

SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

August 2014

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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Editor's Note

Protest marches against Nawaz Sharif Government were launched by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) chief Tahirul Qadri on August 14. According to media reports powerful sections within the Pakistan army orchestrated the protests against Nawaz Sharif government to cut him to size and get complete hold on foreign policy on Afghanistan and India and on internal security issues. Looking at the turn of events ever since, it appears that to a large extent, the Army has achieved what it wanted. Nawaz Sharif banked on the Army's support to deal with the political crisis. Against this backdrop, it was speculated in the Pakistani media that henceforth, Nawaz Sharif would be completely guided by the Army while dealing with India, Afghanistan and internal security. On the other hand, Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri failed to bring out the protestors in large numbers, which showed the lack of popular endorsement of their movement. It has now become a prestige issue for Imran Khan and he has shut the door on any honourable exit from this show. The lack of popular support behind Imran and Qadri must have acted as a deterrent on the army's behaviour and therefore the invisible directors of the entire show have withdrawn from the scene and seem to have left both Imran and Qadri high and dry. It remains to be seen how long can they continue with their sit-ins in Islamabad and to what effect. As of now the movement seems to have lost its momentum.

Narendra Modi made a visit to Nepal on August 3. The visit was widely appreciated by the Nepalese, even though the Power Trade Agreement (PTA) and Power Development Agreement (PDA) were not signed during the trip. The visit addressed the Nepalese grievance that Indian Prime Minister did not take Nepal seriously and neglected it.

While the Nepal visit by the PM raised some hopes in the Indo-Nepal relations, there were disappointing developments in Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Sri Lanka relations. India called off foreign secretary level bilateral talks with Pakistan in protest against Pakistan High Commissioner to India Abdul Bashit's meeting with Hurriyat leader Shabir Shah despite clear communications from the foreign office not to go ahead with his meeting with the separatists. On the other hand, Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj summoned Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India to lodge a formal protest against a derogatory article on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha, published in the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence and Urban Development website.

All these and many other interesting developments in the domestic politics as well as in the foreign policy of the countries in the region in the month of August are highlighted in this issue of *South Asia Trends*.

Afghanistan

Presidential candidates sign joint declaration¹

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Kabul on August 7. Presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai signed a declaration in commitment to the formation of a national unity government in the presence of John Kerry on August 8. US ambassador to Afghanistan James B. Cunningham made it clear that the formation of a national unity government was not a US plan or idea. It was something agreed to by the two candidates following their talks. A joint commission was set up to sort out the structure of the national unity government and creation of the chief executive post. More than 30 representatives from the Change and Continuity and Reform and Unanimity teams launched talks to flesh out details of the new set-up. They are divided in three committees. Two of the working groups of the National Unity Committee were said to have concluded their negotiations successfully. The only remaining discussions to be had are those over the exact structure of the power sharing arrangement, a subject assigned to the third working group. According to members of the National Unity Committee, the first working group has agreed on the holding of a Constitutional Loya Jirga within the next two years, which will, among other things, be charged with implementing a change from the current presidential system of government to a parliamentary one. In addition, the second working group was able to reach a conclusion satisfactory to both campaign teams on how the respective policy priorities of each candidate would be integrated in the new government. Members of the third working group have decided to turn to their respective candidates to resolve the remaining debates. Presidential hopefuls Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai however, continue to disagree on the roles of the president and the chief executive officer (CEO). Member of Abdullah's team, Said Agha Fazel Sancharaki, asserted that if the president and the CEO do not have equal authorities all agreements will be questioned. Meanwhile, U.S. President Barack Obama had a short conversation with both presidential candidates stressing that each candidate should honour their commitments and agreements and increase the number of meetings. However, Abdullah Abdullah's Chief Observer Fazal Ahmad Manawi warned of boycotting the election process if the camps technical demands are not met.

Mismanagement of Aid in Afghanistan: SIGAR²

In a recent report, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) claimed that Afghanistan has received \$104 billion as financial assistance in the past 13 years. This is the most the U.S. has spent on a nation-building project since the Marshall Plan, 1948—implemented to rebuild Western Europe after World War 2. SIGAR stated that Afghanistan's economic condition remains fragile in spite of all the aid, raising questions about the aid system in the country. Experts have said mismanagement is the main reason behind the alleged misappropriation of the funds. Moreover, the government's inadequacies as well as lack of transparency and accountability in the system have been criticised as factors playing into the mismanagement. More than 40 percent of weapons provided by the US to Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police have gone missing, said the SIGAR. The report said two systems — the Operational Verification of Reliable Logistics Oversight Database, or OVERLORD, and the Security Cooperation

Information Portal, or SCIP, which were put in place to keep track of the weapons, are filled with errors and discrepancies. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) however rejected American watchdog's report as groundless.

Green-on-blue attack³

An Afghan soldier opened fire on foreign forces at the Marshal Fahim Military Academy, located west of Kabul City in Qargha, claiming the life of U.S. Maj. Gen. Harold Greene and wounding 10 other U.S. soldiers, two British soldiers, one German general, one Afghan general and two other Afghan officers. The attack was one of the bloodiest "green-on-blue" assaults. The Pentagon said that such attacks are serious threats, but stressed that it would not impact the mutual trust between the Afghan forces and their foreign counterparts.

Taliban adopts confrontational tactic⁴

The Taliban this fighting season has departed from traditional tactics of road side bombs and suicide attacks, opting for a more aggressive and confrontational tactic of large-scale group offensives. Such attacks in southern and eastern Afghanistan have posed major challenges for security officials, who are increasingly confident that support from Pakistan has fuelled the shift in militant strategy. The first major Taliban offensive this fighting season started in Sangeen district of southern Helmand province. Hundreds of militants swarmed the area and battled security forces for weeks, eventually expanding the hostilities to other nearby districts. The aftermath of the fighting is still felt in Marjah, Musa Qala and Sangeen districts. The Taliban then launched an offensive in eastern Nangarhar province, but were less successful due to a quick and effective response by Afghan forces. As was the case in Helmand, hundreds of militants participated in the offensive in Hesarak district, which has similarly impacted surrounding districts, such as Sherzad and Khogyani. According to security officials, there is evidence that Pakistani intelligence was involved in both offensives.

Afghan Government responds to release of Pakistani prisoners⁵

Afghan Government has lashed out against the U.S. for releasing 10 Pakistani nationals from Bagram prison. Fayeq Wahedi, the Deputy Spokesman for President Hamid Karzai, has demanded that the U.S. provide the Afghan Government an explanation for the decision. He linked concerns about the releases to an alleged body of evidence proving the involvement of Pakistani nationals in insurgent activity inside Afghanistan, an accusation that has been made by Afghan officials for many years.

Afghanistan Marks 95th Independence Day⁶

A special ceremony was held at the Ministry of Defense (MoD) commemorating the 95th anniversary of Afghanistan's independence on August 19, 2014. The ceremony was attended by government officials including Afghan President Hamid Karzai and presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai.

USAID Project for higher education system⁷

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has undertaken a new \$92 million project to improve the Afghan higher education system, a USAID press release announced on August 21. The press release indicated that representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), the Ministry of Economy and the USAID signed the agreement for the University Support and Workforce Development Project (USWDP) on August 13. "Improving Afghanistan's educational system is an important and long-term priority for the United States," the statement read, adding that the USAID has contributed \$1.1 billion to the Afghan education sector from 2002-2013.

EU donates 95 million Euros for ANP salaries⁸

Milko Van Gool, in charge of Development Cooperation for the European Union in Afghanistan announced a 95 million Euro allocation for salary payments to the Afghan National Police (ANP) and said that the Afghan government would be held responsible for dispersing the money transparently. According to the Ministry of Interior, the EU is the third largest aid provider for the ministry. The EU has donated a total of US\$ 592 million to the ANP.

Security forces need US \$6 billion annually: Zakhilwal⁹

More foreign aid would be needed to strengthen Afghan security forces after the drawdown of international troops and the current insurgency in the country. Finance Minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal told reporters that NATO's Chicago summit had pledged two and half years back \$ 4.1 billion in annual aid to Afghan security forces. But today's requirements had not been considered at that time. Afghan forces annually needed \$6 billion, he reckoned, hoping the international fraternity would reiterate its vow to meet the Afghan government demands. The view was expressed at a daylong meeting, attended by Afghan officials, representatives of foreign countries and international donor organisations. The event was aimed at preparations for next month's NATO summit in the UK.

Afghanistan suffers over \$5 billion financial loss due to political impasse¹⁰

Afghanistan has suffered over US\$ 5 billion financial loss due to political impasse as a result of election deadlock, Finance Ministry officials said. Finance Minister, Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal, has said the deadlock has also resulted to capital flight from the country which amounts to almost \$6 billion. He said the deadlock has resulted to reduction in government revenue and warned that country would move towards an unstable condition if the deadlock persists.

Japan hands facilities over to AIHRC¹¹

The Embassy of Japan handed over the Human Rights Protection Centre (HRPC) and the Women Rights Consultation (WRC) office to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in western Ghor province on August 26, 2014. A statement from the Japanese Embassy said the centre was constructed by the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects (GAGP) upon the request made by AIHRC. Japan has started this year a capacity building and awareness raising

project to help address violence against women in the northern and western regions including Ghor province. So far Embassy of Japan had implemented more than 900 GAGP projects all over Afghanistan, including construction of schools, clinics and vocational training centres, agricultural, irrigation and infrastructure projects with the special attention to rural and remote areas.

Bangladesh

BGB and BSF meet for DG level talk¹²

A five-day DG-level conference between Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Border Security Force (BSF) concluded in New Delhi on August 25. BGB handed over a list of makeshift Phensidyl factories within Indian territory along the border and requested BSF to dismantle them. BGB also sought BSF cooperation in containing smuggling of firearms and women and children. Both BGB and BSF agreed to make a list of areas along the border where smuggling and trafficking happen the most. The list would be updated every year. India asserted that a fresh trial of the 2011 killing of a teenage Bangladeshi girl, Felani Khatun, by the BSF would be speedily concluded. During the meeting, BSF handed over to BGB a list of 71 Indian insurgent groups camping in Bangladesh.

India begins to tranship rice via Ashuganj¹³

India has started transshipping 10,000 tonnes of rice to Tripura from Haldia port in West Bengal through Bangladeshi rivers and roads. This is the second instance of transshipment that Bangladesh extended to India in a "goodwill gesture". In 2012, Bangladesh had allowed India to tranship heavy machinery, turbines and cargoes through Ashuganj for Palatana power project in southern Tripura. In both the cases, Bangladesh government waived transshipment charges for India.

BPDB signs contract with Larsen & Toubro Ltd. of India¹⁴

Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) signed a contract with an Indian company Larsen & Toubro Ltd. to construct a power plant at Sikalbaha in Patiya of Chittagong that will produce 225 megawatt electricity. The combined cycle (dual-fuel) power project will cost around US \$202.22 million. It will be funded by Saudi Fund for Development, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, Abu Dhabi Fund for Development and OPEC Fund for International Development. BPDB Secretary Zahurul Haque and Larsen & Toubro Vice President Saurav Indwar signed the contract at Bidyut Bhaban in Dhaka on August 24.

Bangladesh exports rice to Sri Lanka¹⁵

Encouraged by a bumper yield and good stocks at home, Bangladesh Government has decided to export at least 50,000 tonnes of rice, first of its kind since the independence, to Sri Lanka in the current fiscal year. The decision came at the cabinet meeting on August 25, two months after the government extended the ban on non-fragrant rice export until June 2015 in order to ensure good supply and control price hikes in the local market. Notifying the cabinet about this year's rice production, Food Minister Qamrul Islam said the Sri Lankan government had sought one lakh tonnes of rice from Bangladesh. In response, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who chaired the meeting suggested that Bangladesh should better export 50,000 tonnes now considering the flood situation. If there is a good Aman harvest,

another 50,000 tonnes of rice will be exported under government to government arrangement, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh invites Turkish investors¹⁶

Bangladesh has called for greater trade and investment relations with Turkey and invited potential Turkish investors to take advantage of the favourable business climate in Bangladesh. The call was made by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, who was on a two-day official visit to Ankara, the Turkish capital, to attend the Presidential Handover Ceremony. Shahriar Alam, during his meeting with President of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce Salih Bezci, briefed the trade body about the most favourable foreign direct investment regime in Bangladesh and called upon its members to take full advantage of it. Earlier, on August 27, he held talks with the top executives of TURK EXIM Bank in Ankara and discussed in detail the ways to utilise the \$300 million annual Line of Credit, which would be utilised by private ventures in Bangladesh. TURK EXIM Bank officials concurred with Alam, and informed that they would send a high-level delegation to Bangladesh in October to discuss further and find the means for early utilisation of the credit line. The two countries' trade now stands at \$1.2 billion, hugely in favour of Bangladesh.

Myanmar delegation visits Dhaka for talk on repatriation of Rohingyas¹⁷

A five-member Myanmar delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Thant Kyaw came to Dhaka on August 28 for talks over issues concerning Bangladesh, including repatriation of Rohingyas, stopping Yaba smuggling, establishing a border liaison office to fast track dispute resolution, and holding regular security dialogues.

US supports war crimes trials of individual, but not of political party or organisation¹⁸

The US supports the ongoing war crimes trials in Bangladesh, said visiting US ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues Stephen Rapp on August 4. After a courtesy meeting with the judges of the International Crimes Tribunal at the Old High Court building in Dhaka, Rapp lauded them for being able to discharge their jobs "without pressure, without politics, without threats". However, Rapp opposed the trial of any political party or organisation for crimes against humanity, and called for focusing on individuals who committed those crimes. Stephen Rapp also said the defence counsels' proposal for holding of these trials in a third country under UN supervision would not be realistic. Rapp said there are lots of rooms for development and the trial must be free and fair with the highest international standards. On the US position regarding death penalty, he had indicated that it would be wisest not to have death penalties.

Bulgaria sign co-op deal¹⁹

Bangladesh and Bulgaria have signed a deal on Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) to establish institutional cooperation between the two countries. Bangladesh Ambassador to Turkey Zulfikur Rahman, also envoy to Bulgaria, and Deputy Foreign Minister of Bulgaria Angel Velitchkov signed the Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of their respective governments in Sofia on July 30. This

is the first step taken between these two countries to initiate institutional cooperation.

Bangladesh expresses concerns over Iraq crisis²⁰

Bangladesh is deeply concerned over the current crises in Iraq, particularly the unfolding humanitarian crisis, a foreign ministry press release said on August 10, 2014. "Bangladesh strongly condemns violence and atrocities. Bangladesh reaffirms its solidarity with Iraq and its people, and underscores the need for maintaining Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity with the continuation of democratic process," it added. The Bangladesh embassy in Baghdad is in touch with Bangladesh nationals working in Iraq to ensure their safety and well being. The suspension of sending workers to Iraq will remain in force till improvement of security situation in Iraq, it said.

The Information Ministry publishes a gazette on the National Broadcast Policy 2014²¹

The information ministry published a gazette on the National Broadcast Policy 2014 for television and radio. According to the policy, no one can provide false or misleading information or statistics on talk shows, discussions and news. Media professionals said the gazette has placed them in an uncomfortable position. Condemning the gazette, the Jatiya Press Club in a statement demanded immediate scrapping of the policy. Supreme Court Bar Association President Khandker Mahbub Hossain said the national broadcast policy was an ill attempt of the government to gag the media. Terming the National Broadcast Policy 2014 "a unilateral exercise", the Transparency International Bangladesh said unilateral imposition of policies and action to control the media can only be counterproductive. The opposition alliance organised a rally to protest the National Broadcast Policy-2014. However, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, did not attend the rally.

Cabinet approves restoration of parliament's authority to impeach Supreme Court judges²²

Ignoring the opinions of many eminent jurists, the cabinet approved a proposal on amending the constitution to restore parliament's authority to impeach Supreme Court judges on grounds of misconduct or incapacity. The existing constitutional provision for the chief justice-led Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) will cease to exist once the constitution amendment bill is passed. The latest move marks the Sheikh Hasina-led government's change of stance on the SJC within a span of three years. Her government retained the SJC system through the 15th amendment to the charter in June 2011. As part of a process to bring about massive changes in the constitution, the government had formed a parliamentary body three years ago, and asked it to come up with recommendations for amendments to the charter. The government has moved to control the judiciary through a constitutional amendment to restore parliament's authority to impeach Supreme Court judges for misconduct or incapacity, said top leaders of the BNP-led 20-party alliance. They also accused the Sheikh Hasina-led government of trying to secure the "illegal regime" by formulating an "anti-people national broadcast policy", which, they said, was aimed at influencing the media."

BNP to lead issue- based movements²³

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has opted for going soft on the Awami League Government for now over holding a fresh national election under a non-party administration. Instead, the party will lead issue-based movements as its various tiers are still weak organisationally. Several thousand BNP leaders and activists are still facing criminal cases and several hundred others have been behind bars since the anti-government movement last year. Party insiders said another reason behind Khaleda's soft stance on the anti-government movement is that she was yet to complete the structural overhaul of the party, especially the Dhaka city unit and the party's associated bodies, including the Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal.

Imports rise in political calm²⁴

Imports increased significantly in fiscal year 2013-14 indicating that the economy is gaining back its confidence lost to the 2012-13 political unrest. Actual imports as indicated by settled letters of credit (LC) jumped more than 15 percent year-on-year to \$37.19 billion against opened LCs of \$41.82 billion that rose by 16 percent in fiscal 2013-14, according to Bangladesh Bank. The growth in settlement of LCs was negative by more than 7 percent in fiscal 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Government approves largest ever investment proposal for coal-based project²⁵

Bangladesh government approved the country's biggest ever investment project of \$4.5 billion to set up a coal-fired power plant on Matarbari island near Maheshkhali. The 1,200-megawatt power project is by far the costliest of its kind in the world, according to experts. While around \$3 billion will be spent on the construction of the plant, the remaining funds will be needed for setting up a deep-sea terminal to facilitate import of coal; developing local infrastructure and township; installing a high voltage power line; and land resettlement, etc. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will provide \$3.8 billion as soft loan for the project. Though it will take till 2023 for full installation of the power plant, the planning minister hoped the plant would be able to start generating 600MW electricity by 2018.

Bangladesh ranks 98th in the Global Peace Index 2014²⁶

Bangladesh has fared better than India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the Global Peace Index 2014. Bangladesh is ranked 98th on the list of 162 countries, a significant improvement from last year's position of 105th. Put together by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the GPI takes into consideration three broad themes involving ongoing domestic and international conflict, militarisation, and social safety and security. In South Asia, Bangladesh is the third most peaceful nation, coming after Bhutan and Nepal which are placed 16th and 76th. Afghanistan, however, continues to be the least peaceful nation in South Asia.

Bhutan

Indian ambassador presents credentials²⁷

The newly appointed Indian ambassador to Bhutan, Gautam Bambawale, presented his credentials to the King at Tashichhodzong on August 6, 2014. Mr Bambawale replaces ambassador VP Haran, who served in the country from January last year. Mr Bambawale is India's 16th ambassador to Bhutan. India will assist and help Bhutan in whatever ways it can in its capacity, and priorities for assistance have to be laid by the people of Bhutan, Bambawale said, after his first visit to the Chukha Hydropower Project Corporation (CHPC) on August 12, 2014. The ambassador said CHPC was chosen for his first visit because it was the first project jointly done by India and Bhutan. "It's an abiding symbol between India and Bhutan partnership," Ambassador Bambawale said, adding that his visit is also in celebration of the project's successful completion of 25 years of operation last year.

New Zealand's foreign minister visits Bhutan²⁸

New Zealand's foreign minister Murray McCully, called on Prime Minister Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay on August 11, 2014 in Thimphu. Mr McCully is the first serving minister from New Zealand to visit Bhutan.

Bhutan assumes Chairmanship of the 70th session of UNESCAP²⁹

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay assumed the Chairmanship of the 70th session of UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in Bangkok on August 7, 2014. Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay took over the yearlong chairmanship from Timor-Leste's Prime Minister Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao. This was the first time Bhutan held this important office at the helm of the 62 member regional body since it became a member in 1972.

ADB Vice President calls on Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay³⁰

Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Vice President, Lakshmi Venkatachalam calls on Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay in Thimphu on August 22, 2014. Lyonchhoen and Ms. Venkatachalam discussed ways to explore new prospects in small and medium scale industries, renewable energy and agri-marketing. The Vice President assured ADB's continued assistance to Bhutan.

Bhutan makes official request to Japan for 1450 power tillers³¹

Bhutan officially requested Japan for 1,450 power tillers during its annual consultation in New Delhi. The request for power tillers was made under the Chiwog grant assistance for farm mechanisation and services. Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay had also made the request for 1,450 power tillers during his official visit to Japan in July.

JICA to assist reconstruction of three bridges along the Thimphu to Trashigang highway³²

Three bridges along the Thimphu to Trashigang highway, the lifespan of which have expired, will be reconstructed with support from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Chuzomsa and Nikachu bridges under Wangduephodrang, and Zalamchu bridge between Trongsa and

Maldives

Wangduephodrang are the bridges that will be reconstructed. Minutes of the discussion for the preparatory survey, which began last month was signed on August 6, 2014 between department of roads (DoR), JICA and the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC). DoR director, Karma Gelay, said funds are not enough to widen road till Trashigang. Proposal for additional fund has been put up to the government of India. JICA has so far built over 19 bridges across the country, of which 16 are along the highway and three are farm road bridges.

President Yameen's visit to China³³

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom visited China to attend the 2nd Youth Olympics Games in Nanjing, eastern China's Jiangsu Province. During the visit, President Yameen met Chinese President Xi Jinping. Reportedly, President Xi Jinping said that China understands the Maldives' position as a small island nation in global climate change negotiations, and that China is willing to enhance coordination with Maldives to jointly safeguard the common interests of developing nations. Speaking at the meeting, President Yameen said that China is an important cooperative partner of the Maldives that has made important contributions to the economic and social development of the country. President Gayoom has said that his vision is to increase the number of Chinese citizens travelling to the Maldives to at least 2 million in the years ahead. President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom also met with leaders of some prominent Chinese companies, during his visit. Furthermore, President Yameen met officials from Tuniu, one of China's top travel agencies, and attended a lunch hosted by the group, according to the President's Office. President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has visited the Suzhou Cultural and Arts Centre and gifted a handwritten script in Dhivehi language to the Centre. Speaking to the local media on arrival at the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport, the President described his visit to China as a very fruitful one. The President also briefed the media on his discussions with the Chinese President Xi Jinping, during which the Chinese Government expressed commitment to provide assistance for Male-Hulhumale bridge project. President Yameen further highlighted the Government's decision to participate in the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Joint naval exercise between India and Maldives³⁴

Indian naval ship 'Triakand' was in the Maldives to conduct a five day joint exercise with the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) coast guard unit. According to a statement released by the High Commission of India in the Maldives, the purpose of the exercise was to conduct a joint maritime security patrol of the exclusive economic zone of the Maldives. Additionally, in a ceremony held on August 26, equipment which can be used to maintain the operational and training capacities of the MNDF was gifted to the Maldivian authorities by India.

Former President Nasheed meets BJP leader³⁵

Former President and opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) leader Mohamed Nasheed met with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Vijay Jolly, convenor of the Overseas Friends of the BJP. A statement from Vijay Jolly's office said that during the 45-minute meeting on August 6, Nasheed and the BJP leader

discussed the rise of radical Muslim fundamentalism in Maldives and its serious implications on peace and security in the region. They also discussed the involvement of Maldivian militants in the Mumbai terror attack of Nov 26, 2008, and the Maldivian military trained 'dropouts' found fighting in Syria for ISIS, the statement said. Jolly's office said that ways to establish party-to-party relationship between MDP and the BJP were also decided at the meeting. Former Foreign Minister Ahmed Naseem was also present at the meeting.

President to pardon four Indian nationals as a goodwill gesture³⁶

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has decided to pardon four Indian nationals serving prison sentences in the Maldives. The decision was made as a gesture of goodwill to improve relations between Maldives and India, according to Ibrahim Muaz Ali, Spokesperson at the President's Office.

Four member ASI team visit Maldives³⁷

The High Commission of India in the Maldives said in a statement that the four-member team, led by Additional Director General of Archeological Survey of India (ASI) Dr. B.R. Mani, visited the Maldives from August 14 to 20 on the invitation of the Maldivian government. The team visited several mosques in various islands of the Maldives and held meetings with the Maldivian delegations in the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Department of Heritage, led by Minister of Islamic Affairs Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed, and Deputy Minister of Education and Director of Heritage Department Yumna Maumoon. According to the High Commission, both sides welcomed a proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ASI and the Department of Heritage for restoration, renovation and preservation of ancient cultural heritage in Maldives with the technical expertise of ASI and training of Maldivians in India in this critical area. The ASI delegation visit is a follow-up of the visit of Dr. Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed to India in April 2014, during which co-operation between India and Maldives in this area was discussed. India had previously assisted the Maldives in restoration of several ancient mosques including Hukuru Miskiy (1988), Eid Miskiy (2006), Dharumavantha Rasgefaanu Miskiy (2004) in Male', and Fenfushi Hukuru Miskiy in South Ari atoll (2001).

Japan's ODA investigation team visits Maldives³⁸

Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) Investigation Team, paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. At the meeting held at the President's Office on August 25, leader of the investigation team, Shimba briefed the President on Japan's ODA initiative, noting the high priority assigned to ensuring human security and infrastructural development under this programme. The visiting Parliamentary delegation assured the Government of Japan's commitment to continue providing developmental support to the Maldives. They underscored the importance of all island communities speaking with a single voice on issues of climate change on the international stage, and encouraged the Maldives to take a leadership role in promoting the welfare of small island developing states.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand visits Maldives³⁹

Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Murray McCully paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom on August 7, 2014 at the President's Office. Highlighting four decades of bilateral ties, the President and the Foreign Minister of New Zealand exchanged views on further strengthening ties in the time ahead. Noting the high importance both countries attached towards raising the voice of small island developing states, they emphasised the importance of the upcoming UN SIDS Meeting in Samoa early next month. Discussions also focused on close cooperation on the global arena, including the Commonwealth. Among the issues that were highlighted for future cooperation were sustainable fisheries management, sports, environmental sustainability and renewable energy.

Secretary General of SAARC calls on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom⁴⁰

The new Secretary General of the SAARC, Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa called on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. At the meeting held at the President's Office on August 21, President Yameen congratulated Mr. Thapa on his assumption of office as the new Secretary General of SAARC, and welcomed him to the Maldives. The President also underscored the importance Maldives attaches to the development of the SAARC.

Minister of Islamic Affairs attends the Presidential handover ceremony of the 12th President of Turkey⁴¹

Minister of Islamic Affairs Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed has attended the Presidential handover ceremony of the 12th President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Minister Shaheem attended the ceremony as a special envoy of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. During his visit, Minister Shaheem also met with the new Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu, and the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani.

Environment Minister discusses climate change projects with WB mission⁴²

Environment Minister Thoriq Ibrahim met officials of World Bank (WB) mission on August 25 to discuss implementation of climate change projects. According to the ministry, discussions focused on preparation of the Climate Resilience and Environment Sustainability (CRES) Project under the second phase of the Maldives Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF) as well as the fifth implementation support mission for the Wetlands Conservation and Corel Reef Monitoring for Adaptation to Climate Change (WCCM) project under the first phase of the Maldives CCTF. The World Bank mission also held meetings with officials from the finance ministry, the CCTF Project Management Unit, the fisheries and agriculture ministry, the Marine Research Centre, the Environment Protection Agency, the Local Government Authority and WCCM project consultants.

Maldives to begin oil exploration with assistance of research vessel⁴³

The German research vessel 'Sonne' with 25 scientists on board came to the Maldives to conduct oil and gas exploration research and they agreed to do the

research for free. Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture Dr Mohamed Shainee said the information obtained would be shared with the Maldives in the first quarter of 2015, adding that it would not be shared with any third party. A local expert and a member of the Maldives National Defence Force will be present with the team during the survey, he said. According to Dr Shainee it will be carried out in one of the three main areas in the country with properties indicating the presence of oil and gas – located 100 miles east of the region between Laamu and Thaa atoll. Oil exploration was an election pledge of President Abdulla Yameen and the government earlier this year said a foreign investor had already expressed interest in oil exploration. French oil company Elf Aquitaine explored for oil and gas between 1968 and 1978, drilling three different sites. According to the MNOC, it was found at the time that the quantity available from the drilled site was insignificant and therefore uneconomical for production. In 1991, Royal Dutch Shell initiated a second attempt at drilling an exploration well in the inner sea of the Ari Atoll.

Gaza fund donations handed over to Qatar Red Crescent⁴⁴

A donation of US\$1.9 million to help Gaza was handed over to the Qatar Red Crescent at an event held on August 27 at the Maldives Broadcasting Commission. The unprecedented donation drive by Maldivians following the conflict in Gaza culminated in a 33 hour telethon aired across multiple participating broadcasters. The cheque was received by Qatar Red Crescent President Dr. Mohamed Bin Ghanim Al Madida. Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon, Help Gaza association's Steering Committee Chairman and MBC Chairman Ibrahim Umar Manik, and Gaza Fund Maldives representative Adhaalath Party leader Sheikh Imran Abdulla handed the check over on behalf of the Maldivian people. The donation is intended to be used to supply food and water and to help Gaza recover from damage sustained after the Israeli Defence Force launched an offensive in retaliation to rocket fire from within the territory.

Election Commission dissolves Gaume Ithihaad Party⁴⁵

Elections Commission has dissolved Gaume Ithihaad Party, founded by former president Dr Mohamed Waheed Hassan Manik. The party was officially dissolved on August 5 after it had completed all necessary steps for dissolution. The decision to dissolve the party was made by its governing council in late December last year after stating that the political atmosphere in Maldives did not allow small parties to maneuver. Dr Mohamed Waheed Hassan Manik and other leaders of Gaume Ithihaad Party have since joined the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM).

14 percent increase in tourist arrivals in July⁴⁶

Ministry of Tourism has reported on a statement published on their website that tourist arrivals during the month of July have shown a 14 percent increase when compared with figures from the same month last year. It reports that total number of tourists who visited the Maldives in July 2014 amount to 100,191. While Europe has traditionally been the area from which the Maldives gets the most number of visitors, the statement reports that in July, visitors from Asia and the Pacific exceeded those from Europe. The most number of tourists arrived to the Maldives in July from China, reaching 30.6 percent of the total number of arrivals.

Nepal

Modi's visit to Nepal⁴⁷

Indian Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi made a two-day official visit to Nepal on August 3. This was the first bilateral visit by an Indian PM in 17 years. In a departure from protocol, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala reached Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) to welcome his Indian counterpart. Other dignitaries including House Speaker Subash Nembang, ministers, high-level government officials and officials from India embassy in Kathmandu were present at TIA during the welcome ceremony for Modi. Prime Minister Modi addressed the Nepali Parliament on covering a range of subjects from religion to politics, from diplomacy to herbal medicines, and from information technology to infrastructure. Narendra Modi announced soft loan of US \$ 1 billion to Nepal for the infrastructure development, including energy during his meeting with his Nepali counterpart Sushil Koirala. The proposed amount will be provided through the import export bank under the 'concessional line of credit'. In a bilateral meeting held at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers at Singha Durbar, the two sides discussed a wide range of issues including political cooperation, trade and transit, development cooperation, water resources, previous treaties and agreements including the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, mutual security, and boundary issues. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the reactivation of Nepal-India Joint Commission with its 3rd meeting in Kathmandu recently and directed their respective authorities to take up the implementations of the decisions taken during the Joint Commission meeting. The Indian Prime Minister stated that India stands ready to resolve boundary issues, take measures to narrow Nepal's trade deficit, and accommodate Nepal's concerns with regard to the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950. He urged Nepal to capitalise the huge opportunities available in India as a huge market for the Nepalese products. Visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the second and last day of his official visit to Nepal, held meetings and political consultations with leaders of different political parties at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Modi also held a brief discussion with Nepali businessmen before flying back to New Delhi. Modi, has pledged a support of Rs 250 million for broader physical infrastructure development of the Pashupati area. The much talked about power trade agreement (PTA) between Nepal and India and power development agreement (PDA) with India's GMR were not signed during Indian Modi's visit. With ruling parties divided, the Cabinet informally agreed to complete the signing of both the PTA and the PDA within the next one and a half months.

Nepal, India launch formal talks on petroleum pipeline⁴⁸

Nepal and India have formally begun talks on developing the much-delayed 41-km Amlekhgunj-Raxaul petroleum pipeline project. Officials at Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) and Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) held talks on probable routes to lay the pipeline after field inspections in Amlekhgunj. They discussed two alternative pipeline routes—right alignment of the Birgunj-Amlekhgunj road and railway corridor that links Amlekhgunj with India's Raxaul via Birgunj. The corridor has so far remained unused. Of the 41km pipeline, 39km lies on the Nepali side of the border.

Nepal urges India to link three ICDs with railway network⁴⁹

Nepal has urged the Indian government to link Inland Container Depot (ICD) in Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj and Biratnagar with railway network and ease the ferrying of wagons to the ICDs. During a recent visit to the southern neighbour, a Nepali team led by Commerce Minister Sunil Bahadur Thapa made such a request to India's Finance Minister Arun Jaitley. Currently, only the Birgunj ICD is linked with Indian railway. Jib Raj Koirala, joint-secretary at MoCS who was also a team member, said they also requested the Indian side to improve the railway line at the Birgunj ICD to facilitate trade with India. The Nepali team also requested the Indian side to remove counter veiling duty (CVD) imposed on a number of Nepali products like readymade garment, copper utensils and synthetic yarn.

UCPN rift deepens⁵⁰

The UCPN (Maoist) is on the verge of a split after the rival factions stuck to their respective stances, with the senior leader Baburam Bhattarai faction continuing to form parallel structures within the party. The party had suspended four leaders from the standing committee and central committee. Denouncing the move, the Bhattarai faction has demanded immediate rectification of the decision. The faction has also announced the continuation of parallel structures within the party, signalling the widening gap between the two rival factions. Leaders close to Bhattarai accused Dahal of instigating a party split in order to disturb the constitution drafting process. Dahal loyalists, on the other hand, say Bhattarai wants to split the party by projecting the former as anti-peace and anti-constitution. Responding to Bhattarai faction's demand, Dahal remains adamant to take action against the leaders who 'violated the party's discipline by forming parallel structures'. Party leaders predict that the recent developments will lead to a party split, even though Dahal and Bhattarai had pledged to work together until the promulgation of the new constitution.

Dispute over HLPC⁵¹

A dispute has resurfaced over the formation of the High-level Political Committee (HLPC), affecting bilateral and multilateral talks among the parties on the contentious issues of the constitution writing process. The UCPN (M) has said the HLPC should be formed under its Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to guide tasks related to the transitional justice mechanism and constitution drafting, but NC and UML are against it. Though parties have just two weeks to settle disputed constitutional issues, cross-party leaders said the trust deficit among them remains. According to the parties, ruling NC and UML will reach a common position on contentious issues first. The UCPN (Maoist) and Madhes-based parties will also find the common ground. Once the major forces form an agreement, then they will hold discussions with the CPN-Maoist and other parties outside the CA. Parties have held first rounds of talks in their respective parties but they are yet to start give-and-take on the agenda. In recent meetings with the NC and the UML, Dahal has maintained that Baidya should be brought in the process. The Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML proposed to set up a cross-party mechanism under UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to complete the remaining tasks of the peace process. In a departure from their earlier positions on forming the High-

level Political Committee to complete the remaining tasks of the peace process and to ensure timely constitution, the ruling parties seek to curtail the constitution-drafting mandate of the HLPC as envisaged by the four-point agreement reached in February. The Maoist party has rejected the idea as it wants to include Madhesi parties and Janajatis in the mechanism. A meeting of the Federal Republican Front, an alliance headed by Dahal, rejected the proposal concluding that Madhes-based parties and Janajatis should be represented in the mechanism. Dahal has made it clear in his meetings with NC and UML leaders that the regional parties should be made part of the larger political process as they are signatories to the four-point deal.

Centre to have bicameral parliament⁵²

As the Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (PDCC) of the Constituent Assembly begins its “track two” approach to talks with various parties to forge consensus on contentious issues of the constitution writing process, Madhes-centric parties have reiterated their position of single autonomous Madhes province. Leaders argue that this will be their bottom line on statute drafting. They call for upholding the eight-point agreement signed with the Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha in February 2008 that calls for an autonomous Madhes province. The stance comes in the backdrop of a majority of the regional parties promising two provinces in the Tarai in their CA election manifestos last year, aimed at accommodating the Tharus who have been protesting against the one Madhes state. The number of provinces in the plains remains among the most contentious agendas of the constitution being drafted, right from the first Assembly. While Madhes-based parties stuck to their autonomous province agenda, the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML stood for multiple provinces. A subcommittee of the Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (PDCC) of the Constituent Assembly settled all the contentious issues relating to the legislature in the federal set-up. As per the cross-party agreement, the upper House will have 65 members, while lower house will be 235-strong. In a new provision, parties have agreed that the Vice President will chair the upper House. Provincial Cabinets will have 35 members. The subcommittee has also settled issues relating to the provincial legislature.

Dalits put forth 27 demands to CA⁵³

Nine Dalit organisations affiliated with major political parties unveiled twenty-seven-point charter of demands to put forward in the Constitution Assembly. The Joint Political Dalit Struggle Committee, an amalgam of Dalit organisations in the country, has demanded to ensure the political, educational, administrative and judicial rights of Dalit in the new constitution. They have asked with concerned authorities to form a powerful autonomous and constitutional body named National Dalit Development Council (NDDC) and further empower the existing Dalit Commission.

16 nominated CA members sworn in⁵⁴

Seventeen Constituent Assembly (CA) members nominated by the Cabinet took the oath of office and secrecy at Singha Durbar on August 31. CA Chairman Subas Chandra Nembang administered the oath of office and secrecy to the newly

appointed CA members. Eight from Nepali Congress, eight from CPN-UML took the oath of office and secrecy. RPP-Nepal lawmaker Ganesh Thapa was not present at the oath taking ceremony. The nominations of 17 CA members in 26 vacant CA seats came nine months after the CA elections and six months after Cabinet formation.

Chinese arrivals to Nepal crossed the 100,000 mark⁵⁵

Chinese arrivals to Nepal crossed the 100,000 mark last year reaching an all-time high of 113,173, largely due to improved air connectivity between Nepal and China, said the Tourism Ministry of Nepal. The figures released by the ministry showed that air arrivals jumped 55.3 percent to 62,616 and overland travellers surged 44.7 percent to 50,557. Arrivals from China in 2012 amounted to 71,861 persons. Around 93 percent of the Chinese tourists were first time visitors to Nepal. Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Wu Chuntai had said recently that the number of Chinese tourists to Nepal would reach 250,000 within a couple of years with increased flights between the two countries and land connectivity through Rasuwa and trans-Himalayan roads.

Flood and landslide in Nepal⁵⁶

The Ministry of Home Affairs said that at least 256 people have been killed and another 255 have been reported missing in floods and landslide across the country since June 7. About 155 people were injured. Similarly, 8,838 houses were destroyed and 22,103 houses were damaged, causing a property loss of Rs 4 billion. According to the Ministry, 16,629 houses were inundated in floods and 4,498 cattle were affected nationwide. The ministry has been providing relief in the flood and landslide affected areas, but there have been complaints from the victims that relief distribution was piecemeal, inadequate, and poorly managed. The ministry further said that over 151,037 people were directly affected by floods and landslide, and 15,201 families were displaced. The Indian government has pledged Rs 48 million in aid for the relief and rescue of the victims of floods and landslides across the nation. Addressing a greeting exchange programme organised by Nepal-India Friendship Network to mark the occasion of 68th Independence Day of India in Kathmandu, Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae announced the relief amount on behalf of Indian government. China has announced support of Rs. 15.5 million to the Prime Minister's Disaster Relief Fund. Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Wu Chuntai handed over the amount on behalf of the autonomous region of Tibet. Similarly, the US Mission in Nepal, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), will contribute more than \$450,000 in food assistance to the UN World Food Programme in Nepal to support existing flood and landslide relief efforts by the government and other humanitarian aid. The US contribution will enable the World Food Programme to purchase approximately 450 metric tonnes of locally and regionally produced rice, legumes and other important food commodities. To assist farmers affected by the landslides and floods in the Mid- and Far-Western districts, the US government, through USAID, has also pledged to help up to 3,000 farmers purchase seeds and tools to rebuild their livelihoods and better prepare for the next agriculture season. The US government also granted \$50,000 to the Nepal Red Cross Society to restock the pre-positioned non-food relief items.

Pakistan

Joint military drills between India and Nepal army to focus on disaster management⁵⁷

In the wake of recent floods and landslides that have ravaged parts of Nepal and India, a two-week joint exercise of the armies of the two countries began in Indian state of Uttarakhand on August 19 with special focus on disaster management. The two armies are fielding around 300 personnel each for the battalion level military training called the “Indo-Nepal Joint Group Training EX-SURYA KIRAN-VII”. Apart from the usual military drill for counterinsurgency operation, jungle warfare, counter terrorism and high-altitude operation, disaster relief and casualty evacuation have been included in the joint exercise that will be carried out at a height of 5,000-6,000 ft in the terrains of Pithoragarh district. “This is a regular joint exercise that takes place twice every year between the two armies.

Govt seeks assistance from China, India⁵⁸

The government has sought assistance from the two neighbouring countries—China and India to ease the flow of Sunkoshi River which has been blocked by a massive landslide in Sindhupalchowk district. An emergency meeting held at Prime Minister’s official residence in Baluwatar along with the security agencies decided to seek assistance from the neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam has said that neighboring countries India and China have offered to provide any kind of technical assistance needed to solve the crisis seen after the landslide.

Four points agreement between the PAT and the PTI⁵⁹

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) commenced the Azadi March on August 14. Leaders of the PTI and PAT announced an agreement on a four-point agenda after delegations of both parties met in Lahore to hold detailed discussions over the Azadi marches. The four points are: 1) the struggle would be democratic with the purpose of bringing in true participatory democracy, 2) the struggle by PTI and PAT would be constitutional, 3) the movement of both parties would be non-violent, 4) if any unconstitutional measure is taken during the struggle, both parties would condemn it and neither would tolerate martial law elaborating on the four points.

Nawaz forms cabinet committee for dialogue with PTI, PAT⁶⁰

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif constituted a five-member cabinet committee to hold dialogue with PTI and PAT. The committee was also been tasked with establishing contacts and coordination with the reconciliation committee formed by the political parties and facilitating them. The committee comprises federal ministers Lt-Gen (retd.) Abdul Qadir Baloch, Muhammad Akram Durrani, Ahsan Iqbal, Khawaja Saad Rafiq and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Irfan Siddiqui.

Opposition to Azadi March⁶¹

Lawyers of the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) and the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) observed a countrywide strike against the sit-ins held by the PAT and the PTI in Islamabad saying the campaigns were putting the parliamentary democratic system in peril. After meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Jamaat-i-

Islami (JI) Emir Sirajul Haq and PML-Q leaders, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari said that his party would not let democracy be derailed. Speaking at a press conference, he reiterated that the PPP would extend every possible effort to uphold democracy in the country. Regarding his meeting with the prime minister, Zardari said he urged Prime Minister Sharif to resolve the current political crisis through dialogue. The Balochistan Assembly adopted a unanimous resolution against the anti-government sit-ins. Members from the treasury and opposition benches lashed out at PTI chairman Imran Khan and PAT chief Dr Tahirul Qadri over what they called hatching conspiracies against the fragile democratic system in the country. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Members of National Assembly from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa opposed to resignation from the lower house have formed their own group and elected their own chairman to serve as focal person within the party and the parliament. They have elected MNA Gulzar Khan as their leader. A vice chairman of the group has also been elected. Opposition Leader in the Punjab Assembly and PTI's member Mehmoodur Rashid and 28 other party members handed their resignations from the house in the Punjab Assembly Secretariat. However, two PTI MPAs from Punjab, Nighat Inqiar and Jahanzaib Kichi, have not submitted their resignations and Rashid said the two lawmakers were "reluctant" to resign from the house. The United States has said that no extra-constitutional transfer of power in Pakistan was acceptable and warned that those "attempting to impose these changes" should not do so.

SC orders clearance of Constitution Avenue⁶²

The Supreme Court ordered PTI and PAT protesters to clear the Constitution Avenue which also includes a road in front of the apex court and the Parliament by August 28. The protesters have been sitting in front of the Parliament House and the Supreme Court building since August 19, making the road impassable for government employees.

PPP, MQM want govt to offer 'sacrifice' to save democracy⁶³

The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) have put the onus of resolving the prevailing political crisis squarely on the government, asking it to "offer some sacrifice". Meanwhile, the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) continued its efforts to mediate between the government and the PTI. According to another news report, MQM chief Altaf Hussain established telephonic contact with PAT chief Dr Tahirul Qadri and appealed to the latter to show patience. The MQM chief reportedly said that Punjab Governor Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar and Sindh Governor Dr Ishratul Ibad, who are members of the government delegation formed to broker a settlement between the government and protesting parties, were making concerted efforts so that the issues between political parties could be resolved with a mutual understanding.

COAS Raheel Sharif made 'mediator' to end political crisis⁶⁴

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif and discussed the prevailing political situation in the country. Reportedly, PM Nawaz took the COAS into confidence over the several rounds of talks that the government had held with the PTI and PAT leadership. Both agreed on the

need to resume dialogue in order to end the political deadlock in the country. The premier made it clear that the government had shown flexibility on certain matters during talks with the PTI and PAT leadership, however, he said that certain demands made by the PTI and PAT were against the Constitution. The premier also took the COAS into confidence over registration of First Information Report (FIR) on the Model Town incident and assured him that all government functionaries, including ministers, nominated in the FIR would extend full cooperation. This is the second such meeting in a week between the premier and the COAS, the first was held on August 26 during which the two had agreed to immediately resolve the political crisis. A political deadlock currently clouds the horizon of the country as two political parties PTI and PAT have been holding anti-government protests for more than two weeks. The protesters holding sit-ins in the federal capital are demanding the ouster of the premier through his resignation, with PAT chief Dr Tahirul Qadri calling for an overhaul of the system altogether. However, speaking shortly after the National Assembly session where Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said they have involved the army at the behest of protesting parties, PAT chief Tahirul Qadri said the government had "lied to the whole nation". Echoing PAT chief Dr Tahirul Qadri, PTI chairman Imran Khan said his party had not asked Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to involve the Army to broker a settlement with the government.

Army says political crisis must end through political means⁶⁵

After a lengthy four hour meeting at General Headquarters, the Pakistan Army corps commanders came out with a statement "reaffirming support to democracy" and reiterating that the current stand-off between the PML-N led government and the PTI, PAT needed a political solution. The meeting, which was headed by COAS General Raheel Sharif, saw the corps commanders reject "further use of force" in the crisis, an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release stated.

Army deployed in Islamabad⁶⁶

Pakistan government deployed the army in Islamabad under Article 245 of the Constitution from August 1, 2014, with the military mandated to aid civilian law-enforcement agencies in securing the capital for the next three months. Five companies of the army have been deployed in various parts of Islamabad to secure main offices of the judiciary, Parliament House, Presidency and Prime Minister Houses, foreign missions, foreign office and other important installations. One army company was deployed at Margalla Hills and on the road that connects the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with Islamabad. According to the security plan, the army would work in close coordination with the police, Rangers and administration for ensuring fool proof security for Islamabad.

Jirga of Dawar tribe demands end to military operation in North Waziristan⁶⁷

A jirga of Dawar tribe of North Waziristan Agency has demanded of the government to complete the operation Zarb-i-Azb as early as possible to ensure quick rehabilitation of the internally displaced persons. It also demanded enhancement of the compensation amount and registration of all the remaining displaced persons so they could get the benefits meant for the affected families.

PAF chief meets Sri Lankan military leadership⁶⁸

Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Chief Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafique Butt called on Sri Lankan Secretary of Defence and Urban Development Gotabaya Rajapaksa at the Ministry of Defence in Colombo on August 28. Later, the air chief called on the Commander of Sri Lankan Army, Lt Gen Daya Ratnayake, and Commander of the Sri Lankan Navy, Vice Admiral Jayantha Perera, at the respective services' headquarters. Bilateral matters pertaining to professional interest came under discussion. During the meeting with Air Marshal Gunathilake, it was agreed to enhance cooperation between the two air forces and new dimensions be given to the already existing friendly relations. Air Chief Marshal Butt assured his Sri Lankan counterpart of sustained support and cooperation in the fields of technical training and professional expertise. Air Chief Marshal Butt was on a three-day official visit to Myanmar and Sri Lanka on the invitation of air forces of both the countries.

COAS General Raheel Sharif visits Australia⁶⁹

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif left for Australia on a four day official visit, a statement issued on the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) website said. Gen Raheel Sharif was visiting Australia on the special invitation of Australian Chief of Defence Force.

PM meets Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation⁷⁰

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met Iyad Ameen Madani, the Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) at the Prime Minister House in Islamabad. Mr Madani was on an official visit to Pakistan from August 4-6, accompanied by senior officials from the OIC. This was Madani's first visit to Pakistan since assumption of the new office in January this year. Both sides discussed a wide range of issues including, the ongoing situation in Gaza, Jammu and Kashmir dispute, and situation in Afghanistan. The both sides discussed issues pertaining to cooperation in the field of science and technology, moreover also on regional and global political issues.

Pakistan navy to head counter-terrorism coalition force⁷¹

Pakistan Navy has taken over the command of the multinational naval counter-terrorism coalition force from the UK Royal Navy. The change of command of Combined Task Force-150 took place on August 14 at the United States Naval Forces Central Command Headquarters in Bahrain and Commodore Sajid Mahmood took over command of CTF-150 from Commodore Jeremy Blunden of the Royal Navy.

India calls off foreign secretary level bilateral talks with Pakistan⁷²

India called off foreign secretary-level bilateral talks with Pakistan following criticism of Abdul Basit meeting with Hurriyat leader Shabir Shah. Two days after India snubbed Pakistan by calling off secretary level talks, High Commissioner in New Delhi Abdul Basit said Pakistan's objective was to engage with all stakeholders. Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Ministry has defended the decision to consult the Kashmiri leaders, saying it is a "longstanding practice" prior to talks between the two nations to "facilitate meaningful discussions on the issue of Kashmir".

Sri Lanka

DGMOs of India and Pakistan talk on the hotline⁷³

Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of India and Pakistan talked on the hotline on August 26. Both sides mutually agreed to reduce tensions along the LoC and Working Boundary. Reportedly, the conversation took place on Pakistan's call.

Pakistan denies Indian media allegations of a Pakistani diplomat in Colombo⁷⁴

Pakistan has firmly denied claims that one of its diplomats in Sri Lanka was involved in spying on India and planning terror attacks in Chennai. About the Indian media allegations of a Pakistani diplomat in Colombo involved in spying India and planning attacks in Chennai, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Tasneem Aslam said that it was an effort to create a wedge between Pakistan and Sri Lanka as the two countries have excellent relations with fruitful discussions on strengthening bilateral relations and increasing economic ties.

New Sri Lankan High Commissioner presents credentials to President of India⁷⁵

Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India Prof. Sudharshan Seneviratne presented his credentials to the President of India Pranab Mukherjee, at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on July 31, 2014. At a cordial meeting which followed the Credentials Ceremony, High Commissioner Seneviratne conveyed the greetings of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to President Mukherjee. President Mukherjee and High Commissioner Prof. Seneviratne exchanged views on the historic and close ties between Sri Lanka and India as well as the commitment to further strengthen bilateral relations.

India summons Sri Lankan high commissioner⁷⁶

India summoned Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India and lodged a formal protest against a derogatory article about Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa. The article titled 'How meaningful are Jayalalitha's love letters to Narendra Modi?' appeared on the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development website along with a graphical portrayal of the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The article drew strong reactions from political parties in India including the AIDMK led by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa and the DMK led by M. Karunanidhi. President Mahinda Rajapaksa expressed regret over the article and ordered an investigation into it. The Defence Ministry later removed the article saying it had been published without appropriate authorisation and did not reflect any official position of the Government of Sri Lanka or the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development.

India and Lanka to share intelligence⁷⁷

India and Sri Lanka agreed to continue sharing of actionable intelligence at the first Director General levels talks between the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) of India and the Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB) of Sri Lanka in New Delhi. The two sides also agreed to adopt a coordinated strategy to prevent drug trafficking between the two countries. Both sides shared concern over the growing menace of narcotic drugs and latest trends in narcotics smuggling in Indo-Sri Lankan sector.

The Indian delegation was led by Mr Vijay Kumar, Deputy Director General, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) while the Sri Lankan delegation was headed by Mr. Pujith Jayasundara, Senior DIG/Northern Province, Sri Lanka.

TNA delegation visits India⁷⁸

TNA leader R. Sampanthan and five TNA MPs including Mavai Senathirajah, MA Sumanthiran, Selvam Adaikkalanathan, Suresh Premachandran and Pon Selvaraj met Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on August 22. Indian External Affairs Ministry Spokesman Syed Akbaruddin commenting on meeting had said, "Sushma Swaraj stressed on the need for a political solution that addresses substantially the aspirations of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka that ensure equality, dignity, justice and self respect within the framework of united Sri Lanka." TNA delegation had a meeting with the Indian PM on August 23 where several issues including the fuller implementation of the 13th amendment to the constitution was discussed. Senior Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader and parliamentarian R Sampanthan has sought the immediate intervention of the Indian government to end the Sri Lankan government's strategy to make the implementation of the 13th amendment irrelevant by altering the demographic composition in the north and eastern provinces dominated by Tamils. Speaking to reporters after holding a discussion with BJP leaders at Kamalalayam in Chennai, he said that the Indian government should make it clear to Lanka that it should stop the present exercise of changing the demographic composition. President Rajapaksa has been heavily vexed at the TNA meeting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and has expressed his discontent through an emissary to TNA leader R. Sampanthan, the weekly English newspaper Sunday Times (ST) reports. In its political column on August 24, the ST has revealed that President Rajapaksa expressed his displeasure to Sampanthan through an emissary before the departure of the TNA delegation. According to the columnist, the President had been vexed about the lack of intimation to the government and had described TNA delegation's trip to New Delhi as a step aimed at 'cornering him and his government' and with the aim of changing the government. President Rajapaksa who expressed his discontent furthermore, has been quoted in ST as stating however despite wherever Sampanthan and his party goes, they would eventually have to come to him – otherwise they will not be able to talk about resolving issues. Meanwhile, the same sources have been quoted in ST as stating that Sampanthan had rejected the accusations that their visit was aimed at prompting a government change.

India –Sri Lanka joint committee meeting on fishery⁷⁹

The first meeting of a joint committee between India and Sri Lanka was held on August 29, 2014 in New Delhi to discuss about institutionalising cooperation in the fisheries sector and address concerns of fishermen. In January, both countries had agreed to set up a joint committee of senior fisheries officials to finalise the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of fisheries.

SL Navy hands over 94 Indian fishermen⁸⁰

The Sri Lankan navy handed over 94 Tamil Nadu fishermen taken into custody by them to the Indian Coast Guard at the International Maritime Boundary Line. The

fishermen, belonging to Ramanathapuram, Nagapattinam and Pudukottai districts, were taken into custody by the navy in July on charges of violating IMBL. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa ordered on August 13 their release as a goodwill gesture ahead of India's Independence Day. Sri Lanka has released 225 Indian fishermen since the Narendra Modi government took over in May this year. The 94 fishermen were the fresh batch released by the island nation. However, the Sri Lankan Fisheries Minister, Dr Rajitha Senarathne, said that there is no possibility of releasing the detained boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen. The Sri Lankan government has rejected a proposal put forward by an Indian political leader to provide a temporary license for Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters for 3 years. Sri Lanka's Fisheries Minister Dr. Rajitha Senarathne turned down the proposal made by the Senior Leader of the Bharatha Janatha Party Dr. Subramanian Swamy at the Defense Seminar in Colombo. India meanwhile, has released 16 Sri Lankan fishermen who had been arrested for crossing into Indian waters illegally.

Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan and Sri Lanka meet⁸¹

Sri Lanka and Pakistan have sought enhanced cooperation in the fields of trade, education, culture and defence and also agreed to a continued collaboration and cooperation on global issues. The agreements were reached when the Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry and Mrs. Kshenuka Senewiratne held Fourth round of political consultations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad on August 6. The Sri Lankan delegation comprised of Sri Lankan High Commissioner Air Chief Marshal Jayalath Weerakkody, Senior DIG Anura Senanayake representing the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, Dharshana Mahendra Perera, Acting DG/South Asia, Ministry of External Affairs, Samantha Wijesekara, Deputy Director, Department of Commerce, Mrs. Tharanga Liyanage, Director (Middle East & SAARC), Department of External Resources and officials of the Sri Lankan High Commission, while senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 12 other government departments were part of the Pakistani delegation.

Pakistani asylum seekers in Sri Lanka⁸²

Sri Lanka began arresting asylum seekers and refugees on June 9 and has since detained 214 Pakistanis and Afghans in two asylum centers, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). At least 108 Pakistani citizens have been deported since the beginning of August, according to the UNHCR. Authorities in Colombo said the influx of illegal immigrants in the past year had become a burden on state resources and potentially compromised state and regional security. The Court of Appeal has ordered the suspension of deporting Pakistani asylum seekers back to their country, till August 29. In issuing the order, the Court of Appeal had noted that Sri Lanka is a signatory to UN refugee laws and so should not send back asylum seekers.

Sri Lanka-Vietnam Co-operation⁸³

During a meeting between Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Sri Lanka's Ministry of Law and Order secretary Nanda Mallawaarachchi on August 21, Phuc sought closer collaboration in ensuring security in both

countries. Vietnam hopes to work closely with Sri Lanka to fight crimes especially those involving e-commerce and credit in accordance with agreements signed earlier, the Vietnam News Agency (VNA) reported. Other areas of possible cooperation include trade, investment, education and tourism. Phuc also thanked Sri Lanka for supporting Vietnam's bid for a seat at the 2014-2016 United Nations Human Rights Council, the 2016-2018 UN Economic and Social Council and 2020-2022 UN Security Council. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka and Vietnam officially opened a business center in Kelaniya to introduce Vietnam's investment environment and cooperative prospects for trade to the Sri Lankan business community.

Rajapaksa names Indian and Pakistani expert as advisor to Commission on missing persons⁸⁴

President Mahinda Rajapaksa invited Pakistani human rights lawyer Ahmer Bilal Soofi and Indian human rights activist Avdhash Kaushal to strengthen the advisory council to the Commission of Inquiry on Missing Persons which already consists of three members.

Secretary General of SAARC meets President⁸⁵

The Secretary General of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Arjun B. Thapa called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the President's House in Kandy on August 11.

Sri Lankan army opens a new hospital in South Sudan⁸⁶

The Sri Lanka Army at the request of the UN, has established its first-ever SRIMED Level 2 Hospital in Bor, South Sudan, under the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Sri Lanka and Samoa established formal diplomatic relations⁸⁷

Sri Lanka and the Independent State of Samoa established formal Diplomatic Relations by signing a joint communiqué. Dr. Palitha Kohona, the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, and Ali'ioaiga Feturi Elisaia, the Permanent Representative of Samoa to the United Nations, signed the Joint Communique on behalf of their respective Governments.

Sri Lanka offers US \$ 1 million to Palestine⁸⁸

President Mahinda Rajapaksa announced that Sri Lanka would be providing US\$ 1 million in financial assistance to Palestine.

Sri Lanka suspends on-arrival visa facility to four African countries⁸⁹

Sri Lankan Government has decided to suspend the on-arrival visa facility to visitors from four African countries namely Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leon and Liberia owing to the spread of the Ebola virus.

Trade deficit narrows⁹⁰

Sri Lanka's external sector strengthened further and trade deficit narrowed for the ninth consecutive month in June 2014 by 35.3 percent to US\$ 454 million as

earnings from exports substantially increased while expenditure on imports declined during the month, the Central Bank said releasing the External Sector Performance review. Earnings from exports in June 2014 increased significantly on a year-on-year (YoY) basis by 22 percent to US\$ 986 million, while expenditure on imports declined by 4.6 percent to US\$ 1.439 billion.

Central Bank of Sri Lanka clarifies its decision to hire a lobbying firm in the US⁹¹

Sri Lanka's Central Bank says that a comprehensive overseas campaign to provide an accurate account of the Sri Lankan political and economic environment to the United States is needed in order to counter the extraordinary and vicious campaigns carried out by sections of the Tamil Diaspora in the US. Responding to a recent report by Sunday Times on the Bank's recent hiring of the Liberty International Group LLC, a lobbying firm in the U.S., at an annual fee of approximately US\$ 760,000 for a year, the Central Bank said in a statement that to carry out such a campaign effectively and successfully in the U.S., the normal practices in the U.S. have to be followed, based upon proper advice and effective interventions.

2.7 million people affected by drought⁹²

The number of people affected by the severe drought which has hit several parts of the country has gone past 2.7 million, according to the Disaster Management Center (DMC). According to the DMC, 561216 people have been affected by the drought in the North Western Province, which was among the worst affected areas. The DMC also said that 412,451 people have been affected in the Eastern province and 382471 in the North.

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