

South Asia Centre
Minutes of the Meeting
March 4, 2014

Members Present

Dr. Ashok K. Behuria, Dr. Anand Kumar, Dr. Nihar Nayak, Mr. Vishal Chandra, Ms. Gulbin Sultana, Dr. Yaqoob ul Hassan, Mr. Shreyas Deshmuk, Mr. Vivek Kaushik and Mr. Abhimanyu Singh

Topic of Discussion

Pakistan

- According to Urdu Media, Ahr-ul-Hind claimed the responsibility for launching attack on Lahore sessions court.
- Indian and Pakistani officials met to discuss the issue of resumption of trade along Uri Muzaffarabad road, which was suspended following arrest of a driver from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) for allegedly smuggling 'brown sugar' worth Rs 100 crore on January 17.
- The inflation rate in Pakistan was recorded at 7.93 percent in February of 2014.
- Parliamentary party leaders of the treasury and opposition benches in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly put their heads together in a closed-door meeting and discussed prevailing security situation in the province. Sources said senior officials briefed parliamentary party leaders about the law and order situation and said 39 militant outfits were operating in the province, while 20 other groups functioning in the garb of Pakistani Taliban were involved in extortion, kidnapping for ransom and other criminal activities.

Sri Lanka

- Sri Lankan delegation led by Prof. G.L. Peiris has left for 25th session of the HRC. He will deliver the national statement on March 4. As is customary for leaders of the delegations, Minister Peiris will meet High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillay on 6 March 2014. On the sidelines of the High Level Segment of the HRC, Minister Peiris will be also meeting with heads of delegations of member states. The report by the High Commissioner on Sri Lanka is scheduled to be presented on 26 March 2014.
- Monitoring MP of the Ministry of External Affairs Sajin de Vass Gunawardena is already in Geneva to participate in the High Level Segment, and is being joined by Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha and senior staff of the Mission, Senior Assistant Secretary to the President Chandima Wickramasinghe and the Assistant Director/West Division and Counter Terrorism Unit of the Ministry of External Affairs Fathuma Mafusa. Leader of the House and Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources Management Nimal Siripala de Silva, and Minister of Plantation Industries

Mahinda Samarsinghe, who will be in Geneva to participate in the 130th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly and related meetings, will join the Sri Lanka delegation from 15-21 and 9 -21 March, respectively, in briefing regional groups of member countries to the UN in Geneva on developments relating to Sri Lanka. Senior officials, Additional Solicitors General Jayantha Jayasuriya and W.J. Shavindra Fernando, Deputy Solicitors General A.H.M.D. Nawaz and A. Nerin R. Pulle, Minister in the Sri Lanka Mission in Qatar Sithara Azard Khan, Senior Assistant Secretary to the Ministry of Defense Shashikala Premawardhane, will join the delegation during the HRC's different segments, which will run through 28 March 2014.

- The resolution on Sri Lanka calling for an international independent and credible investigation into alleged humanitarian and human rights law violations has been tabled at the 25th session of United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 3. The Draft Resolution HRC25/1 "Promoting reconciliation, accountability, and human rights in Sri Lanka" has been submitted by the United States, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Montenegro, FYR of Macedonia, and Mauritius.
- The resolution welcomed the High Commissioner's recommendations and conclusions on the need for an independent and credible international investigation in the absence of a credible national process with tangible results. It requested the Office of the High Commissioner to assess progress toward accountability and reconciliation, monitor relevant national processes and to investigate alleged violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka.
- The Resolution HRC 25/1 welcomes and acknowledges the progress made by the Government of Sri Lanka in rebuilding, infrastructure, demining and resettling the majority of internally displaced persons. However, the resolution notes that considerable work lies ahead in the areas of justice, reconciliation, demilitarization, and the resumption of livelihoods, and stressing the importance of the full participation of local populations, including representatives of civil society and minorities in the efforts.
- The resolution welcomed the successful holding of Provincial Council elections in September last year and praised the high voter turnout but expressed concern over the reports of election related violence as well as voter and candidate intimidation. It appreciated the Sri Lankan government for facilitating the visit of High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay to the island in August 2013 but expressed deep concern over the reported intimidation and retaliation against civil society members, including those who met with the High commissioner during her visit.
- However, the resolution expressed alarm at the rapid rise in violence and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, particularly against members of religious minority groups. It called upon the government to fulfill its public commitments, including the devolution of political authority which is integral to reconciliation and the full enjoyment of human rights by all members of population.

- The resolution reiterated that the national plan of action established to implement recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) does not adequately address all of the findings and recommendations of the LLRC asked the government to broaden the scope of the plan. It urged the government to investigate all attacks, by individuals and groups on all religious places of worship, hold the perpetrators responsible and prevent future such attacks. The resolution also called upon the government to release the results of the investigations into alleged violations by security forces including the attack on residents of Weliveriya on August 01, 2013. The resolution encouraged the government to provide the Northern provincial Council and the Chief Minister with the resources and authority necessary to govern as required by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. It called upon the Sri Lankan government to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner concerning the implementation of the resolution.
- In the US, eleven senior Members of US Senate introduced a bipartisan Senate Resolution (S. Res. 364) on February 27 expressing support for Sri Lanka's internal reconciliation process and the significant overall progress the Country has made since the end of the war--some 5 years ago. In the resolution, the Senate—
 - (1) calls upon the President to develop a comprehensive and well balanced policy towards Sri Lanka that reflects United States interests, including respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, as well as economic and security interests;
 - (2) calls on the United States Government and the international community to assist the Government of Sri Lanka, with due regard to its sovereignty, stability, and security, in establishing domestic mechanisms to deal with any grievances arising from actions committed by both sides during and after the civil war in Sri Lanka;
 - (3) encourages the Government of Sri Lanka to put in place a truth and reconciliation commission similar to the one adopted by South Africa to help heal the wounds of war, taking into account the unique characteristics of the conflict and its aftermath; and
 - (4) urges the Government of Sri Lanka to improve religious and media freedoms and to bring to justice those responsible for attacks on journalists and newspaper offices as well as places of worship, regardless of religion.
- “Tamils for Obama”, an US lobby group has written to Secretary of State John Kerry urging him to include a referendum for independence and protection for the Tamils against GOSL retribution in the resolution.
- Two hundred and five Tamil Christian priests from North and East including Mannar Bishop have written to the members of UN Human Rights Council calling for international investigation on Sri Lanka's war crimes and human rights violations. The priests call for a strong and action oriented resolution on Sri Lanka at the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council.
- President Rajapaksa lashed out at Rauf Hakeem in one of the cabinet meetings demanding that he and his party should decide whether they wanted to continue with the UPFA or not. The reason was some of the SLMC cadres submitted a report to Navi Pillai during her visit to Sri Lanka. President asked Hakeem

whether he wanted to continue as the minister. Rauf Hakeem responded that he did not have control on all the cadres of his party.

- President Mahinda Rajapaksa left for Myanmar to attend the summit meeting of the BIMSTEC. He will meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the sideline of the summit.
- On March 2, Prof. G.L. Peiris met Myanmar foreign minister Mr Wunna Maung Lwin on the sidelines of the 14th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw. Both the Ministers agreed to establish a mechanism for bilateral political consultation led by the Foreign Secretaries to improve each others' understanding of the policy perspectives of the two countries. Minister Perris conveyed to his Myanmar counterpart the interest shown by Sri Lankan banks to open branches in Myanmar. Attention was paid also to the expansion of trade and investment and in particular, to the simplification of import and export procedures. To facilitate all these matters an early meeting of the Joint Commission was agreed upon.
- Inflation, declined to 4.2 per cent in February 2014, from 4.4 per cent in January 2014. This is the fourth consecutive month in which inflation fell continuously from high of 6.7 per cent in October 2013. Annual average inflation, which followed a same declining trend since June 2013, moderated further to 6.0 per cent in February 2014, from 6.5 per cent in January 2014.

Nepal

- Nepal's new Prime Minister Sushil Koirala met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the sideline of the BIMSTEC summit meeting. During the meeting PM Singh expressed India's willingness to invest in hydro sector. According to Nepal's ambassador to Myanmar Paras Ghimire, Singh said that hydropower development could be a key to Nepal's prosperity. During the meeting, Koirala asked his Indian counterpart to help reduce Nepal's ballooning trade deficit with India. In response, the Indian side had expressed willingness to take every possible measure to help reduce the widening trade deficit.
- Nepal's Prime Minister Sushil Koirala was being criticised in Nepal for his statement claiming that the frontier dam constructed by India over the mighty Mahakali River in Tanakpur lay within the Indian Territory.
- New issue of debate in Nepal is now on who should authenticate any bill passed in Constituent Assembly (CA). Nepali Congress said bills should be approved by the President. Constitution Drafting Committee is going to debate on the issue.
- Onsari Gharti was appointed as the vice-chairperson of the CA.
- Nepali Congress Sher Bahadur Deuba has come out with a proposal to invite Mohan Baidya should to join the Govt.

Bangladesh

- On the sidelines of the BIMSTEC summit, Manmohan Singh met Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina and 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-Bangladesh are working together to resolve border dispute.
- Use of fake Indian currency in India-Bangladesh border has been reported. Most of these notes are printed in Pakistan.
- Reportedly rape is used as a weapon to grab land and votes of the Hindu community in Bangladesh. In some areas lands were taken away by Awami League cadres too.
- Bangladesh National Party (BNP) in quiet alliance with the Jamaat, is doing well in the Upazila elections. Upazila election results may encourage Khaleda Zia to launch a more vigorous movement against the government.

Afghanistan

- President Barack Obama and President Hamid Karzai interacted over phone for 40 minutes. Karzai reportedly told Obama that Afghans wanted the BSA to be signed Washington must first bring the Taliban into the peace talks. Obama agreed to a post-2014 training and anti-terror mission. Earlier Obama was planning to pull out all US troops in case the BSA was not signed. US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel backed Obama's move, and confirmed for the first time that the Pentagon was actively planning for a full withdrawal, and at the same time Pentagon would plan also for a prolonged mission with several thousand US troops. The call between Karzai and Obama came hours before Hagel left for talks with NATO defense ministers in Brussels, at which he will share US planning on its future Afghan role. The cluster believed that the US will continue to maintain its presence and these threats were made to basically pressurise Karzai into signing the BSA. Karzai's successor was sure to sign BSA.
- Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi visited Afghanistan. He for the first time openly linked security in Western China with the stability in Afghanistan. Promising to step up aid to Afghanistan, including training for its security forces, Beijing has asked Kabul to crack down on Islamic militants active in China's volatile Xinjiang province bordering the war-torn country. Wang Yi met Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Foreign Minister Zarar Ahmad Osmani and Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the national security advisor. He called for strengthening cooperation in security issues to fight trans-national crimes and terror activities, such as those perpetrated by the al-Qaeda-linked East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) which is fighting for independence of Xinjiang.
- Beijing also indicated that it would provide more assistance to Kabul for its efforts to develop the economy and improve the livelihood of its people with infrastructure projects, including the construction of a school in Kabul University, farm machinery and training classes for Afghan technicians.

- The national security council of Afghanistan instructed the ministry of foreign affairs and ministry of finance of Afghanistan to convey the concerns of Afghanistan to World Bank regarding the planned construction of Dasu on Kabul-Indus river. The statement further added that the government of Afghanistan has called for comprehensive and necessary assessment of the construction plan of dam on Indus river, since the issue was not shared through diplomatic channels with the Afghan government and no agreement was reached between the two nations in this regard.
- Italy pledged \$200 million assistance to the government of Afghanistan which will be spent on three key projects in western Herat province of Afghanistan including development of Herat airport, construction of Herat ring road and Herat-Chest Sharif highway. This is part of Italy's economic cooperation with Afghanistan which was signed between the Afghan finance minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal and the representative of Italy in Herat province.
- Thousands of Afghan women will reportedly plant trees in support of Sayyaf's candidature in the Presidential election. Sayyaf is a former mujahideen leader and might provide a theological alternative to the Taliban ideology.
- Afghan Independent Election Commission has banned foreign participation in the opinion polls on the ongoing presidential election.
- The campaigns for Presidential election are in full swing, but it is not yet clear who is going to win the election. Since most of the candidates are Pashtuns, local politics will determine the final result of the election. To avoid a runoff, negotiations are on among the candidates to provide support to the relatively stronger candidates and back out of the struggle. About 170 members in Kandahar formed a Jirga to bring Zalmai Rasool and Qayoom Karzai together. However, the Jirga members supported Qayoom Karzai. President Hamid Karzai made it clear that he was not supportive of his brother Qayoom Karzai. Subsequently, Qayum backed out of the electoral fray in support of Zalmai Rasool
- Hizb-e-Islami is expected to play an important role in the election. As of now, Hizb supports Qutubuddin Hilal. If there was run-off Hizb may gravitate towards Ashraf Ghani, it was argued in the Cluster. Ashraf Ghani, it was pointed out, was reaching out to all ethnic communities and eating into to Abdullah's vote bank. However, a run-off looks inevitable at the moment.