

SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

November 2015

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

The current issue reflects the major political, economic and foreign policy developments in the South Asian countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The section on Afghanistan focuses on the worsening security situation in the country and the flow of Afghan refugees in the Western countries.

The issue of "war crime trial in Bangladesh "has once again made headlines in media after the execution of two war criminals in November. Bangladesh reacted sharply on Pakistan's foreign office statement, voicing "deep concern and anguish" over the execution; and on the statement issued by the Amnesty International which suggested implication of the "pro-independence forces" too for committing "serious crimes".

Emphasising its priority to improve Bhutan's relations with other countries, Government of Bhutan has held several meetings in the month of November with officials of foreign countries including the EU, Germany, India, Italy, Sweden and Sri Lanka on the issues mutual interests.

State of Emergency was declared for 30 days by the President of Maldives Abdulla Yameen. However, he had to revoke the emergency early due to the international pressure.

Government of Nepal is planning to sign a commercial deal with china to import 40-50 per cent of countries fuel requirement from China to diversify its oil dependency on India. Government of Nepal has requested China to waive off tax on petroleum products for the same. Meanwhile experts in Nepal have suggested government to hold a concrete talk to address the demands of the Madhes movement to end the fuel crisis in Nepal.

Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan General Raheel Sharif visited the USA, Saudi Arabia and Brazil in November and discussed the defence cooperation and the regional security situations with the leaders of these countries. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the other hand had talks with his British counterpart David Cameron on the sidelines of the CHOGM in Malta.

President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena handed over the position of the chair in office of Commonwealth to the Prime Minister of Malta at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held on November 27.

Afghanistan

India, Afghanistan hold extensive talks on regional security¹

India and Afghanistan have held extensive discussions on various aspects of regional security, particularly terrorism which threatens peace and stability of the region as also ways and means to strengthen defence capabilities of Afghan security to deal with the menace. The discussions took place during the meetings Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar with the defence minister of India and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval. Hanif Atmar, who was in Delhi on November 8 and 9, also met Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar and attended a discussion in the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

Russia to provide 10,000 Kalashnikovs to Afghanistan²

The Russian Federation has promised 10,000 Kalashnikovs AK-47 to Kabul for supporting Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in their fight against terrorism. Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, speaker of Meshrano Jirga (Upper House of the Parliament) has said that the weapons are expected to arrive in Kabul in December. He said that Russian officials have rejected rumours of directly fighting Daesh in Afghanistan, adding that they will extend assistance to Afghan government for eliminating any opponent armed group. Moscow has assured of staying with Kabul in its fight against terrorism which not only threatens Afghanistan but the entire region.

US to stay in Afghanistan: Senator Rose³

A US delegation led by US Senator Rose Lit who is the chief of foreign committee for Asia-Africa in US senate house visited Chief of Executive Abdullah Abdullah and stated that US Government will not leave Afghanistan unless Afghanistan quits its ties with USA. US senator said that the ongoing war doesn't belong to Afghanistan; "it is also our war against terrorism". During the meeting both the leaders insisted on strengthening of ties between Kabul and Washington. Chief Executive of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah responded that things have changed, but there are some challenges and opportunities ahead of both countries, "we promise to stay with US shoulder to shoulder, we also appreciate the recent decision of US Government for keeping its troops to Afghanistan on 2016".

Over 100 foreign troops deployed in Kunar⁴

Kunar security officials said that at least 150 foreign troops have been deployed to the capital city Assadabad and other parts of the eastern province in a bid to strengthen security in the province. Kunar police chief Abdul Habib Sayed Kheli told media that the foreign troops have been redeployed after a two year break. This will help Afghan security forces maintain law-and-order in the province. The troops will also help with reconstruction projects in the province according to Kheli. Meanwhile, a number of Kunar provincial council members and residents welcomed the move and said they hope that the troops will help secure the province.

Abdullah calls ANSF to act against Hizb At-Tahrir⁵

Hizb at-Tahrir party of liberation is an international pan-Islamic political organisation, it has been active in Afghanistan since seven years, and necessary

measurements should be taken place to stop the activities of the following terrorist group in Afghanistan, officials in National Unity Government said. Chief of Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah has stated that the radical terrorist group is trying to expand its activities among academic centers in Afghanistan by encouraging young generation to launch terrorist activities in Universities. Afghan officials have identified the two main base of the Hizb at-Tahrir in Nangarhar and Kabul Universities, they are trying to provoke young generation against their existed government. CEO Abdullah Abdullah has said, "that Hizb at-Tahrir is trying to expand its activities among young generation in academic centers where most of young people both boys and girls are studying for their future, Hizb at-Tahrir is the civilian branch derived from the main terrorist Networks, they have been here close to Afghan security forces eyes but they have done nothing to identify them." Officials in Ministry of Interior Affairs mentioned that no chance will be given to those trying to destroy the current system in Afghanistan.

Tajikistan closes borders for Badakhshan residents⁶

As insecurity escalates in northern Afghanistan, Badakhshan residents living along the border with Tajikistan have had their unlimited cross-border access stopped. Darwaz, Ishkashim and Maimay districts all share a border with Tajikistan and residents from these areas have until now crossed freely in order to do their shopping. But these residents have called on government to talk with Tajik officials to reopen the border saying otherwise they will be faced with major problems. The district chief of Maimay Dawlat Mohammad meanwhile said that Tajikistan has also stopped issuing visas to Afghan villagers who live near its border. Darwaz has the longest border with Tajikistan. For local residents in Badakhshan a trip to the provincial capital Faizabad can take up to 18 days but to get across the border to shop is much quicker.

Hekmatyar has offered conditional support to Afghan peace process⁷

The Chief of Hezb-e-Islami party, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, has offered conditional support to the Afghan peace process while seeking a comeback and leverage in the politics. He has been designated a "global terrorist" by the United States and blacklisted by the United Nations along with Osama bin Laden. Hekmatyar's conditions are similar to the other militant groups fighting the Afghan Government, including the Taliban militants. He wants a complete withdrawal of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan and organisation of a new election in 2016.

Taliban splinter group ready for peace talks⁸

An Afghan Taliban splinter group, which refuses Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor as successor of late Mullah Omar, says they are ready to talk peace with the Afghan Government. The dissident group's deputy chief Mullah Abdul Manan told BBC on November 7, that if the foreign forces completely desert Afghanistan, the group will be ready to talk peace with the Afghan Government. The group, which recently elected Mullah Mohammad Rassoul as their new leader in the western Ghor province, says they have no problem with the Afghan Government.

Afghan security has direct impact on regional security: Larijani⁹

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said that Afghan security has direct impact on security of the neighbouring countries. Larijani made the remarks in a meeting with the head of Afghan Parliamentary Commission for Legislative, Justice and Judiciary Affairs in the Afghan House of Elders, Ghulam Mohiuddin Munsif on November 15. "There are vast cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan and we try to play a constructive role in elimination of your country's problems", Larijani said. He voiced concern over growth of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, calling for replacing cultivation of poppy with other crops so Afghanistan would go ahead with economic development. He promised to help the Afghan agriculture ministry with expertise to implement the plan sponsored by the United Nations to replace poppy cultivation with other crops. Munsif, led a parliamentary delegation on a four-day official visit to Iran to discuss with the Iranian officials and members of parliament on issues of mutual concern. He said Afghan nation is very thankful to Iran because the refugees are well treated and Afghanistan is given much help. He thanked Iranian government for financial support to Kabul government and said that the Afghan parliament is willing to develop diplomatic and parliamentary ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Pakistan must counter terrorists fighting against Afghanistan: Ghani¹⁰

President Ashraf Ghani has stressed that Pakistan should take action against the terrorist groups that declare war against the people of Afghanistan and by doing that show their cooperation and sincerity in fighting terrorism and ensuring lasting peace in Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani said this during meeting with Deng Xijun, the special representative of China for Afghanistan and Pakistan on November 9. Ghani also said that dignified and lasting peace is the basic need of Afghanistan. He added that peace in Afghanistan has two dimensions, first peace with Pakistan and second peace with the Taliban. He called terrorism a shared threat for Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region and urged joint and sincere commitment to fight this ominous phenomenon in order to eliminate it. In the meeting that was held in Presidential Palace, Deng Xijun said that "Afghanistan is an important partner of China and to that end we work jointly with Afghanistan to eliminate terrorism in the region and ensure lasting peace and economic development in the country."

Pakistan vows to not create trade problems for Afghanistan¹¹

Ministry of Finance Eklil Hakimi on November 24 said that the Pakistan has promised to not create any trade problems for Afghanistan anymore. Eklil Hakimi who has just returned from a trip to Pakistan noted that he had effective talks with Pakistani authorities. "Talks over the regional connectivity routes are ongoing with Pakistani officials and we are trying to provide an effective agreement for Afghan traders," minister of finance said. Meanwhile, officials in Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) are said to consider good relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are beneficial for the economy of both the countries. In November, Pakistan promised faster clearance of Afghan cargo, greater access for Afghan traders to Pakistan's railway system and to set up 'parallel track' Afghan customs at Karachi.

Kabul and Beijing mark 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties¹²

Afghanistan and People's Republic of China celebrated the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations on November 3 at the Afghan Presidential Palace. President Ashraf Ghani, Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao, Afghanistan's CEO Abdullah Abdullah, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai, the cabinet members, parliamentarians and other high-ranking officials from both the countries attended the event. The two sides signed three major cooperation agreements on security, education and reconstruction which Ghani said is a "vital step towards strengthening the bilateral relations." The Chinese Vice President promised an assistance of \$1 million to the quake-affected families, in addition to helping Afghanistan 1.5 billion Chinese Yuan for the next three years. Based on the agreements signed, China will build four security gates at the entrances of Kabul city. Besides providing 1,500 new scholarships for the Afghan students, China will also construct 10,000 residential units for the families of victims of Afghan Army and Police.

Kazakhstan, Afghanistan sign civil defence cooperation deal¹³

Astana and Kabul agreed on cooperation in the field of emergency situations and civil defence. The agreement was reached during President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Kazakhstan. The agreement on cooperation in civil defence, prevention and liquidation of emergency situations was signed between the governments of Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. The sides have also signed an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the field of culture. In a joint press conference with President Ghani, Nursultan Nazarbayev said that Kazakhstan will send more than 600 thousand tons of wheat to Afghanistan.

Kunduz fact-finding team release results¹⁴

The Kunduz fact-finding commission, appointed by President Ashraf Ghani, has released their findings into the recent fall of the city to the Taliban and said there had been no government-linked conspiracy behind the incident but that the Taliban had received orders from Pakistan. Commission chairman, former NDS chief, Amrullah Saleh said Kunduz war had been planned by an "army and an intelligence service" and that the Taliban were taking orders during the siege from Peshawar. Saleh also stated that the commission found evidence of a "grey network" in Kunduz that was anti-Taliban but in favour of a weak government. He said this "network" was running a parallel government in Kunduz and that it had support from within the Kabul administration. Saleh also pointed fingers at the National Security Council and said the commission's "first line of criticism is with the president's office (national security council). We will not hide anything." He said the commission found that the government made a big mistake when Taliban took control of Chardara and Dasht-i-Archi districts. According to him, local police had been under Taliban pressure for three months ahead of the incident but had not been given any back up. The report stated that leading up to and during the fall of the city, security force members had been well equipped and had enough arms and ammunition. However, Saleh said that had it not been for the U.S that launched an air strike against the Taliban during the siege, the insurgents would have gained more ground by taking control of the airport and the entire

city. Saleh said the primary reason for the collapse of the city had been failure in management by government and a gap in their command structure. The commission also found that differences among MPs, corruption and ghost forces were to blame and that “hundreds of (illegal) armed men, land grabbers and criminal groups are active in Kunduz.” The commission in turn called on government to take practical measures to overcome problems in Kunduz.

Thousands flee homes over Daesh activities in Nangarhar¹⁵

An estimated 24,000 families from Achin, Nazian and Debhala districts have fled their homes to escape Daesh brutality. A Nangarhar displaced persons organisation said that help for at least 18,000 is needed urgently. As Afghan forces continue their military campaign against Daesh in Nangarhar, displaced residents have however slammed government for not doing enough to safeguard them.

Kabul, Oslo agree to repatriation of Afghan refugees¹⁶

Deputy Minister of Justice of Norway Joran Kallmyr and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Tore Hattrem met with President Ashraf Ghani, CEO Abdullah Abdullah and a number of ministers in Kabul on November 15 over the Norwegian refugee crisis – specifically that of Afghan’s seeking asylum in their country. Talks were centered around the Afghan refugees that have made their way across Russia to the Scandinavian country. Following the meetings, a decision was taken to repatriate about 90 per cent of all recent Afghan arrivals in Norway. However, the exact number of refugees has not been made clear.

Rabbani, Balkhi address MPs in the Parliament over migrant crisis¹⁷

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Salahuddin Rabbani and Minister of Refugees and Repatriation on November 16, addressed parliament over the ongoing migrant crisis in Europe with the focus being on Afghan refugees fleeing the country. According to Rabbani, so far this year 146,000 Afghans have sought refuge in Europe. He said that of these, 43 per cent have been given asylum in various countries and that 53 per cent are still being processed. The balance has been repatriated. He said that a total of 80,000 applied for asylum in Germany alone. Rabbani went on to say that the two key issues driving Afghans to Europe is insecurity and unemployment. However, in order to be granted asylum status, all Afghans have to prove their lives are in danger, he said.

Kabul discusses refugee problems with european envoys¹⁸

In the meeting with ambassadors of Germany, Italy, Britain, Czech, Sweden, France, Holland, Finland, Denmark, and Norway, Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani called the problem of Afghan asylum seekers in European Countries a bilateral problem and emphasised the commitment of the Afghan Government for talks with these countries in order to find a bilateral and comprehensive solution to this problem. “We expect European Countries to deal with Afghan asylum seekers according to the situation in Afghanistan and the international conventions frame work and the memoranda of understanding that some of these European countries have signed with Afghanistan”, Minister Rabbani said. Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi Minister of Refugees and Repatriation said,

“Afghanistan is interested in reopening negotiations on MoUs that were signed in the previous years with some of the European countries and wants to start negotiations with some others, especially Germany, in this respect.” In response to Minister Balkhi’s call, the European Ambassadors showed willingness to reopen negotiation on related MoUs but added that they would implement projects to create more job opportunities in the country which would prevent increase of immigration.

36 per cent of Afghanistan’s population under poverty line¹⁹

According to a joint survey by the ministry of economic and the World Bank over 36 per cent of the people of Afghanistan live under the poverty line. With 36 per cent of its population living below the poverty line, Afghanistan is only second to Bangladesh as Asia’s poorest country.

Foundation for 19 factories laid in Kabul²⁰

Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) has laid the foundation of 19 productive factories in the capital Kabul on November 10. Officials in AISA have said, “domestic production will be increased when the factories are active.” Head of the AISA Mohammad Qurban Haqjo said, “\$100 million will be invested on 19 industrial factories and it will produce electronic instruments, and food items.” 5 factories will produce food items.

IOM distributes aid to 1,000 earthquake-hit families²¹

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) distributed vital relief supplies across northern, central and eastern Afghanistan, helping families affected by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake that struck on October 26. Assessment conducted by government, IOM, UN and other NGOs shows an estimated 8,300 families in 14 Afghan provinces were affected by the earthquake. More than 100 people lost lives and around 500 others sustained injuries. According to a report published by IOM on November 7, the toll could rise further as remote communities are accessed by assessment teams. The report further states that the organisation distributed relief items to approximately 1,000 families in Badakhshan, Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman and Takhar provinces, and distributions are ongoing for additional assessed families in these provinces.

EU, EUPOL urge Govt of Afghanistan to eliminate violence against women²²

European Union and European Union Police Mission (EUPOL) in Afghanistan in a joint statement on the International Day of Elimination of Violence against Women urged Afghan government to eliminate violence Against Women. Elimination of violence and discrimination against women and girls remains a pivotal objective of the European Union’s Human Rights Policy, the statement stated.

India–Bangladesh exchanged Nur Hossain and Anup Chetia²³

The Government of Bangladesh brought back Nur Hossain, the prime accused in the sensational seven-murder case in Narayanganj, from India on November 12. A team of police took Nur in its custody after the Indian Border Security Force

handed him over to the Border Guard Bangladesh at Benapole. The deportation took place a day after the Bangladesh Government handed over top ULFA leader Anup Chetia to the Indian authorities. Anup Chetia had been in prison since his arrest in Mohammadpur in December 1997.

EU to give €50million grant for primary education in Bangladesh²⁴

The European Commission has approved a grant of EUR 50 million for the primary education sector of Bangladesh. This funding under the 2015 budget is in addition to the ongoing European Union contribution to the sector which makes the EU the second largest grant provider for the third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP 3), said an EU press release.

Bangladesh Government asks Amnesty International to apologise²⁵

Blasting the Amnesty International over a statement on war crimes trial, the Government of Bangladesh has demanded the rights watchdog withdraw the statement immediately and apologise for its highly objectionable pronouncement concerning the pro-independence forces. In a protest note sent to Amnesty headquarters in London, the government said the watchdog in its October 27 statement went beyond its usual stand, and caused widespread outrage by suggesting that the “pro-independence forces” in Bangladesh be also implicated for committing “serious crimes”.

US updates travel alert²⁶

The US Department of State has issued a travel alert for Bangladesh, claiming there is reliable information to suggest that terrorist attacks could occur against foreigners in the country. In its updated travel alert issued in Washington on November 10, the US, citing “recent violent attacks”, asked its citizens to exercise appropriate caution and maintain a high level of vigilance during their travel to Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the updated travel alert “is not based on reality”.

US State Department representatives meet Bangladesh Home Minister²⁷

The US officials, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) for South and Central Asian Affairs William E. Todd and Director of South and Central Asian Affairs for Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, Clinton Brown, visited Dhaka from November 4-6, left on November 6 for Colombo, then returned to Dhaka on November 8 for additional meetings. During their first visit, the US delegation had meetings with the home minister of Bangladesh and other government officials, while on the second visit on November 8, they spoke with Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali and had a meeting with Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque at the state guesthouse Padma.

Dutch Queen Maxima meets Prime Minister Hasina²⁸

Dutch Queen Maxima assured Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the Netherlands would extend all-out support to Bangladesh in its development efforts. She came up with the assurance during a meeting with Hasina at her official residence the Gono Bhaban on November 18. Queen Maxima arrived in Dhaka on November

16 on a three-day official visit in her capacity as the UN secretary general's special advocate for inclusive finance for development.

Bangladesh assures assistance to Nepal²⁹

Nepal sought support from Bangladesh in tackling its crisis over fuel and meeting the need for other essentials, including rice and life saving drugs. The request came when Nepalese Ambassador to Bangladesh Hari Kumar Shrestha met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her official residence the Gono Bhaban on November 17. In response Hasina said the people of Nepal have been suffering a lot since the earthquake and Bangladesh would extend its all possible help to the affected people by sending rice and medicines. About transportation of goods, she said, the Indian Government has not made any objection to carry goods from Bangladesh to Nepal through India.

India-Bangladesh home secretary level talks held in Dhaka³⁰

Bangladesh and India pledged to share intelligence about any sort of terrorism and insurgency on the last day of two-day home secretary-level talks in Dhaka on November 17. The two sides wrapped up the talks through signing of "joint minutes of agreements".

India agrees to pay Rs 192 per ton as transit fee³¹

India agreed to pay Bangladesh a transit fee of Rs 192.22 per tonne of goods to be transported from its Tripura state to Ashuganj port in Bangladesh. The announcement came after a meeting between shipping secretaries of the two countries.

Bangladesh condemns Paris attack³²

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina strongly denounced terrorist attacks which have killed 129 people at a concert hall, restaurants and the national sports stadium of Paris.

Pakistani envoy was summoned by Bangladesh foreign secretary's office³³

Dhaka has reacted sharply to a statement from Islamabad on the execution of two war criminals, and summoned the Pakistan high commissioner in Bangladesh for lodging a formal protest. Pakistani Envoy Shuja Alam was asked to come to the acting foreign secretary's office on November 23. The development came hours after Pakistan foreign ministry issued a statement, voicing "deep concern and anguish" over the execution of war criminals Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

UN calls for moratorium on execution in Bangladesh³⁴

The United Nations has renewed its call on the Bangladesh Government to immediately impose a moratorium on capital punishment and abolish the practice altogether. In a statement issued in Geneva on November 24, Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the government should not implement death sentences awarded by the International

Crimes Tribunal, "given the doubts that have been raised about the fairness of trials conducted before the tribunal." The statement came in response to execution of war criminals Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid on November 22.

New ship for Bangladesh Navy arrives³⁵

A new ship for Bangladesh Navy "BNS Somudra Avijan" arrived at Chittagong Naval Base from the USA on November 28, and was welcomed there by high officials of the navy including Rear Admiral Akhter Habib. The ship, a cutter, had started its journey on November 16, 1968 under the US Coast Guard and, was decommissioned on February 3, 2015. It was handed over to Bangladesh Navy on May 5, 2015 and has been added to the 9th frigate squadron. Capt. M. Wasim Maksud, commander of the ship, said it would be used for patrolling the country's maritime boundary.

Foreign minister leads delegation to CHOGM in Malta³⁶

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was scheduled to attend the CHOGM and two other events in Paris, cancelled her visits following security situation. Bangladeshi delegation at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM 2015) on November 27-29 was led by Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali.

Bhutan

National Council rejects European Investment Bank framework agreement³⁷

The National Assembly is reviewing the National Council's resolution that recommended against ratifying the European Investment Bank (EIB) framework agreement the Bhutanese Government signed in December 2014. The Council pointed out that the agreement is an affront to Bhutan's sovereignty as the agreement openly undermines national laws, regulations, policies and guidelines. Further, the resolution states that it undermines the supremacy of the courts of Bhutan, including the Supreme Court by subjecting it to the decisions of the European Court of Justice. The resolution states that the government must ensure that the operations of the EIB in Bhutan are in line with the relevant laws governing the financial sector. Considering the nascent financial sector and the present macroeconomic and financial sector problems, opening the entire financial sector to external players could worsen the present problems.

Sixth biennial consultations between Bhutan and the EU held in Thimphu³⁸

The Government of Bhutan expressed its sympathy and solidarity with Europe in regard to the recent terrorist attacks in France, at the sixth biennial consultations between Bhutan and the European Union (EU) held in Thimphu on November 26. Speaking to Bhutanese media, the leader of the EU delegation and EU division head of the SAARC countries, Maria Castillo Fernandez, said that she had pointed out to the Bhutanese delegation that the recent terrorist attacks in France were attacks on European system, values and way of life. She said that the attacks were not only challenges for Europe but the world. Fernandez said that the EU would like to see Bhutan as a partner cooperating together with the EU on all international forums to challenge and combat the threat of terrorism. She pointed out that Bhutan

and the EU will declare an enhancement of cooperation on climate change. She added that Bhutan is a model for the world today, when it comes to policies on the environment, democratisation process, protection of human rights and rule of law. To further enhance relations, Fernandez said that a representative of the EU investment bank was also included in the delegation to explore possibilities of long term investment areas in Bhutan. Another EU delegation member, Jorge De La Caballeria, who is the Europe Aid unit head for South Asia, pointed out that it is important to note that EU support is being mainly channelled through national budget support, a practise not followed elsewhere. The biennial consultations provide a regular mechanism for the two sides to review all aspects of the bilateral relations, including development cooperation, between Bhutan and the EU.

Draktsho receives training equipment from German Government³⁹

The Germany's Ambassador to India, Dr. Martin Ney handed over training equipment worth Nu 890,000 to Draktsho Vocational Training Centre on November 26. The equipment includes machineries, furniture and other supplies to Draktsho in Thimphu. Draktsho's deputy director, Deki Zam, said Draktsho has been lacking adequate and appropriate training gears. With the German Government's contribution, the children and youth at the centre will have access to proper training materials and will be able to study and train in comfort.

Works on Bhutan-India boundary pillars to resume⁴⁰

A technical meeting was held in Phuentsholing between Dzungpas, dzongrabs, and other officials of the law enforcement agencies and the Indian survey team and SSB officials on November 23. The technical meet drew on finalising the detailed work programs for resumption of joint inspection at four areas for the boundary pillars. Finalisation of detailed work program for joint survey in connection with construction of boundary wall around the Motanga Industrial Estate in Samdrupjongkhar area was also discussed. The representative from the Indian counterpart has also agreed to support and jointly identify and inspect the location. Should the wall fall under rural area, the 10-metre distance from the no man's land will be implemented, while it would be decided at 1.5 metre if the wall fell under the urban designated area. Meanwhile, officials with the international boundaries in the country said the work plan meeting was mainly conducted keeping in mind the boundary pillars in three border segments. Following the joint inspection, the pillars will be repaired, maintained, and constructed depending on the cases. There are 1,985 pillars along the boundary today. Officials said the conditions of pillars could be determined only after an inspection. Director Sangay Dorji said the funding for repairing, maintenance works, and construction of pillars will be borne by the Government of India. Joint inspection, repair, reconstruction of damaged, missing boundary pillars will be considered for Nichu-Jaldaka-Jitti segment of West Bengal-Bhutan sector and Samtse/Chukha-Jalpaiguri/Alipurduar segment of West Bengal-Bhutan sector. Arunachal Pradesh-Bhutan sector is another area the work plan aims to carry out for joint inspection, followed by repair and construction respectively. Sangay Dorji said such meetings and inspections were carried every year between the two countries. Phuentsholing thrompon Tsheten Dorji and Consul General of India in Phuentsholing, Pieyush Gupta also attended the meeting.

Prime Minister Tobgay meets Ambassador of Italy to India⁴¹

Ambassador of Italy to India Lorenzo Angeloni called on Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on November 23. Ambassador Angeloni said Italy is keen to explore newer areas of cooperation to further deepen the relations between the two countries, particularly in sectors such as research, trainings and sports. The Prime Minister mentioned that Bhutan welcomes Italy's generous offer to enhance collaboration and cooperation, and said that Italy's support in human resource development and in developing quality traditional medicines in Bhutan have proved to be fruitful.

Current government approved 24 FDI projects⁴²

A total of 24 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects were registered during the government's tenure, Economic Affairs Minister Norbu Wangchuk said on November 20. The total number of FDI projects today, he said, was 55. He was responding to a question in the National Assembly from Nanong-Shumar MP Dechen Zangmo during the question hour. Within the last two years, the government approved 11 projects, eight of which have started works to set up their businesses. Another three have started their business operations, he said, without naming the projects.

BBIN transport agreement deferred to summer session⁴³

The National Assembly deferred the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) Transport Agreement to the next session as recommended by a special committee comprising seven members from both the ruling and opposition parties. During the deliberation on November 17, the opposition members had expressed concerns that the regional agreement could have on Bhutan's security, foreign relations and local economy. Lamgong Wangchang MP Khandu Wangchuk said the agreement should be endorsed only after a thorough consultation with stakeholders including transport operators. "The agreement is likely to affect the livelihood of our transport operators," he said requesting the House to defer the agreement. Foreign minister Damcho Dorji said given the benefit of the agreement to the country, both the elected governments have been involved in extensive discussions leading to the signing of the regional agreement.

PM Tobgay meets Swedish special representative for environment issues⁴⁴

The Special Representative for Environment Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden Lena Ek called on Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay on November 19 in Thimphu. The Special Representative said that a meaningful dialogue would benefit both countries in coming up with measures to combat climate change, address challenges of urbanisation and support forest conservation. They agreed that the two countries needed to cooperate on issues of mutual interests and set a role model in fighting climate change, particularly in areas of forestry and conservation. Lyonchoen conveyed that Bhutan could draw vital lessons from Sweden's progress and said that Bhutan has benefitted a lot from goodwill, guidance and direct support from Sweden since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1985. Ambassador of Sweden to Bhutan Harald Sandberg and Second Secretary from the Embassy of Sweden in New Delhi Mikael Johansson accompanied Lena Ek.

Bhutan-Sri Lanka annual bilateral consultation held in Colombo⁴⁵

The first annual bilateral consultation between Bhutan and Sri Lanka, held on November 16 in Colombo, discussed several issues from political relations, trade, investment, tourism, human resource development, to cultural exchanges, and cooperation in regional and multilateral forums. Foreign Secretary Tshering Dorji and Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Chitranganee Wagiswara welcomed the institution of the annual bilateral consultations as a valuable bilateral forum to further enhance and strengthen friendly cooperative relations between the two countries. The two sides noted the significant contributions made by regular exchange of visits at all levels. The meeting welcomed the deepening of cooperation in the field of education and human resource development and the potential that exists in this area including the opportunity for Bhutanese to pursue higher education in Sri Lanka. Bhutan thanked Sri Lanka for the scholarships and placements that are being provided to Bhutanese medical and engineering students. It was agreed that more opportunities would be provided for Bhutanese to pursue higher studies and trainings at universities and institutions in Sri Lanka. The countries also emphasised the importance of SAARC, BIMSTEC and other regional organisations of which the two are members of and noted that exploiting the full potential of the organisations within the existing frameworks such as the Agreement on South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services (SATIS) would bring huge benefits to the member states. Bhutan and Sri Lanka also stressed on the importance of forging institutional linkages between various agencies in the two countries such as parliaments, educational institutions and chambers of commerce. The next consultation will be held in Thimphu in 2016. On November 17, Foreign Secretary Tshering Dorji called on the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mangala Samaraweera, and the State Minister of University Education, Mohan Lal Grero. During the meetings, he expressed appreciation on behalf of the government for Sri Lanka's invaluable contribution in the health and education sectors. The Bhutanese delegation also paid homage at the Gangaramaya Temple where the Fourth King had laid the foundation stone of the structure supporting the Sri Mahabodhi Tree during His Majesty's visit to in 1976.

Indian ministers call on Lyonchoen⁴⁶

India's Home Minister Rajnath Singh and the State Minister of Commerce And Industry, Nirmala Sitharaman called on Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay on November 13 in New Delhi. Lyonchoen was on a visit to Goa, upon an invitation from India Foundation, as the chief guest of the second India Ideas Conclave. The two leaders discussed issues to strengthen cooperation in maintaining peace and security in the border areas of the two countries. They expressed satisfaction with the existing mechanisms between the two countries on border management. During the meeting, Lyonchoen extended an invitation to the home minister to visit Bhutan at a convenient time. The two agreed that India and Bhutan must nurture and continue to build on the already existing friendly relations for which regular dialogues and exchanges is crucial. During the meeting with Nirmala Sitharaman, the two leaders discussed the agreement on Trade, Commerce and Transit which is due for renewal in June 2016. Lyonchen invited the minister to visit Bhutan in April or May 2016 to sign the agreement. Lyonchoen met the Governor of Goa Mridula Sinha at the Raj Bhavan and Chief Minister Laxmikant Parsekar. On the sidelines of the

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conclave, Lyonchoen also met the Union Minister of Defence, Manohar Parrikar and Union Minister of Railways Suresh Prabhu.

Maldives declares state of emergency⁴⁷

Maldives President Abdulla Yameen has declared state of emergency for 30 days and curtailed some constitutional rights. The president's statement declaring emergency was delivered by Attorney General Mohamed Anil at a press conference at the President's Office on November 4. International community has reacted on the declaration of emergency by the Maldivian President. In a press statement dated November 4, 2015, US State Department Spokesperson John Kirby said the US was deeply concerned with recent events in Maldives and called on the Maldivian Government to terminate the state of emergency and restore full constitutional freedoms. British MP and Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Hugo Swire has also released a statement raising concerns about the state of emergency imposing on the basic human rights of Maldivian people and said that the decision further undermines the confidence in the country's democracy. Urging the Maldivian Government to uphold its commitments towards people, as a member of the Commonwealth, democracy and rule of law, Swire called to end the current state of emergency and for the release of all political prisoners including the former President, Mohamed Nasheed. The European Union in a statement, said, "the decision to declare a state of emergency and suspend fundamental freedoms enshrined in the constitution of the Maldives is the latest in a series of worrying developments in the country". Opposition party MDP has said that the economy is suffering incomprehensible damage due to the current state of emergency declared in the country. MDP said that the losses on the tourism industry due to the state of emergency declared this month could destroy the whole economy. MDP called to revoke the state of emergency as soon as possible. The state of emergency was finally lifted on November 10. The Attorney General Mohamed Anil said that the early termination of the 30-day state of emergency follows progress in ongoing investigations by security forces, arrest of several people on suspicion of possession of weapons, and international organisations' calls to terminate the emergency as soon as possible. The Attorney General said that minimising the impact on tourism is also one of the reasons for the President to revoke the state of emergency.

Maldives Parliament impeaches Vice President⁴⁸

Maldives' Parliament voted overwhelmingly to impeach the country's vice president, who will be charged with terrorism for plotting to kill the president. Ahmed Adeb is the second vice president to be impeached in three months. He has been arrested for allegedly planning to kill President Yameen Abdul Gayoom in an explosion on his speedboat on September 28. The impeachment motion received 61 votes in favour and none opposed in the 85-member Parliament. The main opposition group, the Maldivian Democratic Party, abstained.

Sri Lankan sniper arrested in Maldives⁴⁹

A Sri Lankan sniper has been arrested in the Maldives on October 24 in suspicions of attempted illegal activity in the country and targeting President's life.

President ratifies bill on Maldives becoming AIIB member⁵⁰

President Abdulla Yameen has ratified the bill proposed by the government regarding Maldives becoming a member of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The purpose of the bill, submitted by Nilandhoo MP Abdulla Khaleel and passed by the unanimous vote of the parliament on November 12, 2015, is to establish a comprehensive law and detailed policies on Maldives' AIIB membership.

Majlis passes State Budget for 2016⁵¹

People's Majlis passed the MVR 27.457 billion projected state budget for 2016, proposed by government on November 23. 59 members voted in favour of the budget while 19 members voted against the budget, with opposition party – Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) issuing a three-line whip not to participate in the voting. MDP had proposed 11 revisions to the budget, with none of it gaining approval. The budget was sent to Majlis by Finance Minister Abdulla Jihad, while Budget Committee finished reviewing the budget on November 19 with an additional amount of MVR 20 million allocated to judiciary. The budget includes an allocation of MVR 9.1 billion to Public Sector Investment Programs. Finance Minister Abdulla Jihad had said that of the MVR 9.1 billion allocated for Public Sector Investment Programs, MVR 5.2 billion would be spent by government while the remaining MVR 2.7 billion would be funded through free aid and MVR 1.2 billion via trust funds.

Foreign investments worth \$799 million registered over two years⁵²

Ministry of Economic Development has announced that 55 foreign investment projects worth \$799 million have been registered over the past two years. This came in a report highlighting the ministry's achievements on the occasion of the second anniversary of the current government. A total of 47 foreign investment projects in the tourism sector with a total initial investment amount of \$1.056 billion have been registered since December 2014. Other proposed mega foreign investments include the airport development project, worth \$800 million.

The tourism and the economic development minister visit Singapore⁵³

Minister of Tourism Moosa Zameer and Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed went to Singapore on an invitation extended by a group of Singaporean investors. Before leaving the country, Tourism Minister Moosa Zameer said to reporters at Ibrahim Nasir International Airport, that many companies from Singapore and South East Asia region have invested in the Maldives, and the purpose of this visit was to provide information about planned mega projects in the tourism industry.

Saudi Arabian Islamic affairs minister visits Maldives⁵⁴

Minister of Islamic Affairs, Endowment and Dawa of Saudi Arabia, Salih bin Abdul Azeez bin Mohamed made a three-day visit to the Maldives on an invitation extended by President Abdulla Yameen. During the three-day visit, the two countries discussed strengthening cooperation in terms of encouraging Islam, increasing religious awareness, and other issues related to Islam. Salih also paid a courtesy

call on President Yameen, and participated in the opening ceremony of a religious scholars' conference organised by Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon visits India⁵⁵

Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon visited India on November 20, 2015 to strengthen the existing relationship between the two countries. Dunya Maumoon was accompanied by the Joint Secretary of the Foreign Ministry Aishath Azima. During the official visit, the Maldivian Foreign Minister, Dunya Maumoon met with the Indian Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj.

President Yameen writes letter to the president and people of Palestine⁵⁶

President Abdulla Yamin Abdul Gayoom has said that the work of the international community will not be complete until a day comes where Palestinians can watch their children grow without fear. In a letter to the president and people of Palestine on the occasion of the International Palestine Solidarity Day, President Yamin said that the conflict in Palestine must be resolved.

Agreement signed with Chinese company for 1,500 housing units in Hulhumale⁵⁷

Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure has signed an agreement with a Chinese company for the construction of 1,500 middle-range housing units in Hulhumale. The agreement was signed at a ceremony at Hotel Jen on November 9 by Minister of Housing and Infrastructure Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, and General Manager of China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) Shi Jintao. Speaking at the ceremony, Dr. Muizzu said that this is the first batch of housing units to be established under Phase 2 of the Hulhumale Development Project. The estimated time of completion for the project is May 2018. The project is expected to begin in 2016.

Member of the Chinese central military committee visits Maldives⁵⁸

A member of the Chinese Central Military Committee and Navy Commander, Admiral Wu Shengli made an official visit to the Maldives.

Vice Chairman of the CPPCC calls on President Yameen⁵⁹

President Yameen met the Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Chen Ziaoguang at the President's Office on November 29. In his meeting with the Vice Chairman of CPPCC, President Abdulla Yameen said that China and Maldives are showing a fine example of beneficial cooperation between small and big countries.

Maldives hopes to cut down carbon emission by 10 per cent by 2030⁶⁰

Environment Minister Ibrahim Toriq has said that Maldives will be able to cut down harmful gases being released into the atmosphere by 10 per cent by 2030. Speaking during a ceremony held at Environment Ministry on November 24 in which government companies signed a declaration aimed at building an economy low on carbon emission, Minister Toriq said that Maldivian economy could transform into a carbon low economy if reliance on fuel as a source of energy was cut down.

Nepal

Maldives cannot do this alone, says President Yameen in COP21 message⁶¹

In his message to the 21st session of Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris, President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has pledged his government's commitment to undertaking all necessary efforts to strengthen the Maldives' resilience to climate change, but stressed that this cannot be achieved by Maldives alone.

Oli assures Modi of security for Indian truckers in Nepal⁶²

Prime Minister K.P. Shar'ma Oli urged his Indian counterpart to send through the essential goods stuck at the Nepal-India border and assured security for Indian truckers and freight forwarders in Nepali territory. He informed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the "hardships the Nepali people were facing due to acute shortages of fuel, medicines and other essential goods caused by the over a month-long blockade by India, the only supplier of fuel to the land-locked Nepal." Oli pledged total security for Indian truckers, when the Indian prime minister telephoned him on November 2. Modi informed Oli that he was told the Indian side wasn't able to supply goods to Nepal due to deteriorating security situation across the border. Modi reiterated his government's official statement that the ongoing protest in the Tarai districts was Nepal's internal problem and that supplies from India would automatically normalise once the political situation in Nepal was resolved. During the conversation, the two prime ministers also discussed the death of an Indian in police firing during protests in Birgunj.

No India visit till blockade is lifted: Prime Minister Oli⁶³

Prime Minister KP Oli has said he will not visit India until the blockade imposed for more than two months is lifted. The PM has a formal invitation to visit New Delhi. "PM Oli told Delhi's emissary who came bearing a formal invitation that 'I will visit India only after all the border points are opened and if that is not possible I need a firm commitment that the blockade will be lifted the day after I land in India,'" said CPN-UML Secretary Pradeep Gyawali, who visited New Delhi to attend a workshop at the invitation of the Communist Party of India.

Nepal seeks India's explanation⁶⁴

The government of Nepal has asked the Indian government to investigate into the shooting of four Nepali nationals by personnel of Indian Seema Suraksha Bal (SSB) in Nepali territory on November 25 and inform Nepal about the findings. Writing a letter to the Government of India, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) sought the details of the incident from its counterpart. The letter has been sent to the Indian government through the Kathmandu-based embassy of India. The foreign ministry wrote to the Indian government after the home ministry confirmed that SSB personnel had shot at four Nepali nationals after entering into the Nepali territory in Sunsari district. The embassy of India in Kathmandu, however, has refuted the reports. "A patrol team of SSB came across a few smugglers inside the Indian territory across the Sunsari district of Nepal. When challenged, the smugglers and their accomplices attacked the patrol team and injured one constable," the embassy claimed in its statement. "SSB personnel fired in the air in self-defence, following which the smugglers dispersed. The incident took place inside the Indian

territory and no Nepali citizen was injured." Meanwhile, The Armed Police Force of Nepal detained 13 Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB) personnel who had made an incursion into the bordering Kechana village in Jhapa district on November 29. They were released six hours later after they confessed that they had entered the "Nepali territory by mistake". They had been detained at the APF Border Operation Post where they were quizzed. Four of the SSB men were armed. Reportedly, the Home Ministry had instructed the Nepali officials to release the personnel. The APF said it would further investigate the matter.

India not behind Tarai protests: Envoy Rae⁶⁵

India has reiterated that it was not involved in ongoing protests spearheaded by Madhes-based parties in the Tarai districts of Nepal. Indian ambassador Ranjit Rae on November 4 reached to former prime minister and senior CPN UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal's residence to convey the message.

Foreign Minister consults experts on fuel crisis⁶⁶

As the fuel crisis continues to cripple normal life in the country, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa held discussions with noted diplomats including former foreign affairs ministers, former ambassadors, former foreign affairs secretaries and representatives of different political parties' foreign wings on November 27. Spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Tara Prasad Pokharel said that the interaction program was organised to seek suggestions from the experts on foreign affairs in a bid to troubleshoot the country's ongoing unease situation. Suggestions have come from different perspective and the participants have stressed for taking initiatives to resolve the crisis from different mediums including diplomatic and political, Pokharel said. It is said that the experts have offered suggestions to the government to be cautious as India was attempting to impose its interests on Nepal by "imposing blockade". Likewise, they suggested the government to hold concrete talks to address the demands of the Madhes movement.

China supplies fuel to Nepal⁶⁷

Of the 12 tankers that reached Nepal-China border to receive the first consignment of Fuel pledged by China as a grant, the Chinese side allowed only three to enter Kerung, citing refuelling-related problems. This is the first time Nepal is bringing oil from China after relying solely on India for petroleum supply for the last four decades. The Chinese government has pledged 1,000 tonnes (1.3 million litres) of fuel as grant to Nepal. Nepal has sought an additional 6,000 tonnes of diesel, petrol and aviation fuel and 5,000 tonnes of cooking gas in grant from China. Although the government plans to sign a commercial deal to import 30-40 per cent of the country's fuel requirement from China, it said the deal was being delayed due to issues related to tax waiver. Minister for Commerce and Supplies Ganesh Man Pun went to Beijing on November 17 with a letter from Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli requesting China to waive off tax on petroleum products that Nepal plans to import commercially from China.

Bangladesh, Pakistan ambassadors call on Nepal⁶⁸

The ambassadors of Bangladesh and Pakistan to Nepal have separately called on former Prime Minister and CPN (UML) leader Madhav Kumar Nepal at latter's residence at Koteshwor on November 26. Bangladeshi Ambassador Mashfee Binte Shams and Pakistani Ambassador Arshad Saud Khosa called on the leader Nepal and held discussions on issues related to the current political developments, bilateral relations, and mutual cooperation. The ambassadors added that their countries were sensitive towards the current difficulties faced by Nepal due to the obstruction of supplies at the border and humanitarian crisis caused by it. They assured that both countries would help from their respective places. Pakistani Ambassador Khosa added that there was difficulty to provide appropriate support due to geographical location. Similarly, Bangladeshi Ambassador Shams stressed on the implementation SAARC level transit proposal submitted at the SAARC Summit for free transit rights among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

UK concerned over impact of border blockade⁶⁹

The British Government has expressed its concerns over the impact of the border blockages on the supply and distribution of humanitarian assistance in Nepal. Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Hugo Swire, expressed the concern when he called Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kamal Thapa, on November 19. Assuring Thapa of the UK's continued support and friendship for the people of Nepal, Swire urged the government of Nepal to provide the leadership required for the reconstruction process. "With winter approaching, there is a risk of a second humanitarian crisis if the situation is not resolved shortly," he said. Swire's statement on Nepal's latest crisis has come a few days after Nepal expressed its concern toward the joint statement issued by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and British Prime Minister David Cameron following Indian Prime Minister Modi's two-day visit to London, where the two prime ministers had dwelled on the lasting and inclusive constitutional settlement in Nepal, believing that it would address the remaining areas of concern and promote political stability and economic growth. On November 15, the foreign ministry of Nepal had said "attention of the government of Nepal has been drawn to the reference to Nepal made in a recent joint statement between the UK and India". In the statement Nepal had stated that Nepal strongly viewed that the constitution making is an internal matter of the country and that Nepal is capable of handling its internal affairs on its own.

Big parties agree to forward amendment bill⁷⁰

Major political parties have agreed to forward the constitution amendment bill in understanding with agitating Madhes-based political parties. The constitution amendment proposal registered in parliament by the previous Nepal Congress-led government aims to address some of the demands raised by the agitating parties. A meeting between major opposition NC and ruling CPN-UML and UCPN (Maoist) held at Prime Minister's official residence at Baluwatar on November 23, agreed to seek support of agitating parties for endorsing the proposal through parliament. The constitution amendment bill registered in parliament secretariat includes guaranteeing inclusiveness, and reorganising electoral constituencies based on

population among other things. UML General Secretary Ishwar Pokhrel said that the government is willing to forward the constitution amendment bill based on broader political consensus. He further said any peaceful protest will be an issue of discussion but violent activities are not acceptable to the government. Meanwhile, the agitating United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) has rejected the proposal of the parties to forward the said constitution amendment bill stating the bill is incomplete and cannot address the demands of the ongoing protests.

Baluwatar meet fails to enter formal agendas⁷¹

The much-anticipated meeting between ruling parties, main opposition and agitating Madhes-centric parties held at Prime Minister's official residence in Baluwatar on November 30 ended without entering formal agendas. UCPN (Maoist) Vice-Chairman Narayan Kaji Shrestha said the meet however agreed not to obstruct political assembly by any side. At the beginning of the meet, PM Oli requested providing an outlet to the country by giving up partisan stances. A leader attending the meet said PM Oli said that all should seek solution to the crisis as people are facing hardship and economy has turned shabby. It was for the first time PM Oli attended talks with the Madhesi Front. The meet also discussed 11-point demands forwarded to the government talks team by the front. The Madhesi leaders told the meeting that 11-point demands is their bottom-line to end protest.

US President Obama congratulates PM Oli⁷²

President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, has congratulated CPN-UML's Chairman, K.P. Sharma Oli, on being elected as the Prime Minister of Nepal. The US President in his message has assured that the American people will stand shoulder to shoulder with Nepal as it tries to recover from the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of April 25 and strengthen its democratic institutions. He has also said that the US looks forward to continuing to work with the Government of Nepal through the Millennium Challenge Corporation in support of Nepal's long term economic growth efforts. Recalling the 70 years of partnership between the two countries, US President Obama has stated that the US stands ready to work closely with Nepal to advance unity, prosperity and resilience in the months and years ahead.

Nepal congratulates Myanmar for successful elections⁷³

The government has congratulated the people and the government of the union of Myanmar for the successful conclusion of the general elections in the country, which were held on November 8, with the overwhelming participation of the people of Myanmar.

Privatisation proceeds to be used to clear off debt⁷⁴

The government informed the National Assembly on November 27 that it planned to clear off its debt liabilities by selling public sector enterprises (PSEs). Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said in a written answer to a question that the total domestic debt stood at Rs18,093 billion at the end of September and Rs1,304 billion was spent on debt servicing during 2014-15. He said the government wanted to enhance

its debt repayment capacity through resource mobilisation, by increasing the tax-to-GDP ratio from 11 per cent to 13 per cent by 2017-18 and repaying expensive domestic debt with concessional external loans. He said the government was trying to boost economic activities, increase foreign exchange reserves, restore international investors' confidence and achieve fiscal discipline. "Furthermore, privatisation of various public sector enterprises is under process — 90 per cent receipts of privatisation will be used for debt retirement," Dar said. He said the fiscal deficit was expected to drop to 4 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in 2016-17 from 5.37 per cent recorded in 2014-15. The enhanced fiscal space will reduce the government's borrowing and augment its repayment capacity.

10th session of the Joint Economic Commission between Pakistan and Afghanistan held in Pakistan⁷⁵

Amid concerns over slow implementation of decisions taken in the past, Pakistan and Afghanistan discussed concepts of two major projects — import of 2,000MW electricity from Turkmenistan and development of Gwadar-Helmand road link. These were the main issues taken up at the 10th session of the Joint Economic Commission which concluded in Islamabad on November 23. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and his Afghan counterpart Eklil Ahmad Hakimi led their delegations. Addressing a joint news conference, Finance Minister Dar said Afghanistan had agreed to give up in favour of Pakistan its 150MW share of the 1,300MW Central Asia South Asia (CASA) electricity import from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan without any transit fee. Development of Gwadar-Helmand road was also reviewed by Joint Economic Commission. Dar said the two sides had decided to hold the 6th round of finance ministers' talks under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Coordination Committee in March 2016 in Kabul. Talks on a preferential trade agreement will be held around the same time.

EU agrees to address Pakistan's deportation concerns⁷⁶

The European Union has agreed to address Pakistan's concerns which have led to suspension of Pak-EU readmission agreement on migrants. The visiting Commissioner Migration of the EU, Dimitris Avramopoulos, during a meeting with Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan here on November 23, assured him that deportees from Europe would now be sent to Pakistan under a clearly defined standard operating procedure. They also agreed to the need for curbing Islamophobia and combating terrorism and human smuggling.

Pakistan, US agree on early resumption of Afghan peace process⁷⁷

Pakistan and the United States have agreed to work together for an early resumption of the stalled Afghan reconciliation process. The understanding was reached during the recently concluded visit of Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif to the United States where he held extensive discussions with key figures of the Obama administration, including Vice President Joe Biden. Afghanistan was the focus of Gen Sharif's visit, during which he also discussed Pakistan's strained ties with India, military cooperation, strategic (nuclear) issues and other regional matters.

Pakistan, Tajikistan to enhance defence and trade ties⁷⁸

Pakistan and Tajikistan agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fields of energy, defence and trade and vowed to improve connectivity to deepen bilateral ties. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, while addressing a press conference after their delegation level talks on November 12, termed the talk 'productive' and 'fruitful'. They said it helped further expand their multifaceted relationship. The two leaders, besides inking a joint statement, witnessed the signing of seven agreements dealing with cooperation in energy, industrial sectors, extradition, establishment of a joint business council, and collaboration in science and technology and geology.

IMF approves \$502 million tranche⁷⁹

Despite three missed targets, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cleared Pakistan's economic bailout package for disbursement of next instalment of around \$502 million by mid-December. "The mission and Pakistani authorities have reached staff-level agreement on the completion of the ninth review under the Extended Fund Facility arrangement," IMF's mission chief to Pakistan Harald Finger said at a press conference which was attended also by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar. He said Pakistan needed to work hard on four weak areas — taxation, energy sector reforms, restructuring and privatisation of public sector enterprises and improvement in investment climate. Dar said the IMF executive board was expected to approve disbursement of next tranche of \$502 million in its meeting on December 15.

Gen Raheel meets Saudi forces' chief⁸⁰

Chief of the Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif, who went to Saudi Arabia on a two-day official visit on November 3, met Chief of General Staff of Saudi Forces Gen Abdulreham bin Saleh Al Bunyan. Military to military relations, defence cooperation and regional security situation were issues discussed during the meeting. Gen Sharif's met King Salman bin Abdul Aziz on November 4. The army chief's visit was the first since bilateral ties earlier this year came under tremendous strain because of Pakistan's reluctance to participate in the Yemen war. The visit followed the first-ever joint counter-terrorism exercises between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan at the newly-established National Counter Terrorism Centre in Pabbi near Jhelum. Codenamed As-Shahab-1 the exercises were participated by Special Forces.

Anti-ship guided missiles test-fired⁸¹

The front-line combat units of the naval fleet, successfully test-fired anti-ship guided missiles in the north Arabian Sea on November 14, re-asserting the lethality, precision and efficacy of Pakistan Navy's weapons systems. The display of navy's firepower, in which missiles were launched from surface and air units to hit targets with accuracy, was witnessed by Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Zakauallah and senior officers, from PNS Alamgir.

Prime Minister condemns attacks in Paris and Mali⁸²

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif strongly condemned terrorist attacks in Paris that left at least 129 people dead and scores others injured. He said Pakistan stood firm by the people and government of France in this hour of grief. In a separate statement,

the foreign ministry said: "The people and government of Pakistan wish to convey their heartfelt sympathies and deepest condolences to the bereaved families and the people and government of France." Pakistan also strongly condemned the terrorist attack and hostage-taking at Radisson-Blu Hotel at Bamako in Mali.

Official rules out possibility of Daesh presence in Pakistan⁸³

Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry has ruled out any possibility of the presence of the self-styled Islamic State (IS) militant group in Pakistan. Talking to reporters at the Foreign Office on the occasion of a charity bazaar organised by the Pakistan Foreign Office Women's Association in Islamabad on November 15, he said the IS, also known by its Arabic acronym Daesh, was a terrorist organisation and Pakistan was capable of facing such threats, adding that no-one in the country would be allowed to have links with the outfit. He said the country had taken a number of steps to curb terrorism and rendered sacrifices to defeat terrorists. The menace is now dying because of effective steps taken by the government.

China urged to include dam in CPEC projects⁸⁴

Pakistan has asked China to include Diamer-Bhasha dam in energy projects to be undertaken under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). "We have proposed to the Chinese Government to include Diamer-Bhasha Dam in the next phase of CPEC," federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal said on November 17. He was speaking at the concluding session of the First CPEC Media Forum which was attended by journalists from both countries. Energy projects of about \$34 billion are being undertaken as part of CPEC in the first phase. If China agrees to the proposal, the project would be included in the next phase of the energy projects under the CPEC. The construction of Diamer-Bhasha dam is expected to cost about \$12 billion. Faced with the difficulty of finding funds for the 4,500MW project, the government had decided to divide it into separate dam and power generation projects. However, it is unclear which component of the project the government is interested in getting included in the CPEC. Speaking on the occasion, Chinese Ambassador Sun Weidong said there was no fixed limit for investment under the CPEC and that more could be made depending on the project for which it was required.

Pak-Russia IGC meeting ends with accords to settle trade disputes⁸⁵

The first 'Pakistan Russia Investment Forum' and meeting of Pak-Russia Inter-governmental Commission (IGC) concluded in Islamabad on November 20, with the signing of three memorandums of understanding to promote bilateral trade and investment relations, besides settling trade disputes between the two countries. The accords signed included the Protocol of 4th IGC meeting and enhancing cooperation in the fields of science and technology. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and Co-Chairman of the Russia-Pakistan Inter-governmental Commission on Economic, Trade and Scientific Cooperation Victor P. Ivanov witnessed the signing of MoUs. Meanwhile, the Russian delegation called on Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. During the meeting, Abbasi underlined the need for early completion of the North-South gas pipeline project to meet growing energy need of power generating plants and fertiliser units. Ivanov also

called on Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Muhammad Zakauallah. Reportedly, issues of bilateral cooperation in counter-narcotics and regional maritime issues came under discussion.

Army chief holds talks on military ties with Brazil⁸⁶

Army Chief General Raheel Sharif's three-day visit to Brazil focused on strengthening military ties between the two countries. "We want to intensify our cooperation with Brazil," Gen Sharif said during his visit to the Brazilian Defence Ministry. Brazilian Defence Minister Aldo Rebelo reiterated the importance of having a defence relationship that takes into account the particular characteristics of each country, such as size, geographical location, population and geopolitical situation. Gen Raheel Sharif met Chief of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces of Brazil Gen José Carlos de Nardi. Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif arrived in Brazil on November 23. From Brazil, he was scheduled to go to Ivory Coast to spend a day with Pakistani troops working for the UN peace keeping force.

ADB to lend \$800 million for energy sector, disaster relief⁸⁷

The Asian Development Bank and Pakistan Government signed on November 26 project and programme loans amounting to \$800 million in the energy sector. The bank will also help set up the 'Pakistan National Fund for Disaster Management'. Under the programme loan of \$400 million for sustainable energy sector reform programme, the ADB will support the implementation of the objectives of the government's national power policy of 2013. The policy aims to develop an efficient and consumer-oriented power supply system to meet the need of people as well as economy. The 'letter of exchange' and loan agreements were signed by Secretary Economic Affairs Division, Tariq Bajwa and ADB Country Director Werner E. Liepach. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar was present at the signing ceremony as were representatives of Japan, Belgium, Norway and Australia.

Pakistan ready to contribute in dealing with climate change issues: PM⁸⁸

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that with developed countries having more responsibility in tackling challenges of the climate change, Pakistan was ready to contribute in global efforts. "Although Pakistan has minimum level of carbon emissions, we will contribute in the global efforts to tackle the climate change issues," he said in a brief chat with the media soon after his arrival in Paris to attend the two-week 21st UN Climate Change Conference.

Sharif, Cameron to work together for security, prosperity⁸⁹

Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and his British counterpart David Cameron agreed to continue close collaboration in different fields, particularly trade, investment and security. The two leaders, who met on the sidelines of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta, expressed long-term commitment to work together for greater security and prosperity of their countries. They also exchanged views on issues of global and regional importance, including the security situation in Middle East. This was the third time that the two prime ministers met during the current year, with earlier meetings taking place in April and September. Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs

Sri Lanka

Sartaj Aziz, Special Assistant Tariq Fatemi, Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhry and Pakistan's Ambassador in Malta, resident in Tunisia, Zaheer Pervaiz Khan were also present in the meeting. Sharif also met Prince of Wales Charles Phillips.

President visits Thailand⁹⁰

President Sirisena made a four days official visit to Thailand on November 1 to strengthen and celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. During the visit, President Sirisena met Prime Minister of Thailand General Prayut Chan-o-cha and discussed issues of mutual interests. During discussions, the Thai Prime Minister agreed to a special request made by President Sirisena to support Sri Lanka in technological and research work. Cooperation between the two countries can be promoted in potential products and industries, such as textile, gems and jewellery, and tea, in a complete and comprehensive manner, the Thai Prime Minister said. President Sirisena addressed the Thailand - Sri Lanka Business Forum in Bangkok on November 3. On November 4, President Maithripala Sirisena met the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn at the Sra Pathum Palace. Sri Lankan President's delegation to Thailand included the Minister of Primary Industries Daya Gamage, Chief Minister of Central province Sarath Ekanayake, Governor of Southern Province Hema Kumara Nanayakkara, and Chief Minister of Southern Province Shan Wijayalal de Silva.

Minister of foreign affairs visits Singapore⁹¹

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Singapore Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan had bilateral discussions during Samaraweera's visit to Singapore from November 12 to 13, 2015. During the visit, Samaraweera also called on Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law K. Shanmugam and met Attorney-General V. K. Rajah. He visited the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) for a briefing on Singapore's anti-corruption measures. In addition, Samaraweera delivered a public lecture on "Politics and Development in Sri Lanka" organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies on November 12, 2015.

Sri Lanka, Bangladesh to enhance cultural sector cooperation⁹²

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh agreed to implement a cultural exchange programme to improve the cultural relations between the two countries. This was expressed during Bangladesh High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Tarik Ahsan's visit to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Development, and Cultural Affairs, S. B. Navinne in Colombo in November 4. The High Commissioner handed over a letter of invitation from the Minister of Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh, Asaduzzaman Noor to the Sri Lankan Minister for the 17th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh (AABB) to be held in Dhaka in 2016. The Minister expressed his interest to visit Bangladesh on the occasion of AABB.

Sri Lanka, Bangladesh discuss strengthening ties⁹³

Dr. Harsha De Silva, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, met Tarik Ahsan, High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Colombo, at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and discussed on further strengthening political, economic and cultural relations between the two countries. During the discussion, among other matters the deputy

minister reiterated the importance of establishing linkages between the ports of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The federal minister for commerce of Pakistan visits Sri Lanka⁹⁴

The Federal Minister for Commerce of Pakistan Khurram Dastgir Khan called on Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe at Temple Trees on November 10. The Minister was accompanied by High Commissioner of Pakistan in Sri Lanka Maj Gen (Retd.) Syed Shakeel Hussain and a high level official delegation. The Sri Lankan Minister for Industry and Commerce, Rishad Bathiudeen, Sri Lankan Secretary Commerce and Industry T. M. K. B. Tennakoon and other high ranking officials were also present during the meeting. Khurram Dastgir Khan expressed the hope to broaden and deepen the bilateral FTA through the inclusion of services and investments in its ambit. The Minister emphasised that Pakistan and Sri Lanka need to diversify their existing trading patterns by focusing on non-traditional items of import and export and by creating more trade linkages between provinces and regions within the two countries. The commerce minister requested the prime minister to ease visa facilities and issue multiple visas to Pakistani businessmen and investors to facilitate their travel to Sri Lanka on regular basis. The two sides also agreed to further strengthen the bilateral economic cooperation between the two countries especially in cement, sugar, higher education and pharmaceutical sectors. The prime minister welcomed the prospects of Pakistani investments in cement and sugar sectors and assured his governments support to promote the bilateral trade.

Sri Lanka's LAUGFS to build US\$ 80 million LP gas terminal at Hambantota Port⁹⁵

Sri Lanka's private gas retailer LAUGFS Gas said its wholly owned subsidiary, LAUGFS Terminal Limited has entered into an agreement with the China Huanqiu Contracting and Construction Corporation, a subsidiary of China National Petroleum Corporation to build a Liquefied Petroleum (LP) Gas storage unit near the Hambantota Port. In a stock exchange filing the company said the terminal that will be built with a total investment of US\$ 80 million will have storage capacity of 30,000 metric tons at the initial stage with provision to expand the storage capacity by an additional 15,000 metric tons.

Parents of missing in Sri Lanka submit report to the UN Working Group⁹⁶

An activist organisation representing the parents of the missing persons has submitted a report on the disappearances to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (UNWGEID). The UNWGEID headed by its Vice President, Bernard Duhaime, was on an official visit to Sri Lanka from November 9 to 18, 2015 at the invitation of the Sri Lankan Government. They have visited the North and East during their visit to gather information on the missing and disappeared during and after the war.

Ban on several ex LTTE front groups lifted⁹⁷

The Government of Sri Lanka has lifted the ban on several former LTTE front groups through a gazette notification published by the Government Printer on

November 20, 2015. Signed by the secretary to the ministry of defence as the competent authority, the gazette notification repeals the gazette issued by the former government listing at least 15 organisations over alleged links with the LTTE. The amended list issued on November 20, removes the ban on the Global Tamil Forum (GTF), the British Tamil Forum (BTF), Australian Tamil Congress (ATC) and the Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC), among others. The new gazette notification has also lifted the ban on the head of the Global Tamil Forum, Father S.J. Emmanuel. However, the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) and its leader, former LTTE negotiator V. Rudrakumaran, remain on the list as proscribed organisations and individuals.

Samantha Power visits Jaffna⁹⁸

The US Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power visited Jaffna on November 22 and had talks with Northern Province Chief Minister C. V. Wigneswaran and several others. She discussed the current human rights situation in the North and other related matters. She also met the Northern Province Governor and discussed development plans for the North. Ambassador Power also participated in the inauguration of a new wing of Osmania College, which suffered significant damage during the conflict, and visited Jaffna Library, where she announced U.S. support for the local restoration of ancient Tamil manuscripts.

India funded Mahatma Gandhi International Centre was inaugurated in Matale⁹⁹

The Sri Lankan Government thanked India for funding several projects, including the Mahatma Gandhi International Centre in Matale. President Maithripala Sirisena and the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, Y. K. Sinha inaugurated the Mahatma Gandhi International Centre in Matale on November 22. In his remarks, President Sirisena, highlighted the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to humanity and the continuing relevance of his principles and philosophy to mankind. The Mahatma Gandhi International Centre, which was built at a cost of SLR 88.6 million, was funded under the Government of India's Development Cooperation Partnership with Sri Lanka.

President Sirisena attends the CHOGM 2015 in Malta¹⁰⁰

President Maithripala Sirisena went to Malta on November 26, 2015 to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held on November 27-29, 2015. President Sirisena handed over the position of the chair in office of Commonwealth to the Prime Minister of Malta Joseph Muscat. On the sidelines of the meeting, Sirisena met British Prime Minister David Cameron, where he offered £ 6.6 million over three years for the victims of the war. President Sirisena also met the Prime Minister of Canada and the Australian Prime Minister on the sidelines of the CHOGM on November 28, 2015.

Sri Lanka signs Declaration of Intent for the creation of Commonwealth Trade Finance facility¹⁰¹

Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Mangala Samaraweera signed the Declaration of Intent for the creation of Commonwealth Trade Finance facility to assist boost

trade and investment flows. Proposal to establish the fund was made in the Kotte Statement issued at the end of the Colombo CHOGM 2013.

Sri Lanka subscribes to the IMF's Special Data Dissemination Standard¹⁰²

Sri Lanka has subscribed to the International Monetary Fund's Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS), bringing the number of subscribing jurisdictions to 66. Sri Lanka is the 15th country to graduate to the SDDS from the IMF's General Data Dissemination System (GDDS), in which the country has participated since July 14, 2000.

Sri Lanka ranks 61st in global 'Prosperity Index'¹⁰³

Sri Lanka has risen a notch higher this year and ranked 61st globally in the 2015 Legatum Prosperity Index, which ranks nations according to wealth and wellbeing of their people. This year's Prosperity Index, compiled by London-based Legatum Institute, ranks 142 nations on their performance across eight equally-weighted sub-indices: Economy, Entrepreneurship & Opportunity; Governance; Education; Health; Safety & Security; Personal Freedom and Social Capital. Sri Lanka's best performance is in the Social Capital sub-index, where it ranks 32nd in 2015. However, despite the end of the civil war with the Tamil Tiger terrorists six years ago, the country has not felt safe. The lowest rank is in the Safety & Security sub-index, where it ranks 113th in 2015 although the rank improved from the 120th last year. Sri Lanka's Economy improved five notches to rank at 65th globally this year from the 76th in 2014 and the Health improved a notch to rank at 77th. Education sub-index improved to the 59th places from the last year's 66th place ranking. In Governance, Sri Lanka ranked at 58th place.

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