

SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

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South Asia Trends is a monthly newsletter on South Asian affairs. The purpose of the newsletter is to provide a panoramic view of important events that shape and impact the politics of the subcontinent. The effort would be to inform our readers of the domestic, regional and international repercussions of the political debates and diplomatic engagements that take place in South Asia.



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रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

Editor's Note

The highlight in the month of March was adoption of the Resolution against Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The UNHRC has been adopting resolution against Sri Lanka for the last two years, but this time the resolution called for an international investigation into allegations of war crimes in the final phase of the Eelam War. India who voted for the resolution in 2012 and 2013, decided to abstain on the resolution. India's decision came as a pleasant surprise to Sri Lanka, as till the last moment India did not disclose its stance on the resolution. However, the USA, one of the sponsors of the resolution, expressed its disappointments with India's decision. An external investigative mechanism with an open ended mandate to monitor national processes is considered by India as an intrusive approach. Therefore, it decided to abstain from voting. It was known from the day the draft resolution was tabled that an international investigative mechanism would be introduced to investigate Sri Lankan war crime. India could have made it very clear at the beginning itself that it was not going to vote for an international investigation. But it decided to keep mum till the last moment. Probably it was to avoid any protest demonstration in the country ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. However, such decision perhaps made India open to criticism that it does not have a clear-cut policy on Sri Lanka. It also gave an impression that Mahinda Rajapaksa's decision to extend the mandate of the Presidential Commission to look into the cases of disappearances to cover the human rights violation cases against the Indian Peace Keeping Force influenced India's decision.

Afghanistan

Presidential and Provincial election¹

Presidential and provincial elections in Afghanistan held on April 5, 2014. Originally 11 candidates filed their nominations to contest the Presidential election, but three candidates namely Qayoum Karzai, General Abdul Rahim Wadak and Mohammad Nader Naeem withdrew their nominations from the Presidential election race. Both Qayoum Karzai and Mohammad Nader Naeem threw their support behind former foreign minister Zalmay Rassoul. President Karzai did not endorse any candidate publicly, but observers suggested that he might be at work behind the scenes to help Zalmei Rassoul.

The Taliban issued a statement warning Afghan citizens not to take part in the presidential and provincial council elections. The Taliban insurgents attacked Independent Election Commission (IEC)'s office, situated near Afghan National Army recruitment center twice in less than a week, leaving five dead including the attackers to disrupt the process.

The Taliban also claimed the responsibility of attack on the Serena Hotel. Journalist Sardar Ahmad, his wife and two children were among nine people killed in the assault. Denouncing the death of their colleague in the Serena Hotel attack, Afghan journalists boycotted Taliban's news coverage for a period of 15 days. At a meeting on March 21, the journalists decided to avoid broadcasting any information that could further Taliban's efforts to project their violent acts.

Foreign election observers belonged to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) were pulled out of Afghanistan following the Taliban attack on Kabul Serena Hotel.

Other than these attacks, twenty six cases of election violations were reported from various parts of the country since the beginning of the election campaigns, according to the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA). According to FEFA, the violations include misuse of government institutions and resources, the presence and participation of governors and ministers in the election campaigns and the installation of billboards and pictures on unapproved locations.

Bilateral Security Agreement and US's 'Zero Option'²

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers met with President Hamid Karzai to discuss a still unsigned Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) which will determine the scope of activity for American troops in Afghanistan after 2014. In comments to reporters in Kabul, Republican Senator and head of the delegation Kelly Ayotte said no U.S. soldiers would remain in Afghanistan without a signed agreement in place. Ayotte called on U.S. President Barack Obama to immediately announce the number of American troops he wanted to be stationed in Afghanistan after the NATO-led combat mission formally ends in December. Ayotte urged President Karzai to quickly sign the pact and end uncertainty stemming from his reluctance to do so.

NATO defence ministers and counterparts from International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partner nations also noted the signature of the BSA between Washington and Kabul was a prerequisite for concluding a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between NATO and Afghanistan. If the BSA was not signed, they could not conclude the SOFA agreement and without a necessary legal

framework, there simply could not be a deployment after 2014.

General Lloyd Austin, Commander of US Central Command, in his testimony before a Congressional hearing insisted the “zero option” would give terrorist organisations an opportunity to regroup in Afghanistan and the region. US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan James Dobbins also warned of widespread violence and rapid political disintegration in Afghanistan if the US and NATO opted to a full withdrawal.

In the mean time, NATO top commander in Kabul Gen Joseph Dunford said that the US military would need 102 days for orderly withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

US assistance to Afghanistan post 2014³

Seeking more than \$2.6 billion for the programme in Afghanistan in the budget proposals for 2015, the Obama administration said Washington eyed a long-term partnership with Kabul post-2014. The White House described in the document “responsible transition” from “military missions to political and security support for a unified Afghanistan government” as one of the administration’s main goals in 2015. In its budget note, the White House says that it wants the Afghan government to take “full responsibility for its own future” as the US withdraws. In the proposals, the White House says the funds for Afghanistan include resources to maintain a strong, long-term partnership by supporting military training and assistance. The Afghan programmes include economic development, health, education, governance, security, and other civilian assistance necessary to reinforce development progress and promote stability. The US will work collaboratively with Afghan forces to target Al-Qaeda and other entities that threaten the safety and security of the US and its allies. Proposing \$1.107 billion in civilian aid to Afghanistan, the State Department argued it was necessary for the continued security and economic transitions in the country. Another request of \$325 million for Afghanistan includes a full year of operations for the interdiction, justice, corrections, and various support programmes in Afghanistan. The State Department has proposed \$117.6 million to support a new Afghan government. It has also proposed \$473.0 million for Worldwide Security Protection for Afghanistan; an increase of \$88.8 million above the FY 2014 level. This increase includes costs for general support operation expenses, equipment for the Tactical Operations Center, physical and technical security equipment such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and regional security-related costs, the State Department said.

U.S. is looking into a new option for getting rid of \$7 billion worth of armoured vehicles and military equipments in Afghanistan⁴

The U.S. is looking into a new option for getting rid of \$7 billion worth of armoured vehicles and military equipments in Afghanistan. According to the U.S. Army, 20 percent of its overall military equipments are in Afghanistan, totalling to \$7 billion. Although talks in this regard have not been finalised, Pakistani military has shown interest in mine detection equipment and armoured vehicles, claiming to use them against the Taliban. However, a statement issued by the US-led ISAF in Afghanistan said, “United States Forces-Afghanistan does not provide or intend to provide any such equipment, including MRAPs (mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles),

from Afghanistan to Pakistan.” The Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) had also shown interest to receive the equipment. Nonetheless, the U.S. army believes that Afghan security forces are unable to use these modern equipments and that in order to prevent access of terrorists to these equipments, the only options were to either take them away from Afghanistan or to destroy them.

Telephonic conversation between Karzai and Kerry⁵

President Hamid Karzai had a telephonic conversation with US Secretary of State John Kerry on issues of common interest on March 29, 2014. On March 21, Karzai had told the secretary of state that the Taliban were willing for negotiations with the High Peace Council, but some barriers existed. For the peace process to make progress, Pakistan’s cooperation was necessary, he had said. Kerry held out the assurance that he had spoken to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the need for Pakistan’s role in pushing forward the Afghan-led reconciliation campaign.

Quadruple summit among Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan⁶

At a quadruple summit in Kabul on March 24, 2014, leaders from four regional countries reaffirmed their commitment to constructive relations based on principles of non-interference, mutual respect and shared interests. The commitment was held out by President Hamid Karzai, his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani, Pakistan leader Mamnoon Hussain and Emomali Rahmonov of Tajikistan. Coming together in Kabul for the Nawroz festival, they expressed their support for collective and comprehensive deliberations on current and emerging regional and global issues, according to a joint statement. The four presidents highlighted the importance of infrastructure projects such as roads and railways for strengthening regional connectivity. They particularly stressed the importance of the 17 regional investment and policy priority projects proposed at the fifth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan in Dushanbe in March 2012, calling for enhanced engagement among regional countries to that end.

Kazakhstan expressed its desire to build railways in Afghanistan⁷

Second Vice President Mohammad Karim Khalili in a meeting with Kazakhstan’s ambassador to Afghanistan Omairitai Baitimov called for enhancing bilateral relations between the two countries. In his address the Kazakhstan ambassador expressed his country’s readiness for inking bilateral agreement to formation of regional center in Central Asia to deal with emergency situation and reducing natural disasters. The ambassador also stated the Kazakhstan favours building railway to connect Afghanistan with the rest of central Asian states.

China to work with Afghanistan to fight terrorism⁸

Liu Jieyi, China’s permanent representative to the United Nations (UN), made the call at a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. According to Liu, China will host the Foreign Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan in August, thereby further strengthening efforts to promote cooperation among the countries of the region and peace, stability and development in Afghanistan and in the region. China has been stepping up its engagement with other regional players in recent months in Afghanistan, according to a Beijing-

based diplomat, mainly out of concern that the NATO-led force's pullout may spawn instability that could spill into Xinjiang. Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi also said at a press briefing during an annual session of China's parliament that it would work with Afghanistan to fight terrorism.

Karzai in an exclusive interview with Xinhua, said ties between China and Afghanistan had significance to both countries in the areas of war against terrorism, stability in the region, and economic cooperation. President Karzai warmly welcomed Chinese President Xi Jinping's proposal of building Silk Road economic belt to facilitate trade and investment in the region.

President Karzai was criticised for his stance on the union of Crimea with Russia⁹

President Hamid Karzai's stance on the adhesion of Crimea with Russia not only followed major criticism from the US, but also Afghan officials and political analysts. Considering the current situation of Afghanistan, President Karzai's involvement in the crisis between Moscow and Kiev will not be helpful. Members of Wolesi Jirga asked President Karzai to avoid engaging in political affairs of other countries because of the ongoing sensitive political scenario of Afghanistan. The pentagon said that Karzai has the right to express his views on the issue; however his support for the union of Crimea with Russia did not benefit anything.

Younus Qanuni nominated as first Vice President¹⁰

Marshal Qasim Fahim, one of the two vice-presidents of Afghanistan, died on March 9, 2014 of cardiac arrest. Members of Parliament (MPs) approved on March 25, Younus Qanuni, a former House Speaker, as first vice president to fill the vacancy created by the sudden death of Marshal Fahim. Mr. Qanuni was nominated for the post by President Karzai after a meeting with Jihadi leaders and Fahim's family members at the Presidential Palace.

Violence against Women in Afghanistan¹¹

The Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) has said that throughout the current year, 680 cases of violence against women have been registered, up to 500 of which have been referred to the legal and judicial organs. According to reports published by United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), UN Women, and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in December 2013 the actual number of violent crimes against women is far higher than the number of officially reported cases. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), The European Union (EU) expressed major concerns about the growing violence against women and called on the Afghan government to undertake necessary measures to curb domestic violence against women. The Japanese government has signed a contract worth \$2.2 million with the UNFPA to combat violence against women in Afghan villages. The UNFPA has also launched capacity-building programs for Afghan policewomen in at least eight provinces of the country.

Responding to fears that a reconciliation deal with the Taliban could possibly mean concessions on some of the progress in women's rights that has been made over the past decade, National Security Advisor Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta indicated

Bangladesh

that changes to the Constitution would be an unacceptable precondition to talks. Head of the High Peace Council (HPC), Salahuddin Rabbani, has echoed Dr. Spanta's comments and said that women's rights will never be sacrificed for peace with insurgents.

Upazila election¹²

Third and fourth phase of upazila election took place amidst violence, stuffing of ballot boxes, capture of polling stations, and suspension and boycott of polls. The ruling Awami League (AL) has fought back in the third phase of upazila election, outshining its archrival Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). In the third phase, out of 81, the AL-backed candidates won 37 chairman posts and the BNP favourites 27. The BNP's polls boycott in eight upazilas apparently came as blessings for the AL as its aspirants bagged all the posts there. The BNP's key ally Jamaat-e-Islami secured seven chairman posts. Even Liberal Democratic Party won in one upazila and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) in two, but the Jatiya Party, the main opposition party in parliament, got none. Elections to 91 upazilas in 43 districts took place in the fourth phase on March 23. Seventy-three upazila parishads went to polls on March 31.

Khaleda to launch movement against government after the Upazila election¹³

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia said a fresh movement would be built up soon after the conclusion of the upazila parishad polls to 'dislodge' the 'illegal' government for holding a new general election under a non-party administration. Addressing a public meeting at Khushi railway maidan in Rajbari town, Khaleda said the movement would be launched if the 'illegal' Awami League government did not quit voluntarily. In her first public meeting outside Dhaka after the January 5 general elections, boycotted by BNP and its allies, Khaleda said the incumbent AL government had not been elected by people's vote. She said this government could not be removed without a movement and hoped that this time the movement would be 'successful'. She said BNP was now busy for some time to put the organization into order. Khaleda asked the government to immediately hand over power to a 'non-party government' for holding a free and fair election.

Manmohan Singh met Sheikh Hasina¹⁴

On the sidelines of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit, Manmohan Singh met Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina. During the meeting, Sheikh Hasina urged Manmohan Singh to ink the pact on Teesta water soonest because it was "good for the long run". Prime Minister Singh reportedly conveyed to her that a pact on the Teesta water sharing was an intricate issue but one which India was in favour of signing.

India offers \$1 billion loans to Bangladesh¹⁵

India offered \$1 billion loans, which Bangladesh can use if it wishes to, for developing infrastructure and solar power and boosting trade with the neighbour. India is also ready to export 500MW of electricity to Bangladesh. The twin offers are in addition to the \$1 billion line of credit and 500MW electricity that Bangladesh

is already receiving from India as part of previous pledges, said Arvind Mehta, joint secretary of foreign trade (South Asia) of India's commerce department. Mehta spoke to reporters after concluding a two-day joint-secretary level meeting at the commerce ministry in Dhaka. If Bangladesh agrees to take the loan, the interest will be LIBOR (London Interbank Offered Rate) plus 2.5 percent with repayment tenure of 3-5 years, according to Mehta. However, an official from the Bangladesh side said the loans would be available if Indian companies win work orders to implement the projects in Bangladesh.

Australia-based Santos, KrisEnergy of Singapore and BAPEX to jointly explore oil and gas¹⁶

Bangladesh government awarded a shallow sea block in the Bay of Bengal to Australia-based Santos, KrisEnergy of Singapore and Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Ltd (Bapex) to explore oil and gas. In the joint venture, the trio will invest \$15 million in the first five years of the eight-year contract period, according to a document released at the production sharing contract (PSC) signing ceremony at Petrobangla office in Dhaka on March 12, 2014. As per the contract, the companies will get 55 percent of the explored resources until they recover their investment and the rest will be shared by the trio as profits and state-run oil company Petrobangla.

Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi met NSA Shiv Shankar Menon¹⁷

Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi was understood to have had a luncheon meeting with Indian National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon in New Delhi on March 12, 2014. The two officials were believed to have discussed security-related issues but there was no official word from either side on the meeting or what transpired there.

Exports increased 6.36 percent in February¹⁸

According to the Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh, its exports accelerated 6.36 percent year-on-year to \$2.38 billion in February. The country fetched \$19.82 billion in July-February, a 13.96 percent rise from the same time last year. However, a month-on-month comparison shows exports in February dropped 13.23 percent from January. Exports were 3.76 percent lower than the \$2.48 billion target.

Trade gap between India and Bangladesh increased¹⁹

Reportedly, Bangladesh's trade gap with India swelled to US\$ 2.59 billion in the first half of the current fiscal year. Bangladesh's exports to India slumped to US\$ 182.48 million in July-December of the current fiscal year 2013-14 whereas imports soared to US\$ 2.78 billion during the period. Trade gap with India in July-December in 2012-13 was US\$ 2.05 billion with an export figure of US\$ 267.26 million and import of US\$ 2.31 billion. Officials and economists blamed non-tariff barriers due to protectionist attitude by India for the rising trade gap amid slumping exports from Bangladesh. They said with the current trend, the annual trade gap, which came down to US\$ 4.17 billion in FY 2012-13 from US\$ 4.24 billion in FY 2011-12, would cross a record US\$ 5 billion this fiscal year.

Bangladesh seeks duty-free access for 17 additional products to China²⁰

Bangladesh has sought duty-free access for 17 additional products to China, to reduce trade imbalance between the two countries, which is heavily tilted in favour of China. The trade imbalance between China and Bangladesh is worth \$5.87 billion in fiscal 2012-13. Bangladesh imported \$6.32 billion of goods from China in 2012-13 and exported goods worth \$458.12 million in the same time, according to commerce ministry data. The proposed products include polymers, gloves, silk and silk waste, wiping cloth, leather footwear outer soles, lead-acid batteries and synthetic fibre. Currently, Bangladesh enjoys duty benefits for 4,788 products to China under the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) arrangement. Officially, China is the largest import destination for Bangladesh.

FDI Increased²¹

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Bangladesh increased by 44.83 percent to \$1.73 billion in the financial year 2012-13, according to the latest Bangladesh Bank (BB) data. In 2013, the highest investment of \$337.97 million came from Malaysia, \$159.49 million from United Kingdom, \$138.14 million from Egypt and \$124.94 million from South Korea.

Bangladesh is polio free²²

Bangladesh has been declared polio-free by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Governor of Yunnan province made three days official visit to Bangladesh²³

Governor of Yunnan province Li Jiheng made a three day visit to Bangladesh. The visiting Governor urged Bangladesh to use his province as a springboard to expand trade and business between Bangladesh and China. Jiheng handed over an invitation letter of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to Hasina to attend the second China-South Asia Exposition scheduled to be held in Kunming on June 5-6. Jiheng also met with the ministers of commerce and communications and Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs.

BSF shot two Bangladeshi cattle traders²⁴

Two Bangladeshi cattle traders were reportedly shot by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Beurjhari border in Baliadangi upazila of the district on March 30, 2014.

Bhutan

India to assist hydro power projects in Bhutan²⁵

At the 12th Empowered Joint Group (EJG) meeting held on March 12, 2014 in the Thimpu, India gave the green signal for the construction of four hydropower projects, namely, the 600MW Kholongchhu, the 570MW Wangchhu, the 770 MW Chamkharchhu and the 180MW Bunakha. All of these projects will be undertaken as joint venture projects between public sector companies of India and Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC) with 50 percent equity shareholding each. These will give Bhutan government's target to harness 10,000 MW of hydropower by 2020. However, the financing would be done on a 70 percent loan and 30 percent equity basis. In addition, India will provide an added Nu 17B for the 1,200MW

Punatshangchhu I hydropower project. This decision was shared with the government on the side lines of the 3rd BIMSTEC summit in Myanmar.

JICA assistance to Bhutan²⁶

For an efficient and reliable road network in the country, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will assist Bhutan in carrying out critical slope investigation on three road sites. Representatives from JICA and the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) signed an agreement for the technical cooperation project scheme, "master plan study on road slope management in Bhutan" in Thimphu on March 10, 2014. JICA will provide technical assistance worth US\$ 2 million until 2016.

India to release Rs 1.8 billion for construction of 59 SDPs in Bhutan²⁷

The Government of India agreed to release Rs 1.8 billion for construction of 59 small development projects (SDP) under the 11th Plan. The agreement was reached following a meeting held in the first week of March in Thimphu between Bhutanese foreign ministry officials with those of the Indian embassy. In total, the government of India has committed Rs 8.5 billion for SDPs identified under the 11th Plan. A news release from the foreign ministry states the local government will implement 39 projects while the central agencies will implement 20.

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay led Bhutanese delegation in the BIMSTEC²⁸

Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay has led the Bhutanese delegation to Myanmar for the third BIMSTEC Summit. On the sidelines of the third BIMSTEC Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay met the Thai Special Envoy and later held discussions with the Prime Minister of Nepal Sushil Koirala.

Officer-in-Charge and Advisor, UNDP Global Parliamentary Development team visited Bhutan²⁹

Mr. Charles Chauvel, Officer-in-Charge and Advisor, UNDP Global Parliamentary Development Team, was in Bhutan from March 4–7, 2014 to find out possible areas of UNDP support to the Parliament of Bhutan. He had discussions with the Secretary Generals of the two Houses and also called on the Speaker of the National Assembly and Deputy Chairperson of the National Council.

Parliamentary delegation visited Japan³⁰

A five-member parliamentary delegation led by the Chairperson of the National Council of Bhutan made a ten day official visit to Japan at the invitation of the government and Parliament of Japan.

Bhutan declared polio free³¹

The country received the polio-free certification from the WHO on March 27, 2014. It has been almost three decades since Bhutan recorded the last clinically compatible polio case. Bhutan polio immunisation coverage stands at 99 percent.

Maldives

Parliamentary election³²

After recounting the votes in four ballot boxes, Elections Commission have on March 28 night announced the final results of the parliamentary election held on 22 March 2014. According to the Elections commission the final results remained consistent with the preliminary results. Majority of seats, 53 of 85, were secured by the ruling coalition parties. Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) secured 33 seats, Jumhoory Party (JP) 15 seats, and the Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) gained 5 seats. Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) won 26 seats in the new parliament. The remaining five seats were secured by independent candidates. The total of 189,642 ballots was cast for the 18 parliamentary election; 95,744 men and 93,898 women. The election saw a turn-out of 78.08 percent of eligible voters. A total of 1.12 percent votes were disregarded as invalid votes. Elections Complaints bureau received 75 complaints, of which 52 were accepted and addressed. The complaints include issues of election bribery, influence through intimidation and complaints regarding voters turned away due to registration issues. Several foreign observers including an Election Observation Mission from the European Union (EU EOM) observed the parliamentary election.

Dismissal of President and Vice President of Election Commission³³

At a contempt hearing against the Elections Commission on March 9, Maldives Supreme Court sentenced to disqualify the commission's president Fuad Thaufeeg and his deputy Ahmed Fayaz as members of commission, for disparaging court procedures. The court also sentenced Fuad Thaufeeg to six months in prison, but ordered to delay implementation of this sentence for three years. The written verdict sent by Supreme Court to media states that Elections Commission members disobeyed its order not to dissolve political parties with less than 3,000 members. It states that Elections Commission members also challenged the court's verdict and order to ensure a peaceful environment before holding an election as required by Article 170 of the Constitution, spoke publicly and defiantly on this issue via media, obstructed justice, and defamed the court; and that President of Elections Commission Fuad Thaufeeg challenged and disparaged the court's procedures and jurisdiction while speaking in court.

The Parliament in a letter sent to the President, Chief Justice, and Attorney General stated that the removal of Elections Commission President and Vice President was conducted in violation of the procedures prescribed in the Constitution and the Elections Commission Act. According to the Constitution and Elections Commission Act, appointment and dismissal of members to the Elections Commission must be conducted by the parliament.

Maldives Supreme Court's decision to dismiss the president and vice president of the Elections Commission was observed with concern by the US, the EU, India and the UN. Chief Justice Ahmed Faiz Hussain said in a statement that foreign states and organisations do not have the right to claim that the Supreme Court verdict undermined the independence of the Elections Commission. Faiz acknowledged that the constitutional and political systems of the country were in need of reform, and said that challenging the courts and their verdicts in the guise of efforts to reform the judiciary, however, threatens the constitution.

Ismail Habeeb Abdul Raheem appointed as the Election Commission³⁴

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has appointed Ismail Habeeb Abdul Raheem to the Elections Commission. Parliament approved Habeeb to the commission with a majority of 60 votes and none against at a sitting on March 12.

Maldives in the UNHRC³⁵

The Maldives actively took part at the 25th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which concluded in Geneva on March 28. The Maldives was re-elected for a second consecutive term to the Council this January. During this Session, the Maldives advocated for the rights of children, women and the disabled as well as environmental rights. The Maldives also raised its voice on the human rights situations in Syria, Palestine, Democratic Republic of Korea and Central African Republic. The Maldives co-sponsored 23 of the 42 resolutions at the session. Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon attended the High Level Segment of the Session on March 3, 2014 and addressed the Council. In her statement, Minister Dunya assured the Council of the continued commitment of the Government of President Yameen Abdul Gayoom to uphold universal human rights norms and values. She briefed the Council on the efforts to ensure political rights to the Maldivian citizens and noted the commitment of the Government to promote Islam as a religion of peace and compassion whilst combating terrorism. The Maldives delegation to the regular session of the Human Rights Council was led by Ms. Iruthisham Adam, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations Offices in Geneva. First Secretary of the Maldivian Mission in Geneva Ms. Rishfa Rasheed was also part of the Maldives delegation.

Trilateral meeting on maritime security³⁶

Maldives, India and Sri Lanka have agreed to communicate on illegal maritime activities and hold trainings and capacity building, during the third National Security Advisor-level Trilateral Meeting on Maritime Security Cooperation between the three countries held on March 6-7, 2014. Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) revealed that during Defence Minister Nazim's meeting with Indian Defence Minister A. K. Antony, the Indian Minister had assured to provide the necessary future military support to the Maldives.

\$1 million donation from Saudi Government³⁷

Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who came to Maldives on an official visit, pledged to give \$1 million and build 10 mosques in the Maldives. The \$1 million was being donated by the Saudi Arabian government and the 10 mosques will be constructed under the Prince's personal contributions. In a joint statement issued on the occasion of the visit of the Crown Prince, both the countries agreed on security cooperation in the fields of combating sea piracy, drug trading and money laundering..

Nepal

Imports and exports fell by 24 percent in February 2014³⁸

Maldives Customs Service has said that both imports and exports fell by identical proportion - 24 percent - during February 2014 compared with February 2013. Customs said that imports in February 2014 amounted to MVR 1.95 billion, while it was MVR 2.57 billion in February 2013. Similarly, export in February 2014 was recorded at MVR 149.70 million, while the figure was MVR 196.40 million in the corresponding period last year. The authority also said that total imports thus far this year amounts to MVR 4.60 billion, of which roughly one-third came from United Arab Emirates. Second and third most imports came from Singapore and Thailand respectively.³⁹ Total exports thus far this year is MVR 452 million, and most exports went to Thailand, South Korea and France, said Maldives Customs Service.

Nepal takes over the chair of the BIMSTEC⁴⁰

Nepal formally took over the chair of the BIMSTEC. President of Myanmar U Thein Sein handed over the BIMSTEC flag to Prime Minister Sushil Koirala on the completion of the third summit in Naypyidaw, the Capital of Myanmar.

Prime Minister visited Thailand⁴¹

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala went to Thailand on his way to Myanmar to attend the third summit of the BIMSTEC.

Prime minister met Sri Lankan President in Myanmar⁴²

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala called on President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit. During a meeting that took place at the Myanmar International Convention Center, matters relating to Nepal-Sri Lanka relations and mutual interests were discussed, according to Minister for Foreign Affairs Mahendra Bahadur Pandey who was in the PM's delegation for Myanmar.

Indian army chief visited Kathmandu⁴³

The Indian army chief General Bikram Singh went to Kathmandu on March 13 on the invitation of Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) General Gaurav SJB Rana on a two-day official visit. The CoAS General Rana and Indian Army Chief General Singh observed the Indo-Nepal Joint Group Training "Exercise Surya Kiran-VI" at the Integrated Army Training Centre (IATC) in Saljhandi, Rupandehi, Nepal on March 14, 2014. During his visit, General Singh paid a courtesy call on President Ram Baran Yadav and Prime Minister Sushil Koirala.

India -Nepal Review meeting on Integrated Check Posts⁴⁴

Nepal and India have agreed to speed up work on the planned Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) in Birgunj, Biratnagar, Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj. India has been building the ICPs at all the four places on both sides of the border. Nepal has to make available the land to build the ICPs and India will build them on the Nepal side as per the agreement reached between the two countries in 2009. Amid slow progress so far in the construction of the projects, the two sides met in New Delhi

on March 12 to review the progress and speed up construction work on both sides. The Nepali team was led by the secretary at the Ministry of Urban Development and the Indian side was headed by the secretary looking after border management. The Indian government has earmarked a total of Rs 1.20 billion for the Biratnagar-Jogbani customs. Similarly, an estimated Rs 340 million each has been allocated for the Birgunj-Raxaul customs and the Bhairahawa-Sunauli customs, while Rs 290 million has been set aside for the Nepal gunj-Rupaidiya customs. India is reported to be constructing a total of 13 ICPs with its neighbouring countries including Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan to facilitate bilateral trade.

Inspector General of Nepal Police came to New Delhi⁴⁵

Inspector General of Nepal Police Upendra Kanta Aryal came to New Delhi on March 2 on a six-day official visit. Since former IGP Moti Lal Bohara's visit some 20 years ago, no IGP had officially been invited to India.

UCPN (Maoist) and the CPN-Maoist warned to launch joint movement against govt.⁴⁶

In their first meeting since the party split on June 19, 2012, the UCPN (Maoist) and the CPN-Maoist warned to launch a joint movement against government's bid to hold local body election, and "attempt to revive war-era cases." A joint statement signed by UCPN (M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and CPN-M Chairman Mohan Baidya stated that the government is arresting their leaders and cadres in connection with war-era cases. Reiterating their often-articulated position, both the parties said all war-era cases should be dealt through Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and that it was against the spirit of Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) to deal such cases in piecemeal and through regular court proceedings. On the local polls, the two parties presented a similar position that such elections should be held only after the "progressive restructuring of the country" through a promulgation of new constitution. However, on the issue of constitution drafting, the UCPN (Maoist) is of the view that new constitution should be drafted through the Constituent Assembly (CA), while the CPN-M is demanding a round-table for the same purpose. Leaders from both camps have said that the joint statement is a beginning of the working alliance between the two parties despite their differences on ideology.

Meanwhile, UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has faced strong opposition from his deputy Baburam Bhattarai over the possible unification with the breakaway CPN-Maoist. Bhattarai, who is floating the idea of a new "political force" in recent times, said that only the unification of the parties could not ensure a powerful party until there were ideological differences. Reportedly, the relation between Dahal and Bhattarai has soured after the party's humiliating loss in the November 19 CA election. Bhattarai has been putting pressure on Dahal to reform the party and formulate a new ideology to consolidate its position in the national politics. In the meeting on March 9, Dahal told Bhattarai that along with holding the national convention to revamp the party structure, they should continue a unification bid with the CPN-Maoist, sources said. Dahal tried to convince Bhattarai, saying that a new ideology could be developed through unification with the CPN-Maoist party as the ideology taken by both the parties have become

obsolete. Dahal is of the view that his party committed a mistake abandoning its working class character and “soft policy” on the issue of “national sovereignty.” Bhattarai, on the other hand, maintains that along with the working class, the party should devise a policy to adjust the middle-class in its new ideology. On “national sovereignty”, Bhattarai holds that differences with India should be resolved through political and diplomatic channels. But Dahal wants such policy to be dropped, suggesting that the party should mobilise its cadres to preserve “national sovereignty.” “The two leaders have agreed to initiate a debate inside and outside the party about issue raised by Bhattarai regarding the formation of a new political force,” said Biswodeep Pandey, a Bhattarai aide. According to leaders close to him, Bhattarai is preparing to form a socialist party if Dahal continues to turn deaf ear to his demands.

CPN-Maoist has unveiled a special committee⁴⁷

The CPN-M has unveiled a special committee that shares striking similarities with the party’s “war-era administration in structure and purpose”. CPN-M leaders said the committee formed under Secretary Dev Gurung hoped to act as a “parallel government” at the local level by forming “effective” committees in each village. Leaders said the committee was formed as per the mandate of the party’s recent central committee meeting. CPN-M Chairman Mohan Baidya has said the 133-member committee will carry out a struggle for constitution writing, nationalism and livelihood. The party has forwarded a 40-point demand to the government, warning it to address them or face consequences.

Nepal opens honorary consulate offices in Portugal⁴⁸

The government has opened honorary Consulate Offices in two cities of Portugal including its capital Lisbon. The government appointed Makar Bahadur Hamal and Maria Tereja as the honorary Consulate General of Lisbon and Porto respectively.

ADB assistance for Bagmati river basin improvement project⁴⁹

The government has signed a financial agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to launch Bagmati River Basin Improvement Project. The ADB has pledged to provide an assistance of US\$ 30 million, of which US\$ 25.5 million will be issued as loan and US\$ 4.5 million as grant.

Constituent Assembly⁵⁰

A meeting of the Constituent Assembly (CA) on March 21 passed the CA Regulations and the Legislature-Parliament Operation Procedures Regulations. With the endorsement of the CA Regulations draft, a basis has been created for drafting a new constitution. Addressing the meeting after the endorsement of the drafts, CA Chairman Nembang said a strong ground for drafting a new constitution and making the CA and Parliament business systematic and transparent had been created. In the next meeting of the CA on March 28 it took the ownership of the proceedings of the previous CA.

NC and the CPN-UML reached an agreement on the authentication of bill related to the new constitution⁵¹

A cross-party committee formed to prepare CA rules settled all outstanding disputed contents, including row over the authentication of bill related to new constitution.

The CA chairman will attest the bill and the President will put his signature, according to the bilateral deal. The President will promulgate a new constitution at a special function and the head of state's signature will appear in the annex section of the new constitution. The signature of all 601 lawmakers will be mandatory along with CA chairman's attestation and President's final signature. Earlier, the National Congress (NC) had held the view that the President should authenticate the bill, while the UML were for giving that authority to the CA chairman.

Nepali Congress, CPN (UML) and UCPN (Maoist) agree on five issues⁵²

Top brass leaders of major three parties —NC, CPN (UML) and UCPN-M agreed on five fundamental issues including forming a high-level political committee. The meeting held at the Prime Minister's residence agreed after three days of discussions to constitute a high-level political committee comprising top leaders of the three major parties to conclude the remaining works of the peace process and to assist the CA. UCPN-M leader Post Bahadur Bogati said the meeting also decided to form a committee in the Legislature-Parliament to address the question raised by the UCPN-M regarding irregularities in the last CA election. It has also been decided to pass a political resolution in the CA to own up the tasks carried out by the erstwhile Constituent Assembly. The meeting also decided to constitute a parliamentary committee to conduct study on the recent hike in prices of petroleum products and essential commodities. A day after the three major parties—NC, CPN-UML and UCPN-M —decided to revive the HLPC to facilitate the constitution drafting process, the Maoists side said that it should be allowed to chair the cross-party mechanism. The NC and the UML, however, have not reached any decision on the matter, according to NC Vice President Ram Chandra Poudel. The three major political parties have also agreed to divide the seats for appointing 26 lawmakers in the Constituent Assembly according to their strength in the CA. According to the constitutional provision, after the appointments, the CA will comprise of 601 members with 240 directly elected, 335 picked under Proportional Representation and 26 nominated by the Cabinet. Party leaders said that NC will be allotted nine seats, UML seven, Maoist five and the other five to be selected as common lawmakers.

Madhes politics⁵³

Three Madhes-centric parties Sadbhawana Party (SP), Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Nepal (MJF-N) effortful for unification have approved the guiding principle and objectives for a new party, which calls for establishment of autonomous Madhes-Pradesh and make efforts to end "internal colonialism" of the Tarai region. Meanwhile, some of the senior leaders within the MJF-N are said to be in favour of unity with Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar-led Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Loktantrik, instead of SP and TMLP.

US Commanding General of US Army Pacific visited Nepal⁵⁴

The US Commanding General of US Army Pacific (USARPAC), Gen Vincent K Brooks, paid a courtesy call on Chief of the Army Staff General Gaurav SJB Rana at the latter's office on March 21 and discussed issues related to military cooperation between the two countries.

EU assistance to Nepal⁵⁵

During a meeting with Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat in Brussels on the sidelines of the Asia Programming Consultation Seminar, European Investment Bank (EIB) Director Francisco De Paula Coelho assured US\$120 million for commissioning the Kali Gandaki corridor (220/400 kV double circuit) and Marsyangdi corridor (220kV double circuit). The total estimated cost for these two projects is US\$360 million. According to Energy Secretary Bishow Prakash Pandit, the remaining fund will be injected by the ADB and the Norwegian government. The European Commission has decided to triple its aid to Nepal, according to a communication received by the Post from the EU headquarters. During its bilateral cooperation for 2014-2020, the EU plans to provide 360 million euros to Nepal, said EU's formal communication from the Office of Spokesperson for Development Alexandre Polack. The EC's development cooperation with Nepal for 2014-2020 will be aligned with the objective of Nepal government's next three-year development plan, approved in July 2013, it added.

Nepal in the UNHRC⁵⁶

The UN Human Rights Council questioned Nepal's compliance with recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in a regular session in Geneva. Earlier, UN Human Rights Committee experts during its 110th session had expressed concerns over continued impunity for serious human rights violations, including war crimes, torture and enforced disappearance and the lack of accountability and reparation for victims.

Nepal comes under South Korea's priority under ODA⁵⁷

A joint-secretary level meeting of a committee comprising of the officials of Nepal and South Korea took place at the Ministry of External Affairs in Seoul on March 21 after a gap of nine years. The committee was founded in 2001 and its maiden meeting had taken place in Kathmandu in 2005. The meeting reviewed several aspects of the bilateral ties between Nepal and South Korea, and also discussed on the mutual benefits of both the countries regarding trade, finance, regional and international relations. Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambika Luitel, informed that Nepal was under South Korea's priority from this year for the Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Nepal is polio-free⁵⁸

Nepal has been declared polio -free by the WHO for maintaining polio -free status for the last three years. Three years ago, on August 30, a 22-month baby girl from Rautahat was the last case to be diagnosed with polio.

Pakistan

Assam's NRL signed an agreement with Nepal's BPPL⁵⁹

Assam's Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) signed an agreement with Nepal's Birat Petroleum Private Limited (BPPL) for selling motor spirit and high speed diesel. NRL officials said the company is expected to sell around 100 kl of motor spirit and 5,000 kl of high speed diesel per month to BPPL.

Nepali nurses cannot register with any State Nursing Council in India without work permit⁶⁰

Hundreds of Nepali students pursuing nursing education in India will be deprived of registration as the Indian Nursing Council (INC) recently announced that students from Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh cannot be registered with any State Nursing Council in India as nurses without work permit.

Ahrar-ul Hind claims responsibility for terrorist attacks in KP and Balochistan⁶¹

At least 19 people were killed and more than 80 others injured in two separate incidents of terrorism in the capitals of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces on March 14. An increasingly active Taliban splinter group called "Ahrarul Hind" or "Liberators of India" – a name referring to the whole of the subcontinent – claimed responsibility for the attacks. The leadership of the Pakistani Taliban immediately condemned and distanced itself from the attacks.

Peace talks with the TTP⁶²

A four-member government committee comprising three civil servants and a former diplomat held their first meeting with members of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) political council in North Waziristan tribal district on March 26, 2014. Maulana Tahir Ashrafi, chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council, claimed that during the meeting, the TTP had suggested to the government to set up a judicial commission to ascertain facts about detention of what it called non-combatants. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan has convened the second meeting of the committees representing the government and the TTP at Islamabad on March 29, 2014. The two parties agreed to carry forward the peace process. Talking to reporters after the meeting, the head of the TTP committee, Maulana Samiul Haq, confirmed that the ceasefire would continue beyond March 31, the date set by them. But he did not say whether the ceasefire was still "temporary" or "permanent". He said the interior minister had sought three days to specify the 'practical steps' to be taken by the government. According to sources, the allusion was to release of non-combatants belonging to the TTP. The sources said the minister was likely to convene another meeting of the two committees in a few days and present views of the government and other stakeholders. Then the Taliban committee would meet the TTP shura and the venue and time for another round of direct talks would be decided. The sources said the release of hundreds of prisoners, including some high-profile people, and setting up of a "peace zone" to allow free movement of the Taliban were the main demands of the TTP. They said the government was unlikely to accept the demand for establishment of a peace zone because it would mean allowing creation of a state within state. But they

said commencement of the process of releasing prisoners from both sides could move things fast. He said during the next round, the government committee would hand the TTP a list of about 150 people, including sons of former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and slain governor of Punjab Salman Taseer, as well as Ajmal Khan, a former vice chancellor of a university in Peshawar, for their release from the Taliban's custody.

Meeting between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and PTI chief Imran Khan⁶³

After months of disagreement, in a meeting on March 12, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif took the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan into confidence on national security issues including peace talks with Pakistani Taliban militants. According to sources, the formation of a new committee of government negotiators and a strategy in case of failure of peace talks was discussed at the key meeting which lasted almost two hours. According to sources, the leadership of the two parties agreed on members for a new committee to represent the government in the dialogue process with the TTP. Reportedly, Imran Khan appealed that the government committee should hold talks with the Taliban regarding the polio issue. Polio persists in Pakistan with militant groups seeing vaccination campaigns as a cover for espionage. Speaking to media representatives after the meeting at his Islamabad residence, Khan said that the government was moving in the right direction with regards to negotiations with the TTP.

PTI decides to unblock the Peshawar-Torkham highway for NATO supplies into Afghanistan⁶⁴

After a three-month stalemate, the Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf, the ruling party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, decided to unblock the Peshawar-Torkham highway for NATO supplies into Afghanistan. The NATO supply line was blocked in November when the PTI zealots launched a series of sit-ins against a US drone strike that killed several key Taliban commanders in Hangu district. The decision to reopen the road comes in the light of the Peshawar High Court orders, which had termed the blockade as illegal.

Controversy over \$ 1.5 billion donation to Pakistan⁶⁵

Foreign news agency Reuters had reported that Saudi Arabia "loaned" \$1.5 billion to Pakistan in February to help Islamabad shore up its foreign exchange reserves, meet debt-service obligations and undertake large energy and infrastructure projects. Without taking any names, Federal Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar said the donation of 1.5 billion dollars by 'friendly countries' was a "gift for the people of Pakistan." Chairing a meeting of Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) he said these friendly countries had full confidence in Pakistan and the government of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and donated \$1.5 billion unconditionally in Pakistan Development Fund (PDF). Clarifying the 'rumours' regarding the status of the donation, the minister said it was neither loan nor given in return for any services. The amount should be accepted with thanks and not be made controversial, he added. The opposition however, moved an adjournment motion in the Senate according to which the government had received \$1.5 billion from a Muslim country to stabilise rupee against US dollar at

the cost of the country's foreign policy on Syria. PPP Senator Farhatullah Babar said alarm bells were initially rung by last month's reports that a Muslim country was in talks with Pakistan for supply of anti-aircraft and anti-tank rockets to Syrian rebels. He said doubts lingered on as the joint statement issued after the visit of a dignitary from the Middle East called for regime change in Syria while seeking "formation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers enabling it to take charge of the affairs of the country."

KP Assembly asks for Hazara province⁶⁶

Amid division among the ruling alliance and combined opposition parties, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Assembly on March 21 passed two resolutions asking the federal government to create Hazara province and changing the name of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as Hazara Pakhtunkhwa. The entire house apparently stood divided along linguistic lines. Members from Hazara division irrespective of their political affiliation supported the resolution for the creation of Hazara province, while MPAs belonging to Pakhtun majority areas either opposed the resolution or abstained from voting. Chief Minister Pervez Khattak and several ministers went to the lobby when resolution for creation of Hazara province was put for voice vote which was passed with majority. In the 123-member House, less than 40 MPAs were present during the voting.

China joins hands with Pakistan to set up a commercial factory at Wah⁶⁷

China has joined hands with Pakistan to set up a commercial factory at Wah to produce explosives to meet the demand in the mining, energy, engineering and infrastructure construction sectors and control blasting. An MoU was signed to this effect at the Pakistan Ordnance Factories, Wah, on March 14. Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif was chief guest at the ceremony.

Chief of Defence Forces of Maldives visits Pakistan⁶⁸

During his visit to Pakistan, Chief of Defence Forces of Maldives Maj-Gen Ahmed Shiyam called for cementing defense relations between Pakistan and Maldives. He visited Pakistan Ordnance Factories at Wah.

FDI increased by 18 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year⁶⁹

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) increased by 18 percent during the first eight months of this fiscal year. However, overall foreign private investment in the country dropped by 3.5 percent due to low inflows from portfolio investment. The State Bank reported that the FDI during July-February rose to \$606 million compared to \$514 million received during the same period of last year. The details show both the inflows and outflows of FDI dropped during the period under review. The inflows were \$1.23 billion, declined by \$156 million compared to the same period of last year. The outflows were \$656 million compared to \$904 million of last year. The portfolio investment during the period was \$54 million while during the same period last year it was \$170 million, a fall of 68 percent.

Pakistan reiterates its opposition to increase in permanent membership of the UNSC⁷⁰

Pakistan reiterated its opposition to increase in permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), saying that years of debate had shown that individual permanent membership was not a realistic option and that this demand was hampering the reform process. Ambassador Masood Khan, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, said this in his statement at the 10th round of inter-governmental negotiations.

Chinese investment in Gwadar⁷¹

China would invest \$1.8 billion in nine development projects in Gwadar, including expansion of Gwadar Port and construction of an airport.

Chinese company has offered investment in hydropower projects in KP⁷²

A Chinese company has offered investment in hydropower projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The offer was made by a delegation of the Sino-Tia-Cheng Group during a meeting with advisor to the chief minister on economic affairs and in-charge of the investment promotion cell Razaqatullah Babar on March 9, 2014. The company with financial assistance of the China Developmental Bank was ready for making 100 percent investment in Shozhosin (132MW) and Sharmai (120MW) power stations in Chitral.

USAID to provide a grant of \$81 million for construction of the stage-I of Kurram Tangi Dam Project⁷³

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has committed to provide a grant of \$81 million to the Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority for construction of the Stage-I of Kurram Tangi Dam Project located in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) had approved the stage-I of the project at a cost of Pakistani Rs 12.662 billion. The Stage-1 includes Kaitu Weir Irrigation and Power component, which is scheduled to be completed in two years. It will develop irrigated agriculture of 16,380 acres of land in addition to hydel generation of about 19 MW. It will also provide water for domestic use to about 48,500 people. Benefits of the Stage-I of Kurram Tangi Dam have been estimated at Rs 1.5 billion per annum.

PM attends Nuclear Security Summit in the Hague⁷⁴

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif along with Special Assistant Syed Tariq Fatemi, and Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry attended the Nuclear Security Summit in the Hague. Prime Minister Sharif, in his speech at the Nuclear Security Summit said, "Pakistan is a responsible nuclear weapons state and pursues a policy of nuclear restraint, as well as credible minimum deterrence." He announced that Pakistan was considering ratification of the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) and was actively conducting a review to meet its various requirements. On the sideline of the summit, Prime Minister Muhammad Sharif met US President Barack Obama, Chinese

President Xi Jinping and Turkish President Abdullah Gul. Prime Minister also met US Secretary of State John Kerry. Talking to reporters after a meeting with Kerry, he said India was hesitating to resolve the Kashmir issue bilaterally. He further added that if India was not willing to include a third force in resolving the Kashmir issue then the United States would have to play its role in ensuring a normal situation in the region. The prime minister said peace in Afghanistan was in the interest of Pakistan and the region. He said Pakistan wanted to talk to the Afghan Peace Council to maintain peace in the region, adding that improved relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan should not be derailed. The prime minister praised the US policy of discontinuing drone strikes in Pakistan and said this policy must be carried on.

IMF released the third tranche of \$550⁷⁵

Pakistan received the third instalment of \$550 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on March 27, 2014. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said that the foreign exchange reserves during the week ending on March 21 dropped to \$9.14bn from \$9.64bn on March 14. But with the inflow of \$550m from IMF the reserves have been again increased to \$9.6bn. During the week ending on March 21, the decrease in the reserves was due to external debt servicing of \$248m, inclusive of \$57m repayment to IMF, and other official flows.

Cut in aid for Pakistan⁷⁶

The legislation — *HR 4278, the Ukraine Support Act* — was passed by an overwhelming bipartisan support by the powerful House Foreign Affairs Committee. The legislation deducts a small amount from its aid to Pakistan and gives it to Ukraine. The \$10 million deducted from the \$1.5 billion Kerry-Lugar-Berman annual fund, however, reflects a shift in US efforts to reach out to people of tribal areas. The money deducted from the Pakistan-specific bill would be used to expand the Ukrainian, Balkan, Russian, and Tatar language services of Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and Voice of America at the expense of the programmes currently broadcast in the Pashto language. The bill has gone to the House of Representatives for further action.

Arrest warrant for General (retd.) Pervez Musharraf⁷⁷

The special court constituted to try former military ruler General (retd.) Pervez Musharraf for high treason issued an arrest warrant for the former president. The three judge court, headed by Justice Faisal Arab of the Sindh High Court cited imposition of November 3, 2007 emergency as one of the charges against Musharraf which led to the violation of Article 6 of the Constitution. It also included the deposition of superior court judges and the suspension of fundamental rights among the list of charges.

IDB to provide loan for the Jamshoro coal power plant⁷⁸

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) has approved a loan of \$220 million for the Jamshoro coal power plant. The IDB's approvals were mainly in the energy sector with a total of \$490m in Pakistan, Morocco, Senegal, Mauritania and Cameroon.

Govt. clears Rs. 486 billion for first phase of the Dasu Hydropower Project⁷⁹

The government cleared the Pakistani Rs 486 billion for first phase of the Dasu Hydropower Project to pave the way for approval of a \$700 million loan by the board of directors of the World Bank. According to Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Chairman Syed Raghieb Abbas Shah, the German government would provide \$1b, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) \$2bn and the World Bank \$700m, while the remaining \$500m would be arranged by the government and the WAPDA from their own resources. Earlier, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked international donors not to issue funds for the \$7 billion Dasu Dam project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa until Afghanistan's reservations were addressed.

Meeting between border officials of Pakistan and Iran got cancelled⁸⁰

A scheduled meeting between border officials of Pakistan and Iran to discuss an incident of firing by Iranian guards which left a woman injured in Talab village of Taftan town could not be held on March 28, because Iranians changed the venue of the meeting at the eleventh hour.

Sri Lanka

UNHRC passed resolution against Sri Lanka⁸¹

The resolution HRC25/1 "Promoting reconciliation, accountability, and human rights in Sri Lanka", submitted by the United States, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Montenegro, FYR of Macedonia, and Mauritius was adopted by the UNHRC on March 27, 2014. Out of the 47 members of the UNHRC 23 voted for the resolution and 12 opposed it while another 12 abstained from voting. Countries voted against the resolution are: Algeria, China, Congo, Cuba, Kenya, Maldives, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Vietnam. Countries abstained from voting are: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gabon, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Morocco, Namibia, Philippines and South Africa; and countries voted for the HRC25 are Argentina, Austria, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cote DeVore, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Montenegro, Peru, Korea, Romania, Sierra Leone, FYR Macedonia, UK and the US.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa rejected UN Human Rights Council resolution calling for a probe into alleged human rights violations, telling AFP that he would instead press ahead with Sri Lanka's own reconciliation plan. The President said he had drawn comfort from India's abstention in Geneva.

India's decision to abstain from voting came as a surprise to everybody. Explaining the reason for India's abstention from voting, spokesperson of the Ministry of External affairs said, "we have voted differently on this resolution as it is very different from previous resolutions on Sri Lanka. Unlike the resolutions in 2009, 2012 and 2013, this resolution imposes an international investigative mechanism. It is an intrusive approach that undermines national sovereignty." He said, "an external investigative mechanism with an open ended mandate to monitor national process is not a constructive approach."

Mahinda Rajapaksa meets Manmohan Singh⁸²

President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held bilateral discussions on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in Myanmar. During the meeting President Rajapaksa briefed Prime Minister Singh on the progress of the National Plan of Action (NPoA) for the implementation of the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). The Indian Prime Minister asked about the interaction between the Government and the Northern Provincial Council (NPC) to which President Rajapaksa stated that the Government extended its cooperation to the NPC. The two leaders also discussed matters pertaining to the fishermen of both countries. In response to remarks by the Indian delegation, President Rajapaksa stated that it is a problem of considerable magnitude where almost 1,500 Indian fishing boats sail into Sri Lankan waters on a daily basis. He further told the Prime Minister that the use of bottom trawlers lead to a depletion of fishing resources, which ultimately adversely affects the northern fishermen. The discussions also touched on other areas of mutual interest as well, including further strengthening ties between the two nations.

Second round of India-Sri Lanka fishermen level talk postponed⁸³

Sri Lanka released 116 fishermen and 26 boats on March 12 and 24 fishermen and five boats on March 13. Another 32 fishermen and eight boats were released on March 14. The release of Indian fishermen came after a Tamil Nadu state government official's statement that the second round of talks between Sri Lanka and India fishermen scheduled for March 13 in Colombo would take place only if Sri Lanka released all the 177 Indian fishermen and their 44 boats in Sri Lankan custody. The Tamil Nadu government also released 39 Sri Lankan fishermen and their boats. Following the release of the fishermen, the meeting was scheduled for March 25. But again on March 20, 75 Indian fishermen were arrested by Sri Lankan navy. Jayalalitha demanded release of these 75 fishermen, but Sri Lankan government did not show any interest in releasing these fishermen and replied instead that it was up to the local court to decide whether to release the fishermen or not. Consequently the meeting got cancelled. However, after India abstained on the resolution at the UNHRC, Mahinda Rajapaksa ordered the release of all Indian fishermen as a gesture of good will in response to India's stance.

Hamid Karzai's Visit to Sri Lanka⁸⁴

Afghan President Hamid Karzai led a high level delegation to Sri Lanka from March 5-7, 2014 at the invitation of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. This was his third visit to Sri Lanka. During his visit he had one-on-one dialogue with President Rajapaksa, before joining the delegates for extended talks. During the visit, three MoUs for cooperation in the field of education, sports and in training of Afghanistan Nurses in Sri Lanka; and an agreement on Employment of Sri Lankan Skilled and Professional Manpower in Afghanistan were signed. Both sides agreed to enhance their economic cooperation through joint commission, which was established in 2012. The two sides agreed to enhance the economic and commercial relationship and agreed to consider concluding an Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (IPPA). In the area of Defense, Sri Lanka agreed to increase the number of scholarships offered at the Kotelawala Defence University (KDU) from two to

four placements, provide short-term training opportunities in the intelligence field and, on-field mine clearance.

UPFA won in the Western and Southern Provincial Council elections⁸⁵

The United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa has secured a comfortable victory at the Western and Southern Provincial Council elections with a majority of 388,977 votes in the Southern Provincial Council (SPC) and 683,993 votes in the Western Provincial Council (WPC) held on March 29, 2014. The UPFA also won 56 seats in the Western Provincial Council and 33 seats in the Southern Provincial Council, while the second placed was secured by the UNP with 28 seats in the WPC and 14 in the SPC. The Democratic Party has secured nine seats from the WPC, while JVP won six seats. Democratic People's Front secured two seats and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress managed to get two seats. In the Southern Provincial Council, UNP has again secured the second place with fourteen seats, while JVP and the Democratic Party won five and three seats in the Provincial Council respectively.

Sri Lankan economy grew at 7.3 percent in 2013⁸⁶

The economic output of Sri Lanka as measured by GDP for the year 2013 recorded as 7.3 percent growth while in the fourth quarter of 2013 economy grew at 8.2 percent, according to the Census and Statistics Department of Sri Lanka. The Industry Sector led the growth at 9.9 percent year-on-year (YoY) followed by the Services Sector at 6.4 percent while the Agriculture Sector grew at a rate of 4.7 percent YoY.

NTPC's Consultancy Wing will provide engineering consultancy services to TPCL.⁸⁷

India's State-run NTPC's Consultancy Wing has won the contract for providing engineering consultancy services to Trincomalee Power Company Ltd. (TPCL) for setting up a 500 MW coal-based power project at Trincomalee, in Sri Lanka. The contract agreement between NTPC and TPCL was signed on March 13, 2014 in Colombo.

3,100 Indian devotees attended annual feast of St. Antony⁸⁸

Annual Feast of St. Antony was held on March 15-16, 2014. Around 6000 Indian and Sri Lankan attended the festival. According to the Sri Lankan Navy media spokesman Commander Kosala Warnakulasuriya about 3,100 Indian devotees arrived by 95 vessels attended the festival.

Sri Lanka raised objections to the removal of the President of Ukraine⁸⁹

The Sri Lankan Government has raised objections to the removal of the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. An External Affairs Ministry statement said that in keeping with Sri Lanka's consistent policy of recognising democratically elected Heads of State, the unconstitutional removal of President Viktor Yanukovich from office was regretted. While acknowledging the justifiable concerns of the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka also welcomed attempts at de-escalating the tension, the statement added. Sri Lanka is confident that the parties concerned would be able

to resolve the issues arising out of the recent developments, through a legitimate democratic process, enabling harmonious co-existence of the people of Ukraine.

Japanese assistance to Sri Lanka⁹⁰

The Government of Japan has granted US\$ 3.7 million to implement the “Project for Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure, Improvement of Livelihoods and Empowerment of Women in the Northern and Eastern Provinces” through the United Nations agency for human settlements and sustainable urban development, UN-Habitat. This project will benefit returnees in over 80 villages in the districts of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi through the reconstruction and rehabilitation of vital community infrastructure such as roads, schools, drainage systems etc. The Government of Japan has also provided US\$ 83,735 grant aid for the Project for Improving Fire Units in Export Processing Zones of Sri Lanka under its Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) and Sri Lankan Rs. 100 million under its Non-Project Counterpart Fund for the implementation of the Trilingual Language Policy of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has transformed to a donor country from a rice recipient country under the WFP⁹¹

Sri Lanka donated 50,000 metric tons of rice to the World Food Program (WFP) as proposed by the President in the 2014 Budget. At a ceremony held at the Presidential Secretariat on March 14, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa handed over the rice consignment to the country director of World Food Program, Ismail Omer. The government has spent more than Sri Lankan Rs.3 billion for the donation of 50,000 MT of rice to the WFP. Of the total, 10,000 MT will be donated for local programme and the remaining 40,000 MT will be provided to the member countries of the WFP. Announcing the donation, the government noted that Sri Lanka has transformed from a rice recipient country under the WFP to a donor country in achieving self-sufficiency in rice.

Sri Lanka ranks 48th in the Rule of Law Index 2014⁹²

As per *World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2014* Sri Lanka topped among its South Asian neighbours and ranked 48th globally out of 99 countries.

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