesh politics" since the January election. "This underlying foundation aggravated a student agitation that started in June this year," he continued. "There was growing violence, including attacks on public buildings and infrastructure, as well as traffic and rail obstructions. The violence continued through the month of July."

While there was dissatisfaction over the 2024 election—as well as the previous two elections—the quota reform protests did not really have much to do with that. It began as merely a student movement asking for reforms in the existing quota system in public service recruitment, which turned into an anti-government movement much later due to the government's brutal crackdown on protesters.

Jaishankar's statement does not even hint that Sheikh Hasina's government reacted with overwhelmingly excessive force against students, and police opened fire on protesters with live rounds, killing more than 400 people in the span of 23 days. The ruling party unleashed its student cadres, the Chhatra League, armed with machetes and firearms, on the unarmed protesters. It was only after then that attacks on public buildings began, which no one condoned.

Jaishankar went on to note that "Despite a Supreme Court judgement on 21 July, there was no let-up in the public agitation." He added, "Various decisions and actions taken thereafter only exacerbated the situation. The agitation at this stage coalesced around a one-point agenda, that is that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should step down."

Since the Indian foreign minister glosses over the former government's brutality, it appears to paint the democratic movement behind Sheikh Hasina's fall with

a nefarious intention from its genesis—which fits into the Awami League's narrative—that this was a movement fomented by the BNP, Jamaat or even external forces such as the US. This is far removed from the reality of the Bangladeshi public sentiment. Sheikh Hasina's government murdered so many people before meeting the quota demands. There was a nationwide internet blackout for five days. The student movement had nine demands before the hearing and verdict, including an apology from the ousted prime minister and resignation of former ministers, including Obaidul Quader and Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, for abusing law enforcement.

On the surface, the government said it was open to negotiations with students, yet there were block raids during the nights where law enforcers came hunting for students. More than 11,000 people were arrested in just two weeks. Innocent children were put in jails and framed for murders committed by the police—even ones that were recorded, like Abu Sayed's. The "step down" demand came to the fore on August 3. It was certainly not soon after the court verdict, when the situation was still reversible had Hasina wished to apologise and reconcile. But that was simply out of the question for an increasingly egotistical autocrat.

Jaishankar then jumps to August 4, when he says, "Events took a very serious turn." It did indeed. Awami League had by then decided to unleash its full force onto the protesters, who took to the streets despite the curfew, only to face the police baby-sitting armed goons of the Awami League. Violence shook the nation; the death toll kept climbing to nearly 100 people—the highest and deadliest ever for a single-day protest in the nation's history. Public anger only mounted; student protesters called for a "March to Dhaka" on August 5. In response, hundreds of thousands took to the streets in Dhaka and other surrounding towns ready to converge on Shahbag.

That was when the law enforcers realised the situation was beyond salvation and counselled Sheikh Hasina to leave. Initially, she reportedly refused and urged for using even more force to subdue the crowd. The army refused. Hasina was finally convinced to leave. It was a revolution spearheaded by students that succeeded in toppling a dictatorial regime of 15 years.

The fact that the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami took advantage of what turned into an anti-government campaign and publicly supported it was public knowledge. But entire communities—civilians from all walks of life—came out in support of the campaigners; the nation stood united against the ruling party. Hospitals gave free medical support, and general people donated to their common funds for food and water. Everyone sympathised with the protesters who were braving bullets on the streets and torture in the jail cells. Six coordinators were detained by the police and

confined at the detective bureau against their will for several days without any regard for law or their rights.

What followed after she left her official residence was an outpouring of pent-up hatred for anything and everything linked to Hasina and the Awami League. Desecration of Sheikh Mujib's statues and murals and even his residence in Dhanmondi was heart-wrenching and hurt millions of Bangladeshis.

With the police gone and no law and order in place, minorities became an unfortunate target. The Daily Star reported violence against Hindu homes and businesses in 27 districts on August 5. These crimes must be investigated as the police are getting back on duty.

Hasina's Awami League consciously colluded with the religious fundamentalists, placating them and pandering to them to keep them at bay, only to make sure that Hasina remained at the helm without too much trouble from the right. It was the Awami League government that changed school textbooks, took out pieces by Hindu authors to replace them with stories and poems by unknown Muslim authors. Pictures and drawings were changed exactly as demanded. Besides restoring democracy, reviving the truly secular mindset of the masses is another uphill task that Bangladesh will have to undertake, now that Awami League is gone.

But, back to Jaishankar's statement: the blatant disregard for brewing tension among Bangladeshis, Awami League's intolerance for dissent and telltale signs of the Hasina regime turning into a classic autocrat shows a rather myopic and oversimplified Indian take of what is happening in Bangladesh. Jaishankar's articulate and witty tete-a-tetes with journalists or at discussion panels around the world convincingly demonstrates that he does not lack the calibre to appreciate these nuances. One wonders, then, if he had not been properly briefed by his aides on what actually happened in Bangladesh.

Just as this is an opportunity for Bangladesh to rebuild its future free from Awami League's clutches, it is also an opportunity for India to do some introspection. Bangladesh has just witnessed a people's uprising toppling a dictator—which will be a classic textbook case of the fall of an autocratic regime like Ceausescu or Marcos. And yet India remains extremely apprehensive about what is to come. India built relations with Awami League instead of Bangladesh. The Indian establishment has been more than happy to support Awami League for expedience despite its faults, and in the process alienated the people of the country. Today, with the ouster of Hasina and the Awami League, India is quite naturally seeing more than its fair share of criticism and dip in popularity.

It is really high time that Jaishankar asked his aides, or whoever is in charge of setting the Bangladesh agenda, how India backed itself to such a corner that it cannot join in the jubilation of a nation or empathise with our celebrations. He should ask how it is that India fails to

see the new regime as a result of the mass people's uprising that it was, and why it needs to distort it by labelling it as the machinations of Pakistan, China or the US. Why is it that when we are relieved to have rid ourselves of a dictator, India is apprehensive that the djinn is out of the bottle?

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 8-8-2024 **BD political unrest impacts border trade with India**

The ongoing political unrest in Bangladesh has had a catastrophic impact on its cross border trade with India. More than five hundred trucks loaded with goods are stuck on the border post of Petrapole in the North 24 Pargana district of West Bengal. Due to the unrest, around 700 India trucks are also waiting on the Bangladesh side of the border to enter India. Trade associations estimate a loss of around Rs 110-120 crore of trade per day.

Movement of trucks carrying goods between India and Bangladesh at the Changrabandha border check post in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district has almost come to a standstill. "We estimate that about \$300 million worth of export trade has been affected due to the political crisis in Bangladesh. We export about \$30 million to Bangladesh every day," Ajay Sahai, the Director-General of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO) said.

Bangladesh, notably, is India's biggest partner in the subcontinent, while Delhi is Dhaka's second biggest partner in Asia after China.

Bangladesh is also the fourth largest export destination for India.

"Export has come to a standstill. Many trucks are stuck and even the movement of people with visas has minimised now," Dhiraj Guha, an Indian exporter, said.

"Indian import is happening but export is completely stalled and many of our trucks are stuck," another businessman said.

The political crisis in Bangladesh may also stall a potential free trade agreement between the two countries, which began in October last year.

- **Indian media**

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 12-8-2024 **Misinformation campaigns and the future of Bangladesh-India relations** **Zillur Rahman**

After the fall of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last week, Bangladesh was thrown into a critical state of instability and uncertainty. There was no government till Dr Muhammad Yunus took oath as the chief adviser of the interim government on August 8. During this period, the country saw an outburst of violence and crime, which was the outcome of both pent-up political frustration against the ruling party of 15 years and the

result of some bigotry, and the machinations of bad actors trying to take advantage of the lawlessness for personal gains. One of the most dangerous situations that can happen in a country is the chaos, crime, and destruction that take place after an authoritarian force is forced to abdicate. Unfortunately, Bangladesh is in such a situation.

However, this issue is not just a domestic phenomenon. Several influential groups inside Bangladesh's largest neighbour have taken the initiative to create a narrative that this momentary lawlessness caused by the thoughtless abdication of the former prime minister is the prelude of a Bangladesh where bigotry and religious fundamentalism are going to flare up.

The main platform where such notions are being sensationalised at the moment is X, formerly known as Twitter. Many verified accounts on X are reporting rumours as actual news and sometimes just outright propagating fake news. What's worse is that this propagation of fake news has also been noted in Indian mainstream media, as well as among popular Indian social media personalities.

It is true that there have been concerning reports of violence against minority communities. Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad reported 205 incidents of persecution of members of minority communities across 52 districts. Gobinda Pramanik, general secretary of Bangladesh National Hindu Mahajot, recently made a video statement about the matter, in which he said that, after Sheikh Hasina's resignation on August 5, the Hindu community in Bangladesh thought they would be attacked in a massive way and there would be incidents of arson. According to the general secretary, houses of some Hindu leaders of the Awami League who were very active, as well as those of some Muslim leaders, were attacked. He also stated that some opportunistic people attacked a few local temples. Coordinators of the anti-discrimination student movement called for protection of the minority communities, which was answered by many. Leaders of BNP, Jamaat and other parties, too, instructed their functionaries to ensure that Hindu homes were not attacked and temples were protected.

But against this backdrop, we saw Republic TV from India spreading rumours and making strange claims.

The West Bengal Police, in a statement posted from its official Facebook page, stated that the way some local TV channels are reporting on the current situation in Bangladesh is clearly communally inflammatory and against the norms of the Press Council of India. The West Bengal Police urged viewers to exercise their own judgement when viewing this type of coverage and keep in mind that the authenticity of the footage shown by the channel is not verified by any neutral third party. They requested people not to fall into the trap of one-sided, hateful and misleading propaganda.

The sudden upsurge in misinformation and disinformation on Indian social media coincidentally aligns with a seemingly coordinated rise in criminal activities and vandalism all over Bangladesh. Inside the country, some people are also taking to social media and calling this another attempt by pro-AL forces in India, as well as RAW, to fabricate a narrative of communalism in order to plunge Bangladesh into further unrest and instability. Needless to say, there is no evidence for any of this. Rumours beget rumours. This kind of misinformation treadmill needs to be stopped immediately lest it leads to further instances of violence, and makes the people-to-people divide between Bangladesh and India even worse.

Although it seems the Indian authorities have overtly asked for people to stop propagating fake news regarding what is happening in Bangladesh, there are many in India who firmly believe that Bangladesh is about to fall under a fundamentalist rule the moment the next general elections are held. It almost feels like, with the fall of Sheikh Hasina, some elements in India are behaving as though India has suffered a great loss. It is my humble opinion that, instead of immediately choosing to take the easily monetisable culture-war talking points, the enlightened Indian cultural leaders should first push for a democratic Bangladesh where actual political discourse can take place without fear of getting killed or disappeared by security forces. The people of Bangladesh don't need to be kept "in check" by a convenient autocrat. That is the narrative of a now-disgraced political party that has proven to lie repeatedly to the people and the world to keep power. The people of India must not fall for this narrative ever again.

India must realise the shortcomings of its foreign policy regarding Bangladesh. These should be fundamental lessons from history. Never trust a dictator to keep power. A robust and mature democracy is the only reliable international partner. Right now, India needs to revamp its approach towards Bangladesh entirely. Now is the time for genuine track 2 diplomacy. It is time for genuine people-to-people relations to ensure long-term, sustainable friendship with its most significant geostrategic partner. And this kind of change must start at home.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 4-8-2024

An impetus for the North

Indo-Lanka connectivity will take another giant leap forward when IndiGo, India's biggest airline, begins daily operations to the Jaffna International Airport (IATA Code JAF) in Palaly in the North from September 1 this year. India's only State-owned airline Alliance Air already connects the city pair using ATR 72 turboprop planes.

IndiGo's decision will immediately impart a bigger profile to Jaffna, the Northern capital and bring it even

closer to Tamil Nadu, with which it shares cultural and linguistic links. Moreover, Northerners wishing to visit other cities and regions in India will have easy connections from Chennai via IndiGo or other airlines. Indeed, Chennai has many air connections to other major world cities and it may be easier for Northern residents to go to Chennai and then board those flights. They can thus avoid a tedious journey to Katunayake, 400 Km away.

It was not immediately clear as to which type of aircraft will be used by IndiGo for the Jaffna flights, but it is most likely to be the French-Italian ATR, which is used by IndiGo for many short-haul flights. This is mainly because Jaffna cannot yet handle bigger jet-powered regional aircraft such as the Airbus A220, Boeing 737 or the A320/321 due to the runway limitations at the airport. At just 1,400 metres long, it cannot handle the aforementioned jets which need a runway length of at least 2,300 metres. Indeed, there are plans to extend the runway to that length under the proposed first phase of development, while the second phase will extend that to around 3,500 metres, which can accommodate bigger jets such as the Airbus A350. If and when that happens, many regional and global airlines will be keen to commence operations to Jaffna.

Sri Lankan Airlines should also commence domestic and international flights from Jaffna. The Jaffna International Airport should also be upgraded with all modern facilities. Right now, it lacks infrastructure facilities such as jet bridges and modern check-in counters. These shortcomings should be rectified, especially if the runway expansion project takes off.

The modest success of the Jaffna Airport in just a couple of years (give the Covid-19 years a miss) naturally takes our focus to another “international” airport in the Deep South that receives virtually no planes. Dubbed by the aviation press as the world’s emptiest airport, the US\$ 200 million Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (IATA Code HRI) was a vanity project of a previous Government. It was given the go-ahead despite clear evidence that it would not be successful, mainly due to the lack of catchment area for would-be passengers. Apart from a couple of diversions from Colombo in the case of bad weather, the HRI receives no regular international services.

Instead, that money should have gone to the Jaffna airport for the expansion. That did not happen, as the then Government was blinded by majoritarian rhetoric. But if JAF was expanded 10 years ago, it could already have become a major hub in the region. This is what happens when national interests are abandoned for political expediency.

The Batticaloa International Airport (IATA Code BTC), with a runway of 1,560 metres, is also a promising candidate for turboprop flights to India and the Middle East. However, this too should be expanded to accommodate larger passenger jets. Hingurakoda too is

to be upgraded to international standards – this airport already has a 2,200 metre runway, but it is still too early to say whether international airlines will come there as Trincomalee (China Bay) and Batticaloa airports are also not that far away.

It will be more prudent to divert those funds to the expansion of the Colombo International Airport at Ratmalana. Even with the JICA-funded expansion of the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) back on track, it will be bursting at the seams a few years down the road as more airlines begin operations to Colombo and the number of passengers increases.

Every city worth its name has a second or secondary airport and some bigger cities even have five or six. Both Chennai and Bengaluru in India are scouting for locations for a second international airport, but Colombo already has one in Ratmalana (IATA Code RML), which is not being used properly. Currently, its runway length is only 1,800 metres, but if this can be extended to at least 3,000 metres, it can become Colombo’s second hub. There was a proposal to turn the Galle Road into an underpass in this area and extend the airport runway. This proposal should be revisited, given that many international airlines would seize an opportunity to have more flights to Colombo.

It also goes without saying that the restructuring of SriLankan Airlines, the national carrier, should also be expedited, along with fleet renovation and renewal. It is the biggest airline flying out of Colombo and needs more aircraft to solidify its position. Sri Lanka should also implement an “Open Skies” policy to encourage more airlines to fly to Colombo and Jaffna, with attractive landing fees and slot timings. If Ratmalana also comes into the picture, Colombo can be the biggest airline hub of South Asia, even ahead of New Delhi and Mumbai, due to its strategic position between Singapore and Dubai. Indeed, apart from North America and South America, every other region is less than 11 hours flying time away from Colombo. This is an advantage that our authorities must harp on to give Sri Lanka an edge in the global aviation scene.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 9-8-2024

Inauguration of SL–India Friendship Arch

The Indian High Commission and the Sri Lanka–India Parliamentary Friendship Association with the assistance of the Urban Development and Housing Ministry inaugurated the ‘Sri Lanka – India Friendship Arch’ at the National Sandalwood Garden, Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte yesterday (8).

The event commenced with the unveiling of the ‘Sri Lanka–India Friendship Arch’ by Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana who was the chief guest at the event, along with Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha. Minister Prasanna Ranatunga, office-bearers of Sri Lanka–India Parliamentary Friendship Association,

including Parliamentarians M.A. Sumanthiran, Dr. V. Radhakrishnan and Jagath Kumara Sumithraarachchi, and senior officials joined in planting *murutha* tree saplings in an arch-shaped tract at the National Sandalwood Garden.

The event was organised as a part of the #Plant4Mother campaign launched by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on World Environment Day 2024. Prime Minister Modi launched the campaign on June 5 by planting a Bodhi Tree sapling at Buddha Jayanti Park in New Delhi. He called upon everyone in India and abroad to join the movement. In India, the campaign envisages planting 800 million trees by September 2024 and 1.4 billion trees by March 2025 following a ‘whole of Government’ and ‘whole of society’ approach.

The inauguration of the ‘Sri Lanka – India Friendship Arch’ is a testament to the long-standing friendship between the two nations. It signifies the shared vision to enhance and deepen the bilateral partnership for mutually beneficial and sustainable economic growth.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 14-8-2024

Sri Lanka, Egypt hold bilateral talks

Foreign Minister Ali Sabry, PC undertook an official visit to Egypt from August 07 to 11 at the invitation of the Egyptian Foreign Minister Dr. Badr Abdelatty.

Foreign Minister Sabry held productive discussions with his counterpart Dr. Abdelatty and reviewed bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and Egypt. Both sides noted the potential to expand the relations between the two countries by fostering closer links in the fields of trade, investment, tourism, education, culture, archaeology, maritime transport, renewable energy, and climate change. The two Ministers also discussed on regional and global issues of shared interest and on further strengthening cooperation in multilateral fora.

Upon completion of the bilateral talks, Foreign Minister Sabry joined Minister Dr. Abdelatty in the signing ceremony of the MoU between the Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute (BIDTI) and the Institute for Diplomatic Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt. The MoU aims to strengthen and consolidate cooperation in the fields of diplomatic training, capacity building, research and studies in diplomacy between the two countries.

Minister Sabry also engaged in discussions with Egyptian Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade Hassan El Khatib and the President of the General Authority of Free Zones and Investment (GAFI) on avenues to enhance cooperation in trade and investment between the two countries and took note of prospective sectors of mutual interest, the importance of exchange of trade delegations and early convening of trade consultations mechanism. During these interactions, the Egyptian side commended on Sri Lankan private sector investments in Egypt and asserted their fullest

cooperation to boost Sri Lankan investments in Egypt and overcome any challenges they may face.

During the visit, Minister Sabry met with His Eminence Dr. Shawky Ibrahim Allam, Grand Mufti of Egypt and exchanged views on matters related to religious cooperation, cultural links, combating extremism and radicalisation, promoting peaceful co-existence and enhancing closer people-to-people ties between Sri Lanka and Egypt.

Foreign Minister Sabry also participated in an event organised by the Cairo Chamber of Commerce in coordination with the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce on enhancing trade and economic cooperation between Sri Lanka and Egypt. The event entailed a constructive discussion on ways of unleashing untapped potential to expand trade and investment between the two countries, particularly in sectors of agriculture, apparel, IT, renewable energy and tourism. Foreign Minister Sabry made use of this opportunity to invite the Egyptian business community to explore enticing trade and investment opportunities available in Sri Lanka for the mutual growth and prosperity of the two countries.

The Minister also met with Ambassador Mohamed Al-Orabi, Chairman of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA) along with a group of its members and engaged in a discussion on developments in the region and possible cooperation with the ECFA.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 14-8-2024

SL – Singapore explore academic, policy-oriented partnerships

High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Singapore Senarath Dissanayake met representatives from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP) at the High Commission recently to discuss potential collaborations and exchanges between LKYSPP and Sri Lankan Universities and Government Sector Organisations with a view to strengthening the existing ties between Sri Lanka and Singapore in the areas of public policy and academic exchange.

High Commissioner Dissanayake emphasised on the continuation of the collaboration with LKYSPP specifically regarding scholarship opportunities available for Sri Lankan public officials interested in pursuing a career in academia.

In response, the representatives from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy indicated the school’s willingness to support individuals seeking an advanced public policy degree and offered merit-based scholarships through a competitive selection process for high-performing public officers. Both parties expressed strong interest in potential collaboration to foster academic and policy-oriented partnerships between the two countries.

The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy was represented by Deputy Director of Academic Affairs

Celeste Ho and Assistant Senior Manager of Academic Affairs Norlela Binte Mohamed. Minister Counsellor of the High Commission, Nanduni Govinnage was also present.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 11-8-2024

**India's foreign ministry, NewSpace
India to provide grant for Nepal-made
Munal satellite's launch**

The satellite will be launched soon on NSIL's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, the ministry said.

Post Report

NEW DELHI, The Ministry of External Affairs of India and NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) have signed a memorandum of understanding to provide grant assistance for the launch of the Munal satellite, which is developed in Nepal.

Anurag Srivastava, joint secretary (North) from the ministry, and Arunachalam A, director of NSIL, signed the MoU on Saturday, the ministry said.

Dr Rabindra Prasad Dhakal, secretary at Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST); Dr Surendra Thapa, chargé d'affaires of Nepali Embassy; and Dr Abhas Maskey, founder of Antarikhya Pratishan Nepal (APN), were also present at the signing-in ceremony.

Earlier, NSIL and NAST had forged the Launch Service Agreement for the Munal Satellite during India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar's Nepal visit in January.

Jaishankar witnessed the agreement during his visit to Nepal on January 4.

The Munal Satellite, which aims to build a vegetation density database of the Earth's surface, is a satellite developed in Nepal with NAST's support. APN, a Nepali startup, has assisted Nepali students in the design and fabrication of the satellite.

"This satellite is expected to be launched soon on NSIL's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle," the press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 12-8-2024

**Indian foreign secretary meets a host of
top politicians in Kathmandu**

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli invites Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to visit Nepal soon.

PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL

KATHMANDU, In Nepal on a 'familiarisation' visit, new Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had a hectic first day in Kathmandu.

He paid a courtesy call on President Ramchandra Paudel on Sunday. During the meeting at Rashtrapati Bhavan, Sheetal Niwas, a number of topics related to bilateral relations and mutual interest were discussed.

During the meeting, President Paudel stated that Nepal and India have to cooperate to minimise the effects of climate change.

"Both countries must work together to reduce the effects of climate change since the safety of mankind depends on the safety of mountains and water," Kiran Pokharel, the President's press adviser, told the Post, quoting Paudel.

President Paudel also said that Nepal and India have had a relationship from the time immemorial and acknowledged India's big contribution to Nepal's development.

President Paudel mentioned that there is a lot of potential for hydropower development, sustainable and easy energy trade in Nepal.

On the occasion, Indian Foreign Secretary Misri expressed his commitment to working together with Nepal as the issue of reducing the impact of climate change is a challenge for both the countries, says Pokharel.

Quoting Misri, Pokharel further said, "Among the plans of the Nepal government, India would like to work on Nepal's priorities such as energy, agriculture and tourism."

The visiting Indian foreign secretary also paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on Sunday at Singha Durbar. During their meeting various matters of mutual interest were discussed, says the foreign ministry of Nepal.

A source at the Prime Minister's Office said that during the meeting Prime Minister Oli strongly urged that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi should soon visit Nepal. He also extended a formal invitation.

Earlier, Indian Prime Minister Modi was expected to come to Nepal on one of the Mondays of Shawan to pay homage to Lord Pashupatinath. But that window closes in five days.

During his first and second tenures, Indian Prime Minister Modi visited Nepal five times in total. After the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition got the majority in the 14th Lok Sabha election in June, Modi was appointed the prime minister of India for the third time.

While Modi first became the prime minister in 2014, Oli became the prime minister of Nepal in 2015. During the second tenure of Modi, which started in 2019, Oli was against the prime minister, following the 2017 elections. Relations between the two countries are at present considered to be at a low, according to experts.

Earlier in 2018, Indian Prime Minister Modi had visited Nepal at the invitation of Oli the prime minister.

This is a familiarisation visit of Secretary Misri, said spokesperson for the foreign ministry in Kathmandu Amrit Rai. "Therefore, no issues other than those of bilateral interest were discussed."

However, Rai refused to categorically mention the issues of mutual interest.

Oli, who became prime minister on July 12, will be in Thailand as his first foreign trip after being appointed the prime minister. He is scheduled to attend the sixth summit of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) starting September 4.

Nepal and Thailand are also working to make Prime Minister Oli's visit bilateral.

After Thailand, Prime Minister Oli will take part in the 79th session of the United National General Assembly in September.

The Prime Minister's Office claimed that both India and China had invited Prime Minister Oli.

Indian Foreign Secretary Misri, apart from President Paudel and Prime Minister Oli, also met Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba at his residence in Baluwatar. Among other things, they discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations, according to a press release issued after the meeting.

Also on Sunday Misri also paid a courtesy call on CPN (Maoist Centre) chair and former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. During the meeting both sides discussed issues of mutual interest, said Dahal's personal secretary Ramesh Malla.

"Since it was an introductory visit, the discussion was casual," Malla told the Post. The visiting foreign secretary reportedly vowed to work on the agreement reached between the two countries when Dahal was the prime minister.

When Dahal visited India as the prime minister of Nepal in June 2023, India had agreed to import 10,000 MW of hydroelectricity from Nepal.

Indian Secretary Misri came to Kathmandu on a two-day visit at the invitation of Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal.

Misri was welcomed by his Nepali counterpart Lamsal at the Tribhuvan International Airport.

Misri took up his new role last month, succeeding Vinay Mohan Kwatra, who served as Indian ambassador to Nepal from March 2020 to April 2022. Misri undertook his first familiarisation visit, to Bhutan, on July 18.

Foreign ministry officials said that it is customary for new foreign secretaries to tour South Asian countries after assuming office to update themselves and assess bilateral relations.

Before being promoted to Indian foreign secretary, Misri served as deputy national security adviser of India.

The 59-year-old has a distinguished career, having served as private secretary to three prime ministers— Inder Kumar Gujral in 1997, Manmohan Singh in 2012, and Narendra Modi in 2014.

Known as a China expert within the Indian foreign policy establishment, Misri was India's ambassador to China (2019-2021) and played a key role in India-China negotiations following the 2020 Galwan Valley clashes

that resulted from the actions of the Chinese military in eastern Ladakh.

Misri also inaugurated the new building of the Nepal Bhasha Parishad in Kathmandu. The building, located in Naradevi, was built with the assistance from India's post-earthquake reconstruction grant.

After an introductory meeting with Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba on Monday, Misri will return home.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 1-8-2024

Japanese parliamentary delegation concludes Nepal visit

The visiting delegation paid courtesy calls on President Paudel and ministers.

Post Report

KATHMANDU, A four-member delegation of the House of Representatives of Japan concluded its Nepal visit on Tuesday.

Issuing a press release, the embassy of Japan in Kathmandu said that the team, led by Takebe Arata, chair of the Standing Committee on Judicial Affairs of Japan, visited Nepal from July 27 to 30.

The delegation also included parliamentary members Makihara Hideki, Michishita Daiki, and Oguchi Yoshinori.

"It was the first high-level visit from Japan after the establishment of the new Cabinet of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on July 14," the embassy said.

During the visit, the delegation paid courtesy calls on President Ramchandra Paudel; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Urban Development Prakash Man Singh; Sharat Singh Bhandari, minister for labour, employment and social security; and Foreign Minister Arzu Rana.

They discussed various aspects of the Japan-Nepal bilateral relations, including the people-to-people exchanges, Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Programme and Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP), economic cooperation and investment.

The delegation also had a meeting with the Nepal-Japan Parliamentary Friendship League, led by Narayan Khadka, the notice further reads.

They visited various entities in Kathmandu to observe the education and training of the young Nepalis before they travel to Japan for their study or work.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 9-8-2024

Nepal, Oman agree to promote cooperation

Post Report

KATHMANDU, Nepal and Oman have agreed to promote cooperation encompassing all sectors.

During the first meeting of the bilateral consultations held in Muscat, Oman, on Wednesday, officials from the foreign ministries of Nepal and Oman discussed bilateral relations and agreed to promote cooperation encompassing all sectors, especially the exchange of

high-level visits, trade, investment, economic cooperation, agriculture, energy, and tourism, among others.

According to the Nepali embassy in Muscat, the two sides expressed a firm commitment to further enhance partnership in mutually agreed-upon areas, work together to realise economic opportunities for mutual benefits, and create more opportunities to promote people-to-people engagement.

Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal thanked Oman for providing employment to more than 21,000 Nepalis and emphasised providing additional opportunities.

She stressed the exploration of the untapped potential in economic, cultural and educational areas, and proposed establishing meaningful collaborative partnerships including in the private sector.

She urged the Omani side to explore investment opportunities in Nepal including in hydropower and tourism sectors, and collaboration in the green hydrogen sector.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 15-8-2024

Iran, Pakistan expanding bilateral relations: envoy

TEHRAN- During the anniversary ceremony commemorating Pakistan's independence, the Pakistani ambassador in Tehran underscored the optimistic prospects for the relationship between Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The formal observance of Pakistan's seventy-eighth independence anniversary was held on Wednesday at the Pakistan embassy in Tehran. Attendees included members of the Pakistani community residing in Iran and officials from the Pakistan Embassy.

The event commenced with the playing of Pakistan's national anthem, followed by Ahmad Shami, the charge d'affaires of the Pakistan embassy, who raised the national flag.

Subsequently, messages from both the Pakistani president and prime minister were conveyed. In his address, the charge d'affaires highlighted the significance of the day in history and paid tribute to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Quaid-e-Azam as the founder of their nation, Allama Iqbal, the national Pakistani Poet and other prominent leaders who were instrumental in the movement for Pakistan's independence and dedicated their lives to establishing a sovereign nation for Muslims.

Ahmad Shami extended his congratulations to the Pakistani diaspora on the occasion of Pakistan's Independence Day, urging them to contribute to their homeland with unwavering commitment.

During the event, the ambassador of Pakistan emphasized the strong ties between Pakistan and Iran, which are founded on shared historical, cultural, and religious links. The partnership between the two nations is poised for further enhancement, driven by the dedication of their respective leaders.

August 14, 1947, is celebrated as Pakistan's Independence Day, marking the nation's emergence from British colonial rule under the guidance of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, revered as the Quaid-e-Azam. On this significant day, Muslims from both the western and eastern parts of India united to establish Pakistan. The western region was designated as the Federal Republic of Pakistan, while the eastern region became known as East Pakistan, which eventually evolved into Bangladesh.

The formation of Pakistan was intended to create a homeland for Muslims, enabling them to practice their values and Islamic traditions freely.

A significant aspect of the August 14 festivities involves honoring the legacies of Quaid-e-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the esteemed poet who played a crucial role in the struggle for independence.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 7-8-2024

Iran, Saudi Arabia officials discuss bilateral ties

TEHRAN- Iran's chief of the Charity Affairs Organization and Saudi Arabian Minister of Islamic Affairs emphasized the importance of strengthening bilateral relations.

During the 9th conference of ministers of Islamic Affairs in Islamic countries in Makkah, Mehdi Khamoushi, chief of Iran's Endowments and Charity Affairs Organization, met with Abdullatif bin Abdulaziz Al Al-Sheikh, the Saudi Arabian Minister of Islamic Affairs.

Abdullatif bin Abdulaziz expressed his pleasure at the Iranian delegation's attendance and underscored the significance of collaboration between Saudi Arabia and Iran, both bilaterally and within the broader Islamic world.

Khamoushi commended the results of the conference of ministers of Islamic Affairs from the member states of the Makkah-based Muslim World League, as well as the experiences and ideas shared during the event.

The 9th conference of ministers of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in Islamic countries, organized by Saudi Arabia, began on August 4, 2024, in Makkah. The meeting focused on the theme "The role of Islamic Affairs ministries in promoting and consolidating the principles and values of moderation."

Ministers, heads of Islamic councils, associations, and institutions from 60 Muslim countries participate in the event.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 12-8-2024

Iran dismisses accusations of involvement in hacking Trump's campaign

TEHRAN- The Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations has dismissed claims regarding Tehran's alleged involvement in the hacking of the election campaign of former U.S. President and Republican candidate Donald Trump.

As reported by Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Iranian mission to the United Nations issued a statement refuting a report by Politico, an American digital news outlet, which alleged that it had obtained documents regarding Iran's involvement in hacking the Trump campaign.

The report also claimed that the publication had started receiving emails from an unidentified account that included documents related to the internal operations of the Trump campaign.

The mission's statement addressed the claim made by Politico, asserting, "We do not attribute credibility to this news, as the Iranian government lacks both the intent and motivation to intervene in the American presidential elections."

Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for the Trump campaign, asserted that internal documents were obtained from an anonymous source, which was designed to disrupt the 2024 election and create disorder within the democratic process.

Additionally, the Trump campaign referenced a June report from Microsoft, which indicated that hackers associated with Iran attempted to infiltrate the account of a senior official from an undisclosed presidential campaign, highlighting that the breach was executed using the email credentials of a former senior advisor.

The Iranian mission to the United Nations provided clarification on Friday, addressing inquiries regarding the Microsoft report.

Iran's mission to the UN stated, "Iran is a victim of numerous cyber-attacks aimed at its infrastructure, public service facilities, and industrial sectors. The nation's cyber capabilities are primarily defensive and correspond to the threats it encounters."

This accusation related to the elections emerged shortly after another media narrative suggested Iran's involvement in a shooting incident at a rally for Trump, a claim that Iranian officials dismissed as nonsensical, unfounded, and prejudiced.

Earlier on August 9, a spokesman for Microsoft company declared, "Iran was involved in cyber activities aimed at interfering with the U.S. electoral process."

After these accusations, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has officially declared that it has neither the intention nor the plan to carry out cyberattacks against the United States during its upcoming presidential elections.

THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 6-8-2024

Mawlavi Kabir urges European diplomats to resume missions in Kabul

KABUL: The Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Mawlavi Abdul Kabir, in a meeting, with the ambassadors and diplomats of several European and other countries in Doha, asked them to resume their political missions in Kabul, Arg said in a statement the other day. Speaking in a meeting with the representatives from the embas ada, Italy, France, South Korea, Australia, Germany, and the United States, Kabir extended an invitation to the diplomats to visit Afghanistan and assess the situation directly, according to the statement. Also, the meeting discussed several important issues including enhancing bilateral relations, addressing security concerns, and exploring humanitarian cooperation, the statement further said. Sharing updates on Afghanistan's progress, security, and stability, Mawlavi Kabir urged the diplomats to resume their political missions in Kabul and manage Afghanistan-related affairs from the capital.

THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 4-8-2024

Continued Torkham port closure to put negative impacts on bilateral trade

Nowadays, it is the export season for Afghanistan; therefore, hundreds of thousands of tons of fresh fruits and vegetables are exported to various countries. Most of the country's fresh fruits and vegetables are exported via Torkham, Spin Boldak and other ports to Pakistan, a neighboring country that has always created challenges for Afghan traders, particularly during the exports season. The prolonged closure of the Torkham crossing has had negative impacts on trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan and inflicted severe economic losses on truck drivers, who report that their shipments of fruits and vegetables have spoiled. Drivers have attributed the closure to Pakistan's enforcement of a requirement for a temporary entry permit for commercial truck drivers. Days back when Afghan traders started to go for exporting the country's fresh fruits and vegetables to neighboring countries, the Pakistan government announced additional taxes on Afghan products;

therefore, they blocked over 300 trucks of fresh fruits and vegetables belonging to Afghan traders from entering the country. Later on, they re-opened the gate for Afghan truck drivers. Pakistan's authorities have once again closed the Torkham crossing port to Afghan trucks, saying that they lacked the necessary documentations to cross the point. For several days, trucks carrying fresh fruits, vegetables, and other goods have been stranded on both sides of the crossing point. Drivers say that the fresh fruits and vegetables are spoiling as they have been waiting for several days, asking both the Pakistan and Afghanistan governments to address the problem so that truckers can smoothly cross the crossing point. They say that the continued Torkham crossing closure has inflicted severe economic losses on Afghan truckers. Hundreds of commercial trucks are stuck on both sides of the Torkham crossing point. The increasing number of stranded vehicles is also contributing to a rise in traffic accidents. There are also reports of rampant bribery among Pakistani police. It is not the first time Pakistan has created challenges for Afghan traders during the export season. Afghan traders have always faced with challenges created by the Pakistan government during the Afghan export season. In the three or four months when it is the season for Pakistan's oranges, tomatoes, and vegetables, there is no issue. However, when it is the season for Afghanistan's fresh fruits and vegetables' season, the Pakistan government either puts additional taxes or blocks trucks transiting our country's products to the neighboring country. In April, the Islamic Emirate and Pakistani government agreed to implement a temporary entry permit through the Torkham crossing. However, the deadline for this decision has passed, leading Pakistan to halt hundreds of trucks carrying fruits and vegetables belonging to Afghan traders at the Torkham, Spin Boldak, and Kharlachi crossings. If Pakistani authorities continue to keep Torkham Crossing points closing, this can lead to reduced trade and create challenges between the two countries. Pakistan should allow the Afghan traders' trucks to enter the country, or Afghanistan will take similar steps although similar steps have been already taken in response to the closure of the crossing point. Mohammad Ehsan

THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 7-8-2024

Bilal Karimi discusses bilateral relations with Chinese envoy

BEIJING: The Ambassador of the Islamic Emirate to China, Mawlavi Bilal Karimi, in a meeting with Yuxiao Yong, the Special Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China for Afghanistan, discussed enhancing bilateral relations between the two countries, the embassy said in a statement Tuesday. Both sides discussed several important issues including further developing political relations between China and

Afghanistan, strengthening good relations, and enhancing economic connectivity through mutual interaction with neighboring and regional countries, the statement said. According to the statement, trade, transit, consular matters, and other bilateral issues have been discussed in the meeting. Evaluating the current political and economic relations between China and Afghanistan, both sides emphasized the need for continued efforts in this regard.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 6-8-2024

PM asks Delhi to come to the table on Kashmir

Syed Irfan Raza

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday extended another olive branch to neighbouring India, stressing the need to sit together to find a peaceful solution to the Kashmir dispute, for permanent peace in the region.

In his address to the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on Monday, PM Shehbaz said the only way to maintain peace and stability in the region was to give the people of Kashmir their due rights. He was speaking to mark Youm-i-Istehsal, observed on August 5, against India's unilateral action of revoking Indian-held Kashmir's special status in 2019.

The prime minister said that Pakistan is a nuclear power, but had never thought of aggression with regard to its nuclear capabilities. "Therefore the better option is to adopt the peaceful way and sit together to find out the peaceful solution to the Kashmir dispute."

The PM expressed a similar sentiment in a separate message, issued earlier in the day.

He said New Delhi's actions five years ago were a means to "consolidate its occupation" of the disputed valley. "Ever since, India has been trying to convince the world that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of its territory." The PM added that international laws, historical facts, moral principles and the ground situation deny India's "baseless claims".

"History has proven, time and again, that durable peace in South Asia remains contingent upon the settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute," he said.

'India's illegal actions' PM Shehbaz told AJK lawmakers that Youm-i-Istehsal served as a reminder of the grave consequences of India's "illegal actions" of August 5, 2019.

Ever since that day, New Delhi has been trying to silence the genuine leadership of the Kashmiri people and muzzle the media, PM Shehbaz claimed.

"The number of political prisoners remains in the thousands, while 14 political organisations have been outlawed." The PM also lamented the harassment of

innocent people, arbitrary detentions, and the so-called “cordon and search operations”, which have become a routine matter. PM Shehbaz vowed that until Kashmiris get their rights and freedom, Pakistan would continue to extend moral support to them and knock on the doors of all the international institutions for the resolution of this dispute.

He also paid tributes to Kashmiris “who had been bearing the atrocities and cruelties of the Indian armed forces” in their “struggle for freedom”.

Atrocities in Gaza

In his address, the prime minister also mentioned the atrocities committed by Israeli forces in Gaza and said the day was not far when both India and Israel will be compelled to give Kashmiris and Palestinians their due rights.

He added that 40,000 Palestinians have been martyred, including thousands of children, and the toll is rising each day.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 6-8-2024

Pakistan, China agree to shift coal plants to local fuel amid energy crisis

Leghari highlighted that China has taken the issue of ‘debt profiling’ seriously, which is a crucial aspect of this transition

By Israr Khan

ISLAMABAD: In a significant move aimed at enhancing energy cooperation and economic stability, Pakistani Power Minister Muhammad Leghari announced on Monday that China and Pakistan have agreed to convert their coal plants to use local coal.

Leghari highlighted that China has taken the issue of ‘debt profiling’ seriously, which is a crucial aspect of this transition. The announcement comes amid ongoing challenges in Pakistan’s energy sector, particularly the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) saga. Since 2018, the country has struggled with the financial burden of capacity payments to IPPs, which are made regardless of whether the electricity is consumed.

This has been a major strain on the national economy, exacerbated by a depreciating rupee and rising interest rates. The shift to local coal is expected to alleviate some of these financial pressures and support broader reforms aimed at reducing electricity prices and improving energy efficiency.

Leghari said this following a meeting with the MQM delegation led by MNA Mustafa Kamal regarding Karachi’s electricity issues. He stated that expensive power plants would be retired, and imported coal-based plants would be converted to use local coal. “Our government intends to lower electricity prices. We are

working practically rather than holding sit-ins or press conferences,” he said.

He added that he had been briefed on MQM’s concerns but did not want to go into details due to legal complexities. Responding to statements made by the former prime minister, Leghari said, “Yesterday, the former prime minister said that Gohar Ejaz cannot explain the issue of capacity rates, and I say that even if Gohar Ejaz forms his own Supreme Court, no one will understand him.”

Mustafa Kamal, leading the MQM delegation, emphasized that IPP agreements have consistently harmed the economy. Capacity payments are a major issue for the national economy, and every era’s IPP agreements have harmed the economy.

Kamal further said, “The government has prioritized the issue of expensive electricity, and we should not cause discomfort to anyone to convey our message to the government.” He further mentioned that after this budget, a new series of taxes has begun, and capacity payment agreements are bleeding the economy. Capacity payments are the biggest wound inflicted on the economy.

He also noted that there are power outages of up to 18 hours in Karachi. He suggested, “They [government and local IPPs] can be made to understand that a reduction in their profits will save the country,” noting when the dollar rises, capacity payments automatically increase.

The MQM leader assured that the public would hear good news in the coming days. “We have discussed industrialization with the government;” adding that “Karachi is the best place for industrialization.”

He also mentioned that political and administrative discussions are ongoing to address the IPPs issue. He also urged for ending the monopoly of Distribution Companies (Discos) across the country, suggesting, “The market for Discos should be liberalised.”

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 7-8-2024

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia enjoy eternal friendship: envoy

Resolution noted that entire Muslim Ummah had full trust in leadership of Saudi Arabia

By Asim Yasin

ISLAMABAD: Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan Nawaf Saeed Al-Maliki Tuesday said Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were bonded in an eternal friendship and had a relationship of faith and belief.

He was addressing the Paigham-e-Haj Conference here.

Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Chaudhry Saliq Hussein, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi, Palestinian

ambassador to Pakistan, Pir Naqeebur Rehman, Allama Shabbir Hussein, Saad Nazeer, Sanaullah Khan and others also addressed the conference.

Maliki said serving pilgrims was pride of Saudi Arabia adding that it was their responsibility to facilitate the Pakistani pilgrims to their best.

Acting ambassador of Palestine to Pakistan said time had come when the sacrifices of Palestinians will bear fruit and Palestine will come into being as an independent and autonomous state and they will say prayers inside Al-Quds.

Ashrafi said the message of Haj Sermon 2024 was unity and harmony among the Muslims and appreciated the Haj arrangements made by the Saudi government.

He congratulated the Saudi government for the excellent arrangements and thanked them for their services to Pakistan. He said this year eleven million people performed Umrah. "On the 27th night of Ramadan, 2.6 million people were present in the Haram," he added.

The speakers said Kashmir and Palestine were the burning issues of Muslim Ummah and the entire Muslim world stood united with the people of Palestine and Kashmir.

They noted that the OIC needed to be strengthened adding that the Saudi services for the Muslims and Hajj were exemplary.

The speakers said Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had unanimous stance on the issue of Palestine and their respective struggle for an independent and autonomous Palestinian state will continue.

The speakers said Hajj-e-Baitullah was an important pillar of Islam and the Saudi services for Haj were unforgettable and laudable.

The participants of the conference noted that the prevailing challenges required the Muslim Ummah to get united and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had to play their respective role for the unity and stability of the Muslim Ummah.

They said Makkah and Medina were the centres of Muslim unity as the way Muslims from all over the world say prayers in the leadership of an Imam in Makkah and Medina demonstrated that Harmain Al-Sharifain were the centres of Muslim unity.

The conference also adopted a resolution to laud the services of Shah Salman bin Abdul Aziz, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and Dr Taufeeq Al-Raba, Saudi Minister for Hajj, for making best Haj arrangements in 2024.

The resolution noted that the entire Muslim Ummah had full trust in the leadership of Saudi Arabia. The resolution also noted that Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman had to play his role on the issues of Palestine and Kashmir and his services for the

cause of Muslims all over the world should also be intensified.

Another resolution adopted at the conference also noted that some elements were raising the slogans of confrontation, violence and sectarianism to create divisions among the Muslim Ummah. The resolution noted that Muslims and Islam were free from such acts adding that unity and stability of Muslim Ummah is solution to all the prevailing challenges of Islamic world.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 9-8-2024

India to facilitate visas for Chinese technicians, echoes strong economic ties

By Yin Yeping

India's reported move to facilitate visas for Chinese technicians shows the need of the Indian side to maintain strong economic ties with China. Experts said that this is a positive message from the Indian authorities, which will be beneficial for economic and trade ties between the two major economies in Asia to get back on track.

India has put in place a portal to facilitate business visas for Chinese technicians, whose expertise is required in Indian manufacturing firms in the sectors that are covered under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) programs, Indian media outlet The Economic Times reported on Wednesday, citing a senior government official.

According to the report, the portal began functioning last week, and India's Ministry of Home Affairs met with various departments to sensitize and train them on how the portal is to be used.

In another report, the Times of India said on Wednesday that the Indian online visa portal has enabled Chinese nationals to apply for e-business visas, facilitating fast-track approvals for those coming in to execute projects under the PLI arrangement.

An India-based business representative told the Global Times on Thursday on condition of anonymity that the reported new visa facilitation service has not been made available to Chinese citizens yet. But he noted that "it's expected that soon, Chinese citizens will be able to apply for e-commerce visas."

In Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term, efforts will be made to boost the economy and employment, such as selectively allowing cooperation with China and prioritizing opening up visas, and the visa facilitation measure is one approach, the insider said.

Over the past four years, the China-India relationship has experienced ups and downs. Recent measures taken by Modi's government, including potential relaxations in visa policies for Chinese company employees, are a

relatively positive development, Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Thursday.

The reported visa facilitation measure comes as various sectors in India, particularly the business community, consistently advocate improving these visa policies, Qian said.

Since the border conflict between China and India in June 2020, the Indian government has taken a more confrontational approach toward Chinese firms. This has involved measures like banning more than 300 Chinese apps, launching probes over so-called tax and money-laundering concerns, and intensifying oversight of Chinese investments in the country.

Among other restrictions, the rigid visa policies prevented skilled Chinese technicians from entering India, adversely affecting collaborative projects and hindering India's economic growth and manufacturing sector, Qian said.

A report by The Economic Times in June said that Indian electronics manufacturers had suffered \$15 billion in production losses and 100,000 job cuts due to escalating tensions with China. Visa delays for Chinese executives were hindering the industry's expansion plans, leading to a \$10 billion export opportunity loss and \$2 billion in value-added losses, the report said.

Before 2020, there were more than 1,000 Chinese enterprises in India and tens of thousands of staffers from China. But as of January this year, there were no more than 300 Chinese companies in the country and less than 800 personnel, the Global Times learned from an India-based industry insider.

More efforts are still needed from the Indian side to win back the trust of Chinese businesses.

"Until India's business environment for Chinese enterprises shows clear improvement, investment and operational risks remain high in the South Asian country," the industry insider said, indicating that investors need to remain alert to possible risks of their businesses.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 13-8-2024

China, Indonesia hold first 2+2 senior officials' meeting amid South China Sea tensions

By GT Staff Reporters

China and Indonesia are holding their first Senior Officials' Meeting of the Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue, a meeting that analysts say will potentially cover multiple topics including the South China Sea issue.

Experts believe that Indonesia will play a constructive role in the ongoing tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, as cooperation between Beijing and Jakarta will set an example for ASEAN member states while contributing to stabilizing the situation in the South China Sea.

As agreed between China and Indonesia, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Sun Weidong and Deputy Director of the Office for International Military Cooperation of the Central Military Commission Zhang Baoqun led a delegation to Jakarta on Monday to attend the first Senior Officials' Meeting of the China-Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue, according to remarks by a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson on Monday.

The China-Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue, launched in 2023, is the first 2+2 ministerial dialogue established between China and another country. During the Senior Officials' Meeting, the two sides will exchange views on China-Indonesia relations and international and regional issues of mutual interest, the spokesperson said.

Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Monday that 2+2 ministerial dialogues usually take place only between allies or countries with close relations and high strategic mutual trust.

This senior officials' meeting is expected to pave the way and create better conditions for talks among even higher level officials in the future, Qian said.

In terms of what might be discussed at the meeting, Chen Xiangmiao, director of the World Navy Research Center at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, told the Global Times on Monday that the meeting will likely address the relationships between China and ASEAN, and China's support for ASEAN's centrality in the region.

The two sides are also expected to discuss the negotiations on the Code of Conduct (COC) on the South China Sea, with a view to reaching an agreement on the COC as soon as possible. In addition, the two sides will likely continue to focus on the Belt and Road Initiative and discuss ways to strengthen economic and trade cooperation under the framework of RCEP and the upgraded China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, Chen said.

Chen believes that given the fact that China and Indonesia share a common understanding in various areas, the two sides will also discuss various issues, ranging from Indonesia's support for the one-China principle and clean energy to conflicts elsewhere in the world.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

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THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 1-8-2024

Delusional Narendra Modi government has learnt no lesson: Sonia Gandhi

On the budget, Sonia Gandhi said that the pressing demands of farmers and youths had been totally ignored

Anita Joshua, New Delhi

The top leadership of the Narendra Modi government “continues to be self-delusional” and has not learnt any lessons from the Lok Sabha election verdict, said Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday.

Addressing the CPP, Sonia said: “We would have hoped that the Modi government would draw the right lessons from their significant decline in the Lok Sabha elections. Instead, they are persisting with their policy of dividing communities and spreading an atmosphere of fear and animosity.”

Making an oblique reference to the Uttar Pradesh government’s directive to vendors along the Kanwar Yatra route to display their names on their outlets, the Rajya Sabha MP said: “Fortunately, the Supreme Court intervened at the right time. But this can only be a temporary respite. Look at how the rules have been suddenly changed to permit the bureaucracy to participate in the activities of the RSS. It calls itself a cultural organisation but the whole world knows that it is the BJP’s political and ideological base.”

On the budget, she said that the pressing demands of farmers and youths had been totally ignored. “Allocations in several vital sectors have not done justice to the tasks required to be fulfilled,” she said.

Stating that there is widespread disappointment despite efforts by senior government functionaries, including the Prime Minister, to “talk up the budget”, Sonia said:

“The Union government, especially its top leadership, continues to be self-delusional as crores of families across the country are devastated by mounting unemployment and price rise.”

According to Sonia, it is clear that the government has no intention of conducting the census that was due in 2021.

“This will prevent us from having an up-to-date estimate of the population of the country, especially of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It also means that at least 12 crore of our citizens are denied the benefits of the National Food Security Act of 2013, now repackaged as PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana,” she said.

Touching on the “damage” done to education under the Modi government’s watch and the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur, she took a swipe at

the Prime Minister for not visiting the northeastern state even once since the trouble started in May 2023.

“The Prime Minister travels the world over but steadfastly refuses to go to the state and take the initiative to bring about normalcy.”

“We must not become complacent and overconfident. The mahaul (atmosphere) favours us but we have to work unitedly with a sense of purpose. I dare say that if we perform well, reflecting the trend we witnessed in the Lok Sabha elections, national politics will undergo a transformation,” she said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 9-8-2024

The Akali Dal crisis is more than just a political one

Though one can never write off a politician, this does seem like the beginning of the end of the Badal era.

Chander Suta Dogra

ALL of a sudden, the Akal Takht — the supreme temporal seat of Sikhism — has become a refuge for top leaders of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), desperate to claw back into favour with the Sikh masses after a series of electoral defeats. They are flocking for forgiveness to the very institution whose loss of prestige they are being held responsible for. Can the Akal Takht free itself from the overriding influence of the SAD and take a decision that is seen as impartial and has the approval of the Sikh community?

Last month, a rebel group of senior Akali politicians created a flutter when it listed some ‘anti-Panth’ activities of SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal and sought his ouster. The group presented the alleged ‘crimes’ in a letter to the Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Raghbir Singh. The group members also admitted to religious and political lapses made by them while they were part of the SAD governments between 2007 and 2017 and sought atonement for them. In other words, they admitted to being party to the same wrongs.

Just a few days later, Sukhbir also went to the Akal Takht and apologised in writing for the lapses during the party’s 10-year rule. His letter of apology, in which he took responsibility for his actions, was made public on Monday. The SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee), the apex body controlling Sikh gurdwaras, has also submitted an apology.

The apologies centre around four major issues that have been riling the Sikh community for several years. The first is related to the 2007 blasphemy case against Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh for impersonating Guru Gobind Singh. The case was later quietly withdrawn. The second pertains to the alleged

manipulation of an apology issued by the dera for impersonating the Guru. Ram Rahim was pardoned by the Akal Takht in September 2015. But as he continued to face anger and protests from the community, the pardon was revoked less than a month later.

The SGPC, controlled by the SAD, reportedly spent Rs 90 lakh on advertisements to defend the decision to pardon the dera head. Akali leaders now openly accuse Sukhbir of pressuring the then Akal Takht Jathedar to pardon Ram Rahim. Worse, when three sacrilege incidents concerning the holy birs of the Guru Granth Sahib occurred in 2015, the alleged perpetrators, belonging to the dera, were not prosecuted.

More recent revelations claim that Sukhbir secretly met the dera chief in Jaipur and Delhi in 2017 to mobilise electoral support. This was in defiance of a 2007 Akal Takht edict forbidding Sikhs to have any ties with Ram Rahim. More evidence of the betrayal of ‘Sikhi’ by the leadership of a party of the Sikhs was a body blow to Sukhbir’s political persona.

In the midst of this, nine top rebel leaders were expelled from the party when they launched the ‘Shiromani Akali Dal Sudhar Lehar’ (reform movement) to “strengthen and uplift” the party. But this is just the political aspect of the ongoing crisis.

To restore the spiritual dominance of ‘Sikhi’ in the fabric of the SAD is the other goal, which is more challenging. Punjabis are watching this unprecedented churn in the Sikh domain with a sense of hope that things will change for the better. The sentiment calls for a return to the core religious values that were allegedly abandoned by the Akali Dal during the Badals’ regimes in pursuit of electoral gains.

Since its inception in 1920, the Akali Dal has championed the aspirations of the Sikh community, fashioning its politics around the Sikh concept of Miri Piri, which prioritises spiritual or religious authority over political power. The decay set in during the Badal era, when the spiritual authority of Sikh institutions like the SGPC and the Akal Takht became subservient to the party. These revered institutions began to be used as instruments to further the political prospects of the Akali party, and they gradually lost their importance as robust religious institutions that were meant to guide the Sikh Panth. The stranglehold of the Badal family over the party and such institutions began to be resented within the party and outside, though none spoke openly about this till the time Parkash Singh Badal was alive.

If today the Sikh Panth is rejecting Sukhbir’s politics and, by extension, that of his father, it is because of the setting in of a deep revulsion over the blatant misuse of Sikh religious institutions. Ten of the party’s 13 Lok Sabha candidates lost their security deposits in the

General Election held earlier this year, taking the party to rock bottom. Its vote share is down to 13.4 per cent, even lower than that of its one-time junior partner, the BJP, which now stands at 18.5 per cent. The situation was equally bad in the 2022 Assembly elections, when the party won only three seats.

But nobody wants to see the demise of the SAD. Not even its enemies. Because Punjab needs a strong Akali Dal to balance its delicate politics and social harmony. For long, the party was the voice of the Sikhs and exerted a moderating influence on the community. Today, as it flounders and the Sikhs find themselves rudderless in the state’s changing polity, radical elements like Amritpal Singh have emerged.

The Badal camp has described the rebels’ actions as a conspiracy hatched by its political opponents, the BJP and AAP. But given the adverse baggage accumulated by Sukhbir, it is hard to see him winning back the trust of the Sikhs and Punjabis in the near future. Though one can never write off a politician, this does seem like the beginning of the end of the Badal era.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 13-8-2024

AAP to launch Delhi poll campaign with Manish Sisodia’s padyatra on August 14

In 2020, AAP formed government in Delhi, winning 62 out of 70 Assembly seats

New Delhi, The AAP will kick-start its campaign for the Delhi Assembly polls with a padyatra of senior leader Manish Sisodia to reach out to people in all the 70 constituencies, party leader Sandeep Pathak said on Monday.

The Delhi Assembly elections are likely to be held early next year.

Former Delhi deputy chief minister Sisodia, who was released from Tihar Jail on Friday, held a meeting with senior AAP leaders. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal’s wife Sunita also participated in the meeting.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Pathak, AAP organisation general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP, said Sisodia will also campaign for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Haryana where assembly elections are due later this year.

Pathak said Sisodia’s padyatra will start on August 14 and it will tell people about the “tendency” of the BJP to obstruct work and cause distress to them.

“It was resolved in the meeting that the Assembly polls will be fought to defeat the conspiracies of the BJP to break the Aam Aadmi Party which is not going to succeed. It is impossible to break the party,” Pathak asserted. He said the Aam Aadmi Party is ready and the

people of Delhi are also prepared to teach a lesson to the BJP so that it does not dare to employ “dirty politics” to win elections and break parties elsewhere in the country. Pathak said in poll-bound Haryana, the AAP has already held 45 public meetings and now bigger ones will be held in each Lok Sabha constituency of the state. The party has also held a round of small meetings in the villages. Another round of meetings will also begin soon, added the AAP leader.

The AAP formed government in Delhi, winning 62 out of 70 Assembly seats in the 2020 polls. The party came to power in Delhi winning a whopping 67 assembly seats in the national capital in 2015. This time, the AAP is gearing up to take on the BJP, exuding confidence to repeat its earlier successes in the assembly polls. The morale of the party leaders and volunteers, dented by arrest of Kejriwal, has boosted after bail was granted to Sisodia by the Supreme Court last week.

Sisodia, who walked out of Tihar jail last Friday, has actively involved himself with preparations for the Assembly polls. He held a meeting with the ministers of the Delhi government on Sunday to discuss the poll preparations.

The AAP councillors will meet the former deputy chief minister on Tuesday to discuss the polls.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 14-8-2024

New shift: Editorial on Waqf Amendment Bill 2024 & introduction of non-Muslim members to state waqf boards

Although the State always had a part in the management of waqf properties, ministers and legislators on boards and the Central Waqf Council came from the minority community

Problems surrounding waqf properties were not entirely eliminated with the Waqf Act of 1995. Irregularities and the lack of transparency with regard to ownership and management of almost half the waqf properties, together with the looming potential for dispute, suggested the need for further reforms. The waqf (amendment) bill, 2024 was prepared for this purpose, but it was formulated without discussions with stakeholders, scholars and experts of the community. Organisations such as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board were not asked for suggestions. That is being seen as strange, since waqf properties are specifically related to religious or charitable use. On top of that, the changes introduced in the bill for the purposes of clarifying ownership, reforming management and reducing disputes have been labelled unconstitutional, anti-minority and divisive by

the Opposition. The reason lies in an inner shift, by which non-Muslim members have been introduced to the state waqf boards. Although the State always had a part in the management of waqf properties, ministers and legislators on boards and the Central Waqf Council came from the minority community. Disputes over identifying land ownership will be decided not by the tribunal as earlier but by the district collector and, if not settled, an appeal can be made to the civil court.

These changes would mean a far larger role for the State in the management of waqf properties. Various problems are being foreseen with the entry of non-Muslim members unacquainted with Islamic practices on the boards and there are fears that the entry of civil authorities could prolong disputes rather than reduce them. Waqf properties identified orally or by use have been eliminated in the bill; all such properties must be registered and have a *waqfnama*. They will be audited regularly by the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. Women are also to be made board members. These clarificatory and progressive steps, however, have been undermined by the bias towards government intervention. While reform is necessary, it should evolve with discussion and with the community taking up the reins of change. It is to be hoped that modifications will be suggested by the joint parliamentary committee to which the bill has now gone. The government is not bound to accept its recommendations, but the bill in its final form should not be divisive or cause feelings of alienation.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 14-8-2024

RSS keen to choose BJP boss: Party leaders pursue peace with parent after poll pangs

The BJP has never had a woman party boss and insiders said Prime Minister Modi was keen to have one to further his political agenda following the passage of the women's reservation bill

J.P. Yadav, New Delhi

The BJP's top leadership has launched efforts to mend fences with the RSS in the wake of the party's underwhelming performance in the Lok Sabha polls.

The RSS is keen to ensure that a person of its choice becomes the next BJP boss and Narendra Modi and Amit Shah appear eager not to annoy the parent outfit, sources said.

Sources said the option of electing a woman and an OBC leader as the BJP chief and the possible names to fit into the category were discussed at a “coordination meeting” of the BJP and the RSS on Monday evening.

The BJP has never had a woman party boss and insiders said Prime Minister Modi was keen to have one to further his political agenda following the passage of the women's reservation bill.

The five-hour meeting, held at the residence of defence minister Rajnath Singh, was attended by home minister Shah, BJP chief J.P. Nadda and general secretary (organisation) B.L. Santosh. The RSS was represented by general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale and joint general secretary Arun Kumar.

The discussions, insiders said, focused on the election of the next BJP president, the upcoming Assembly polls in Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir and the turmoil in Bangladesh with an emphasis on the safety of Hindus.

The meeting follows the apparent discord between the BJP and its ideological parent that became evident just after the poll results. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had publicly disapproved of the "ahankar" (arrogance) of the "sevak" and the bitter election campaign threatening social harmony. Bhagwat was seen to be targeting Modi, who prefers to call himself "Pradhan Sevak" and not "Pradhan Mantri".

RSS insiders said the marathon meeting indicated that the BJP's top leadership had realised that sidelining the RSS from key decision-making, particularly during the national elections, had cost the party dearly.

Privately, RSS leaders had accused the BJP of "unilaterally" finalising the names of candidates, many of them quite unpopular among the voters and the RSS cadres.

"We are part of the same family, the Sangh parivar, and differences in a family are very normal," an RSS leader said. "But now we have decided to ensure better coordination to minimise the scope of differences," the leader added.

The main topic of discussion at Monday's meeting was the possible candidates for the next BJP president. Nadda's extended term had expired in June and the delay in selecting his replacement is widely attributed to differences between the two sides.

Though both sides were tight-lipped about the probable names, BJP leaders said a final decision would be taken at the larger meeting at the end of this month during a key RSS brainstorming session in Kerala.

The upcoming Assembly polls also figured prominently in the discussions, with the BJP leadership eager to secure the full backing of the RSS given the political significance of the poll-bound states.

Of the three states, the BJP rules Haryana directly and Maharashtra indirectly. Going by the results of the Lok Sabha polls, it would be an uphill task for the BJP to

retain Maharashtra and Haryana and win back Jharkhand from the INDIA bloc.

The RSS has a strong presence in both Maharashtra (the RSS has its headquarters in Nagpur) and Haryana and the synergy of its ground cadres could give the much needed push to Modi's effort to improve his political standing.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 1-8-2024

Six arrested for throwing beer bottles into mosque: Police

Coovercolly Indresh

A group of seven-eight people consumed alcohol near the mosque and threw the bottles inside without any reason

Six people have been arrested and a minor has been detained for allegedly hurling beer bottles into the Firdosi Masjid in Sirawara town, Raichur district, a police officer said.

The officer said that the incident took place on Tuesday night behind the town's bus stand. Following the incident, the police arrested six people and detained a minor. The arrested people are NB Sagar (23), R Basava (24), KN Vijay (25), BR Ranganath (25), NS Suresh (22), BK Sabaiah (22). All are reported to be residents of Sirawara.

Sirawara police inspector B Guruchandra said: "The incident occurred at around 8:30 pm. A group of seven-eight people consumed alcohol near the mosque and threw the bottles inside without any reason. We received a phone call from the mosque immediately after the incident and rushed to the spot. Though the perpetrators fled the scene, we were able to apprehend them soon after."

"We have arrested the six accused and booked them under BNS section 193 (Promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race) 351(2) (punishment for criminal intimidation). They were produced before the JMFC court on Wednesday, which remanded all the accused to 14 days of judicial custody," he added.

The breaking of beer bottles inside the mosque and the damage to the mosque's Darpa, a raised platform used for prayer and sermons, incensed the local Muslim community.

In response, hundreds of community members gathered at the mosque, demanding immediate action against the culprits.

Upon receiving reports of the incident, the law enforcement officials engaged in discussions with local Muslim leaders to address the community's grievances and to prevent the escalation of the protest.

During the discussions, police officers assured the community leaders that those responsible would be brought to justice without delay.

Mohammed Siraj, a mosque committee member, expressed relief at the police's quick response and said: "The timely intervention and arrest of the accused defused the tension in the area."

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 4-8-2024

Uttar Pradesh: Mob sets Muslim man's house on fire, accuses him of abducting woman; police also attacked

The SHO of Sirauli police station and two other policemen were suspended for alleged negligence in connection with the incident

PTI, Bareilly

A mob of villagers allegedly vandalised and set on fire the house of a Muslim man here, accusing him of kidnapping a woman of their community, police said on Saturday.

The angry locals also allegedly attacked the cops who reached the spot on information about the incident, which took place on Friday night in Chandupura Shivnagar village in the Sirauli area here, they added.

The SHO of Sirauli police station and two other policemen were suspended on Saturday for alleged negligence in connection with the incident, the police said.

Bareilly Senior Superintendent of Police Anurag Arya on Saturday morning said on July 29, the 20-year-old daughter of Maiku Lal and 21-year-old Saddam were reported missing in Chandupura Shivnagar. They were found by the police on August 1.

On the request of the woman's father and the villagers, she was handed over to her family, Arya said, adding that Lal submitted in writing that he did not want to lodge any complaint against the youth.

On the consent of the woman, she was handed over to the family and Saddam was detained for questioning, the SSP said.

Despite this, at around 11 pm on Friday night, miscreants allegedly broke into Saddam's house, vandalised it and set it on fire. They also attacked the police team who reached the spot on information about the incident, he said.

Following this, cross FIRs have been filed from both sides in the case, he added.

The SSP also said that SHO of Sirauli police station Luv Sirohi, Sub-inspector Satyaveer Singh and a constable were suspended on Saturday morning over negligence in the matter and not registering an FIR.

He said that the situation in Chandupura Shivnagar is now normal and police force has been deployed to maintain peace.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 6-8-2024

Assembly poll in J&K will be held in September: Minister

Staff Correspondent

Jammu, The Assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir would be held in September, Union Minister G Kishan Reddy said on Monday, urging people in the Union Territory to vote the BJP to power for maintaining the "development tempo" and rooting out terrorism.

Reddy was speaking at the 'Ekatma Mahotsav' rally organised by his party on the fifth anniversary of Article 370 abrogation at the Bana Singh Stadium in RS Pura of Jammu district.

"Come September, the people of J&K will choose the BJP and make it victorious in the Assembly election for continued growth and peace. Together with the people of J&K, the BJP will make the region a land of opportunities and place it on the global tourism map" he said.

Reddy said, "The full integration of J&K was the first ideological resolution of the BJP and its fulfilment is realisation of a long-standing promise to the country. Post-abrogation of Article 370, region is undergoing holistic transformation with significant advancements in economic growth, peace, and the rights of women and OBCs in UT. From a hotspot for terrorism to a prime tourism destination, J&K is flourishing under the PM Narendra Modi-led government," he said.

Lashing out at opposition parties, especially the Congress and the National Conference, he said they are talking about re-implementing Article 370, which has only brought "death and destruction" to Jammu and Kashmir through Pakistan-sponsored terrorism.

"People have to decide which government they want in J&K, the one which is talking about Article 370 or the BJP-led government which wants to take J&K to new heights of development, peace and prosperity," he said.

The rally was also seen as a platform to highlight the achievements of the present government by party leaders ahead of Assembly poll, which are likely by September. The Minister also attacked Pakistan by stating that the country was involved in a proxy war against India by sending terrorists to J&K. "It was only after the abrogation of Article 370 that the terrorism was curtailed. The government has time and again acted against the terror infrastructure in Pakistan which has brought much needed peace in the region," he said.

BJP national general secretary and J&K in-charge Tarun Chugh and J&K BJP president Ravinder Raina were

also present at the rally. In his address, Chugh said that on this day, final tribute was paid to “Do vidhan, do nishan, do pradhan” in the erstwhile state. He remembered Dr Shyama Prasad Mookherjee and his arrest while entering J&K.

Ravinder Raina said that on this day the injustice with the West Pakistani refugees, PoJK displaced persons and other communities was undone. “Congress party did grave injustice to the communities like Valmiki, Gujjar-Bakerwal, OBCs and SCs. Due to this day, today the West Pakistani refugees have got proprietary rights on the lands after 70 years”.

He mentioned the major development and infrastructure initiatives like road networks, AIIMS, IIT, IIM, medical colleges, educational institutes and other major projects to boost the socio-economic development in the region.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 7-8-2024

Cong, NC begin talks for alliance, PDP out of sight

Arjun Sharma

Jammu, With the possibility that the Assembly elections will be held here in the coming months, the Congress and the National Conference (NC) have started talks to form a pre-poll alliance. However, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has so far not shown any interest in the alliance in the wake of a rift between NC vice-president Omar Abdullah and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti ahead of the Lok Sabha elections a few months ago.

Abdullah and Mufti had criticised each other in separate press conferences after the former did not let PDP, a part of INDIA alliance, to contest from the Anantnag seat under the alliance. Mehbooba contested from the seat, but was defeated by NC candidate Mian Altaf.

A senior leader of the J&K Congress told The Tribune that talks for an alliance have begun between NC and Congress, but these were in initial stage.

“At present, we are discussing the number of seats to will be shared between the two parties. The NC is asking for 12-15 seats in Jammu region which is quite a lot, given the performance of the Congress in LS poll where the winning margin of two BJP candidates decreased considerably,” the Congress leader said. He said if the talks failed to mature, the “Congress will not shy away from contesting alone”.

It has also been learnt that the PDP is likely to contest the Assembly poll on its own without entering into any alliance.

A party leader based in Poonch said as Mehbooba Mufti was not allowed to contest the Lok Sabha poll under the INDIA alliance from Anantnag, there was little scope that there would be an alliance.

The NC, which is a Valley-based party, has influence in pockets of Jammu region. The NC and Congress have been into an alliance in earlier governments in J&K. There are a total of 90 Assembly segments in J&K. Of this, 43 are located in Jammu division.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 14-8-2024

Jammu and Kashmir polls: National Conference president Farooq Abdullah back in race for CM

Omar’s decision not to contest had led to murmurs within the party that an outsider might don that mantle. Farooq’s comments seemed to settle the issue

Muzaffar Raina, Srinagar

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah, 86, looks poised to return to electoral politics at a time when son Omar has decided not to contest the Assembly polls until statehood is restored to Jammu and Kashmir.

“He (Omar) does not want to contest. He is saying he won’t contest unless statehood is restored. (But) I will contest. I am going to fight. I am not dead,” Farooq told reporters in Doda in his usual aggressive style.

The former chief minister would not reveal his likely choice of constituency. “Why should I tell you? Does a general reveal on which front he is fighting? I am the general (of the party),” Farooq said. If Farooq contests the Assembly elections, he is virtually certain to be the chief ministerial face, as his remarks suggested.

Omar’s decision not to contest had led to murmurs within the party that an outsider might don that mantle. Farooq’s comments seemed to settle the issue.

Like Omar, fellow former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti too has vowed not to contest Assembly elections until statehood has been restored.

Farooq had opted out of the general election, paving the way for Aga Ruhullah Mehdi to contest from the Srinagar seat, the family’s so-called pocket borough.

The octogenarian had cited health reasons for not contesting. But his latest statement lends weight to the speculation that he had at the time merely acquiesced to Omar’s wish to have Mehdi, known for his pro-Article 370 stand, contest from Srinagar.

Omar had initially wanted to contest from the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat himself but eventually chose a tougher battle in Baramulla against separatist turned pro-India politician Sajad Lone, who is believed to have the Centre’s full backing.

But the last-minute entry of jailed politician “Engineer” Rashid, known for his soft separatism, proved his undoing. According to the grapevine, the Centre had allowed Rashid to contest only after being convinced that he alone could defeat Omar.

Rashid, who has been in Tihar jail on terror funding charges since August 2019, rode a sympathy wave.

Farooq has a long history of making sacrifices for his son.

As part of a family understanding in 2002, he had left state politics in charge of his son but the party, Omar included, suffered a humiliating defeat in the Assembly elections that year.

Farooq shifted to national politics, first as a Rajya Sabha member and then, in 2009, as Lok Sabha member from Srinagar. He lost the seat in 2014 but again won in 2019.

At 86, he looks in good health although he had been ill a few years ago.

Farooq hoped the Assembly elections would be held soon. "I have heard and read that the dates will be announced by August 20," he said.

True to his knack for stoking controversies, particularly ahead of elections, Farooq had kicked up a storm last week by suggesting that collusion between sections of the security forces and the militants had led to successful infiltration bids into Jammu.

Protesters from a Hindutva group on Tuesday burnt his effigy and chanted slogans against him in Jammu.

"We have so many soldiers on the border. No other country has such a deployment. How are they (militants) coming in? How are drugs (narcotics) coming in? There is collusion. They have colluded for our destruction," Farooq had told a gathering in Kishtwar.

Farooq is on a tour of the Chenab Valley, which includes Doda and Kishtwar.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 6-8-2024

Hasina falls, flees

Army chief meets politicians, civil society members to discuss formation of interim govt

Tanim Ahmed and Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee

Bangladesh's iron lady of 15 years bowed out to a people's uprising yesterday. Serving as the prime minister since 2009, Sheikh Hasina was forced to resign and flee the country as hundreds of thousands marched towards Dhaka defying a curfew amid a continual morning drizzle.

The streets of the capital that had convulsed with violence and death over the last three weeks, reverberated with wild celebrations as soon as the Bangladesh army chief, General Waker-Uz-Zaman, confirmed the rumours of Hasina's resignation. He went on to say that a new interim government will be formed soon.

Millions took to the streets gridlocking the entire capital well into the evening while many found it hard to believe that Hasina's absolute hold on authority and Awami League's fabled political fortress could crumble, faced with a three-week campaign initiated by students.

Revellers stormed the prime minister's residence, office and the parliament. They also ransacked Awami League offices and residences of high-ranking ministers across the country.

Even while thousands converged on Shahbagh from early afternoon, there were reports of violence between demonstrators and police officials on the fringes of Dhaka and from around Bangladesh amid the vacuum that was left in the wake of Hasina's hasty departure without so much as a statement or press release.

A fledgling student protest against reserved quotas for government jobs that began on July 1 started to gain momentum as the government dealt with them harshly. Despite reassurances of no harassment, the AL government employed excessive force to subdue a campaign leading to over 300 deaths. That protest transformed into a strong anti-government campaign over the last week and culminated in a people's uprising yesterday as the student campaigners called for their compatriots to "march to Dhaka". This was particularly in reply to AL's show of political force on Sunday, which left at least 93 dead in a single day's violence. Another 66 were killed yesterday in Dhaka alone.

Droves of people began gathering in neighbourhoods of Dhaka and its outskirts ready to converge in the capital's Shahbagh from early morning. There were also thousands gathering outside the capital and marching towards it, braving all obstacles. The strong tide turned on the back of university students.

About 43 years after Hasina had flown into Dhaka as the newly elected AL president for the first time, she took off on a military helicopter with her younger sister Sheikh Rehana to India.

The five-time prime minister landed in Agartala, the capital of India's northeastern state of Tripura. Thereafter, the 77-year-old premier was flown to Hindon Air Force Base in Ghaziabad, about 30km from the Indian capital of New Delhi, according to Indian news outlets India Today and NDTV.

Hasina was reported to have met with the Indian national security adviser, Ajit Doval, in the evening at Hindon. It is widely reported that Hasina will seek asylum in London. Later in the evening Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a high-level meeting with key ministers and intelligence chiefs who briefed him about the unfolding situation in Bangladesh, according to reports in Indian media.

Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, the former PM's ICT affairs adviser, told BBC that his mother would not "come back" to politics.

Back in Dhaka, before he took the podium at the army headquarters to address the nation, flanked by the air chief and naval chief, General Waker-Uz-Zaman met with several politicians and members of the civil society including representatives of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, other politicians and teachers. The AL was not represented. The student campaigners were not present there either. Leaders of the student protest campaign have announced that they will present an outline for the interim government soon.

In the context of hundreds of violent deaths, the army chief reassured everyone that justice would be ensured for each. He said it was now everyone's responsibility to remain calm.

"Together, we hope to go towards a better situation," he said addressing the media. "I am taking full responsibility."

"The country has suffered a lot, the economy has been hit, many people have been killed. It is time to stop the violence."

On his way to the presidential palace, Bangabhaban, the army chief was greeted by jubilant crowd. Hundreds thronged around A

the general's convoy and some even rode on his car as the convoy slowly glided through the teeming millions who hailed the army chief like a triumphant hero.

Aside from his announcement of an interim government, there were no statements about the nature of the government or the transition process till later in the evening when the president met with the military chiefs, political parties and civil society representatives.

A Bangabhaban press release said that the meeting had unanimously decided to immediately free BNP chief and former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

The meeting also decided to form an interim government immediately and urged everyone to show patience and tolerance. The military will strictly maintain law and order and prevent lawlessness. Parliament will be dissolved and all those arrested during the anti-quota protests will be released.

The delegation included BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir; BNP leaders Mirza Abbas and Major General (Retired) Fazle Elahi Akbar; Jatiya Party (JP) chairman GM Quader; JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnu; JP Senior Co-chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud; Nagorik Oikhya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna; Hefajat-e Islam leaders Mamunul Haque, Monir Kasemi and Mahabubur Rahman; Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman; Jamaat leader Sheikh Md Masood; Jaker Party Secretary General Shamim Haider; Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis leader Maulana Jalal Uddin Ahmad; Zonayed Saki of Gonosonghoti Andolon; Gono Odhikar Parishad leader Golam Sarwar Jewel; Dhaka University teacher Asif Nazrul and Firoz Ahmad; and student protest leaders Abdullah Al Hossain, Arif

Talukder, Omar Faruq and Mobashwera Karim Mimi and Engineer Md Anisur Rahman.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-8-2024

Hasina will return once democracy is restored: Joy

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League President and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina will return to Bangladesh once democracy is restored, her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy told PTI, an Indian news agency.

He also alleged that Pakistan's ISI fuelled the unrest in Bangladesh.

He added that the Indian government must "build up international pressure" for swift restoration of democracy in Bangladesh, PTI reported.

Joy said although 76-year-old Hasina would definitely return to Bangladesh, it is not yet decided whether she will be back as a "retired or active" politician.

He also asserted that the members of the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman family will neither abandon the people of Bangladesh nor leave the beleaguered Awami League in the lurch.

He expressed gratitude to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government for protecting his mother and appealed to India to help build international opinion and exert pressure for the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh.

"Yes, it is true that I had said she wouldn't return to Bangladesh. But a lot has changed in the last two days following continuous attacks on our leaders and party workers across the country. Now we are going to do whatever it takes to keep our people safe; we are not going to leave them alone."

"She will definitely return to Bangladesh once democracy is restored," he told PTI over the phone.

With Bangladesh set to get an interim government, Joy also urged it to restore law and order, noting that "the country is turning into a state of anarchy and becoming a second Afghanistan in the region."

He said he also expects the interim government to create a level playing field whenever democracy is restored and fresh elections are held.

"You cannot exclude the Awami League and have a representative democracy in Bangladesh ever. Whatever his (Muhammad Yunus) personal views are, he has said that he wants a government of unity and wants to move forward and not let the mistakes of the past cloud over the future. I hope he stays true to his word," Joy said.

Joy mentioned that once democracy is restored, either the Awami League or BNP will come to power, and the "Mujib family and Sheikh Hasina will be around."

"She has been in touch with all our party leaders for the last two days. My mother was going to retire anytime soon, so we thought now that she is gone, they (rioters) would leave our party people alone, but that did not happen. Instead, they started attacking," he said.

Declining to comment directly on whether he and his sister Saima Wazed, who is currently the South East Asian regional director for the World Health Organization, would join politics, Joy said he would do whatever it takes to protect Bangladesh from "total anarchy."

"I can't give a definite reply to this question. But I will do whatever it takes to save Bangladesh and protect the Awami League. The Mujib family would not leave them in a lurch," said Joy, the former Information and Communication Technology Advisor to Hasina.

Blaming Pakistan for fuelling the unrest in Bangladesh, Joy said there is circumstantial evidence suggesting foreign interference and alleged involvement of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency.

"I am quite certain given the circumstantial evidence; I suspect Pakistan ISI's involvement. The attacks and protests were very coordinated, meticulously planned, and intentional efforts to keep inflaming the situation through social media. No matter what the government did to control the situation, they kept trying to worsen it," he said.

He also pointed out that the rioters attacked police with guns which could only be provided by terror outfits and foreign powers.

On reports of involvement of a US intelligence agency like the CIA, Joy said he had no evidence but added, "maybe, they are." He dismissed any Chinese involvement when asked about it.

Dismissing reports of Hasina seeking asylum in the UK or any other country as "rumours," Joy said the reports of her US visa being revoked are also untrue.

"Nothing of this sort has been planned (seeking asylum). Sooner or later, there has to be a restoration of democracy in Bangladesh and hopefully, that will be between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League. Then Sheikh Hasina will be back."

"At this point, she wants to go back to Bangladesh. It's a question of when rather than if," he said, hinting that the ousted Bangladesh PM will be staying at an undisclosed location in India for now.

Speaking on the "India Out" campaign in Bangladesh, he said, "The anti-India forces are already very active, and with Awami League out of power, the ISI is now free to supply as many weapons as it wants to the anti-India forces."

Joy said India must act fast before anti-India forces gain more ground.

Refuting claims that Hasina ran away to save her own life, he said the family insisted on stopping the bloodshed.

"She was not willing to leave the country. The Prime Minister's security was ready to protect her till the end. But that would have led to hundreds of deaths of protestors who were marching towards the PM's residence. We convinced her for the sake of Bangladesh, we cannot let her get killed," he said.

"Our government was not weak, but my mother did not want to harm the students. Even after her leaving the country, the bloodshed has not stopped. The people will now understand the difference with and without Sheikh Hasina," he said.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 14-8-2024

‘Gave shelter to AL leaders whose lives in danger’

Says Army chief

Staff Correspondent

Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman yesterday said they gave shelter to some influential people from the ousted Awami League government as their lives were in danger.

He also said they gave shelter to people irrespective of their party affiliation, opinion and religion.

"If there is any allegation against them, any case is filed, they will be punished. But of course, we don't want any attack or extrajudicial action [against them]. We have given them shelter because of the threat to their lives," he said replying to a query.

Waker-Uz-Zaman was speaking at Rajshahi Cantonment where he met with officials of army, police, and the civil administration.

Asked about any possibility of a counter-revolution, the army chief said he had no knowledge of it.

Enquired about any pressure from foreign nations regarding the prevailing situation, he replied in the negative.

"... this is a unique situation. Everyone understands it. There has been some discussion over the minority issue. A total of 30 minority-related attacks have place in 20 districts."

He said they do not want any such incidents to take place.

"We are looking into the incidents. We will bring the criminals to book."

Speaking about the situation in Rahshahi division, Waker-Uz-Zaman said, "Nothing like this [attacks on minority community] happened in the eight districts of Rajshahi division. Such congenial atmosphere should

always be maintained. We will all work together and take the country towards development.”

The army chief said, “The situation has become normal. But the police are still in trauma. Once it’s over, the police will be able to perform their duties properly again.

“Police have already started working in different police stations. We are giving protection to the police. Once they start functioning fully, the situation will become normal. Then we will return to the cantonment,” he added.

He said the army will provide all-out support to the government. “The government wants some reform, and to hold a free and fair election. We will provide all sorts of assistance in this regard.”

The army chief said many looted arms of police have already been recovered and more will be recovered soon.

Regarding the recent attack on army men in Gopalganj, Waker-Uz-Zaman said it was nothing but a misunderstanding.

“The situation is calm there. We have talked with them. But the crime they have committed must be investigated, and those who were involved will be brought to justice.”

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 11-8-2024

Khaleda will run in polls if able

Says Fakhrul

Staff Correspondent

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has said party chief Khaleda Zia will run in the polls if she is fit.

“If she’s physically fit, she will definitely contest the election,” he told NDTV in an interview yesterday. “She’s very sick. She’s in the hospital. She’s suffering from multidisciplinary diseases. Her treatment was not going well in this country and we requested the judiciary as well as the government several times to send her abroad, but that didn’t happen... Doctors say she’s not fit to travel right now and we will have to wait for some time before taking her outside the country,” he said. The BNP leader said while his party is ready for polls at any point, the interim government would need more time to conduct them. “The entire election machinery has become totally polluted and they are not in a position to hold a free-and-fair election. So, they will have to bring some reforms to the election system as well.” The BNP leader also said he believes that the Bangladesh army will not interfere in the political process going forward and also claimed that no extremist elements were involved in the protests.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 13-8-2024

Interim govt to protect fundamental rights, freedom

Adviser Touhid Hossain tells foreign diplomats

Diplomatic Correspondent

The interim government is committed to promoting and protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms, said Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain.

“As part of our renewed nation-building efforts, Bangladesh would need the unstinting support and cooperation of the international community,” he told more than 60 foreign diplomats based in Dhaka during his first diplomatic briefing at the State Guesthouse Padma yesterday.

The adviser appreciated the positive and constructive remarks of the international partners after the formation of the interim government, led by Prof Muhammad Yunus, on August 8.

“We affirmed that the government will uphold and promote all its international legal obligations, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law,” Touhid told journalists after the diplomatic briefing.

Responding to a question, he said former prime minister Sheikh Hasina’s stay in India will not impact the Dhaka-Delhi relationship.

“Bilateral relationship is established based on the mutual interests. If interests are compromised, the relationship does not sustain.

“There is no reason that our relationship with India will be affected for anyone’s stay in India.”

Touhid said the government will make sincere efforts to promote national reconciliation through inclusive dialogue and accountability.

The former foreign secretary said in a drastically changed scenario, all political parties are now free to express their views and opinions.

He said the government will ensure justice and accountability for all deaths and violence committed during the recent mass uprising through independent investigations and judicial process.

“In the process, the government will remain engaged with the international partners, including the UN, to avail itself of appropriate support for facilitating such processes in a sound and seamless manner.”

The adviser said the interim government will work on essential policies and institutional reforms towards ensuring a democratic and prosperous future for the country.

He said the previous Awami League government in its efforts to suppress the popular movement committed gross human rights violations by abusing and misusing state power.

However, the sheer force of “people’s power” added momentum to the movement, leading to the fall of the authoritarian regime, led by Sheikh Hasina, he added.

Touhid said the most pressing task before the interim government is to bring normalcy in the overall law and order situation, and the government is working towards that end.

Some diplomats expressed concern over the safety of their citizens and diplomatic premises.

He said ensuring safety and security of the diplomatic and consular premises and personnel is a core priority for the government. The government is pledge-bound to ensure safety and security of all religious and ethnic groups, and it will not tolerate any violence or intimidation against them, he added. “We said they [diplomats] should not be frustrated about the current situation. Competent people are in charge of the economic sector. We assured them of protecting their investments and profits.” A diplomat told the adviser that young people brought a change in the country and they should have more representatives in the next parliament.

“I said there would be more young and women representatives in parliament in future.”

About fake news in the media on religious minorities, Touhid said propaganda should be countered with facts. “But we will not allow any violence or damages to occur. All those committing such crimes will be investigated.” Meanwhile, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong yesterday wrote on X that her country looks forward to working with Prof Yunus’ interim government. She welcomed Yunus’ calls for peace, order and justice.

“Australia will continue to support a democratic and inclusive future for all Bangladeshis,” she said.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 15-8-2024

Presidential Race Heats Up

Lakdev Liyanagama

All eyes will be on the Elections Commission (EC) Secretariat in Rajagiriya today where nominations for the much-awaited Presidential Election (PE) will be accepted. Already, forty potential candidates have paid their deposits.

The weeks that ended saw a flurry of political activity, some of it unexpected, as major political parties scrambled to make announcements regarding their respective candidates and forge political alliances which they believe will best serve their parties at the poll scheduled for September 21.

Incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe has declared he will be an Independent candidate. Among the major parties, the Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB) and the Jathika Jana Balavegaya had settled on their

choices some time ago, Sajith Premadasa and Anura Kumara Dissanayake respectively.

Eleventh-hour change of strategy

That left the other major political party, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) the task of deciding on its nominee. At first, it was widely expected to endorse President Wickremesinghe. However, in an eleventh-hour change of strategy, the SLPP’s politburo decided the party will field its own candidate.

This led to significant disruption in the political landscape. Many SLPP parliamentarians opted to support President Wickremesinghe, defying their party’s decision. This included the entire Cabinet including Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, most State Ministers and many other MPs.

Even at that stage, the personality widely tipped to accept the challenge of being the SLPP candidate was business magnate turned parliamentarian Dhammika Perera. Observers note that Perera’s enthusiasm for the candidacy appears to have diminished after the numerous SLPP defections.

In another last-minute change, Perera opted not to stand as a candidate, citing ‘personal’ reasons. It is understood the SLPP leadership then considered several options including Namal Rajapaksa. The younger Rajapaksa was agreeable, while being aware that the task he had before him was onerous.

In the SLPP, opinion is divided about the impact the candidacy would have on Rajapaksa’s political future. At 38 years of age, it is argued that he has the time to wait for more leadership opportunities but accepting this nomination will identify him as someone willing to take on a challenge.

On the other hand, some SLPP stalwarts feel that a below par performance at the election at a time when the SLPP is not at the height of its popularity and when many of its stalwarts have aligned themselves with President Wickremesinghe, can in fact do Rajapaksa more harm than good.

Top leadership

Critics of the SLPP already claim Rajapaksa’s nomination proves what has always been a factor in decision-making at the highest levels of the party: that its top leadership is reserved for the Rajapaksa family, just as it was with the Bandaranaike family and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

Nevertheless, there is consensus even among the SLPP’s detractors that the aim of forwarding Rajapaksa as a candidate was not the short-term objective of victory at the election alone; the longer term intention is to protect the integrity of the SLPP as a viable political entity for the future.

They point to the fate of the SLFP, the parent party from which the SLPP emerged. Mass scale defection from the SLFP to the SLPP during Maithripala Sirisena’s term of

office has reduced the SLFP to what it is today, a shadow of its former presence ravaged by bitter factional legal battles.

It could be argued that, with parliamentarians gravitating towards President Wickremesinghe at least for the upcoming election, the SLPP too will be eroded significantly in terms of its grassroots strength and power bases at the electoral level. Without its presence at the poll, it risks becoming redundant.

From the perspective of President Wickremesinghe's camp, the impact of Namal Rajapaksa's candidacy is twofold. Firstly, the President has lost some votes and also access to the SLPP's party machinery that would have otherwise been available to him had the SLPP endorsed his candidacy.

Secondly, the President is now truly unencumbered by allegations of association with the Rajapaksa family. This allows others who were hesitant to join forces with him because of these associations, to align with him and support him. Whether this materialises remains to be seen in the coming weeks.

In what could be the first of several similar moves, former Health Minister and SJB MP Rajitha Senaratne declared his support to President Wickremesinghe on Tuesday at a ceremony in Colombo. Senaratne's cross-over was widely expected. He had been critical of the SJB for some time.

Major political development

The other major political development last week was the formation of the 'Samagi Jana Sandhanaya' (SJS), an alliance where the SJB is the major partner. A ceremonial event at the Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo heralded the formation of the SJS, presided over by SJB leader Sajith Premadasa.

Stakeholders in the SJS include the SJB, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, the Nidahasa Janatha Sabhawa led by G.L. Peiris and Dullas Alahapperuma, Dayasiri Jayasekara's SLFP faction, the Tamil Progressive Alliance led by Mano Ganesan and the National Union of Workers led by P. Digambaram.

Also joining in were the Up-Country People's Front led by V. Radhakrishnan, the 'Purawesi Handa' led by former Sri Lanka cricket captain turned politician Arjuna Ranatunga, former cricketers Hashan Tillakaratne and Chaminda Vaas and former Army Commander Mahesh Senanayake.

Observers note that Ranatunga and his bitter rival in matters related to cricket, Thilanga Sumathipala are in the same political camp now. Although not joining the SJS at its launch, SLPP parliamentarian Dr. Sudarshini Fernandopulle has since said she will support Premadasa at the Presidential Election.

The All Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC), the party led by Rishad Bathiudeen which contested the 2020 General Election under the banner of the SJB is yet to

be a signatory to the SJS. The ACMC is considering supporting President Wickremesinghe and was due to announce its decision shortly.

The SJB had another reason to celebrate last week. That was after the Supreme Court determined the expulsions of Harin Fernando and Manusha Nanayakkara from the party were valid. They were expelled after they accepted the portfolios offered to them by then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

National interest

By accepting these positions, Fernando and Nanayakkara argued they were acting in the national interest, attempting to address the severe economic crisis facing the country. However, their actions were seen by the SJB as a betrayal of party principles, leading to disciplinary action by the party.

Fernando and Nanayakkara had filed two separate expulsion petitions challenging the SJB decision to remove them from their party membership. However, the Supreme Court ruled that the SJB had adhered to the party Constitution and had followed due procedures in expelling the two Ministers.

Therefore, a Supreme Court three-judge bench comprising Justices Vijith Malalgoda, Achala Wengappuli and Arjuna Obeysekera held the decision made by the SJB to expel the duo from the party is valid in law. As a result, they lose both their Parliamentary seats and Ministerial portfolios.

Both Fernando and Nanayakkara are at the forefront of President Wickremesinghe's election campaign. The expulsions and the loss of parliamentary seats, while a moral victory for the SJB, are of little practical value now as Parliament is expected to be dissolved soon after the Presidential poll.

However, it will be of great significance for all political parties in the long term. That is because the judgment clearly outlines the legal requirements that need to be satisfied if rebels MPs are to be expelled for violating party discipline. This is an issue parties have been struggling with in the past.

Besides these events, there is also a list of other notable personalities who have said they will contest the September 21 election. They include former Ministers Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe and Roshan Ranasinghe, former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka and businessman Dilith Jayaweera.

Pakkiyaselvam Ariyanethiran, a former parliamentarian, has been nominated as a candidate from several political parties based in the North and East. He does not have the endorsement of the main party in the region, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) but will have some support from the region.

Whether they will all proceed to handover nomination papers will be seen today. Even if they do, there is a belief that some of them may proceed to pledge their

support to one of the ‘mainstream’ candidates as the election campaign progress over the course of the next six weeks.

The election will, for the most part, be focused between President Ranil Wickremesinghe, SJB leader Sajith Premadasa, JJB leader Anura Kumara Disanayake and SLPP candidate Namal Rajapaksa. The contest is expected to be close and may well head towards a second count of preference votes.

Whatever the final outcome of the September 21 election, it will mark a turning point in Sri Lankan politics. Altered forever by the events of mid-2022 that led to the resignation of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the President elected in a few weeks has the task of resurrecting the economy and uniting the nation.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 1-8-2024

116 Former SLPP, UNP PC members pledge support to President

President to contest as an independent candidate with fresh, unbiased vision

To delegate responsibilities to all 10 governing bodies

Assassination of the Hamas political leader condemned

President Ranil Wickremesinghe announced his candidacy as an independent in the upcoming Presidential Election, emphasising his commitment to advancing the country with a fresh vision and unbiased programme.

He plans to delegate responsibilities to all 10 governing bodies including the nine Provincial Governments and the Central Government, to carry out his initiatives.

He made these remarks during a meeting at the Waters’ Edge hotel, Battaramulla with former Provincial Council representatives from the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and the United National Party (UNP).

Former Western Province Chief Minister Isuru Devapriya, proposed that President Ranil Wickremesinghe’s victory in the upcoming Presidential Election should be regarded as a significant achievement. This proposal was supported by 116 former Provincial Council representatives, including T.M.R Siripala, who affirmed it with their endorsement.

The President further emphasised the importance of safeguarding and advancing the country’s growing economy. He asserted that the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) must remain intact; highlighting that it is everyone’s responsibility to continue working toward economic progress, even during elections.

Additionally, President Wickremesinghe strongly condemned the killing of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh and urged the government to take necessary measures to mitigate potential economic impacts arising

from developments in Iran, the Middle East, and other regions. He assured that these precautions would be implemented.

Addressing the gathering President Ranil Wickremesinghe further elaborated:

“I thank everyone who has spoken on my behalf and come here to support me. We all came together in July 2022, a time when we lost our homes and many believed the country had no future. Some doubted whether it was possible to move the country forward and questioned why I took over this government. I told them I believed in the country’s potential for recovery. When asked about the experience of the SLPP members, I said that I can’t create new people unless I work with the existing ones, so we should continue this journey. Now, they say that I have a strong team.

Together with Ministers, MPs, Provincial Councils, and local bodies, we first established stability in the country. There was great fear back then, with MPs being attacked in the streets, and we faced a dire situation. We have now taken steps to return the country to normalcy and free it from bankruptcy. Our work cannot end here. We must adhere to the IMF agreement, as breaking it would send us back into crisis.

They provide us with financial support under specific terms, which we have accepted and must follow. Currently, we have funds available only until December. We need to sign another agreement with the IMF in January to receive funds by January or February. If we start renegotiating now, it could take about a year to finalise, and we cannot continue without funding. Therefore, we must decide to accept the funds and proceed with the programme.

Additionally, we need to address the challenges faced by young people by creating job opportunities, eliminating poverty, and developing the country. To achieve these goals, I am establishing 10 governments: Nine Provincial Governments and the Central Government, each with specific responsibilities.

I am running for the Presidential Election as an independent candidate because the country needs a fresh perspective and a new, unbiased programme to move forward. Let’s embark on this journey together and advance collectively.

In 2022, the majority of the SLPP decided to support me, a decision that was crucial for the country’s current situation. I especially thank former President Mahinda Rajapaksa for making that decision, which helped save the country. Now, we need to move forward without dividing parties, preserving them as much as possible.

There are significant global issues today. The killing of the Hamas leader in Tehran this morning is something I strongly condemn. It was wrong and could have prevented a solution to the Gaza conflict. This action is likely to escalate problems in the Middle East again,

which I do not support. As a nation, we must always uphold the right to life.

This international issue has led to other challenges. If a war breaks out, what will happen to fuel prices? If any issues arise, we might need to bring back everyone in the Middle East to Sri Lanka, similar to what we faced when Kuwait was invaded in 1991. This would result in a loss of revenue for the country, making it difficult for the emerging Sri Lanka to handle such a situation.

I instructed the Foreign Minister to engage with their counterparts from other countries to discuss a joint programme to manage this situation. Our focus should be on these activities. Our speaker is currently in Tehran, and we are working to bring him back as soon as possible.

We must prepare for this situation now. To this end, a committee has been established under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Power and Energy, and the Minister of Labour and Foreign Employment. Additionally, a committee composed of officials from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Power and Energy, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been appointed under the chairmanship of the National Security Advisor to assess the potential economic consequences.

The government is taking proactive measures to address any situation that may arise. There is no benefit in merely shouting from the stage; we must protect the economy and move forward. International agreements cannot be abandoned; they must be upheld and advanced. Even if elections are held, it is our responsibility to continue this work.

Provincial Council Elections are scheduled to take place after the Parliamentary Elections. I hope to conduct these elections under the 1988 system. I discussed this with MP Sumanthiran yesterday, and he is in agreement. We need to ensure greater representation of women and youth in these elections.

Additionally, a Member of Parliament can run for a position in the Provincial Councils while retaining their current role. We must all work together as a government.

In addition to the President and Prime Minister, there is a committee of chief finance ministers under the government.

We are also proposing the creation of a Rajya Sabha, which would include the President, Prime Minister, party leaders, and Chief Ministers. As of 2017, the Chief Ministers of seven provinces are working according to the recommendations from the Constitutional Council report.

The Tamil parties have also expressed their support. We have agreed to discuss Police powers at a later stage, but we will proceed with the implementation of these activities now. There are significant areas of work, such

as agriculture modernisation, school education, and tourism responsibilities that should be entrusted to the Provincial Councils. We are committed to preparing for these changes and advancing the country with these 10 governing bodies.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 1-8-2024

Oli: New versus old

More disappointments are on the way. Or will there be a collective explosion of people's anger?

Naresh Koirala

Khadga Prashad Oli, President of the CPN (UML), returned as Prime Minister for the fourth time. His unexpected decision to walk out of his four-month-old deal with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Chair of the Maoist Centre, and to form a new alliance with Sher Bahadur Deuba, President of the Nepali Congress (NC), precipitated Dahal's fall and Oli's ascendancy.

No political party commands a majority in the parliament. The support of a majority of members of the parliament is necessary to be elected as Prime Minister, thus making some form of alliance between parties essential to all aspirants to the post. Before the fatal deal with Oli, Dahal was in partnership with Deuba, and prior to Deuba, he was with Oli. Betrayals and making and breaking deals have become the new norm of Nepali political leaders.

The principal players in this game of musical chairs, involved in shifting alliances and betrayals, are Deuba, Oli and Dahal. Their ultimate objective is to capture the prime ministerial chair and control the government. In the last 10 years, as occasional game winners, Deuba, Prachanda and Oli have each led the country several times. Oli's victory in the latest round made him prime minister on July 15. Kathmandu's pundits are on overdrive, trying to crystal-ball the life of the Oli-Deuba alliance, but the immediate question is how the new Oli government will perform. Will the new Oli be different from the old Oli? The performance of previous Oli governments provides a basis for predicting the likely direction of the new Oli government, but more is needed. The prediction will only be credible if it considers the reasons for Dahal's sudden dumping.

Dahal's removal preceded a secret meeting between Deuba and Arzu Deuba at the end of June in Oli's residence. This meeting is believed to have been the setting for the deal to form a new Deuba-Oli alliance and remove Dahal. The deal was announced about 24 hours after the meeting and sheepishly endorsed a couple of days later by the central committees of both the NC and the UML.

According to an NC Central Committee statement, the objectives of the new alliance are, among other things, to amend the provision of proportional parliamentary seats in the Constitution (which they argue is the reason

for the instability of previous governments), to form a stable government, and to control corruption. Oli will hand over the premier seat to Deuba after 18 months.

It is disingenuous to suggest that an alliance to form a government is necessary to amend the Constitution. If they believe the amendment is required, the UML and the NC could jointly work towards it and help garner the two-thirds vote necessary to pass it.

The proposed change of prime minister halfway before the next election contradicts the objective of a stable government. Experience shows that changing prime ministers is inherently disruptive. Coalition governments govern most of continental Europe; their prime ministers do not change in the middle of an election term. India has a coalition government. Prime Minister Modi has no plans to hand over power to his coalition partners before the next election.

The NC statement is virtually silent on how political corruption, the most debilitating scourge of the Republic, will be controlled. The contradictions in the NC Central committee statement and the urgency with which Dahal was ousted have fueled several speculations on the intent of the new alliance. One gaining ground is related to the arrest of Bechan Jha, one of the principal actors in the 'Bhutani refugee scandal', a few days before the Deuba couple met with Oli. The Deubas were distraught that Jha may have evidence implicating Arzu Deuba in the scandal. Jha was arrested on orders from Dahal's Home Minister, Rabi Lamichhane.

The arrest of Jha preceded the NC and led to persistent criticism of Lamichhane for his involvement in the cooperative's financial scandals. Demonstrating that he had not compromised the RSP's mission to investigate all significant corruption cases had become an existential necessity to Lamichhane and his party. In this context, Lamichhane had ordered Jha's arrest and threatened to reopen other corruption files that the previous Oli and Deuba governments had buried.

If carried to their logical conclusion, the investigations on these files could implicate senior leaders of all the major parties. Stifling these investigations and getting rid of Dahal urgently before Lamichhane became too aggressive was in Deuba's and Oli's interests. That is why Oli-Deuba acted, the theory goes.

The new Oli

Without an official explanation of the reasons for Prachanda's coup-like overthrow, Oli's previous performances and recent cabinet appointments are the only objective indicators available to predict the new Oli government's likely direction.

Three years ago, Oli led a government with support from two-thirds of the parliament's members. It was a powerful government that could do much good for the country. At the time, Oli and Prachanda were allies. In

the two and a half years he was prime minister, he concentrated the power of the government in his office and packed every organ of the government, including constitutional bodies and educational institutions, with his lackeys. Policy-level corruption in the country peaked during this period. It is difficult to think of anything memorable he did to improve governance and to control burgeoning corruption. It was a period of squandered opportunity.

Oli's new government also has the support of nearly two-thirds of parliament members. Early indications are that the new Oli will not be better than the old Oli. His new cabinet includes several people allegedly involved in unresolved corruption rackets. Within less than two weeks of taking the oath of office, his Home Minister transferred the Deputy Inspector General of police, well known for his courageous investigation of political corruption, including the Bhutanese Refugee Scandal, in which the NC and the UML leaders are implicated.

The ministerial appointments and the transfer of the DIG indicate that controlling political corruption is not the priority of the Oli government. Without controlling corruption, Nepal cannot and will not move ahead. Political corruption is Nepal's most debilitating scourge—it has compromised every organ of the Nepali Government—from national security to the executive to the judiciary to education and transportation.

More disappointments are on the way. Or will there be a collective explosion of people's anger?

Koirala is a retired engineering consultant and political observer.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 11-8-2024

Out of power, Maoist leader Dahal seeks broader unity to build strength

Maoist Centre leaders urge soul-searching, as their party has gradually been weakened.

Post Report

Kathmandu, Former prime minister and CPN (Maoist Centre) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal said on Saturday that he will propose broader unity among the leftist parties.

According to party spokesperson Agni Prasad Sapkota, at the ongoing Standing Committee meeting, Dahal proposed a left unity that goes beyond the Socialist Front, an existing alliance of four left and socialist parties in Nepal. The front was announced on June 19 last year. Apart from the Maoist Centre, the CPN (Unified Socialist), the Nepal Socialist Party led by Mahendra Yadav and the Communist Party of Nepal led by Netra Bikram Chand "Biplav" are associated with the front.

“Nepali people want greater unity among leftist parties and reorganisation of communist parties,” Sapkota quoted Dahal as saying.

“That a similar plan did not work in the past does not mean it won’t work in the future as well.”

The UML and the Maoist Centre formed an alliance in 2017 to jointly contest the general elections and won an overwhelming majority in Parliament. They merged to form the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) in June 2018. However, the party was dissolved in March 2021 after the Supreme Court invalidated the unified party’s registration.

Dahal also hoped that, in due course, more parties and leaders would join hands for a larger reorganisation of the communist parties.

The ruling UML, the largest communist party at the moment, has decided to stay away from such an alliance.

Dahal stressed that there was no alternative to unity among the leftist parties, according to a leader who attended the meeting.

“We are in talks with Madhav Kumar Nepal of the CPN (Unified Socialist) and Netra Bikram Chand of the Communist Party of Nepal, as well as with some other outfits, in order to form a progressive alliance,” Dahal told the party’s standing committee.

“Now, the time has come for unity among the left parties while also bringing together patriotic, pro-people and progressive forces.”

The Maoist Centre, which is a distant-third biggest party in the House of Representatives with 32 seats, is discussing ways to improve the party’s image by launching a purge in the party and building a more solid organisational base.

Several standing committee members urged the top leadership to launch a campaign to strengthen the party organisation, said Sapkota. The Maoist Centre also has decided to push for the directly-elected presidential system to ensure political stability.

The Maoist party’s position is that there is no alternative to an executive president, said Sapkota. “We had also written a ‘note of dissent’ insisting on the same while drafting the constitution.” If the Nepali Congress and the UML want political stability, let’s elect an executive president, Sapkota proposed. “Only such a political system can ensure stability.”

Sapkota said the leaders called for a purification campaign to strengthen the party and regain its lost glory.

“The political situation has become difficult. In order to safeguard national interests, democracy and people’s livelihoods, we have to be stronger,” said Sapkota. “For this, we have to purge bad elements from the party. We have been weakened by the parliamentary system.”

Leaders say a “serious soul-searching” is underway in the Maoist Centre, which emerged the single largest party from the first Constituent Assembly election in 2008 but has been consistently downsized in successive elections.

Dahal was removed from the prime minister’s position last month, after the Congress and the UML joined forces against him. Now, Dahal, who faces multiple challenges, is working out strategies to revive the party.

THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 11-8-2024

Daesh presence in Afghanistan West’s propaganda, Mujahid

KABUL: The spokesman of the Islamic Emirate Zabihullah Mujahid, in a statement, on his X official page said Saturday that the existence of Daesh ‘Kharijites’ in Afghanistan, is Western propaganda. Concerns raised by Western countries and institutions regarding the extensive presence and escalating threat of ISIS in Afghanistan are unfounded and driven by propaganda, said Mujahid. “The security forces of the IEA have actively engaged in combating the Daesh insurgency in Afghanistan and supported the group effectively,” Mujahid said, adding that the entire Afghan territory is under the stringent control of the Islamic Emirate and the current system would not allow any vicious group to use Afghanistan soil for their destructive activities. Despite the prevailing security, stability, and the presence of robust security forces in Afghanistan, raising concerns about the activities of ISIS or similar groups is merely a campaign aimed at sowing discord and spreading misinformation that should cease, Mujahid stressed.

THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 15-8-2024

Entire nation contributed in 20 years of Jihad against foreign forces,

Mawlavi Kabir

KABUL: The Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Mawlavi Abdul Kabir has said that the entire Afghan nation had an active contribution in 20 years of Jihad against the U.S.-led foreign occupying forces. Addressing a great ceremony to mark the third year of the victory of the Islamic Emirate against foreign forces, Mawlavi Kabir said: “All Afghans had a part in our twenty-year Jihad against the United States and NATO and their tireless efforts and countless sacrifices will not be forgotten by the officials of the Islamic Emirate.” He added after the two decades of Jihad, Afghans have achieved two goals, which are the implementation of the Islamic system and the end of the occupation in the country. “Overall security has been ensured as a result of 20 years of Jihad in the country

and now everyone can travel to any province of the country without fear,” Kabir said. The deputy PM also stated that the Islamic Emirate since its establishment, has been committed to having positive and productive relations with all the world countries even those countries that have occupied Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the spokesman of the Islamic Emirate Zabihullah Mujahid, during the celebration ceremony of the third anniversary of the IEA victory, once again emphasized that based on the decree of the Leader, the public amnesty has fully been implemented, all the IEA’s opponents who have been working with the previous regime were forgiven and the IEA has no problem with any side. Mujahid once again emphasized that the territory and soil of Afghanistan will not be used against the interest of the regional and the world countries and the Islamic Emirate will not allow any country to use the country’s soil for their vicious goals. Babrak Qayumi

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 3-8-2024

Govt-opposition negotiations on the horizon

Mahmood Khan Achakzai will soon be reaching out to the government and its partners for talks

By Staff Correspondent

KARACHI: There are reports that the opposition coalition, Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-e-Pakistan, led by Mahmood Khan Achakzai will soon be reaching out to the government and its partners for talks. Achakzai is also the PTI’s choice to lead the negotiations/talks. However, there is some confusion on exactly with whom the talks are to be held -- the establishment or the government coalition -- with a social media message by PTI founder Imran Khan saying the PTI will not talk to the ‘puppet, mafia regime’.

The opposition coalition is expected to make surprise contacts with the ruling coalition very soon. Media reports on Friday claimed that PkMAP Chairman Mahmood Khan Achakzai will likely be initiating the process by approaching the leadership of the PMLN and the PPP.

On Thursday, PTI leader Asad Qaiser had said that a new grand opposition alliance would be formed within two weeks. The present opposition alliance includes the PTI, PkMAP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Balochistan National Party-Mengal, Sunni Ittehad Council and Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen. In a post on X on Friday, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif criticized the PTI founder’s claim that Mahmood Khan Achakzai would represent the PTI in talks with the establishment. Calling the proposal “frivolous and insincere political manoeuvring”, Asif tweeted: “I asked Mahmood Khan Achakzai this question today in the meeting in the National Assembly; his answer was in the negative --

that he cannot play this role.” A night earlier, Khawaja Asif had said on Geo’s Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Saath that he was sceptical about whether Achakzai was even ready to speak to the establishment on behalf of Imran Khan.

Given the confusion, on Friday in a media talk, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar clarified the PTI’s position with the statement: “We have no confusion regarding talks. Mahmood Khan Achakzai had wanted to initiate dialogue with political parties. Imran Khan and the party gave permission. If Achakzai brings any proposal, we will consider it. There is no mistrust. Achakzai has full authority.” Interestingly, Achakzai had in a TV interview on a private channel said that if any negotiations were to be had with the establishment they should be for an ‘honourable retreat’, adding that the way out was to have a national government in place with all parties. The national government should, he added, be in place for three months, sort out reservations, and then go for new elections. The push for negotiations is also coming from coalition partner PPP whose Raja Pervaiz Ashraf spoke in the National Assembly and while addressing Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said: “[For God’s sake] open a dialogue; you are at the helm of affairs. Mr Prime Minister. Let’s open a dialogue and save our country.”

However, in a July 31st post on X, Imran Khan’s account had posted a message from the former prime minister in which he does not seem to favour talking to political parties. The message from Imran Khan stated categorically that: “We will not hold any talks, nor will we negotiate with the puppet, mafia regime, imposed on us illegitimately through fraud and rigging. The country is under an undeclared martial law. Political, and consequently, economic instability has impacted every segment of society. Their representatives have been planted in every key post.”

After criticising Mohsin Naqvi, the Punjab IG, and Maryam Nawaz, the post went on to say: “This is why we prefer negotiations with military leadership, who are the actual decision-makers, instead of this puppet government. We have given a mandate to Mahmood Khan Achakzai for negotiations. We will hold conditional negotiations if the military leadership appoints its representative.”

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 4-8-2024

Talks within constitutional limits: Imran

*“I will hold talks while staying within the Constitution,
“ PTI founder said*

By Shabbir Dar & Shakeel Anjum

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has said that he is open to talks but only within the ambit provisioned by the Constitution.

“I will hold talks while staying within the Constitution,” the PTI founder said while speaking to reporters in the Adia jail.

The former prime minister’s remarks come against the backdrop of his willingness to hold negotiations with the military where he has even called on the latter to nominate a representative to hold parleys.

Continuing on the prospects of negotiations, Khan reiterated the party’s longtime demand for their allegedly stolen mandate to be returned. He also said that how can he talk with the incumbent government which will collapse if even the electoral results of four constituencies are opened and looked into?

To a question that Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) Chairman and Tehreek-e-Tahafuz Ayeen-e-Pakistan (TTAP) chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai has allegedly refused to talk with the army, the PTI founder clarified that he has, in fact, asked the veteran politician to negotiate with political parties. “Achakzai will only hold] talk with political parties,” he said.

When asked if he was taking a U-turn on his earlier statement where he took Achakzai’s name for talks with the military, the PTI founder took a jibe at the PMLN for going back on its “vote ko izzat do” narrative for restoring the sanctity of the people’s vote.

The biggest U-turn taken by a person is the one who demanded respect for the vote but instead, himself gave respect to the “boot”. To a question regarding the reason behind the termination of Sher Afzal Marwat’s party membership, the former prime minister initially gave no response. However, when pressed on the matter, he said that he would discuss the issue at some other time.

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said the PTI was not responsible for the May 9 tragedy, terming it a conspiracy.

“It was a conspiracy hatched against us. If proven wrong, we are willing to apologize. But the error must first be demonstrated. If it’s your mistake, don’t expect us to apologise,” he said while talking to reports after meeting with Imran at the Adiala Jail.

He said the government invited them for negotiations, but their stance was that it lacked legitimacy.

“When we negotiate, we won’t forget our martyrs,” he added.

He said the PTI founder chairman and former premier Imran Khan was stuck to his ideology, which could not be confined.

He urged the nation to wholeheartedly attend the 5th August rally and demonstrate their support to their leader’s ideology.

“I hold an official position; I have contacts and discussions with the establishment, but nothing concrete has emerged so far,” he said.

Gandapur aired Imran Khan’s concerns about the country’s economy and said their leader was willing to talk for the nation’s benefit.

A committee has also been formed, and they are committed to the decisions of their leader, he added.

The KP chief minister expressed his resentment over the unfair treatment they received, noting that Andleeb Abbas had left the party without spending a day in jail, while Murad Raas made 1,800 calls and was now appearing in the TV programs.

“We are bound by the decisions of our leader,” he said, adding that those disregarding the court orders should be left to their own devices.

Gandapur declared that he would announce a rally in Islamabad, and if unable he could not do so, he would quit politics.

He recalled telling Rana Sanaullah about his plans previously, causing him to hide upon his arrival.

The KP chief minister emphasized the need for terms of reference (ToRs) for talks, stating that expressing mutual concerns was essential for resolving issues.

He accused the opposition of stealing their mandate and mentioned that the founding chairman had always advocated for dialogue, forming a committee for negotiations.

In Punjab, he noted, there was fascism, and cases were being filed.

“They don’t give Form-45, yet those with Form-47 are sitting in the assembly,” he said.

He expressed optimism about breakthroughs from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, referencing a ceasefire in Parachinar, where a land dispute between two groups was being falsely portrayed as terrorism and given a religious color.

Regarding Sher Afzal Marwat, the chief minister affirmed his relationship and contact with him, noting that notices were issued to him on the party chairman’s instructions.

“I told Sher Afzal Marwat to tolerate criticism, and we will resolve the party’s internal matters internally. I believe we should not close the doors to reconciliation,” he said, adding that he was unaware of Marwat’s notification.

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 6-8-2024

Indian economy likely to grow at 7-7.2 per cent in FY25, says Deloitte

Several initiatives in the Union Budget 2024-25 to help improve supply-side demand

PTI

New Delhi, India's economy is expected to grow at 7-7.2 per cent in the current fiscal year driven by robust economic fundamentals and continuity in domestic policy reforms, Deloitte India said on Monday.

The August update of Deloitte's India Economic Outlook said several initiatives in the Union Budget 2024-25 toward improving agriculture productivity, creating jobs for the youth, and in manufacturing and addressing the challenge of access to finance for micro, small, and medium enterprises, would help improve supply-side demand, curb inflation, and prop up consumer spending, especially in rural areas.

Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar said, India would witness robust growth in the second half after a period of uncertainty in the first six months of the year.

"Key contributing factors include the continuity in domestic policy reforms, reduced uncertainties in the US post-elections, and more synchronous global growth within a low inflation regime.

"Additionally, improved global liquidity conditions, as central banks in the West ease their monetary policy stance, will enhance capital flows and drive higher investments, particularly in the private sector," Majumdar said.

THE HINDU, DELHI 7-8-2024

Powering up to get to the \$30-trillion economy point

India must aim for rapid economic growth using liberal policies that tap the private sector; it should not be affected by criticism of income inequality

Rahul Ahluwalia, Harshit Rakheja

Commentary on the India growth story often betrays a hint of premature triumphalism. Facts such as our 7%-plus GDP growth rate and India being the fastest-growing large economy in the world today, are repeated to buttress prophecies such as the 21st century being 'India's century'. There is a belief that in India's case, economic growth is inevitable. We must remember that several countries have been here before, at the very juncture where India stands today. However, most have failed to go the last mile and emerge as developed nations. For India to avoid such a fate and become a \$30-trillion economy by 2047, as envisaged by the government, we must relentlessly pursue rapid economic growth built on liberal economic policies that harness the private sector. In this pursuit, many would

continue to decry India's income inequality. We must not get swayed or overly affected by such criticism.

Potential of India's working-age population

The fact is: economic growth is the most effective tool for poverty alleviation and improving living standards. From Independence till 1991, India's poverty rate stayed at approximately 50% despite socialist policies emphasising poverty reduction. However, between 1991, the year of liberalisation, and 2011, the poverty rate fell to approximately 20%. India's growth pulled 35 crore people out of abject poverty during this period.

Is India more unequal today than pre-1991? Perhaps, though the data does not show much change in the gini co-efficient. But are more Indians better off than ever before, especially those at the bottom of the pyramid? Yes. In any fast-growing economy, there are bound to be a few people who generate a lot of wealth — wealth creation is inherent to economic growth and the most crucial incentive for entrepreneurship. It is also, simultaneously, the vehicle that improves everyone's lives. We should focus on the latter.

Now that we have somewhat placated the inequality doomsayers, let us look at a few more numbers — less triumphal and more sobering.

The easier gains from the economic reforms of the 1990s have been realised. India's high-growth years of 2000-10 were led by an IT services boom that spawned an affluent middle-class. However, 46% of our labour force remains in agriculture, characterised by low productivity and under-employment, contributing just 18% of our GDP. Another inconsistency with the trend observed in countries that grew rapidly is India's female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) — just 37%.

Even this is a figure that masks more than it reveals, as it was 26% in 2019, and post-COVID-19, several women have gone back to work as agricultural labour. Compare this with the FLFPR in China, Vietnam, and Japan, all between 60%-70%, and we know exactly where we need to be.

So, how do we unlock the immense potential of India's working-age population — sized 950 million, only half of whom are employed — and ensure employment equity? Low-skilled, employment-intensive manufacturing with a strong focus on exports is how South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam came to be called the 'Asian Tigers', regularly achieving double-digit growth between 1960-90. Their particular brand of economic policy, focused on rapid export-oriented industrialisation, was premised on the understanding that growing exports require focusing on your advantages while being receptive to imports in other areas. Net-net, openness is needed for growth, as it was for India — between 1990 and 2013, exports as a percentage of India's GDP grew from 7% in 1990 to 25% in 2013. Today, as India tries to capitalise on the China+1 moment to attract global manufacturers and

their supply chains, and further augment its exports, we must resist the temptation of putting up huge tariff walls for imports.

The middle-income trap

In our hope of protecting industries from foreign competition, we risk giving rise to heavily coddled and inefficient manufacturers. The lure of import tariffs must also be resisted for how they will disadvantage Indian manufacturers, say a mobile phone maker who has to import components from China. Tariffs will artificially inflate the prices of the many parts needed for their finished phones, ultimately raising the prices of downstream Indian exports. It is the proverbial vicious circle that India should steer clear of, especially as the middle-income trap looms ahead.

Of 101 middle-income economies in 1960, only 23 had attained high-income status by 2018, a stern reminder of the challenge that awaits India, still a lower-middle-income economy that must graduate to middle-income status by the early part of the next decade, and then go further. There are many reasons countries get ensnared in the middle-income trap — these can be broadly summed up as economies losing their edge in lower-end sectors and not being competitive enough with more prosperous countries in high-tech sectors.

India's problem is peculiar: We have been unable to leverage our surplus labour to grow in low-end sectors. The IT boom gave us an alternative pathway to growth, but the headroom there is limited. This is damaging as moving up the value chain in manufacturing is built on a foundation of low-tech manufacturing — ecosystems of managers and workers who get things done while ensuring scale and quality, form the backbone of any industrial sector. Even government functionaries who have helped develop simple, low-tech manufacturing at scale will find it easier to graduate to more complex challenges later.

India's social sector and civil society should view campaigns that paint factories (hubs of low-tech manufacturing) as sweatshops, decrying their work conditions and low wages, in this regard. Forcing employers operating on wafer-thin margins to spend more on employee welfare would not improve the quality of manufacturing jobs as much as it would result in the erasure of such jobs altogether for those with very few options for employment outside of farm work.

Avoiding the middle-income trap requires a market-led economy that lets private enterprise thrive, without the government, or perceptions of factory jobs, getting in the way — Minimum Government, Maximum Governance. The Indian state must continue delivering on this decade-long promise in earnest, which means that reforms to enhance 'ease of doing business' must not stall.

A cluster-led industrial model

The government must also double down on its impressive achievements in revamping India's hitherto creaky infrastructure by building industrial clusters that are on a par with those in China and Vietnam, replete with plug-and-play infrastructure and ancillary ecosystems, for education, health care and entertainment, which would attract both employers and workers. Today, Indian States face cost disabilities for power, logistics and financing, coupled with low labour productivity when compared to countries such as Bangladesh, China and Vietnam, and a compliance burden that deters new players from entering and the existing ones from expanding. Several countries have faced similar challenges; hence, a cluster-led model of industrial development, whereby stringent regulations are relaxed in designated areas, helps create a favourable environment for manufacturing.

Time is of the essence; the government must leverage the strengths of the private sector and its own penchant for reforms to focus on low-skilled manufacturing that can employ multitudes of people in sectors such as electronics assembly and apparel, as the opportunity that needs to be made more lucrative for scores of Indians. Inter-State migration and urbanisation would be important proxies here, as would FLFPR and a decline in agriculture's share of total employment, to assess whether we are on the right path to becoming a \$30-trillion economy by 2047.

There is a phrase often repeated in policy circles about India — "It's a country with mouth-watering opportunities and eyewatering challenges." We think the challenges here are the most exciting opportunities. The reward for breaking down these barriers to growth would be an unfettered path to prosperity till we fulfil our tryst with destiny. It is time to be as forward-thinking and ambitious as befits a Vishwaguru.

Rahul Ahluwalia is Founder-Director at the Foundation for Economic Development (FED), a not-for-profit that works with the Centre and State governments to advance economic growth. Harshit Rakheja is Manager, Communications at the Foundation for Economic Development

THE HINDU, DELHI 15-8-2024

Illusory blip: On inflation

The decline in inflation offers no respite for households
India's retail prices rose 3.54% in July, the slowest pace in almost five years, easing sharply from 5.1% in June. Food inflation, that has been high for about three years now, slid to a 13-month low of 5.4%. This is also the first time since August 2019 that inflation as per the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has aligned with the Reserve Bank of India's median inflation target of 4%. Last week, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

decided to maintain status quo on interest rates for the ninth consecutive time as it awaits a durable decline in the inflation rate. July's pleasant inflation numbers will not trigger a rethink, as the MPC has in fact, hiked its projection for this quarter's inflation average to 4.4% from 3.8%. So it expects price rise to rebound to well over 4% through August and September. There is good reason to see through July's print as a purely statistical outcome of base effects from last July — when the CPI was up 7.4% and food was 11.5% dearer — rather than a tangible softening of persistent price pressures for households.

Vegetable inflation, the biggest driver of last month's decline, slid from June's 29.3% spike to just 6.8% in July. But this was on top a whopping 37.3% rise last July, when prices of tomato, which played a key role in last month's vegetable price trend, had hit around ₹110 per kilo. Moreover, households do not feel the pinch of living costs on a year-on-year basis alone, as they need to readjust spending plans depending on how every passing month plays out. While vegetable (and tomato) prices were already high in May amid a heatwave, July's price levels are over 30% and 14% higher than May and June, respectively. Moreover, inflation in some food items, such as pulses and cereals, remains stubborn despite base effects. The prices of pulses rose in double digits for the fourteenth straight month, by 14.8% on top of 13.3% recorded last July. On the other hand, core inflation (excluding food and energy prices) rose for the first time since January 2023, primarily led by pricier services, including transport and communication that sped thanks to telecom tariff hikes. Private surveys on manufacturing and services signal a hardening of price pressures beyond food, which in turn is expected to see a meaningful reprieve only by October when the next harvest hits the market. While kharif sowing progress holds some hope, the September monsoon spurt predicted by the weatherman may yet hit standing crops. With the prolonged spate of high inflation cramping consumption levels, and in turn, hopes of fresh private investments, the latest optical blip offers neither comfort nor room for complacency.

THE HINDU, DELHI 3-8-2024

An unstated shift in Modi's economic direction

The new ELI scheme for corporates is an acknowledgement by the Narendra Modi government of the breakdown between GDP growth and jobs

Praveen Chakravarty

“We are nudging industry to use less automation and more labour,” said Finance Secretary T.V. Somanathan in a post-Budget interview. He was referring to the Narendra Modi government's Budget announcement of a new employment linked incentive (ELI) scheme for

corporates. Under the scheme, companies will be provided a financial incentive for every new employee they hire. Dozens of commentators and experts have critiqued it and have questioned the assumption that a company will hire more people, merely for a financial incentive. This is a myopic and technocratic analysis that misses a fundamental shift in economic thought. The Finance Secretary's statement symbolises a significant and profound change in the economic policy direction of the Modi government. It signals a recognition of the misplaced faith in chasing GDP growth, the big capital-labour skew, and the need for course correction.

Initiatives that did not work well

For a decade, the Modi government's economic philosophy was the traditional Washington Consensus' trickle-down development model that emphasised the efficient production of goods and services, in the assumption that it would automatically lead to jobs, incomes and prosperity for people. When companies produce, GDP grows, and jobs are created, was the doctrine. 'Make in India', which was launched in 2014, was this quintessential example that aimed to spur manufacturing in the hope that it would make companies hire large numbers of workers. In 2019, the Modi government made a sudden off-Budget announcement of a big cut in corporate tax rates for companies, again in the hope that it would lure industry to invest more, which would then trickle down to more jobs. In 2020, the government announced a new production linked incentive (PLI) scheme of a whopping ₹2 lakh crore as financial incentives to be provided to companies based on the achieving of certain production targets. Once again, the intent was to incentivise companies financially to produce more, which would then lead to more jobs. Of course, we know now that none of these initiatives yielded the expected number of jobs. Companies either pocketed the tax cuts without investing or they invested more in equipment than in hiring people. Simply put, production incentives or tax cuts for corporates neither trickled nor dripped down to enough people through jobs and incomes.

ELI is a recognition of this failure and a change in course to provide direct incentives to corporates to employ people rather than through indirect trickle-down means. After all, if one agrees that production incentives can entice companies to produce more by lowering marginal production costs, then, by the same logic, employment incentives should propel companies to hire more people by lowering marginal labour costs. ELI must be viewed in the context of PLI and not as a standalone idea for job creation. PLI is an incentive for the economy to pour more into the top of a funnel. ELI is an incentive to collect more at the bottom of the funnel, which is the eventual objective anyway.

ELI is the first such policy of the Modi government that acknowledges the breakdown between GDP growth and jobs. If the ultimate goal of economic development is to improve the living standards of the median citizen, then the neo-liberal economic development paradigm of chasing GDP growth has run its course because it has stopped translating into jobs and prosperity for people. Which is why the bombastic rhetoric about India being the fastest growing economy in the world has no significance for the average Indian. The natural next step then is to call for direct policy interventions for jobs for people, rather than for economic output. And a PLI to ELI transition is the first attempt in this shift in economic direction.

It can make a difference

ELI by itself may not incentivise corporates to create more jobs. But it can impact firm level decisions at the margin, of buying equipment versus hiring more people. *Ceteris paribus*, an ELI scheme encourages firms to hire people rather than use machines. When a million small, medium and large enterprises are ‘ELI nudged’ to choose labour over machines (capital), it can make a meaningful difference to overall job creation.

Neo-liberal economists, for whom technology-led productivity and efficiency are the cornerstones of economic development, would deem ELI blasphemous. Their argument is that it would render Indian companies less productive and, hence, less competitive globally. They are partially justified in their fears but the current model of development that prizes capital over labour and headline GDP over jobs is unsustainable in a democratic society.

Jobs deficit and ideas deficit

The shortage of jobs is the root cause of dangerous and foolhardy proposals such as the recent one in Karnataka to reserve all jobs for locals. When there are very few jobs generated overall in the economy, political compulsions in a democracy are bound to induce a mad rush to grab as many of the few available jobs for their voters. It is intellectually dishonest to merely criticise such proposals but not provide concrete ideas to create new jobs. India not only has a jobs deficit but also an ideas deficit to bridge the jobs deficit. The stock response by economists for creating more jobs is the much abused ‘R’ word — reforms. Their standard refrain is that a concoction of labour, education, skills and ease of doing business reforms is the magic pill to create more jobs, which is easier written than done.

ELI may or may not work to create additional jobs, but it is certainly a concrete new idea to alleviate the capital-labour imbalance and jobless growth woes of India’s economy. More importantly, it marks a distinct shift in policy direction from trickle-down economics to bottom-up interventions. “India is ready for ELI, regardless of whose idea it is” was the last line in my article in a daily on the morning of Budget 2024. Just a

few hours later, much to my utter surprise, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the ELI scheme in Parliament. ELI was proposed in the Congress’s manifesto, and it is extremely laudable that the Finance Minister chose to keep politics aside to adopt this idea in the larger national interest.

Praveen Chakravarty is Chairman, All India Professionals’ Congress

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 15-8-2024

India seeking review of select provisions in UAE deal

Ravi Dutta Mishra

As Silver imports continued to surge from the UAE amid a suspected breach in rules of origin norms, India is seeking a review of certain provisions in the India-UAE trade deal signed in 2022, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Wednesday.

Trade data released on Wednesday also showed that silver imports, largely coming from the UAE, surged 439 per cent to \$165.74 million in July compared to \$30.74 million during the comparable period last year. The UAE is the third largest trading partner of India with \$83.65 billion bilateral trade in 2023-24.

“As regards Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), there are two things – one is the value addition norms and the second is reduction (of customs duties). So we are in discussion with them and there are various issues which are discussed under the CEPA review. So, I think we are seeking a review with them and once we get it, then we will look at all the issues holistically,” Barthwal said in response to a question on rising silver imports.

“When you (a country) give a concessional rate (of duty), there is a condition of meeting rules of origin. So when we do review, we look at all the aspects of it...whether the rules of origin are met or not and what is the future course of action that we will do,” Barthwal said.

Seeking an urgent review of the pact, think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has stated that the India-UAE CEPA allows unlimited imports of gold, silver, platinum, and diamonds from the UAE into India with zero tariffs in the coming years.

This will lead to significant annual revenue losses, move import business from banks to a few private traders, and replace top suppliers with Dubai-based firms, the GTRI report has said.

It highlighted that currently, gold can be imported from Dubai at 5 per cent duty, but this will drop to zero in three years if the alloy contains 2 per cent platinum. GTRI has also claimed that many imports do not meet Rules of Origin conditions and, hence, do not qualify for concessions.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 11-8-2024

**‘Caught napping at the wheels’:
Congress slams Central Government
over trade deficit with China**

Government data shows India’s trade deficit with China has surged by about 16% over the last two years:

Jairam Ramesh

New Delhi, The Congress on Saturday hit out at the Centre over the issue of trade deficit with China and said that while other countries around the world had taken measures to restrict uncontrolled Chinese imports, “our government has been caught napping at the wheels”.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the data revealed by the government in the Rajya Sabha shows that India’s trade deficit with China has surged by about 16% over the last two years from USD 73,306.2 million in FY22 to USD 85,079.03 million in FY24.

“Governments across the world are taking note of China’s industrial overcapacity and its dumping of goods overseas. However, unlike most governments that have taken proactive measures to restrict uncontrolled Chinese imports, our government has been caught napping at the wheels,” Ramesh said in a post on X.

“Our domestic industries are being decimated and shutting down, unable to compete with the onslaught of cheap Chinese goods,” the Congress general secretary said.

“The public clean chit of the non-biological PM to China on June 19th 2020 has proved disastrous in more respects than one,” he alleged.

The Congress has been attacking the government over the issue of trade deficit with China and calling for immediate steps to tackle the same. - PTI

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 4-8-2024

**International Conference of
Agricultural Economists: A chance to
cement India-Africa partnership in food
security**

IE Online

India is hosting the 32nd International Conference of Agricultural Economists (ICAE) from August 2-7 in Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the chief guest and Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is the guest of honour.

It is interesting to note that the last time India hosted this ICAE was in Mysore in 1958, with Jawaharlal Nehru, the then prime minister of India, as the chief

guest. If one digs a little deeper, one finds that ICAE actually has its roots in India. The founding president of ICAE was Lord L K Elmhirst, the British agronomist. Rabindranath Tagore cabled Elmhirst at Cornell in the spring of 1921, requesting for a meeting in New York. When they met, Tagore told Elmhirst of his concern for the villages around Santiniketan, north of Calcutta, which seemed to be on the verge of disintegration. He said that he had already acquired a farm in the village of Surul that could be used as a centre for assisting the villages, but had not yet found the appropriate means of doing this. He invited Elmhirst to join him, which Elmhirst agreed to do. He arrived about a year later, bringing with him a promise of financial help from Dorothy Straight, his wife-to-be.

Tagore made clear his attitude to the villages: “If I can free only one or two villages from the bonds of ignorance and weakness, there will be built, on a tiny scale, an ideal for the whole of India . . . Our aim must be to give these few villages complete freedom – education for all, the winds of joy blowing across the village, music and recitations going on, as in the old days...Our people need more than anything else a real scientific training that could inspire in them the courage of experiment and initiative of mind which we lack as a nation.”

From those roots, ICAE has flourished over time. This is perhaps the biggest congregation of agricultural economists committed to world’s food and nutritional security, which is becoming an increasing challenge in the face of climate change and geo-political conflicts. India’s success in ushering in the green revolution and white (milk) revolution is well known. But the African continent is still struggling to overcome food shortages. Nutritional security, especially of children below the age five, still remains a challenge for India and Africa. Given that the African Union was invited to be a permanent member of G20 during India’s Presidency, it opens the gates for India and Africa to learn from global developments in food and agriculture, and also promote South-South collaboration and learning from each other to overcome their food and nutritional security challenges.

In this context, ICAE has a special session where the experiences of 20 major Indian states were compared with 15 African countries from 2004-05 to 2019-20. The two regions have a lot of experiences to share. The findings of this unique study show that: One, high debt service ratios result in lower agricultural spending relative to social protection; two, African countries consistently underfund agriculture compared to Indian states, hampering productivity and efforts to reduce child malnutrition; three, enhancing public spending on agricultural R&D and extension is crucial, as both regions underinvest in these high-return areas; four, the study suggests reforming subsidies and reallocating

resources to infrastructure and R&D to boost agricultural growth and improve child nutrition outcomes. Agricultural investment pays off in poverty reduction and saves on social spending. Food hand-outs have their role in food crises but must not impair growth and job creation in rural areas.

At the global level, in its fight against global hunger, the human and financial costs of complacency are alarming. As a result of recent developments – including growing conflicts, the climate crisis and economic slowdowns – and the lack of concerted global action, achieving the established goal of the United Nations of zero hunger by 2030 seems increasingly infeasible. A new study from University of Bonn (ZEF), Germany, and FAO shows that it would require additional investments of \$21 billion annually in agriculture and rural areas to end global hunger by 2040.

India's G20 presidency last year and that of Brazil this year has had good impact in setting the global agenda focusing on food security and ending hunger and presenting for the first time a strategy paper on bioeconomy for G20. This is now followed up by Brazil even more concretely with G20 nations. China too recently launched its bioeconomy strategy. It is commendable that India facilitated on-boarding the African Union to the G20 platform during its presidency.

It is now all the more important to get the South-South collaboration on vibrant mode. The developed countries of G20 can help to solve the problems of food and nutritional security in the Global South by addressing climate change with support for resilience and by sharing science and innovation for food systems transformation. This is what Africa and South Asia, that together account for almost 3 billion people on this planet, can call for. The investment in climate resilience requires adaptation, mitigation and system transformation, the latter is facilitated by building the bioeconomy which would benefit from global investments, including the Global Climate Fund. The sequence of G20 presidencies over these four years 2022–25 – Indonesia, India, Brazil and next year South Africa – shows indications of change in governance of food systems. A well-functioning global food system is mainly in the interest of the Global South. It shows when they are in the driver's seats.

We hope the Indian Prime Minister will take this agenda of the south in G20, and also provide dynamism in agri-food relations between Africa and India for the common good of almost one third of humanity.

Braun is former President of International Association of Agriculture Economists, Director General of International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and currently with ZEF. Gulati is Distinguished Professor at ICRIER.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-8-2024

Foreign Secy in Nepal to boost bilateral ties

Kathmandu, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Sunday met Nepal's top leadership and discussed ways to provide an impetus to various sectors of bilateral cooperation.

Misri, who is here on a two-day visit at the invitation of his Nepalese counterpart Sewa Lamsal, paid a courtesy call on President Ramchandra Paudel at the president's office Sheetalniwas in Kathmandu. "While conveying greetings of the Indian leadership, he discussed ways to further strengthen India-Nepal ties across all sectors," the Indian Embassy in Nepal said in a post on X.

Misri also called on Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli at his office at Singhdurbar.

"The Foreign Secretary reaffirmed India & Nepal's civilisational, close and multifaceted relationship and discussed ways to provide an impetus to various sectors of bilateral cooperation," the Embassy said in another post. Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal was also present on the occasion.

Earlier in the day, Misri and Secretary of Nepal's Urban Development Ministry Maniram Gelal jointly inaugurated a new building of Nepal Bhasha Parishad in Kathmandu built under India's post-earthquake reconstruction grant.

The building in the Naradevi area of the capital was damaged in the 2015 earthquake. Nepal Bhasha is the language belonging to the ethnic Newar community of Kathmandu.

In keeping with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call of "Ek Ped Ma ke Naam", Misri planted a sapling of "Nili Gulmohar" at the Indian mission's complex. — **PTI**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 4-8-2024

India assures Taiwan of policy stability in semiconductor sector

Soumyendra Barik, Anil Sasi

As Taiwanese businesses and government officials take a cautious approach towards India's semiconductor ambitions, New Delhi has mobilised officials to the island territory bearing a key message: an explicit assurance of policy stability. The Indian Express has learnt that senior officials from the IT Ministry have met with industry executives in Taipei and government officials, to assure them of policy stability, especially with regard to changes in rules governing imports and tweaks in customs duties on inputs.

"IT Ministry representatives met Taiwan government officials and representatives of (Powerchip) PSMC in June. Assurances regarding policy stability, New Delhi's continued support for investments in the chips' space were made, and we conveyed to them that there

will not be any ad-hoc changes to rules regarding material imports and customs duties” a senior government official said, requesting anonymity.

The first commercial fab in India, which is being opened by Tata Electronics in Gujarat, will start operations due to technology support from Taiwanese chipmaker PSMC. But, PSMC does not have any equity stake in the operations as its partnership is limited to a technology collaboration. It is also one of Taiwan’s smaller chipmakers that fabricates legacy logic and memory chips.

The Indian Express had earlier reported that the reason the company has taken this conservative approach is because key players want to play it safe. PSMC is a relatively smaller company and so has “negotiated a model where they would not need to put money on the table. I’m not sure how this model progresses,” a Taiwanese executive had said.

New Delhi hopes that with constant engagement with Taiwanese chip firms and the government, there could be a possibility in the future that some companies enter the Indian market with more skin in the game, and take equity partnership in a chip joint venture with an Indian company, or open up an independent operation in the country.

There is a major reason behind New Delhi’s outreach to Taiwanese officials: the strategic island territory is home to some of the leading names in chipmaking, including the likes of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), which counts Apple and Nvidia among its clients, and United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC). More than 90 per cent of the world’s most advanced chips required for almost all electronic equipment such as smartphones, car components, data centres, fighter jets and AI technologies, are made in Taiwan.

Chips, or integrated circuits, that are at the heart of most modern-day semiconductors, are essentially a set of minute electronic circuits comprising transistors and diodes, capacitors and resistors, and the interconnections between them, layered on a thin wafer sheet of silicon. Fabs are the highly-specialised semiconductor manufacturing facilities that print the miniaturised integrated circuits from the chip design onto the silicon wafers. The fabrication process is intricate and the cleanrooms are required to maintain sterile conditions to prevent contamination by particles in the air. There could be between 500 and 1,500 steps in the overall manufacturing process of semiconductor wafers, requiring multiple inputs, including silicon wafers, commodity chemicals, specialty chemicals, and other infrastructural prerequisites such as clean water supply and uninterrupted power supply.

India’s chip incentive plans are focused on boosting all three aspects of the semiconductor ecosystem – packaging, assembly and testing facilities (called ATMP

and OSAT units), and full-scale foundries that can manufacture chips.

From a Taiwanese perspective, there are yawning gaps in the policy support extended by New Delhi, which is a major reason firms from the territory are yet to commit serious investments in India.

Joseph Wu, Taiwan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, had earlier cited the issue of a “cumbersome” administrative structure, lack of experienced engineers, high tariffs for electronics component imports, as challenges that India needed to address before chip companies from the island nation can commit serious investments to New Delhi.

“India is known to be very cumbersome in its administrative structure and it would require for the Indian government to look at that too, to streamline all kinds of laws and regulations to help semiconductor investors coming to the country... In order to get the major semiconductor production to move to India, we need to think about the whole supply chain coming together... a whole cluster, rather than just one company. If it is only one company and nobody else, that is not going to help. We need to have IC design, testing, packaging, and material supply,” Wu had told The Indian Express earlier. IT Ministry officials have, however, consistently maintained that India has the “talent and deep expertise” to become a global player in the semiconductor value chain and that more interest is expected to come in from global players in fab investments.

Taiwan’s Deputy Minister for Taiwan’s National Development Kao Shien-Quey had said in July last year that there was “huge scope” for collaboration between New Delhi and Taipei in areas of emerging and critical technologies, and that major Taiwanese technology giants were looking at India as a key destination to strengthen their global supply chains. In reality, all that has not translated into actual investment pledges yet.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 14-8-2024

Prioritise immediate economic concerns

*Interim govt should prepare a white paper, says
Debapriya Bhattacharya*

AM JAHID

The interim government should prepare a white paper on the economy and identify sectors that require immediate attention, according to Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, an eminent economist and public policy analyst.

“It should prioritise mitigating recent shocks to stabilise the economy before going for structural reforms to the banking sector, capital market, energy sector, revenue collection and public expenditure,” he said.

A white paper is an assessment report that features potential plans and policies to address the identified issues.

Bhattacharya suggested that such an initiative would help the interim government, headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus, to better understand the magnitude of existing challenges.

“The interim government needs to understand the state of the economy because if it does not establish a starting point, it cannot be credited for any improvement or blamed for deterioration.”

In an interview with The Daily Star on Sunday, Bhattacharya said an advantage of preparing a white paper is that it engages stakeholders through an open consultative process.

This not only informs them about the state of affairs but also raises awareness about what to expect.

Another benefit is that the planning and policy options provided are not official commitments and may be amended if necessary, Bhattacharya said.

How It Can Be Prepared

Bhattacharya said it is expected that a white paper will be drafted by a group of competent people within a certain timeframe, which may be a maximum of two months.

The voluntary engagement of experts through such an inclusive process will also show the convening power of the government and generate confidence, particularly in the private sector.

Citing that Bangladesh’s international development partners and investors should be consulted as well, Bhattacharya said the process may assuage concerns centring the economic uncertainty.

He also said that the concerned ministries should provide their input.

“The energy ministry has already prepared a note for the new government. Among others, similar notes have come from Bangladesh Bank and the ministries concerned with finance, commerce, agriculture and social welfare,” he added.

A review of available real-time technical data inputs and consultation with stakeholders would provide a good basis for a much-required benchmark analysis of the economy.

Major Challenges And Urgent Priorities

“As the country has settled down with the coming of an interim government, it is now time to give attention to economic issues,” said Bhattacharya, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

“I see three types of priorities in the economy at this moment. The first is mitigating the economic shock caused by the recent movement. This is a key issue that

should be dealt with to get the economy back up and running,” he said.

The second is stabilising the adverse economic trends seen in the recent past, particularly inflation and supply chain disruptions as well as rising exchange and interest rates.

The last is initiating much-awaited wholesale structural reforms. It concerns on a priority basis the banking sector, revenue collection, quality of public expenditure, and so on.

“Mitigating the most recent shocks should be the immediate concern. This would entail the functional restoration of supportive institutions for the economy,” Bhattacharya said.

Also, ensuring smooth port operations and clearing the container backlog will be critical.

“Once we have dealt with immediate shocks, we can move to the stabilisation issues. However, there is no silver bullet to solve inflation,” he added.

Bhattacharya said it is more important for now to ensure an adequate supply of essential commodities in the domestic market.

“Maintaining the commodity supply from both domestic sources and international sources is very important in this case,” the economist added.

However, related issues include the rising exchange rate for US Dollars and poor market monitoring.

Most importantly, remittance flow must be enhanced and whether the price of foreign currency is appropriate, Bhattacharya said.

He added that these measures could help reduce the forex crisis to not only facilitate imports but also debt payments.

Bhattacharya urged the authorities to take a closer look at the financial sector to ensure that bad loans stop rising.

Regarding structural reforms, Bhattacharya said this demands a bit more preparation by the government as it has to take only those it can fulfil during its tenure.

So, since the tenure of the interim government remains a bit uncertain, it is very difficult to say how ambitious the structural reform programme should be, he added.

Nonetheless, reforms in the financial sector and capital market should be prioritised.

Following that, the most important will be reforms to the energy sector. The third priority is public finance management, with its two components being revenue mobilisation and impactful public expenditure.

“Indeed, the economic ambition of the interim government will be tampered with by the reality on the ground and its deployable capacity,” Bhattacharya said.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 13-8-2024

Reforms the only way to restore high growth

Salekeen Ibrahim

Bangladesh, which economic analysts previously touted as an emerging Asian Tiger, is at a critical juncture of its development journey.

The recent unrest driven by a student movement and public frustration has led to significant political change.

So, it is extremely fortunate that renowned Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus is heading the interim government, which has the unenviable task of navigating the country through its current economic turmoil.

Bangladesh needs immediate and effective reforms for stabilising its economy and improving investor confidence both at home and abroad.

One major frustration that prompted so many people to actively participate in the mass uprising is the persisting high inflationary pressure. The higher inflation rate is reducing people's purchasing power, intensifying poverty and disparity.

As such, the central bank must embrace a more aggressive stance for taming inflation. This may include tightening the money supply and imposing price control measures.

Also, reducing bottlenecks in the supply chain would lower transport costs. This involves remodelling the country's logistics system by reducing bureaucratic red tape and abolishing industry syndicates.

The banking sector needs urgent attention considering the growing amount of bad loans. Many banks lack proper risk management systems and have poor lending practices. Besides, poor market monitoring has led to the rise of non-performing loans (NPLs) to the point that many banks now find themselves at risk of insolvency. It is now essential to strengthen the regulatory framework for reducing NPLs and ensuring that banks operate on sound financial principles.

This involves major policy reforms, restructuring existing debt, negotiating better terms with international creditors and limiting new borrowing to sustainable projects.

In the past, Bangladesh has shown a tendency to put various development projects on hold. But now, the country should identify and prioritise implementing projects that have significant long-term benefits.

For example, projects to improve connectivity by establishing more transport systems and infrastructure that support economic activities must move on.

Increasing the tax base horizontally, curbing tax evasion and streamlining tax administration could increase government revenue without burdening the poor.

In addition, expanding access to banking services, particularly for rural and unbanked people, could stimulate economic activity and reduce poverty.

The interim government should also focus on ensuring clear and transparent governance to rebuild investor confidence and draw foreign direct investment. This necessitates stable law and order and better ease of doing business in the country.

Corruption has long been a barrier to Bangladesh's development. To ensure that the next government is more transparent and efficient, the interim administration must enforce anti-corruption laws and establish a strong anti-corruption body.

To improve efficiency in the public sector, the government should implement performance-based evaluations for bureaucrats and reduce unnecessary administrative layers.

Meanwhile, the US dollar crunch is a significant challenge that requires multidimensional solutions, such as further incentivising the use of legal channels.

Beyond the garments sector, boosting other export-oriented industries like pharmaceuticals, IT services, freelancing and agro-processing could also enhance the country's forex earnings.

In order to ensure that local apparel exporters can access the global markets, the government must make local producers comply with international standards and production practices.

The coming economic reforms must be inclusive and strengthen social safety nets, ensuring that the benefits reach to all segments of society.

This can be achieved by increasing support for vulnerable groups through targeted cash transfers, food security programmes and healthcare subsidies.

Also, investing in education and healthcare could drive long-term economic growth.

So, with Bangladesh standing at a crossway, the interim government could implement bold economic reforms to stabilise the economy and ensure sustainable development.

By addressing inflation, managing debt, combating corruption and fostering innovation, the country could revive its growth momentum and pave the way for a prosperous future.

The writer is a banker.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 13-8-2024

Food inflation tops 14pc for first time in 13yrs

Rejaul Karim Byron and Md Asaduz Zaman

Bangladesh's worsening economic crisis has spun off a price shock with food inflation crossing 14 percent in July for the first time in 13 years.

Part of the reason was a nationwide supply chain disruption caused by weeks of deadly protests that led to the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government.

The consumer price index that includes food and non-food inflation rose 1.94 basis points to 11.66 percent in July from the previous month, according to data released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics yesterday.

Moderate inflation is a fact of life, but higher inflation hurts fixed-income people badly. Consumers lose purchasing power faster at a higher rate of inflation. People are forced to chip away at precious savings.

"July was a month of turbulence and economic disruption. Supply chains broke down because of shutdowns, curfew, and internet blockage. These adversely affected the supply of goods in various markets," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

The statistical agency published inflation data after Bangladesh formed an interim government following the end of Hasina's 15-year regime. Hasina fled the country face of mass protests led by students.

Elevated consumer prices have a long life in Bangladesh. Since March 2023, the overall inflation has stayed over 9 percent.

While economists blamed the price surge in July on the supply chain breakdown, they also raised questions over the statistical agency's past shoddy data that kept inflation relatively subdued. The actual data could be much higher. The economists have now urged the government to reveal the real inflation data as Hasina's rule ended.

The price spike came largely from food inflation in both urban and rural markets. Non-food inflation also increased, albeit at a much slower pace than food inflation.

Hussain said the increased uncertainty due to political turmoil may have created a "precautionary demand" for essential items.

"It is natural for people to try to stock up when they are not sure about the functioning of markets and the availability of goods even if markets are open. This may have created additional pressure on prices."

The "fearless disclosure of the truth" may be another reason for higher inflation, he said. "The BBS may have

felt no inhibition in releasing the numbers without massaging under the changed political circumstances."

Prof Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, concurred with Hussain and accused Hasina's government of manipulating inflation data.

"The statistical agency didn't publish the real data and showed the 'reduced value' to give political advantages to the government," Raihan said. "We raised the issue with the government as well."

He also pointed to the supply chain disruption since mid-July when student protests turned deadly. As a result, the low- and fixed-income people were the first to take a hit from a sudden price spike.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 1-8-2024

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

EU postpones negotiations with Dhaka

Cites 'prevailing situation' as reason

Diplomatic Correspondent

The European Union has postponed its first round of negotiation with Bangladesh on a new agreement meant to elevate its partnership with the South Asian country.

"In light of the prevailing situation, the first round of negotiations on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement envisaged for September has been postponed with no later date fixed as yet," Nabila Massrali, EU spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, told The Daily Star in a message yesterday.

The decision comes a day after EU High Representative and Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell on Tuesday issued a statement condemning the "shoot-on-sight policy" announced by the authorities in Bangladesh.

The government put the death toll at 150 in violence centring the quota reform protest.

But according to The Daily Star's count, at least 163 people were killed.

The death toll from the violence could be much higher as this newspaper could not reach many hospitals, where dozens of critically injured patients were taken.

Also, many families reportedly collected the bodies of their loved ones from the scene, and this newspaper could not contact those families.

The Daily Star's count of the victims is based solely on hospital and police sources.

In the statement, Borrell also expressed grave concern over unlawful killings perpetrated in recent days by the authorities in Bangladesh. He called for thoroughly investigating the killings and bringing those responsible to justice.

“We will follow closely the actions of the authorities in the context of this crisis and ... expect all human rights to be fully respected,” Borrell said.

Bangladesh exported products to the EU market worth \$24 billion in 2023. This is 58 percent of Bangladesh’s total export, according to the Export Promotion Bureau.

Bangladesh enjoys duty-free access to the EU market because of its LDC status.

The country can enjoy similar privileges after 2026 under another scheme called GSP Plus, which will, however, require conditions on human rights, labour rights, democracy, and environment.

Once the country is graduated, it will face 12.5 percent duty on export of goods to the EU if Bangladesh cannot obtain the GSP Plus fulfilling EU’s conditions of 32 international conventions, including four core conventions on labour, human rights, good governance, and environmental protection.

Experts said any kind of bad relationship with the EU may have a negative impact on trade.

The EU and Bangladesh agreed in principle in 2022 to sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA).

The first round of negotiation was scheduled in Dhaka in September.

A diplomatic source said Bangladesh is willing to hold the first round of negotiation of PCA in November, considering the 79th session of the UN General Assembly opens on September 10, 2024.

In view of the increasing importance of EU-Bangladesh relations, including in the international domain, the EU had proposed to initiate discussions for signing the PCA, which is aimed at enhancing dialogue between both sides on issues of global concern and give more scope for mutually beneficial cooperation in a wide range of policy and strategic areas, said the European Commission.

“The PCA will give Bangladesh-EU relations a new legal foundation, which is ‘more comprehensive and up-to-date’, and will respond better to current and evolving challenges,” according to the European Commission.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 14-8-2024

CPA Australia sign MoUs with key institutions for future growth

CPA Australia, one of the world’s largest professional accounting organisations with over 173,000 members in over 100 countries, hosted ‘The President’s Cocktail’ in Colombo.

The event was graced by the Chief Guest, Dr. Susil Premajayantha, Minister of Education and Guests of Honour, Professor Sampath Amaratunge, Chairman of the University Grants Commission and Charge’ d’Affaires Lalita Kapur, Australian High Commission Colombo.

Other notable guests at the event were Dinesh Weerakkody, Chairman, Board of Investments, Heshana Kuruppu, President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka, Professor Lakshman Watawala, President of the Institute of Certified Management Accountants of Sri Lanka, (CMASL).

A key highlight of the Signing Ceremony of two Memorandum’s of Understanding (MoU), one between CPA Australia and the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the other between CPA Australia and the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Society Sri Lanka.

CPA Australia President and Chair of the Board Professor Dale Pinto said; “At CPA Australia, our vision is to ‘lead the future of the accounting profession and develop business professionals with tomorrow’s capabilities. We are deeply honoured to have forged these connections. Signing MoUs with esteemed organisations such as the CFA Society Sri Lanka and the University of Sri Jayewardenepura enables us to collaborate effectively and empower young talent with the latest accounting and finance knowledge and skills.”

Guest of Honour, Professor Sampath Amaratunga, Chairman of the University Grants Commission stated; “Firstly, let me thank The President of CPA Australia, and the CPA Australia organisation, for their decision to expand into Sri Lanka. We have 17 public universities all across the country, and a further 25 high-quality non-state universities as well. Despite the challenges brought about the crisis we faced over the last few years; we have managed to increase our student population by 50%. This is normally unheard of because of restrictions, funding and recruitment, but in Sri Lanka, because of the policies put in place by the government to provide opportunities for the youth, we were able to achieve this.”

CFA Society Sri Lanka President Aruna Perera said; “I am grateful that CPA Australia has decided to widen their reach in Sri Lanka. This partnership with CPA Australia, provides a fantastic opportunity to not only nurture talent in the accountant and financial sphere, but also provide them with global recognition as well.

CPA Australia Sri Lankan Liaison Representative Dinuk Hettiarchchi, said; “The role of the accountant within organisations has changed significantly over the years and now more than ever, it is imperative that accountants contribute to development and decision making of any business.”

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 7-8-2024

Nepal-Bangladesh bilateral trade headed for uncertainty

Nepal, India and Bangladesh were scheduled to sign the power trade agreement on July 28 to export 40MW of electricity to Bangladesh via India.

Krishana Prasain

Analysts have warned that the ongoing political turmoil in Bangladesh may disrupt Nepal's trade, including the signing of the first agreement to export electricity to the energy-hungry nation.

Nepal, India and Bangladesh were scheduled to sign the power trade agreement on July 28 to export 40MW of electricity to Bangladesh via India.

Bangladesh has been facing its worst political crisis since independence in 1971. On Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled amid massive anti-government protests.

“It’s more than 15 days since cargo trucks from Bangladesh have not moved. The containers ready to be dispatched from Nepal are on hold,” said Rajendra Sangraula, senior vice president of the Nepal Freight Forwarders Association. “There will be cargo movement until the situation returns to normal.”

Banglabandha is a major inland port in northern Bangladesh that was established to provide a trade link with Nepal through the Asian highway. The three nations are separated by the Siliguri Corridor, a 52km stretch of Indian territory. Phulbari is on the Indian side of the border.

The Siliguri Corridor, also called 'Chicken's Neck,' connects India's northeastern states to the rest of the country. Bangladesh and Nepal lie on either side of the corridor, and Bhutan lies on the northern side.

Bilateral trade between Nepal and Bangladesh began to increase after the Kakarbhitta-Phulbari-Banglabandha transit route was opened on August 31, 1997.

“We used to receive 20–25 cargo trucks from Bangladesh at normal times,” said Sangraula.

Traders said that despite having potential trade opportunities with Bangladesh, exports have remained minimal due to 35 percent import duty levied by the country.

Sangraula said Nepal has been majorly importing jute, a raw material for garments, and branded readymade garments like Nike and Adidas, among others.

Nepali traders who have already opened Letters of Credit (LC) will have to wait to receive their ordered goods.

Sangraula said the domestic industry, which depends on raw materials imported from Bangladesh, will be mostly

affected. Producers might also need to look for other markets amid the crisis in Bangladesh.

The total trade between Nepal and Bangladesh is Rs4.78 billion. Nepal’s imports from Bangladesh declined by 30.13 percent in the last fiscal year ended on July 15. According to the Department of Customs, Nepal’s imports fell to Rs4.22 billion in the past year.

Export, too, declined by 3.37 percent to Rs554.66 million in the review period. Nepal faced a trade deficit of Rs3.67 billion with Bangladesh in the period. Nepal has been facing a trade deficit with Bangladesh since 2014-15.

In the last fiscal year, Nepal majorly imported raw jute, medicine, lead-acid accumulators, oil cakes and other solid residues of soybeans, toilet paper, and juice.

Sangraula said that, in the long term, the changes in the government system might impact the bilateral agreement, which has been in the works for 15 years. It will also affect the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreements.

“If the crisis continues for a long period, it will have repercussions on trade. But as in Sri Lanka, the situation in Bangladesh may eventually get normal,” said Paras Kharel, executive director of the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment.

A trade expert said that Bangladesh holds a considerable export potential for Nepal, but this has yet to be realised. Currently, Nepal exports most of the lentils it produces to Bangladesh.

Kharel said the new government in Bangladesh might not give much importance to BBIN and BIMSTEC. “The trade between two countries might remain the same, with no progress in the coming days.”

Kharel said the electricity import might also be on hold for some time, but as it is their need, it will be continued.

In June, Bangladesh's Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase approved a proposal by the Bangladesh Power Development Board to import 40 MW of electricity from Nepal.

Nepal plans to sell 144,000 MWh (megawatt-hour) of electricity in five months at 6.4 cents (US dollar) a unit.

Nepal will transmit the energy to India through the 400KV Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur cross-border transmission line before India transmits the equivalent to Bangladesh.

A study conducted by SAWTEE on Nepal-Bangladesh trade shows that Nepal's exports to Bangladesh have been limited to agricultural products, with lentils making up approximately 90 percent of exports over the past five years.

As Nepal moves closer to graduating from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status, exploring alternative

markets to mitigate the impact of tariff increment in some of its major trade destinations becomes crucial. According to the report, there is substantial potential for strengthening bilateral trade ties with Bangladesh.

Experts have said that the proposed preferential trade agreement, which has been discussed since 2019, could remove this constraint, but Bangladesh faces various challenges.

This year, too, a commerce secretary-level meeting between Nepal and Bangladesh held in Kathmandu in April to strengthen economic ties could not reach a conclusion on the much-delayed bilateral preferential trade agreement between the two neighbours.

Since 2015, Nepal and Bangladesh have been mulling to establish direct bus services between their respective capitals.

The distance between Kathmandu and Dhaka is more than 1,184 km, and the bus journey is expected to take 24 hours.

The proposed route extends from Dhaka to Banglabandha (510 km), Banglabandha to Kakkarbhatta, Nepal via Panitanki (56 km) and Kakkarbhatta to Kathmandu (618 km). The trip from Kakkarbhatta to Kathmandu takes around 11 hours.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 4-8-2024

Railway service to reconnect Janakpur with India's Ayodhya soon

Trains to go beyond Bijalpura (Mahottari, Nepal)-Jayanagar (India) route that came into operation in April 2022.

Post Report

Kathmandu, Cross-border railway connectivity between Nepal and India is getting a boost with the neighbours planning to operate the Janakpur-Ayodhya railway soon, according to officials.

The Nepal Railway Company, under the aegis of the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, is the country's sole railway service provider. Its primary responsibility is to build rail connectivity between Nepal and India. One of the company officials said they plan to resume the Janakpur-Ayodhya service soon.

Currently, the Nepal-India railway connecting Bijalpura, Mahottari with Jayanagar (India) has been in operation since April 2022 after it was upgraded from a narrow-gauge to a broad-gauge line.

"We used to run trains between Janakpur and Ayodhya, whose service was later halted," said Balaram Mishra, a member of the Railway Board and former head of the railway department. "Now, we are resuming the same service at least once a week."

On December 17, 2023, the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport devised a plan to run a railway service between Janakpur and the Indian capital, New Delhi, via Ayodhya. However, in the first phase, the service will be between Janakpur and Ayodhya.

According to officials, there is a proposal to run a pair of trains every Saturday. The Indian train will leave Janakpur at 1:30 pm and will reach Ayodhya at around 4:30 am on Sunday. Then, the train will depart for Janakpur at 5:00 pm on Sunday and reach Janakpur on Monday morning.

On January 14 last year, the Indian Ministry of Railways announced that it would operate a special train for pilgrims connecting Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh with Janakpur in Nepal.

The 'Bharat Gaurav Deluxe Train' will also pass through Nandigram, Sitamarhi, Kashi, and Prayagraj, according to a statement by the Indian Ministry of Railways.

The first train on the route will be flagged off on February 17 from New Delhi. But the plan was cancelled later.

"To realise Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of showcasing India's rich cultural heritage and magnificent historical places to the people of India and the world, Indian Railways is going to run the train covering two of the most significant pilgrimage sites: Ayodhya and Janakpur," read the statement.

"The initiative will strengthen the bilateral relations and also promote the cultural relations between the two countries."

Some foreign ministry officials claim that the prime ministers of Nepal and India will flag off the new service, but there is no official confirmation yet. Mishra said discussions on how to operate the railway regularly continue. Relevant officials are also working on modalities with Indian railway officials.

The proposed seven-day 'Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train' tour's first stop is Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Ram. There, tourists will visit Shri Ram Janmbhumi temple, Hanuman temple, and Bharat Mandir at Nandigram.

Officials said the train service between the two cultural cities of Nepal and India is going to relaunch, with its inauguration due soon.

Mishra said that since Nepal's railway track is connected with India's line in Jayanagar, Nepali rail can operate between Janakpur and New Delhi and other Indian cities via Jayanagar.

On January 22, the two sides were planning to operate a special railway service between Janakpur and Ayodhya ahead of Lord Rama's consecration ceremony, or prana pratishtha at the temple dedicated to the Treta Yuga king, but it was struck off the agenda at the last minute.

The ceremony at Lord Ram's birthplace took place on January 24. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Ram married Sita of Janakpur.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-8-2024

Iran's Qeshm and Russia's Krasnodar sign 'sisterhood' MOU

TEHRAN - The Iranian Qeshm island in the Persian Gulf and Russia's Krasnodar have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish sister-city relationships in a ceremony hosted by the Russian side.

The MOU was signed by Mayor of Qeshm Mirdad Mirdadi, and his Krasnodar counterpart Yevgeny Naumov on Monday evening, IRNA reported.

According to this memorandum, which was signed in the presence of regional officials and the head of the Russian Krasnodar city council, as well as the advisor of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, these two cities will interact with each other in the fields of construction, education and cultural exchanges. The mayor of Qeshm emphasized the development of cooperation, referring to close relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation.

Referring to the geographical location of Qeshm as well as being the largest island in the Persian Gulf, Mirdadi noted its potential in playing a role in the North-South corridor that connects Russia to open waters through Iran. He announced the island's readiness to transport and load goods to Russia on the North-South international route. This island hosts more than three million domestic and foreign tourists every year, Mirdadi said while highlighting Qeshm's tourist and natural attractions. The mayor of Krasnodar during the ceremony talked about the potential of cooperation with Qeshm, saying the Iranian island is a free trade zone and also a tourist center, and by relying on these capacities, cooperation with this region can be strengthened in both tourism and construction sectors. Naumov also spoke about the possibilities of cooperation with Qeshm Island in the field of higher education institutions, continuous exchange of students and participation in commercial and cultural projects. In April 2024, the mayors of Qeshm and Krasnodar discussed the prospect of bilateral cooperation during a video conference call.

Iran's Qeshm Free Zone Organization and Dubna Special Economic Zone (SEZ Dubna) of the Russian Federation recently signed a memorandum of understanding to attract mutual investment and enhance infrastructure development.

EF/MA

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 13-8-2024

Iran's exports to Latin America up 680% in 4 months yr/yr

TEHRAN – Iran exported 436 million tons of goods worth \$136 million to Latin American countries in the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-July 21), registering a 680-percent rise year on year, IRIB reported.

Based on the latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the weight of the exported goods to the mentioned countries also increased by 18 million tons during the said four months.

During the mentioned four months, Iran exported commodities to 15 different Latin American countries including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay, El Salvador, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Brazil has been the top export destination for Iranian goods importing more than 435 tons of commodities from the Islamic republic, followed by Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia and Mexico.

Urea, components and parts of aircraft engines, agricultural tractors, sprockets and wire were the most exported products to Latin American countries in the mentioned period.

EF/MA

THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 11-8-2024

Use quality domestic products to strengthen country's economy

Afghanistan is a rich country due to its proper geographical location and vast natural resources but due to several decades of internal wars and foreign invasions, in addition to heavy casualties and migration, the Afghan nation also faced extensive economic problems. Domestic production was significantly affected as in those years, Afghanistan was almost entirely dependent on imports and it is clear that importing countries are always facing political and economic pressure from others. During this period, the rich Afghans could not invest here with confidence, but their wealth and human resources were used for the benefit of other countries. Afghanistan gained independence and took over the affairs of the Islamic Emirate. But, the country is now enjoying sure security and Afghan investors are investing with confidence in different fields. Domestic production exhibitions have been held in different parts of the country for a long time and in the capital Kabul, Herat, Kandahar and a number of other provinces, many small and large

factories of medicines, textiles, cement as well as construction and food have started operation. In order to stand on our own feet, the Islamic Emirate, investors and the whole people of Afghanistan have the responsibility to work hard to reach the goal. In order for domestic products to compete with foreign products, they should raise import tariffs and accelerate their efforts to provide domestic products with appropriate markets. Investors and factory owners are also responsible for paying more attention to the quality and production level of their products. Now the main problem is that the quality of the products of some factories is as low as does not meet the needs of the people. Likewise, investors should pay special attention to the industrialization of agriculture, because Afghanistan is an agricultural country and many of its people are engaged in agriculture and livestock husbandry. Also, the people should use domestic products instead of foreign ones to help the country become self-sufficient in the economic sector.

THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 8-8-2024

Turkish companies to invest in chemical fertilizer production in Afghanistan, ministry

KABUL: Turkish investors, Professor Jumma Ali Qahraman and Erkan Ozsoz, in a meeting with the acting Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Mawlavi Ataullah Omari, said Wednesday that they are ready to invest in the production of chemical fertilizer in Afghanistan. Speaking at the meeting, the Turkish investors stated that they are interested in producing fertilizers, particularly protein and amino acid-based products in Afghanistan and asked the ministry to cooperate with them in this field, according to a statement from the ministry. Welcoming them, Mawlavi Omari said that his-led ministry was committed to providing support and creating investment opportunities in various agricultural and livestock sectors for foreign investors across the country.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 7-8-2024

Debt rollover commitments secured from key lenders

Mubarak Zeb Khan

- *Aurangzeb says volume of rollovers will be same as last year*
- *Projects Pakistan's financial needs to be between \$3bn and \$5bn over next three years*
- *Insists IMF board set to finalise staff-level agreement by end of the month*

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has secured commitments from China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

to roll over debt for a year, a boost for Islamabad as it awaits final approval of a \$7 billion, 37-month loan programme with the IMF.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb told reporters in Islamabad after a parliamentary committee meeting that the volume of rollovers would be the same as last year, adding that Pakistan has \$12bn in bilateral loans that have been extended for the past few years, according to a Bloomberg report.

Mr Aurangzeb also reiterated that the IMF's executive board is set to convene by the end of this month to finalise a staff-level agreement (SLA) with Pakistan for the new loan programme aimed at ensuring stability and inclusive growth.

He emphasised that he communicates with IMF officials daily, refuting claims that Pakistan's loan programme would be excluded from the next board meeting.

He projected Pakistan's financial needs to be between \$3bn and \$5bn over the next three years, assuring that the government would manage these funds comfortably.

The minister said the government has also received offers from international commercial banks for concessional loans. "We are also reviewing these offers," he said, adding that high-interest loans would be dismissed.

A major IMF demand is for Pakistan to ensure the rollover of its annual \$12bn debt commitment to three key bilateral donors: Saudi Arabia, China, and the UAE. Saudi Arabia has already extended \$5bn, China \$4bn, and the UAE \$3bn for one year.

Under the new IMF programme, these bilateral loans will be rolled over, although Mr Aurangzeb did not specify when the decision would be announced.

On the issue of independent power producers (IPPs), Mr Aurangzeb proposed appointing an adviser in China to discuss transitioning coal power facilities to local coal, a process expected to take two to three years. He stated that the government has hired an adviser in China for the issuance of Ponda bonds.

Senate briefing

During his briefing to the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue, Mr Aurangzeb noted signs of economic growth and increased investor confidence, leading Fitch to upgrade Pakistan's rating.

He said the State Bank of Pakistan has reduced interest rates and that a rightsizing plan for ministries and divisions is underway, starting with five ministries.

A plan will be developed to address legal issues and assets that arise from the rightsizing. Former SBP governor Dr Ishrat Hussain and renowned economist Kaiser Bengali have already prepared a study on rightsizing. The minister assured the committee that the report will be provided to the committee.

The finance minister informed the committee that everyone would be subject to taxes and that the tax net had been extended to the retail, real estate, export and agriculture sectors. "Easier tax registration procedures are being adopted for businessmen," he said.

He also highlighted government initiatives to reduce expenses, devolve provincial affairs ministries, and merge others, leaving the private sector to handle business operations.

Senator Farooq H. Naik queried the number of ministries to be abolished under the 18th constitutional amendment. Mr Aurangzeb responded that these ministries would be phased out in five groups, with the first phase involving a proposal to dissolve five ministries within the next few days.

The committee's chairman, Salim Mandviwala, mentioned reports of a list of FBR officers being sent from the Prime Minister's Office for removal. FBR Chairman Zubair Tiwana confirmed receiving monthly lists, ensuring that any action against officers is based on evidence.

Earlier, speaking at an event, Mr Aurangzeb stressed the need for effective projects to address climate change challenges, advocating for active participation and financing from private sector.

He noted that Pakistan was among the countries most affected by climate change and in 2022 floods, it suffered massive destruction and incurred losses estimated at \$30bn.

Mr Aurangzeb said at the Geneva conference, various countries, bilateral and multilateral partners, and international organisations pledged over \$9bn in assistance for Pakistan. However, the country did not receive the promised funds.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 9-8-2024

Pakistan, Turkiye agree to remove trade barriers

Mubarak Zeb Khan

ISLAMABAD: After enforcing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a high-level Turkish business delegation arrived on Thursday to explore investment opportunities and remove barriers to increasing bilateral investment.

The Turkish business delegation is in Islamabad, led by Trade Minister Prof Dr Omer Bolat, and has met with Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Privatisation, and Communications Abdul Aleem Khan and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb to discuss potential investment prospects.

Minister Bolat proposed measures to facilitate investment for Turkish companies to enhance investor

confidence and recommended increasing flight connectivity between Pakistan and Türkiye to support greater economic exchange. He said the economic, business and bilateral ties are going to be a new beginning, as Türkiye will also ensure all possible cooperation in all circumstances. Turkish business leaders proposed increasing bilateral investment in various sectors, including infrastructure. Representatives of Pakistan's main commercial institutions welcomed Türkiye's proposals and said that Türkiye can develop better with its modern machinery and Pakistan with its raw materials. In a meeting with the finance minister, Mr Bolat highlighted Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Erdogan's shared commitment to strengthening bilateral ties, with a particular focus on increasing trade and investment. He identified key sectors for potential investment, including services, health, education, medicine, and fashion. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb acknowledged the significance of historical and cultural ties between Pakistan and Türkiye and provided an update on Pakistan's improving economic fundamentals, including a stable currency, foreign exchange reserves exceeding \$9 billion, and declining inflation rates.

He informed Mr Bolat of a recent staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund to ensure long-term stability. He outlined ongoing reforms in taxation, energy sector and state-owned enterprises. The minister also highlighted the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in streamlining investment processes and attracting foreign direct investment.

Both ministers reiterated their dedication to strengthening bilateral relations and expanding trade volume. Mr Aurangzeb assured Minister Bolat of the Pakistan's commitment to supporting investors by streamlining regulations supporting ease of doing business.

Roundtable Meanwhile, Mr Bolat and Privatisation Minister Abdul Aleem Khan co-chaired a Round Table Business Conference.

Deputy Trade Minister of Türkiye Mustafa Tuzcu, the Ambassador to Pakistan, Mehmet Pacaci, and the presidents of various trade chambers of Türkiye were also present. At the same time, prominent business community figures from Pakistan joined this session.

While addressing the conference, Mr Aleem said that the two countries have already signed economic and joint business agreements. He added that Pakistan wants to promote bilateral investment and business ties in various fields with Türkiye because now is a prime time to increase the economic activities between Turkey and Pakistan.

Mr Khan welcomed the business community's interest in Türkiye and said that it would benefit both countries and that all possible support would be provided.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 14-8-2024

China-built landmark hydropower project connects to grid, another milestone for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, despite Western media's smears

By GT Staff Reporters

The first unit of the Chinese-built Suki Kinari Hydropower project in northwest Pakistan was connected to the power grid on Monday, the Xinhua News Agency reported, meaning the project, which was among the first under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework, has taken the most critical step toward full commercial operation.

The launch of the landmark project, which is the largest overseas greenfield hydropower investment project by a Chinese enterprise, will further alleviate Pakistan's chronic electricity shortages, while injecting new impetus into the sustainable development of the regional economy, experts said.

The project's launch comes as some Western media outlets have intensified efforts to badmouth China-Pakistan cooperation, the CPEC in particular, and the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), by bringing up old issues such as debt, which they claim may disrupt future cooperation.

Construction of the project, funded and developed by Energy China, started in January 2017 with a total investment of about \$1.962 billion. The power station features four impulse turbine units, with a total installed capacity of 884 megawatts and a total reservoir volume of 13.45 million cubic meters, according to Energy China.

All units of the power station will be put into operation by the end of August, the company said.

As a flagship project of the CPEC, the Suki Kinari Hydropower project boasts the largest impulse water turbine generator units and the deepest pressure shaft group in the world, meaning that it involved high construction standards.

The project will generate an average of 3.21 billion kilowatt-hours per year, saving about 1.28 million tons of standard coal annually and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by about 3.2 million tons.

More importantly, it will provide affordable, clean electricity to more than 1 million households in Pakistan.

Chinese experts said that the launch of this massive project is another milestone in the cooperation between China and Pakistan under the BRI. It serves as a living example of how the Chinese company has deeply

participated in the sustainable development of Pakistan for the benefit of its social and economic development.

"Helping Pakistan deal with its energy shortage has been an important task under the development of the CPEC since the beginning... while the heavy reliance on imported coal and high international coal prices are among the issues that have troubled Pakistan.

"The hydropower station offers an alternative choice to resolve many of these problems due to its ecologically friendly, affordable and sustainable nature," Liu Zongyi, director of the Center for South Asia Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

The launch is an important achievement in the new phase of the high-quality construction of the CPEC, which will further ease Pakistan's electricity crisis and provide tangible benefits to local living standards and economic development, Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

The launch comes amid negative coverage by foreign media outlets of China-Pakistan cooperation and the CPEC. One even used an intimidating headline saying that "China-Pakistan ties are at a crossroads," in hyping issues such as debt and security in the region.

"Such negative commentary is not new... it has been ongoing since the inception of the CPEC," Qian said. He noted that these persistent negative claims by Western media outlets can underscore the critical importance of China-Pakistan cooperation in further building a China-Pakistan community with a shared future.

China is globally recognized for its infrastructure capabilities. In terms of financing, projects under the BRI have benefited from favorable loans, which have significantly motivated Chinese enterprises to participate in development and construction.

This financing also helped Pakistan overcome funding constraints that are common among developing countries, experts said.

As a key flagship project under the BRI, the CPEC has brought \$25.4 billion in direct investment to Pakistan, created 236,000 jobs, built 510 kilometers of highways and generated more than 8,000 megawatts of electricity, among other achievements.

All these have significantly boosted Pakistan's social and economic development, according to the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan.

As the CPEC enters a new phase in 2024, its 11th year, experts said that cooperation between China and Pakistan under the BRI will be further strengthened in sectors where they have complementary advantages.

These sectors could include new energy, manufacturing and cross-border e-commerce, to further enhance

regional connectivity and support Pakistan's sustainable development and improvement of livelihoods.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 9-8-2024

China-Russia cultural exchange adds to more bright spots of bilateral cooperation under BRI

Exhibition epitomizes friendship, adding new energy to cooperation

By Li Xuanmin and Zhang Yiyi

A 19-year-old Russian young artist, Mikhail Kalyuta, raised his paintbrush after carefully studying a Chinese model in a red dress in Changsha, the capital of Central China's Hunan Province. He sketched the outlines, mixed colors, and applied them to the canvas. The piece was finished within a couple of days, and has been donated to the Li Zijian Art Museum, also based in Changsha, as part of its permanent collection.

Mikhail's 105 oil paintings, themed "the world in Mikhail's eyes," has just concluded a one-month exhibition at the Li Zijian Art Museum and will be displayed at an art gallery in Beijing 798 Art Zone next week. It is also the first time that Mikhail's works have been shown in China.

Li Zijian, a well-known Chinese artist and founder of Li Zijian Art Museum, told the Global Times on Thursday that the exhibition has been a huge success and has provided Chinese art enthusiasts with the opportunity to appreciate the creative works by Russian youth.

"It also epitomized the closer people-to-people exchange and cultural link between China and Russia under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," Li stressed.

In May, China and Russia issued a joint statement on deepening China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, Xinhua News Agency reported.

This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China-Russia diplomatic relations and the opening year of the China-Russia Years of Culture. Industry insiders pointed out that enhanced cultural exchanges are vital in enriching overall China-Russia relations and will further consolidate the friendship and amity between the people of the two countries.

As the potential of bilateral cultural cooperation is further brought into focus through a series of cultural exchange programs, such closer ties will also serve as an example of mutual learning and respect between two friendly neighbors, observers said, adding to more bright spots of BRI fruitful cooperation at its 11th year of development.

Influencing each other

A number of Mikhail's paintings with elements of Chinese culture have attracted huge crowds, including an oil painting themed around the Chinese Year of the Dragon and a self-portrait of the artist in traditional Chinese attire.

Yury Kalyuta, the father of Mikhail and an honored artist of the Russian Federation, told the Global Times that he believed that the art and cultural exchange between China and Russia has been "elevated to a new height," and such cultural integration is quite beneficial as it has created new art forms and brought the countries closer together.

"Mikhail has developed a strong interest in Chinese culture. He has been reading Chinese books and visited a lot of Chinese culture exhibitions. He also deeply admires the free style of Chinese painting that utilizes silhouettes and pure colors. This light and liberated approach to creation has had a direct impact on Mikhail's works," Yury explained.

He added that Chinese culture is becoming increasingly popular in Russia, which undoubtedly influenced artists in Russia and Mikhail is no exception.

Using himself and Mikhail as examples, Yury said that a number of Chinese renowned artists have a significant influence on Russia peers, and he in particular named Qi Baishi, who is famed for painting in the expressive xieyi style.

"It's not just about the free control of brushstrokes; it embodies a relaxed and free emotional attitude. We're deeply enamored with this form of art, even though he might not be able to articulate it directly, the feelings it evokes have profoundly moved us," Yury said.

Yury's first exhibition in China dates back to almost 25 years ago, and over the past decades, he has held multiple exhibitions across Chinese cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou of East China's Zhejiang Province and Guangzhou of South China's Guangdong Province, as well as Changsha.

Last year, Yury himself also held an individual exhibition at the Li Zijian Art Museum, showcasing a retrospective of 120 oil paintings he had created over the years.

To date, the Li Zijian Art Museum has held four Russian artists exhibitions, and is planning to organize more, to "make the friendship between the people of China and Russia blossoms here," Li said.

DEFENCE, NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-8-2024

Capital outlays at the core of defence capabilities

Any nation keen to raise the quality of life of its citizens requires serious efforts and substantial resources.

Lt Gen Pradeep Bali (retd)

Military Commentator

THIS calendar year has seen the tabling of two Budgets — the interim one on February 1 and the full one for 2024-25 on July 23. The allocations for the defence sector have not seen any major variation, belying hopes that Modi 3.0 would focus more on capability enhancement of the armed forces. The defence expenditure as a share of the total expenditure has declined from 17.8 per cent in 2016-17 to 13.9 per cent in 2023-24 (revised estimates) and 12.9 per cent for the current fiscal. Overall spending for FY 2024-25 has increased only by 4.8 per cent over FY 2023-24. Adherence to fiscal strictness in government expenditure may partially explain why the Modi government has kept the increase in defence expenditure minimal.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has a total allocation of Rs 6,21,941 crore. Within this kitty, 27.7 per cent is for planned capital acquisitions, aimed at equipping the armed forces with advanced technology and weaponry, 14.8 per cent for revenue expenditure, 53.3 per cent for salaries and pensions, and 4.2 per cent for civil organisations under the MoD. To boost indigenous defence production, Rs 1,05,518 crore has been allocated for domestic capital procurement out of the total capital head.

The continuing inimical activities by our northern and western neighbours, the need to ensure maritime security, and having the ability to deter the enemy on land, in the sea and the air, are inescapable realities that narrow down our options. A robust financial outlay for defence is thus imperative for any FM. However, a cursory look at the outlays indicates a largely status quoist approach. Factoring in inflation makes percentage increases largely cosmetic and just about adequate to meet immediate needs. Any attempted dexterity in spending is hemmed in by committed liabilities consuming the larger part of capital outlays.

Though the defence expenditure is the largest component of the Union Budget, one sees little result-oriented discussion and informed debates on it. Even the well-thought-out recommendations of the Standing Committee for Defence remain bereft of action. A long-standing recommendation, which had also been projected by the 15th Finance Commission, was the creation of a non-lapsable modernisation fund for

defence and internal security. However, this has not matured into a working mechanism. The security situation in the neighbourhood as well as globally remains unpredictable. We, however, have been mostly reactive in dealing with any crisis to the extent that even funding is met in an emergency mode.

Building capacities and developing capabilities need time, while intentions can change rapidly. Cost-intensive infusion of high-end technology in military systems and equipment, which in the present day also includes cyberspace, space and unmanned platforms, has to be ongoing. While planning for our defence, we need to clearly understand that capital outlays are the foundation of capabilities.

The ‘capital good, revenue bad’ analysis is a regular part of discussions on the defence budget. This is more of a slogan than a cogent analysis. The revenue head includes expenditures on sustenance, operational preparedness, continuing procurement and maintenance of in-service equipment. The situation we face in J&K and on the borders with China and Pakistan makes a manpower-intensive posture imperative and inevitable. Salaries and pensions are a function of the size of the forces needed to be maintained, based not only on operational needs but also on the methods of application in such a scenario. The cost of the human resource required for this is as necessary as any weapon platform. The ‘capital versus revenue’ argument is not of much consequence outside of account books. It also needs no reiteration that defence pensions are a sovereign promise to the soldier and his family for his service to the nation.

As much as 75 per cent of the outlay for modernisation will be spent on sourcing from the domestic industry, in line with the focus on Aatmanirbharta, and Rs 43,000 crore will be spent on imports dedicated to capital acquisitions. The lead times necessary to develop, produce and deploy critical technologies and weapon systems are considerable. Boosting indigenous production of defence equipment has to be an important pillar of our defence policy, but this will be a long, ongoing process and cannot meet current requirements in an optimal manner. Then again, our indigenisation efforts must be freed from stifling procedures. There has to be a concerted effort for encouraging startups and private players in defence production by an underwritten assurance of confirmed orders for viable products within a clear timeline, failing which the project could be foreclosed.

Unlike in the past, the current defence budget does not spell out distribution of capital expenditure among the three services, on the grounds of fostering jointness. This obstructs the estimation of service-wise share. This

also leads to an issue of concern from the past — the lapsing of the capital budget of the Army. While the Navy and the Air Force are platform-centric in their capital inventory, with big budget systems, the Army has a huge inventory of small and medium-level weapons and equipment. The fault lies primarily in procedural delays, overshooting trial timelines and contractual issues, most of which are beyond the control of the Army HQ directorates dealing with procurement. The acquisition vertical of the MoD should be fully accountable for this and reasons need to be ascertained for missing the expenditure targets.

The defence budget must be capability-driven and not intention-driven. A firm step in this direction would be to make the capital budget ‘non-lapsable’ and ‘roll-on’ in nature, with a five-year time span. A non-lapsable military modernisation fund must be created and a Defence Commission constituted to ensure that this is utilised optimally by being the bridge between Service HQs and the Cabinet Committee on Security. A draft Cabinet note for such a fund has been under consideration by the government for quite some time now and needs to be approved expeditiously.

Any nation keen to raise the quality of life of its citizens requires serious efforts and substantial resources. India, too, is engaged in this journey towards development. We must never forget, however, that the sine qua non of Viksit Bharat is Surakshit Bharat.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 13-8-2024

IAF seeks urgent upgradation of MiG-29 fighters to carry long-range, high-speed ground attack missiles

According to reports, India is in process of procuring 21 additional MiG-29s from Russia

Vijay Mohan

Chandigarh, The Indian Air Force has projected an “urgent requirement” for upgrading its MiG-29 fighter aircraft with new stand-off ground attack weapons and associated avionics and control systems that would enhance their operational capability.

Initially, 24 MiG-29 aircraft would be modified to carry the High Speed Low Drag (HSLD) Mark-II stand-off weapon, having a strike range of over 180 kilometers, that would require retrofitting additional hardware as well as software on the aircraft. The MiG-29 is primarily an air defence fighter.

Stand-off weapons are missiles or bombs which are launched from a sufficient distance away from the target to allow the attacking aircraft to evade enemy retaliation. These are used against surface targets and in most cases are precision guided.

IAF officers said that a request for proposal was floated by the Ministry of Defence on August 7, inviting industrial partners to undertake the project that would be overseen by the IAF’s No.11 Base Repair Depot.

According to a statement of case issued by the IAF for the indigenous production of HSLD Mk-II, these missiles are already deployed on the IAF’s Su-30 and Jaguar fighters and there is a requirement to manufacture these weapons within the country.

Modifying the MiG-29 for the HSLD would involve designing and integration of suitable bomb racks to be carried on the aircraft’s external hardpoints under the wings or fuselage and development of an avionics and software package along with cables and associated rigs.

Inducted into the IAF in 1986, about 66 of the Soviet/Russian origin fighters are in service in three squadrons. Two of them are based at Adampur and Jamnagar, while the third recently moved to Srinagar to replace a MiG-21 squadron that was phased out. In addition, the Navy also procured 35 MiG-29s for its fleet air arm. The modification of the IAF’s MiG-29s for carrying HSLDs could also have spin-off benefits for the Navy.

The IAF’s MiG-29s went in for extensive modification and upgradation during the second half of the last decade, which significantly enhanced their combat capability. Christened the MiG-29 UPG, this included modifications to the airframe along with new avionics, radar, missiles, weapon control systems and electronic warfare suite.

The IAF is also planning to undertake a second life extension programme on the fleet to enhance their service span from 40 years to 50 years. In the first life extension programme undertaken in the mid-2000s, the MiG-29s’ technical life was being extended from 25 years to 40 years. According to IAF sources, the enhanced technical life of the MiG-29 aircraft will begin expiring from 2025 onwards.

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

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

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 14-8-2024**India, Australia discuss ways to strengthen maritime cooperation****Tribune News Service**

New Delhi, India and Australia today discussed ways to sustain a safe and secure maritime environment that would be conducive for growth and global well-being.

Representatives of the two countries, which also are partners in the four-nation grouping of Quad, met for the 6th India-Australia Maritime Security Dialogue at Canberra today. "They exchanged views on various topics of mutual interest, including the maritime security environment in the Indo-Pacific region," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

The two sides are looking at maritime domain awareness, coordination for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), regional and multilateral engagements, and the sustainable use of marine resources. They discussed the way ahead for collaboration in maritime pillar of the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI).

The Indian delegation was led by Muanpui Saiawi, Joint Secretary, Disarmament and International Security Affairs in the MEA, and the Australian delegation was led by Sarah Storey, First Assistant Secretary, South Asia and Central Asia Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Indo-Australian meeting comes a week after a US and Australia joint statement spoke about engaging with India. It said: "The US and Australia reaffirmed our shared ambition to increase maritime domain awareness collaboration with regional partners, including Japan, India, and the Philippines."

Meanwhile, the India-Australia joint working group on counter-terrorism met separately in New Delhi on Monday. The two sides condemned the use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism and exchanged views on the domestic, regional and global terrorism threat assessment. Cooperation in counter terrorism is an important element of the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 13-8-2024**'Mitra Shakti': India-Sri Lanka joint military exercise begins****PTI**

A joint exercise between the militaries of India and Sri Lanka got underway in the island nation on Monday to facilitate interoperability and sharing of best practices, the defence ministry said.

The 10th edition of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Military Exercise 'Mitra Shakti' at the Army Training School, Maduru Oya, will be conducted from August 12-25. It will enhance the joint military capability so as to undertake counter-insurgency operations in a sub-conventional scenario under the UN mandate, the ministry said.

Joint exercise 'Mitra Shakti' is an annual training event conducted alternatively in India and Sri Lanka. **Its last edition** was conducted in Pune in November 2023.

"The aim of the joint exercise is to enhance the joint military capability of both sides to undertake counter-insurgency operations in a sub-conventional scenario under Chapter VII of the United Nations Mandate. The exercise will focus on operations in the semi-urban environment," the statement said.

"Tactical drills to be rehearsed during the exercise include response to a terrorist action, establishment of a joint command post, establishment of an intelligence and surveillance centre, securing of a helipad/landing site, small team insertion and extraction, special heliborne operations, cordon and search operations, besides employment of drones and counter-drone systems, among others," it said.

'Mitra Shakti' will enable both sides to share best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures for conducting joint operations, the ministry said.

"It will facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between the two armies. The joint exercise will also enhance defence cooperation, further augmenting bilateral relations between the two friendly nations," the ministry said.

The Indian contingent, comprising 106 personnel, is being represented by a Battalion of Rajputana Rifles along with personnel from other arms and services.

The Sri Lankan contingent is being represented by personnel from the Gajaba Regiment of the Sri Lankan Army.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 4-8-2024**Bilateral military exercise on disaster response and humanitarian assistance**

The Montana National Guard, under the leadership of the Adjutant General for the State of Montana and Commander of the Montana National Guard, Major General Pete Hronek will conduct the 'Atlas Angel' exercise from August 5 to 9. In partnership with U.S. Pacific Air Forces, this five-day training program will take place at the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) Base, Katunayake and SLAF Academy China Bay, marking a significant collaboration between the United States and

Sri Lankan military with participation from the Maldives National Defence Forces and civilian experts from the Disaster Management Centre.

The Atlas Angel exercise will include six Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs) focusing on C-130 Pilot Exchange, C-130 Aviation Maintenance, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) at SLAF Base, Katunayake as well as Medical Search and Rescue (SAR), Urban SAR and Airfield Assessment at SLAF Academy China Bay.

The Atlas Angel exercise aims to enhance bilateral cooperation and readiness in addressing natural and man-made disasters. Military personnel from Sri Lanka and the United States, alongside Maldivian participants and several civilian experts from the Disaster Management Centre will participate in a series of workshops, briefings and training sessions designed to improve mutual understanding and coordination in disaster response efforts.

Air Force Commander, Air Marshal Udeni Rajapaksa said, "Exercise Atlas Angel is one of the main combined exercises operationalised under the Montana State Partnership Program and it provides space for greater engagement between Sri Lanka Air Force and Montana National Guard through subject matter expert exchanges, developing strategic foresight on HADR and SAR missions and promoting interoperability for collective security in the region."

Adjutant General for the State of Montana and Commander of the Montana National Guard Major General Pete Hronek said, "The Atlas Angel exercise is crucial for enhancing our disaster response capabilities and fostering international cooperation. This exercise allows us to share best practices, improve interoperability and strengthen our collective ability to respond to natural and man-made disasters, ultimately contributing to regional stability and humanitarian efforts."

SLAF pilots, flight engineers, loadmasters and medical personnel will gain experience in advanced disaster management techniques. Key topics covered will include an overview of natural and man-made hazards, interagency coordination and the utilisation of aerial platforms in HADR operations. The exercise will feature an in-depth look at both Sri Lanka's and the United States' disaster management structures and processes. Participants will explore the roles and responsibilities of various agencies, inter-jurisdictional relationships and the strategic use of mutual aid agreements and compacts.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 14-8-2024

'Mitrashakti' Indo-Sri Lanka Joint Field Military Exercise Commences

The Indo-Sri Lanka Joint Field Military Exercise 'Mitrashakti' commenced with a parade at the Army Training School, Maduruoya on 14 August 2024.

Major General Dinesh Udugama, the Commander of the 59 Infantry Division and the Director of the exercise, graced the ceremony as the chief guest. During the event, he officially declared the commencement of the military exercise and addressed the Sri Lankan and Indian troops participating in the exercise.

The inaugural parade was commanded by Major Roshan Weerakkodi, the Commanding Officer of the 3 Gajaba Regiment. Major Ruwan Karunathilaka and Major Kuljith Poonav served as the second-in-command, representing the two countries.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 8-8-2024

Iran bolsters air defenses with new radar systems: official

TEHRAN- Iran's air defense system in the eastern region has been upgraded with new radars and missile interceptors, as announced during a ceremony attended by the chief commander of Iran's Army Air Defense Force.

Brigadier General Alireza Sabahifard inspected various sites and radar positions of an air defense unit in the east, assessing their combat readiness and operational capabilities. During his visit, Sabahifard addressed commanders and military personnel, emphasizing the significant role of Iran's Air Defense Force in enhancing the combat power of the country's armed forces.

Sabahifard said that Iran is stronger than ever in the defense sector, adding that "We ensure that we respond decisively to any kind of threat."

Earlier, Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, the chief commander of the Iranian Army, stated, "Iran is equipped with very advanced defense systems. In the event of a war with the Zionist regime, we will defend the country and prevent the enemy from harming our facilities."

The assassination of Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31 has escalated tensions between Iran and Israel to their highest point.

Less than 24 hours before Haniyeh's assassination, Israel assassinated Fuad Shukr, a founding member of Hezbollah's armed forces in the southern suburbs of Beirut.

After these assassinations in Tehran and Beirut, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, warned the Israeli regime of a "harsh response" to Haniyeh's assassination, asserting that Iran must revenge the blood of the Palestinian Resistance leader.

In recent days, many military analysts have acknowledged that the liability of conflict between Iran and Israel is very high if Iran responds militarily to the assassination of Resistance commanders, and Iran must be able to enhance its defensive capabilities to counter the Israeli Air Force.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 13-8-2024

Iranian 'Mohajer 10' drone turns heads in Moscow military exhibition

TEHRAN— Iran has showcased the home-grown "Mohajer-10" drone in the International Military-Technical Forum "Army-2024", which captured the attention of many attendees.

On the opening day of the 10th International Military-Technical Forum in Russia, the national pavilion of the Islamic Republic of Iran drew significant attention from visitors, highlighting the country's latest achievements in defense technology.

The exhibition featured a broad range of Iran's defense innovations, with particular interest centered on the advancements in drone technology and defense systems.

The Mohajer-10 boasts more advanced technology compared to previous models, underscoring Iran's growing expertise in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) development. This drone, along with newly unveiled radar and defense systems making their debut in the exhibition, were met with considerable interest.

The exhibition also displayed other key aspects of Iran's defense capabilities, such as air defense and naval defense systems, ballistic missiles, aerospace industry equipment, and both industrial and military batteries.

The event has seen Iran participating for the third consecutive year, displaying a wide range of its military and defense products.

The exhibition, running from Monday to Wednesday, was officially inaugurated with the presence of a high-ranking Iranian military delegation. Brigadier General Ali Shadmani, Deputy Coordinator of the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, led the delegation, accompanied by Kazem Jalali, the Iranian Ambassador to the Russian Federation.

Brigadier General Shadmani participated in the opening ceremony of the ARMY 2024 International Forum as the representative of Major General Mohammad Baqeri,

following an invitation from the Russian Minister of Defense.

During his visit, he toured various sections of the Iranian pavilion, reviewing the showcased technologies.

Iranian military official warns of impending retaliation against Israel

On the sidelines of the exhibition, Brigadier General Shadmani issued a stern warning to Israel, declaring that a severe retaliatory response from the Islamic Republic is imminent following the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

He emphasized on Sunday that Iran's retribution is "fast approaching."

General Shadmani, who plays a key role in orchestrating joint military operations within Iran's armed forces, revealed that the details of this retaliation are under active consideration. He assured that the response would indeed take place, reinforcing the Iranian leadership's commitment to avenging the assassination.

The assassination, which occurred late last month in the Iranian capital, resulted in the deaths of Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas's Political Bureau, and one of his bodyguards. Haniyeh was in Tehran to attend the inauguration ceremony of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian when the attack took place.

Following the incident, Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei vowed a "harsh response" against Israel, declaring that it was the Islamic Republic's obligation to avenge the death of the Palestinian resistance leader.

During his address, General Shadmani condemned the Israeli regime, labeling it as "bloodthirsty and homicidal" and accusing it of repeatedly violating human rights and crossing moral boundaries.

He referenced a series of aggressive acts committed by Israel against regional nations, including Iran, citing the assassination of at least seven Iranian nuclear scientists and the bombing of the Iranian Embassy's Consular Section in Damascus earlier this year, which resulted in the deaths of seven Iranian military advisors.

Highlighting the significance of the recent assassination, General Shadmani described the killing of Haniyeh as an atrocity surpassing previous acts of aggression by Israel.

The assassination of Haniyeh occurred in the early hours of Wednesday, July 31, when he was in Tehran to attend the inauguration of Iran's new president. He was killed by an aerial projectile while staying at a residence in northern Tehran.

The Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei warned of a "harsh response" to the recent

atrocities, and reaffirmed the Islamic Republic's duty to avenge the blood of the Resistance leader.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 10-8-2024

IRGC Navy bolsters arsenal with domestically-made cruise missiles

TEHRAN – The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has significantly expanded its military capabilities with the acquisition of new domestically-produced equipment, including advanced cruise missiles designed to evade current missile defense systems.

The delivery, which took place during a ceremony on Friday, was overseen by Major General Hossein Salami, the IRGC's chief commander.

In total, the IRGC Navy received 2,640 missile systems, drones, and other sophisticated equipment. A key highlight of the new additions is the inclusion of radar-evading cruise missiles equipped with highly explosive warheads.

These missiles are specifically designed to inflict devastating damage and have the capability to sink destroyers. The delivery also featured a variety of long-range and medium-range missiles, combat and reconnaissance drones, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) with electronic warfare (EW) capabilities, and state-of-the-art electronic warfare systems.

During the ceremony, only 210 out of the total 2,654 newly received systems were publicly displayed. The remaining equipment, including some of the navy's most advanced anti-surface and sub-surface weapons, was withheld from public view for security reasons, as reported by the Iranian Tasnim News Agency.

Major General Salami emphasized the importance of military strength and independence, stating, "In today's world, nations must choose between becoming strong and independent or giving in to external pressures; there is no middle ground." He stressed that nations must either strive for power and freedom, breaking away from the control of global powers, or accept compromise and submission.

Salami highlighted the strategic significance of naval forces, describing the sea as a crucial battlefield where global military powers converge. "Naval combat and defense represent a comprehensive level of warfare. The sea itself is a complete battlefield, and naval powers are typically self-sufficient in all aspects of combat," he explained. He further noted that naval battles are often decisive, where speed and precision are key to outmaneuvering and defeating opponents.

He also underscored the growing role of technology in modern naval operations, stating, "In naval operations, utilizing artificial intelligence across all levels—from

vessels to missiles, defenses, submarines, and mines—is a crucial aim."

In recent years, Iranian military experts and engineers have achieved significant advancements in the development of indigenous military equipment, leading to greater self-sufficiency for the armed forces. Iranian officials have consistently emphasized that the country's military capabilities, particularly its missile power, are intended solely for defensive purposes and are non-negotiable.

Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for continued efforts to maintain and enhance Iran's defense capabilities, reinforcing the nation's commitment to its military independence.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 7-8-2024

PLA continues Peace Unity-2024 exercises in Africa

Joint drills help African countries enhance counter-terrorism, counter-piracy capabilities: experts

By Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan

The Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Peace Unity-2024 joint exercises in Africa is progressing smoothly, with a Chinese warship kicking off a joint naval drill with Mozambique on Tuesday after two other Chinese vessels wrapped up their joint naval drill with Tanzania earlier on Monday.

The PLA Navy's Type 071 comprehensive landing ship *Qilianshan* is joining the Peace Unity-2024 joint exercises from Tuesday to Thursday, having arrived in waters off Mozambique on Friday, practicing training courses including maritime patrol, VBSS (visit, board, search and seizure), maritime rescue, as well as counter-terrorism and counter-piracy with Mozambique, the PLA Navy said in a press release on Monday.

On its way to Mozambique from Tanzania, the *Qilianshan* conducted joint search and rescue as well as counter-terrorism and counter-piracy training in preparation of the joint exercises, the PLA Navy confirmed.

The start of the joint naval exercise with Mozambique came after the conclusion of joint naval exercises with Tanzania, also under the banner of the Peace Unity-2024 joint exercises.

Vessels participating in the China-Tanzania joint exercise wrapped up their sea phase training courses and returned to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on Monday, according to a China Central Television (CCTV) report.

Against the background of safeguarding maritime transportation security in waters to the east of Tanzania,

the joint naval drill featured the PLA Navy's Type 071 comprehensive landing ship *Wuzhishan* and Type 052D guided missile destroyer *Hefei* as well as four patrol vessels from Tanzania, CCTV reported.

They practiced main gun shooting, joint search and rescue, counter-terrorism and counter-piracy, VBSS and joint patrol maneuvers, the report said.

The land phase of the Peace Unity-2024 joint exercises has begun to incorporate tactical training, as Chinese and Tanzanian forces have been practicing drills together at a comprehensive training center in Mapinga, according to a press release by the PLA Central Theater Command on Sunday.

With a focus on counter-terrorism and counter-piracy nature of the joint exercises, Zhang Junshe, a Chinese military expert, told the Global Times that the drills are of pragmatic significance in Africa where terrorist and pirate attacks occur frequently.

The joint drills will help African countries enhance their counter-terrorism and counter-piracy capabilities, which is conducive to peace and stability in the region, Zhang said.

Zhang also pointed out that this is the first time China had held joint exercises with African countries which included navy and army participation at the same time. This will also boost the PLA's own interoperability among different military services and branches as well as different theater commands, he said.

Another Chinese military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Tuesday that the Peace Unity-2024 features long-distance traveling, three participating countries, multiple services, branches and theater commands, realistic training courses and significant scale.

Such complexity reflects that the pragmatic military cooperation among China and African countries has reached a new level, the expert said.

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PLA Army drills cross-sea transport using ferry

By Liu Xuanzun

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Army recently practiced cross-sea transport of heavy equipment of a combined arms brigade using a 20,000 ton-class civilian ferry, a ship type experts said on

Wednesday could serve as an addition to the PLA Navy's existing amphibious landing ships.

In a move to explore a new method in civilian-military coordinated long-range transport and boost the troops' maritime transport capabilities, the PLA 80th Group Army recently conducted a joint exercise to transport a heavy combined arms brigade across the sea in waters between the Yellow Sea and Bohai Sea with a roll-on roll-off passenger vessel, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Tuesday.

With surface-to-air alert teams armed and man-portable air defense missile launchers, assault rifles on alert in four directions, main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, self-propelled howitzers and air defense missile vehicles embarked on the ferry through its bow, the CCTV report showed. Upon arriving at their destination, the alert teams disembarked first for alert duties before the heavy equipment landed on the dock via the ferry's stern.

The exercise was designed to streamline the transport of equipment of a heavy combined arms brigade, characterized by tracked and heavily armored vehicles, a Beijing-based military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Wednesday.

It demonstrated that the ferry can transport heavy and powerful equipment across the sea, and honed the troops' skills in embarking and disembarking the ship, the expert said.

While the PLA Navy has many dedicated landing ships to carry troops in cross-sea operations, they remain limited in number, and the addition of civilian ferries can further boost the PLA's cross-sea transport capabilities, the expert said.

The ferry involved in the exercise is the *Bohai Yuzhu*, according to the CCTV report. It has a length of more than 160 meters, width 25 meters and a displacement of more than 20,000 tons, capable of carrying more than 200 vehicles of different kinds, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

Overseas media including the UK's Telegraph speculated that the PLA could use an armada of ferries in a potential "reunification-by-force operation on the island of Taiwan."

The PLA has overwhelming advantages over the armed forces on the island of Taiwan, and the PLA has many tools in its arsenal, observers said.