

SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

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



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Editor's Note

After a prolonged stalemate, Afghanistan got a new President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on the basis of National Unity Government agreement signed by Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. According to the agreement, the CEO will serve as prime minister after due revision of constitution within two years. A Loya Jirga will be convened to suggest constitutional amendments in this regard. The President, as the head of the state, will chair the cabinet. The CEO will be responsible for running the affairs of the government and report to the president. The president will issue a decree introducing the CEO into the cabinet. He will advise the president on high-ranking postings and governance-related issues. The CEO will also be a member of the National Security Council. It is too early to say how effective the National Unity Government will be, but for the time being, it has saved the country from the political crisis.

In Pakistan the political standoff continues as both the Nawaz Sharif Government and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) stick to their respective positions.

Terror networks are reportedly increasing their recruitment activities in Bangladesh. 25 Bangladeshi citizens are reportedly being convinced to join the ISIS by a Bangladeshi origin British citizen. 12 of them were arrested by the Bangladesh police.

Indian media reports suggested that section of the ruling establishment in West Bengal were supporting Jamaat-e-Islami of Bangladesh to create political instability in the country. It clearly indicates the cross-border linkages among insurgent/terror/radical outfits, which is posing a grave challenge to internal security in different states of South Asia.

Afghanistan

National Unity Government formed in Afghanistan¹

After a prolonged electoral stalemate, presidential candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai finally signed the National Unity Government agreement at the Presidential Palace on September 21. President Hamid Karzai, prominent political figures and members of both electoral teams were present at the ceremony. Speaking at the event, President Karzai congratulated the candidates on signing the agreement, calling it an “Afghan agreement.” Soon after the agreement was signed, the White House, in a press release, applauded the formation of the National Unity Government. After signing the National Unity Government agreement, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the election “outcomes,” declaring Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai as the new president of the country. IEC Chairman Ahmad Yusuf Nooristani said, that the election results—figures and data — were revealed to the two electoral camps only. Reports indicate that the decision to announce the election “outcomes” without declaring “any winners or losers” was a major part of Abdullah and Ghani’s agreement on the National Unity Government. Later, IEC presented President-Elect Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai the winner certificate on September 26, endorsing his win in the 2014 presidential race. The engraved wooden, glazed plaque inscribed that Ghani won with 55.27 percent of total votes; a total 3.93 million votes out of 7.12 million votes, a number dissimilar to IEC Chief Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani’s proclaimed 8 million in the June 14 runoff. Nuristani, before bestowing the certificate to Ghani, apologised to the nation for the protracted elections and emphasised that the election commission was not the sole actors of fraud, “but the electoral camps were involved too.”

Ahmadzai, Abdullah sworn in as President, CEO²

Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai on September 29, took oath as Afghanistan’s new president, succeeding Hamid Karzai. Chief Justice Abdul Salam Azimi administered oath to Ahmadzai, at the Presidential Palace. Soon after that Chief Justice Azimi administered oath to Abdullah as Chief Executive. Eng. Mohammad Khan and Haafghanistanji Mohammad Mohaqqiq were sworn in as Abdullah’s assistants. Vice-Presidents Gen. Abdur Rashid Dostum and Sarwar Danish took oath from Ahmadzai. Around 1,400 people, including 200 international figures, attended the swearing-in-ceremony.

BSA signed between USA and Afghanistan³

The Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) was signed between the USA and Afghanistan a day after Ashraf Ghani was sworn in as Afghanistan’s new president in a power-sharing government, marking the first democratic hand-over of power in the nation’s history. President Obama called it a “historic day” and said in a statement that the signing came after “nearly two years of hard work by negotiating teams on both sides.” The accord allows U.S. basing at nine separate locations across Afghanistan. The agreement allows for 9,800 U.S. troops to remain in Afghanistan past 2014, with the expectation that troop levels would be cut in half by 2016. American forces thereafter will be based only in Kabul and at Bagram air base. By the end of 2017, the U.S. force is to be further reduced in size to what U.S. officials have called a “normal” military advisory component at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, most likely numbering several hundred. The agreement also prevents

U.S. military personnel from being prosecuted under Afghan laws for any crimes they may commit; instead, the United States has jurisdiction over any criminal proceedings or disciplinary action involving its troops inside the country. The provision does not apply to civilian contractors. The NATO agreement, closely coordinated with the U.S. document, ensures that troops from countries including Germany and Italy will also stay, although in much smaller numbers. The BSA was signed by U.S. Ambassador James B. Cunningham and Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar in the presence of President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. In remarks after the signing, Ghani assured dignitaries, as well as Afghans watching the nationally televised ceremony, that the BSA would not violate the country's sovereignty and laws. He also assured Afghanistan's neighbors that the extended presence of U.S. troops would pose no threat to them. A Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, declared the security pact an attempt by the United States to assert its authority over Afghanistan and its people. But tribal leaders in areas targeted by the Taliban said that they welcomed the accord and that they hoped it would deliver a blow to the resurgent militants, as well as to what they described as meddling by neighboring Pakistan and Iran.

Taliban attack on Musa Qala⁴

More than 80 Taliban insurgents were killed or injured after a group of them attacked Musa Qala district of Helmand province on August 31, local officials said, adding that the attack claimed the life of an Afghan policeman and injured eight others. According to a security official in Helmand, Mohammad Wais Samim, the attack led to an intense clash between the insurgents and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The attack has led to the displacement of a number of families in the area. After Sangeen, Musa Qala is the second district of the province attacked by the Taliban. The clashes in Sangeen have continued for more than a week, with no details about insurgent casualties.

Around 100 civilians brutally massacred in Ghazni⁵

Around 100 civilians were brutally killed by Taliban militants in Ajristan district of southeastern Ghazni province. According to local government officials, around 800 Taliban militants including 200 foreign fighters staged coordinated attacks in Ajristan district. A local security official, speaking on the condition of anonymity said the Taliban execution of civilians in Ajristan had resemblance to Islamic State killings in Iraq.

Deadliest year for the ANSF⁶

According to the Minister of Defense Bismillah Mohammadi, Minister of Interior Umer Daudzai and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) Deputy Hasamuddin Hassam, the current year has been the deadliest for the ANSF. The officials stated that in the past six months, Taliban insurgents have conducted about 700 offensives in different parts of the country with the cooperation of their foreign and domestic counterparts. Minister of Interior Umer Daudzai stated that this year's war was led by foreign Taliban. Daudzai stated that in the first six months of the year, 955 civilians 1,523 police officers were killed and another 2,394 civilians and 2,506 police officers were injured. The Taliban, too, have suffered from casualties. In the last six months, 5,503 Taliban insurgents were killed and

another 2,370 were wounded. The ANSF tackles the unprecedented rates of insurgent attacks as the forces get ready to take on the full security responsibility after the foreign troops withdraw from the country at the end of the current year. However, a number of Afghan military experts stated that the lack of equipments and logistic support could undermine the abilities of the ANSF.

Afghan forces to receive \$5.1 billion annual aid⁷

Defence Minister Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, who attended the two-day NATO summit in Wales, said that the international community had increased annual aid to Afghanistan by one billion dollars from \$4.1 billion to \$5.1 billion. In the meeting, Mohammadi gave the participants information about the latest political and security situations in Afghanistan. He also complained about the non-stop rocket attacks from Pakistan into border Afghan provinces near the Durand Line.

Meshrano Jirga condemns Pakistan for digging trench on the Durand Line⁸

The Meshrano Jirga condemned Pakistan for digging a 480 kilometres long trench on the Durand Line and warned the issue would be taken to the United Nations (UN) and other international forums. Media reports suggest Pakistan's paramilitary troops are busy digging the huge trench on its southwestern border with Afghanistan to stop smugglers and terrorist from sneaking into Balochistan province. The irritant echoed in the Senate, with members slamming the move on the disputed border as illegitimate and aimed at dividing the Pashtuns living on both sides of the Durand Line. Chairman Fazal Hadi Muslimyar said Pakistan's action had once again proved its blatant interference in Afghanistan. The house summoned the ministers of interior and defence, as well as the National Directorate of Security (NDS) chief, to share their findings with lawmakers. Member of the upper house also expressed their anger over the construction. Nisar Ahmad Haris, a senator from Kabul, suggested the matter should be taken up with the United Nations, Organisation of Islamic Countries and other international forums. Lailuma Ahmadi, a member parliament from Panjsher province, alleged Pakistan was not respecting the principle of good neighbourliness. Instead it was playing political games with Afghanistan.

Karzai criticises US and Pakistan in farewell speech⁹

Former President Hamid Karzai blamed the United States for Afghanistan's long war in a final swipe at the country that helped bring him to power 13 years ago but towards which he has become increasingly bitter. Karzai blamed both the United States and neighbouring Pakistan for the continuing war with the Taliban-led insurgency and warned the new government to be "extra cautious in relations with the U.S. and the West". The conflict kills thousands of Afghans each year and has claimed the lives of more than 2,200 American and other international forces in Afghanistan. "One of the reasons was that the Americans did not want peace because they had their own agenda and objectives," Karzai said. He did not elaborate, but in the past has suggested continued violence has been an excuse for the United States to keep bases in the country. U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan James Cunningham called Karzai's comments "ungracious and ungrateful". Karzai also accused Pakistani power players of trying to control Afghanistan's foreign policy. He said he had travelled to Pakistan, where much of the Taliban's leadership

is believed to be based, at least 20 times seeking a negotiated end to the war, but his efforts were thwarted. Pakistan's embassy in Kabul had no immediate comment on Karzai's speech. The deterioration of his relationship with the West was seen by some as an effort to shape his legacy as an independent leader rather than a U.S. puppet as maintained by the Taliban.

"Afghanistan to remain India's ally", Karzai¹⁰

Former President Hamid Karzai on September 10 assured visiting Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj that Afghanistan would always stand by its South Asian ally. During a meeting at the Presidential Palace, Sushma Swaraj and Hamid Karzai discussed issues of bilateral interest and regional matters. Based on friendly relations, mutual interests and shared concerns, Afghanistan remained India's partner and friend, the president was quoted as saying. Sushma Swaraj reiterated India's commitment to partnership with Afghanistan. Swaraj said that New Delhi would work in close cooperation with the future Afghan government. Later, Swaraj inaugurated a new Indian Embassy building, which features an integrated security system, in the Wazir Akbar Khan diplomatic enclave close to the Afghan Foreign Ministry.

Bangladesh

Sheikh Hasina visits New York¹¹

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina accompanied by 200 members went to New York to attend the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). During the visit, Prime Minister spoke at the opening session of the Climate Change Summit at the United Nations in New York on September 23, co-chaired the US-sponsored Peacekeeping Summit on September 26 along with US Vice-president Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Rwandan President Paul Kagame. On the sideline of the UNGA session, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, US President Barack Obama, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Belarusian Prime Minister Mikhail V Myasnikov and Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg.

Hasina meets Modi for the first time in New York¹²

India would be willing to help Bangladesh improve its infrastructure, if required for transit and connectivity purposes, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when the two leaders met for the first time in New York on September 27. Hasina stressed the need for infrastructure development if India needed to transport food grains to its north-eastern region via Bangladesh on a regular basis, according to the transcript of the media briefing by Syed Akbaruddin, official spokesperson for India. Modi thanked Hasina for allowing transport of food grains through Bangladesh to the Indian part, the spokesperson said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's website also said the Teesta waters issue and the land boundary agreement came up for discussion during the meeting. Modi said the matter of the Land Boundary Agreement was already with a Parliamentary committee. Regarding Teesta, he said an effort was being made to evolve a consensus. During the meeting Hasina invited Modi to visit Bangladesh at his convenience.

Shinzo Abe visits Bangladesh¹³

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made an official visit to Bangladesh from September 6-7. According to Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, Abe's trip to Dhaka was aimed at advancing the "Japan-Bangladesh Comprehensive Partnership". During the visit, Prime Minister Abe expressed his profound gratitude to government and people of Bangladesh for withdrawing its candidature in support of Japan's candidature from the Asia Pacific Group for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the term 2016-17.

President gives nod to 16th amendment¹⁴

The constitutional changes empowering parliament to remove Supreme Court judges on grounds of misbehaviour and incapacity came to effect on September 22 as President Abdul Hamid gave his assent to the 16th amendment bill. With the president signing the bill passed in parliament on September 17, the provision for the chief justice-led Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) also ceased to exist after more than 35 years of its introduction. Parliament is also now vested with the authority to remove the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners; chiefs and members of the Public Service Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the National Human Rights Commission; and the comptroller and auditor general on the same grounds. The House that regained the power after around four decades, however, will not be able to exercise this until a new law is enacted to make the constitutional changes operational. To protest the amendment, pro-BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami lawyers boycotted court proceedings across the country. BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said the government restored parliament's powers to remove judges in a bid to keep them in fear and force them to give verdicts against opposition leaders and activists.

Deals signed with Malaysia to build mega power plant¹⁵

Bangladesh signed two memorandums of understanding with Malaysia to set up a 1,320-megawatt coal-based power plant in Maheshkhali at an initially estimated cost of around \$2 billion. The plant on 550 acres of land will include two units with a production capacity of 660 megawatt each, and could start commercial production any time after 2019. Of the two MoUs, one is government-to-government deal and the other is public-private agreement.

Syrian linked jihadists held¹⁶

Detectives have arrested a UK citizen of Bangladeshi origin for recruiting jihadists for the ISIS, acting on information from two of his recruits detained. Samiun Rahman alias Ibn Hamdan was picked up from Kamalapur Railway Station on September 28. On September 24 night, detectives arrested two youths — Asif Adnan and Fazle Elahi Tanzil — who allegedly planned to go to Syria through Turkey with Samiun's help. Samiun entered Bangladesh to recruit jihadists to fight in the war in Syria, Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said at a press briefing on September 29. "The UK national also had a mission to open branches in Bangladesh and Myanmar as per al-Qaeda supremo Ayman al-Zawahiri's recent announcement on the launching of al-Qaeda in Indian subcontinent (AQIS)," said Monirul. According to police, Samiun fought against

the forces of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from September to December last year. Samiun, who was placed on a three-day remand denied being an IS member. Detectives picked up Asif and Tanzil in the capital on September 24 night on information from seven Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh men, including its acting chief Abdullah al-Tasneem alias Nahid, arrested from Ashulia on September 19. Another suspected militant was also arrested in the capital's Paltan area on September 25. On condition of anonymity, a detective said Samiun, with the help of Asif and Tanzil, convinced 25 people to join the Syrian war. Of them, 12 have been arrested. They had planned to leave the country for Syria through Turkey after the Eid-ul-Azha, posing as members of Tabligh Jamaat. Samiun told them that he would take them to different parts of Syria where several militant groups, including Islamic State, al-Qaeda and al-Nusra Front, are fighting.

Bangladesh, US start joint naval exercise in Chittagong¹⁷

The fourth Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) between Bangladesh and the US navy began on September 25 with an opening ceremony at School of Maritime Warfare and Tactics in the Issa Khan Base of Chittagong. The CARAT Bangladesh 2014 marks the 20th anniversary of the exercise series conducted by the US Navy with nine partner nations of South and Southeast Asia.

Government plans to take back part of land allotted to Korean EPZ¹⁸

Bangladesh Government plans to take back part of the 2,492 acres of land allotted to the Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) 16 years ago. The country's largest private export processing zone is in a web of land-related and legal tangles triggered mainly by the non-cooperation from the local administration and some government agencies and public representatives. The government is yet to hand over the transfer deed for the land in Anwara upazila of Chittagong to the KEPZ owner, Korean YoungOne Corporation, creating obstacles to investment. Several foreign investors, including the Japanese, over the years had contacted the KEPZ authorities for plots but had to back out realising the land-related complications. Without having the land deed, YoungOne could not offer them any plot. Now the land ministry has begun the process for getting back the land on the grounds that YoungOne had not been able to set up industries there.

JCC meeting between India and Bangladesh held in New Delhi¹⁹

During the third Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) meeting at Jawahar Bhavan in New Delhi, Bangladesh offered special economic zones for Indian businesses and sought investments in sectors like automobiles, manufacturing and power. The meeting was co-chaired by Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali and his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj. Mahmood Ali during his four-day visit to India met top Indian leaderships including President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mahmood Ali said that Bangladesh would offer land to Indian companies to set up exclusive economic zones. However, the foreign minister-level talks that concluded on September 20 saw no headway in the longstanding issues of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and the Teesta water sharing deal.

Home Secretary level talks between India and Bangladesh²⁰

During the home secretary-level talks between Bangladesh and India both the countries reached an agreement to bring down border killing to zero. Bangladesh proposed that the Indian border force should not kill Bangladeshi nationals in case of trespass, but hand them over to the law enforcers. The meeting discussed border management issues, trafficking of arms, drugs, women and children, training for Border Guard Bangladesh and police by India. It was expressed that Dhaka is ready to extradite Anup Chetia, leader of Indian separatist outfit United Liberation Front of Asom, who is currently in Bangladesh prison. New Delhi for its part has expressed its willingness to extradite Nur Hossain, the alleged mastermind of the Narayanganj seven-murder, now in Indian prison.

India gives historic aircraft to Bangladesh²¹

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has handed over a Dakota aircraft from the IAF museum to the Bangladesh Air Force at a request from Bangladesh for the plane played a crucial role in Bangladesh's Liberation War. Western Air Command Chief Air Marshal SS Soman gifted the plane to Bangladesh Air Force Chief Air Marshal Muhammad Enamul Bari in a ceremony at Air Force Station Palam on September 18.

"No queries from Dhaka on Saradha fund issue", says India's official spokesperson²²

India has not received any report from its mission in Bangladesh on a Trinamool Congress lawmaker's alleged involvement in funneling the Saradha chit fund money to Jamaat-e-Islami, said Syed Akbaruddin, India's official spokesperson, in a press briefing on September 15. Following an Indian Bangla daily's claim that Dhaka communicated with New Delhi over funneling of Saradha scam money to Jamaat, Bangladesh State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan, too, said he was "unaware" of any such development. Indian Bangla daily Anandabazar Patrika said crores of money from Saradha chit fund was invested to spark violence in Bangladesh. Citing "intelligence reports of Bangladesh", the newspaper said the money made its way to Jamaat-e-Islami in 2012-13 through Ahmed Hassan Imran, a Rajya Sabha member from West Bengal's ruling TMC. In a new development, Babul Supriyo, a BJP MP from Asansol, alleged that the charges against Imran playing a leading role in receiving funds from Bangladesh-based political party Jamaat-e-Islami to help TMC win the 2011 Assembly polls, were "not merely allegations, but are facts", according to a report published on September 15 in the Hindustan Times.

Exports rise seven percent, but miss target²³

Exports rose 7.25 percent year-on-year to \$2.15 billion in the month of August on the back of a rebound in garment shipments. The receipts are about 28 percent less than July's collections and missed the monthly target by \$457 million, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh. Garment products, by far the biggest contributor to the export receipts, raked in \$1.71 billion last month, up 4.27 percent year-on-year. The export target of \$33.20 billion for fiscal 2014-15 is ten percent over last fiscal year's actual receipts. The total export earnings in

the first two months of the fiscal year was \$5.14 billion, which, although an increase of almost 2 percent year-on-year, is 10.12 percent less than the target for this time of the year.

Bangladesh gets stolen money back²⁴

Bangladesh is among the 15 countries that received money siphoned out of the country, as the international community stepped up its efforts to freeze and return assets stolen from developing countries, according a new report. The United States returned \$2.90 million to Bangladesh sometime between 2010 and 2012, said the joint report of the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Earlier, a United Nations Development Programme report ranked Bangladesh as the top exporter of illicit capital among all the least developed countries between 1990 and 2008, when \$34.8 billion was leaked out of the country.

BIMSTEC office opens in Dhaka²⁵

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is expected to get further momentum with the operationalisation of its secretariat in Dhaka on September 13. In January 2011, the members decided to set up the permanent secretariat, and Dhaka was finalised as the location at the 3rd Bimstec Summit in Myanmar in March.

Bhutan

India releases INR 1.299 billion²⁶

The new Indian Ambassador, Gautam Bambawale, on his first visit to the finance ministry of Bhutan on September 1, presented a cheque of Indian rupees 1.299 billion to Finance Minister Namgay Dorji. Handing over the cheque, Ambassador Bambawale said that the success of Bhutan was important for India and vice versa. "The budget is released for the smooth functioning of the government and the 11th Plan," he said. Finance secretary Lam Dorji said the two governments had resolved differences over the excise duty refund, and the Indian Government has released it, which adds to the revenue, and would contribute towards reviving the economy. While, Bhutan government has received the excise duty refund for 2011-12, the 2013 refund is to be finalised soon by the two parties. Indian Government also committed Nu 5 billion for the economic stimulus plan. Of the Nu 4.1 billion received towards the 11th Plan so far, Nu 2.125 billion is programme grant; Nu 550 million was given to fund the small development projects; and the rest for the project-tied assistance. Indian government approved Nu 1.8 million for SDPs and has released 30 percent of the budget.

Gol commits Nu 680 million for Paro airport expansion²⁷

Government of India has committed Nu 680 million, in principle, for the expansion of Paro international airport, in the 11th five-year plan. The 'in principle' commitment was made during the third round of Bhutan-India development cooperation talks, for the 11th five-year plan held in Thimphu. India funded Paro international airport expansion in the 10th five-year plan too. It provided Nu 185 million for the expansion and another Nu 83.7 million to improve communications and navigation aid technology at the airport.

Indian ambassador visits PHPA I and II²⁸

Ambassador Gautam Bambawale visited the Punatsangchu I and Punatsangchu II project on September 4, which, he said, was second on his priority list since he came to Bhutan in August. As of August, Government of India has released about Nu 43,321 million for PHPA I, and Nu 19,251 million for PHPA II. The expenditures as of August for PHPA-I were Nu 43,346 million, and Nu 19,366 million for PHPA II.

Bhutan clarifies freedom of religion situation²⁹

Bhutan clarified that freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, at the 27th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC). "The Bhutanese people have the freedom to embrace and practise any religion of their choice, provided it's a choice made out of free will," said foreign secretary Yeshey Dorji. Bhutan was at the 27th session of the HRC for the adoption of the outcome report of its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR), carried out in April this year. The Bhutanese delegation was responding to a non-government organisation's recommendations, made during the session, to amend "restrictive measures against compelling others to change their religion" in Bhutanese legislation. Secretary Yeshey Dorji explained that while freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution, the majority of the Bhutanese population is vulnerable to conversion through inducement. It was also pointed out that Bhutan has accepted 107 of 163 recommendations it received during its UPR in April. Bhutan also provided an explanation on the status of the remaining 54 recommendations. Two recommendations are partially accepted. "This however doesn't mean that we've rejected the other recommendations," said Yeshey Dorji. "I'd like to highlight that many of the important recommendations we received are already being implemented, or are addressed sufficiently in some form or the other," he said. Bhutan has ratified four of nine core treaties so far, two more since its first review in 2009. Yeshey Dorji pointed out that Bhutan is aware of the importance of ratifying the core treaties and intends to gradually expand the range of its commitment. However, financial and resource implications, the burden of reporting, and the need to amend legislation and practices, have to be taken into account, he explained. During the 27th HRC session, a number of countries commended Bhutan for how it has responded to recommendations made during its first review in 2009. Bhutan's next UPR is scheduled for 2019, when it will report on how it has implemented the 107 and two partial recommendations, it accepted this time.

Bhutan becomes 96th contracting party to Revised Kyoto Convention³⁰

Bhutan became the 96th contracting party to the Revised Kyoto Convention, with the country completing the procedures to join the international convention on the simplification and harmonisation of customs procedures on September 15. The revised convention was ratified during the summer session of the National Assembly, and the convention will be effective from December 16 this year. The Kyoto Convention entered into force in 1974, and the Revised Kyoto Convention in 2006.

ADB assistance to Bhutan³¹

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will fund US\$ 120 million towards the 118 megawatt Nikachu hydropower project, whose total estimated project cost was

US\$ 200 million. The project is modelled on public-private partnership (PPP) lines, with Druk Green Power corporation (DGPC), and the debt to equity ratio of 65:35. Nikachu is the second project to be built as a PPP after Dagachu project. However, ADB will provide US\$ 95million of the total US\$ 130million debt portion and US\$ 25million of the equity portion (US\$ 70million). The remaining amount will be raised from other investors, including DGPC. Of the total ADB funding, US\$ 25million is provided as a grant, US\$ 75million is a loan from ADB's ordinary capital resource (OCR) with 3 percent interest, and another US\$ 25million loan is from the Asian Development Fund with one percent interest during the grace period of eight years. ADB is also supporting Bhutan with US\$50.35 million for the South Asian Sub-economic Cooperation (SASEC) Road Connectivity Project, of which US\$ 31.39 million is on soft term credit and US\$ 18.96 million grant. Finance minister Namgay Dorji and ABD President Takehiko Nakao signed the loan and grant agreement on September 5 in Manila, Philippines, where the Bank's headquarters is based. The construction of the 68.30 km of South – west highway between Nganglam and Deothang is one of the major components of the project, finance ministry officials said. One of the ADB's credit terms is that the loan of US\$ 31.39M is to be used exclusively for the construction of the Nganglam – Deothang road. Besides the road, the project includes construction of mini dry port in Phuentsholing and Alay and construction of land customs station at Alay. Construction of 2.7km bypass at Phuentsholing and the 1.2km Pasakha access road are also part of the project. ADB also committed a grant of US \$0.360M to promote eco-friendly transport in the country. These proposed activities are identified according to the priorities of the 11th Plan. Finance ministry officials said the maturity period for ADB credit is 32 years including eight years of grace period. The interest is one percent per annum during the grace period and 1.5 percent per annum thereafter. As part of the project, the government will spend US\$ 18.65 million as counterpart funding to cover the cost of land acquisition, project management and other costs not covered by the ADB financing.

Maldives

President Yameen visits Sri Lanka and Singapore³²

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom concluded his official visits to Singapore and Sri Lanka, and returned to Male' on September 22. The President's visit to Sri Lanka, to attend the opening ceremony of the 8th General Assembly of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP), was made at the invitation of Sri Lankan president, Mahinda Rajapaksa. Following his visit to Sri Lanka, President Yameen also visited Singapore, at the invitation of Lee Hsien Loong, the Singaporean Prime Minister. During the visit to Sri Lanka, President Yameen met with the Sri Lankan Health Minister who assured the president that they would provide assistance in hiring anestheticians, gynecologists and children's doctors to solve the difficulties faced by Maldives in finding such specialists. Discussions also took place regarding having additional hospitals in Sri Lanka that will treat Maldivian patients under the 'Aasandha' health scheme, to offer special rates for Maldivians who seek the service of Sri Lankan hospitals.

Xi Jinping visits Maldives³³

President of China Xi Jinping and First Lady Madam Peng Liyuan made a state visit to the Maldives on September 14. The visit was being made at the invitation of

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. In an article published on Sun Online on September 14, Chinese President Xi Jinping wrote, “the ship of China-Maldives friendship has set sail. I am confident that with our joint efforts, it will brave winds and waves and forge ahead toward an even brighter future.” President Xi was the first Chinese Head of State to conduct a state visit to the Maldives. Noting that the Maldives was a valued neighbour, President Xi stated his confidence that relations between China and Maldives would be further strengthened under the Maritime Silk Road initiative. President Yameen and President Xi affirmed their intentions of forging a “future-oriented all-round friendly and cooperative partnership”. President Jinping met with former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom during the visit. The ‘Housing Project of the Maldives – Phase 2’, and the ‘Laamu Atoll Link Road Project’ were inaugurated by President Yameen and visiting President Xi Jinping, at a ceremony at the President’s Office on September 15. The ‘Housing Project of the Maldives – Phase 2’, which will see the construction of 1,500 housing units, will be financed through concessional loan financing by the government of China, and implemented by the China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC). The ‘Laamu Atoll Link Road Project’ will be a 15.1 kilometre long link-road, constructed through non-reimbursable aid financing by the Chinese Government. The project will be undertaken by the Jiangsu Provincial Transportation Engineering Group Co. Ltd. During Xi Jinping’s visit, both China and the Maldives signed total nine agreements, such as MoU on strengthening the cooperation, establishing the joint committee on trade and economic cooperation, marine cooperation, health cooperation, establishment of a joint meeting mechanism to deal with the issue of safety of Chinese tourists in the Maldives, tourism infrastructure development project, preliminary contract agreement expansion and upgrading of Ibrahim Nasir International Airport’, promoting the construction of the Male-Hulhule’ bridge project’ and ‘MoU on the Greater Male’ power station project.

Nasheed appeals the government to change the decision to join the Chinese maritime route³⁴

President of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and former president of Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, said that Maldives need not take part in another country’s Silk Route. Speaking at an event held at the Alimas Carnival area on September 22, Nasheed criticised President Yameen’s decision to support Maldives joining the maritime silk route announced by the Chinese government. He said that Maldives is our country, and it should be Maldivians who settle here. “Travelers and businessmen come to Maldives all the time; there is no need for a route belonging to somebody else to be here. This is Maldivians’ country, where Maldivians live. We have been here for a long time. We function on the Indian Ocean. The Chinese, Americans and even Indians can come and station here. We do not need to join some other group’s route,” Nasheed explained. Nasheed also said that Maldives should maintain its independence and it was the duty of the current president to maintain harmony. He appealed to change the decision to join the Chinese maritime route.

Maldives – Sri Lanka Joint Commission meeting held in Colombo³⁵

A high level delegation from the Maldives went to Colombo for a meeting of the Maldives – Sri Lanka Joint Commission. The meeting was co-chaired by Maldivian

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dhunya Maumoon and Sri Lankan Minister of External Affairs G L Peiris. Dhunya is accompanied in her visit by Minister of Education Dr Aishath Shiham, Minister of Fisheries Dr Mohamed Shainee, and senior officials of government institutions. The Maldives – Sri Lanka Joint Commission was established in 1984, under the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation between the two countries. Five sessions of the Commission have been held to date, with the last session held in Male' in April 2006. During the latest meeting, Maldives proposed to establish sub-commissions on Education and Health with Sri Lanka. Discussions were held regarding obtaining doctors and teachers, as well as on several other areas to strengthen and expand public services in the Maldives. A request was also made by the Maldivian delegates for facilitating lower prices for Maldivian patients in Sri Lankan hospitals. The Sri Lankan External Affairs Minister assured that he would look into the matter and respond to this request soon.

Bank of Ceylon approves loan for Hulhumale' reclamation project³⁶

The Board of the Bank of Ceylon (BOC) has approved a loan of \$30 million, requested by the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) for the second phase of the Hulhumale' land reclamation project. The loan, with a repayment period of seven years and interest of eight percent was approved. According to HDC, the \$50 million project will be financed by the \$30 million loan from BOC and \$20 million from HDC's reserve. The 188 hectares reclaimed under phase one of the project, launched in 1997, was aimed at facilitating housing for 60,000 people.

Discussions held regarding export of fish products to Russia³⁷

Discussions were held between officials of the Maldives and Russia, regarding exporting Maldivian fish products to Russia. The discussions took place during a meeting between Maldivian Minister of Fisheries Dr. Mohamed Shainee and Russian Ambassador to Maldives Alexander Karchava in Colombo. The meeting was also attended by Maldivian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dhunya Maumoon and senior officials of the Maldivian government. At the meeting, Dr Shainee noted that the recent cease in the exemption of duty for Maldivian fish exports to Europe causes losses for local fish companies, and that for this reason, efforts are ongoing by the government to enter new markets. He invited a delegation of the Russia Federal Agency for Fisheries to visit Maldives to audit Maldivian companies, and facilitate the export of fish to Russia as soon as possible. The Russian Ambassador welcomed the request, and promised to extend support in this regard on behalf of the Russian Government.

US expresses concern over attacks on media in Maldives³⁸

The United States has expressed concern over the attacks on media and political offices in Male' as well as continuing threats to media personnel in a statement issued on September 26. This statement came in relation to several journalists receiving threats, after they reported the attacks on Minivan News on September 24.

Waheed attends the 69th Session of the UNGA as Special Envoy of the President³⁹

Former President Dr. Mohamed Waheed attended the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly as Special Envoy of the President of the Republic of Maldives. Speaking

at the high-level event “Healthy Oceans & Seas: Paving the Way Towards a Sustainable Development Goal” in New York, former President said that Small States should more aptly called “Large Ocean States”. At the event, Dr Waheed briefed the audience on the work undertaken by the Maldives in the preservation of the oceans and seas. He highlighted Maldives’ sustainable method of pole and line fishing as a tradition that has been maintained for time immemorial. He also commended the leadership of the small island states in its advocacy towards the finalisation of a standalone goal on oceans and seas under the Sustainable Development Goals within the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom represents Maldives at the SIDS conference⁴⁰

Former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has said that while a country may face unique developmental challenge due to its small size, size alone does not determine a country’s destiny. He made this remark in his statement at the 3rd International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Apia, Samoa, from September 1 to 4, 2014. The former President represented the Maldives at the conference as a special envoy of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom.

Indian High Commission donates MVR 125,000 to the ARC⁴¹

The High Commission of India to the Maldives has donated MVR 125,000 to Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC). The donation would benefit the education of children with disabilities, as it would facilitate training opportunities in India for local teachers.

Soil erosion reported by 116 islands⁴²

Minister of Environment Thorig Ibrahim has said that 116 islands have reported cases of soil erosion. Speaking in the press conference held on September 24 at the Environment Ministry on the Climate Summit held on September 23 in New York, the minister said that out of 116 islands that reported soil erosion, 64 islands face severe erosion and the government is currently working to protect these islands. He further said that work has started to provide 30 percent of electricity used in 196 islands to be generated from renewable sources within the next five years.

Maldives ratifies Maritime Labour Convention⁴³

Mohamed Saeed, Minister of Economic Development, signed the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 on behalf of the Maldivian Government on September 30 at a ceremony at the State Electric Company Limited (STELCO), held to mark World Maritime Day.

Nepal

PM visits New York⁴⁴

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala went to New York to attend the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). He addressed the UNGA on September 27, 2014. On the Sideline of the UNGA session Prime Minister Koirala held talks with US President Barack Obama, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Under Secretary of US State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman. During the visit, Prime Minister Koirala attended and

addressed the UN Climate Change Summit-2014. Koirala brought the attention of world leaders to the climate change impacts faced by Nepal and other Least Developed Countries (LDC) during his address to the UN Summit. Koirala went to Abu Dhabi, UAE, on his way to New York. He made a three-day visit to the Federal Kingdom of Belgium and the Luxembourg after attending the UNGA session.

Foreign Ministry team visits to Delhi in run-up to the SAARC summit⁴⁵

A three-member team from the Foreign Ministry visited New Delhi to exchange information with diplomats from India, Maldives, Bhutan and Afghanistan on preparations for the 18th SAARC Summit to be held in Kathmandu from November 22-27. The team led by Prakash Subedi, head of the SAARC preparatory secretariat at the ministry, includes Under Secretary Bharat Kumar Regmi and Umakanta Acharya. Besides sharing experience with the diplomats of the countries which played host to the recent SAARC summits, the Nepali team also explored options to rent bulletproof cars for the VVIPs attending the Summit in Kathmandu. The Cabinet decision not to purchase the vehicles, reportedly stemmed from government's fears that it might be dragged into controversy if there emerged any financial embezzlement during the high-profile procurement.

Sixth meeting of the SAARC ministers of home/ interior held in Nepal⁴⁶

The sixth meeting of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) ministers of home or interior was held in Nepal on September 19. The session was preceded by the meeting of the SAARC immigration authorities on September 17, followed by the meeting of SAARC secretaries of interior or home on September 18. A wide range of issues on security, safety and social peace were discussed during the meeting, besides terrorism, drug and human trafficking and other transnational organised crime. Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh made a three day visit to Nepal to attend the meetings. During his stay in Nepal, he met President Ram Baran Yadav, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, Home Minister Bamdev Gautam and other political leaders. Addressing a press meet before wrapping up his visit on September 20, Singh said India would help Nepal's efforts to become a prosperous and stable country.

PDA signed between Government of Nepal and the GMR⁴⁷

Authorities from both Nepal and India have signed the project development agreement (PDA) for the Upper Karnali Hydropower Project on September 19. The Chief Executive of Investment Board Nepal and Vice-chairman of GMR-ITD Consortium signed in the agreement paper, representing the Nepali and Indian side respectively. As per the agreement, Nepal will receive 27% free share and 12% of free energy from the project. After 25 years of energy production, GMR-ITD will have to handover the project to Nepal. CPN-Maoist has protested the PDA the government signed with Indian company GMR. The Supreme Court has been moved against the PDA. Dambar Bahadur Rawal filed the petition on behalf of 36 residents of the project area. The petitioner has claimed the PDA was against Nepal's interim constitution, existing Acts and rules and is not in the interest of Nepal and the Nepali people. He has sought annulment of the deal. The writ has

made 15 government offices, including the Council of Minister, IBN, and Energy Ministry, as defendants.

First meeting of the Boundary Working Group held in Kathmandu⁴⁸

Nepal and India have finalised the terms of reference of the Boundary Working Group (BWG) and formed two subsidiary panels-Survey Officials' Committee and Field Survey Team-to look into boundary issues between the two countries. According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, the first meeting of the BWG-a panel of officials in the Survey General level-held in Kathmandu on September 19 also finalised the terms of reference of subsidiary panels. The meeting was attended by Survey Generals from the two countries. Nagendra Jha was leading the Nepali side while Swarna Subbaro was leading the Indian team. The agreed functions of the BWG include construction, restoration and repair of boundary pillars; carrying out GPS observation of boundary pillars; development of modalities to address cross-holding and encroachment of no-man's land and provide the technical inputs, when asked, to the Foreign Secretary-level mechanism on outstanding boundary issues. The meeting also finalised tentative programme for field works for the next three years. As per the BWG's decision, the meeting of the Survey Officials' Committee will be held before December 2014, and the next meeting of the BWG before September 2015 in India.

Indian grant for eye health care project⁴⁹

Indian government has pledged to provide Rs 10.27 million to the Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh (NNJS) to carry out the School Eye Health Care Programme in various districts. A memorandum of understanding was signed between NNJS and the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu in this regard on September 17. According to a press statement issued by the embassy, the assistance will cover the cost for providing 9,000 optical dispensing devices to visually-impaired children and 300 low vision dispensing devices to school-going children in Nepal during the year 2014-15. India has been providing assistance to the NNJS to carry out the programme as part of the India-Nepal Economic Cooperation Programme since 2001. Under this programme, optical devices/spectacles have been distributed to over 37,000 children. A mobile eye care van with ophthalmic equipment was also gifted to the NNJS for implementation of the programme in 2009.

Nepal, India finalise draft of survey for the proposed Amlekhgunj-Raxaul petroleum pipeline⁵⁰

Nepal and India have finalised a survey draft for the proposed Amlekhgunj-Raxaul petroleum pipeline. A joint team of Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) and Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) conducted the survey in three different phases. The draft report will be submitted to NOC and IOC separately. The Indian government has agreed in principle to build the project, worth around Rs 9 billion, in grant. Of the total cost, pipeline construction and land acquisition costs are estimated at Rs 4 billion. Rest of the funds will be used for other work, including capacity upgradation of NOC's Amlekhgunj depot, its automation, and construction of a pumping station. IOC had proposed building the cross-border pipeline in 1995. Subsequently, a memorandum of understanding was signed between NOC and IOC in September

1996 at the junior executive level. In 2004, another agreement was reached at the chief executive level. The much-delayed project gathered pace after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his Nepal visit in first week of August, promised constructing the pipeline. The pipeline is expected to reduce transportation costs by 40-50 percent, control leakage and ensure hassle-free transfer and quality of petroleum products.

China to extend rail to Nepal⁵¹

China has agreed in principle to extend the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to the Nepal border. During the fifth Nepal-Tibet Trade Facilitation Committee (NTTFC) meeting held in Lhasa during September 25-26, the Chinese side made the confirmation, according to members of the Nepali delegation. The Chinese team at the NTTFC was led by Ciden Nanjie, deputy secretary general of the local government of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. According to Nepali delegation members to the NTTFC, the Chinese side also agreed in principle to build an alternative cargo route from Rasuwagadhi to Kathmandu. With Nepal requesting clearance for cargo containers from the alternative Rasuwagadhi-Kerung border point, the Chinese side has agreed to opening the route. China also agreed to provide training to Nepali exporters as the country's export has been small despite China providing duty free access to 7,787 Nepali goods. The training will make Nepali traders aware of the duty free access. The two sides also agreed to develop western borders between the two countries with road and other infrastructure.

Vice President visits China⁵²

Vice President Parmananda Jha left for Lhasa on September 24 to attend the First China -Tibet Tourism and Cultural Expo that took place there from September 25 to 27. The Expo was jointly organised by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region and the National Tourism Centre.

First Secretary General of the BIMSTEC meets Prime Minister Koirala⁵³

Sumith Nakandala, the first Secretary General of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sushil Koirala on September 16. During the meeting, matters related to mutual cooperation and coordination among the member states, institutional development of the BIMSTEC, relations and coordination between BIMSTEC and another regional bloc such as SAARC were discussed, according to a press statement issued by the PM's private secretariat.

Pact signed to achieve sustainable energy⁵⁴

Nepal and Norway, Denmark, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on September 24 signed a Framework Document for Energy+ Cooperation to contribute towards achieving sustainable energy for all in Nepal. The four donors extended their support to achieve the goal of providing universal access to modern energy services, doubling the rate of energy efficiency improvement and doubling the share of renewable energy in the energy mix by 2030 as per the Sustainable Energy for All initiative launched by the UN Secretary-General.

PDCC endorses provisions regarding the constitution of the Constitutional Council⁵⁵

A meeting of the Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (PDCC) passed a provision which envisions that the country shall not be without a legislature-parliament after the promulgation of the new constitution. Agreeing on the topic of the legislature, the meeting passed a provision that the previous legislature-parliament will continue to exist until another election to the legislature is held. The meeting also endorsed a provision regarding the constitution of the Constitutional Council comprising the executive head of government, the chief justice, the leader of the opposition, the speaker and also a woman from among the people making notable contribution to different sectors based on the principle of inclusion. PDCC agreed on the agenda of providing special citizenship certificates to the Non-Resident Nepalis which will guarantee all rights, except political. Such special citizenship will also be awarded to ex-British Gurkhas. The NRN and ex-British Gurkhas have been lobbying for dual citizenship since long. As per the act formulated to deal with NRNs, the term refers to any Nepali, except for those residing in SAARC region, for more than two years. If the new provision is endorsed by the CA, it will be fourth category under which a person will be entitled to receive Nepali citizenship. Other categories include citizenship by descent, naturalised and honorary. Barring political rights means the NRNs will not have voting rights nor can they contest elections. However, they will have the right to purchase/sale of properties and make investments. But they will enjoy the social and economic rights under the existing laws.

UCPN (Maoist) sticks to ten-state model⁵⁶

The UCPN (Maoist) asserted that the ten-state model suggested by the High-level State Restructuring Commission of the first Constituent Assembly is its bottom line for talks with the ruling parties on federalism. A meeting of the party's ideological management committee agreed to take the ten-state stance on state restructuring, claiming that less than ten states in the country would not address the aspirations of Janajatis and other marginalised communities. The opposition party's statement comes at a time when the ruling Nepali Congress and CPN-UML have publicly stated to go for no more than seven provinces.

Human trafficking increased by 60.34 percent⁵⁷

A report released by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on September 1 shows the rate of human trafficking has increased by 60.34 percent in one-and-a-half years. The number of people trafficked or attempted for trafficking increased to 29,000 in 2012/13, compared to 11,500 in 2011. The report titled "Trafficking in Persons especially on Women and Children in Nepal" concludes trafficking is common for three major purposes—sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and entertainment. Releasing the report, the rights watchdog urged the government of Nepal to formulate a national policy on prevention and combating trafficking and revise the existing National Plan of Actions and other acts and rules accordingly.

Pakistan

Islamabad stand-off: No deadlines, no solutions⁵⁸

The political crisis in Pakistan remains at fever pitch as both the PML-N led government and the protesting Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) refuse to budge on their respective positions. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif stands firm in the face of growing pressure for his resignation, and the protesting PTI and PAT are adamant on standing their ground in the capital's high-security red zone. Violent clashes took place leaving at least three dead and hundreds injured. Speculation and conspiracy theories are widespread, the most popular of which sees the powerful military as somehow engineering the ongoing crisis. The United States called for restraint by all sides in Pakistan's political crisis, saying protesters had a right to demonstrate peacefully but that it strongly opposed efforts to impose change through violence and destruction of property.

Court orders FIR against PM Nawaz⁵⁹

An additional sessions judge has ordered the Secretariat police to register a case against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and 10 others while disposing of a petition filed by the PTI over the incidents of August 30 that led to the deaths of three people during the protests by PTI and PAT in the federal capital. The party had approached the Secretariat police station to register a First Information Report (FIR) on the matter against Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif, Chaudhry Nisar, Khawaja Asif, Saad Rafique, IG Islamabad, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, IG Railways and three others. PTI had filed the request days after the August 30 violence but following the police's failure to register a case, the party had approached the sessions court under clause 22-A of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) for redress. Additional sessions judge Shahrukh Arjumand issued the order on September 27, directing the police to register an FIR against the prime minister and 10 others.

Political unrest causes decline in tourists visiting Gilgit Baltistan⁶⁰

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) minister for information and tourism Sadia Danish said that the ongoing political unrest in Pakistan has badly affected tourism industry of the region. Talking to mediapersons, she said that GB economy depended on tourism as thousands of people were associated with the industry to earn their livelihoods, but the current political instability had caused a decline in number of tourists visiting the region. The minister said that many a local and foreign tourist had cancelled their visit to the region in the wake of the political impasse due to the continued sit-ins of PAT and PTI in Islamabad. Sadia Danish said that tourism department of GB had to cancel the scheduled Silk Route International Festival which was to be held on September 10 due to the ongoing political turmoil. She pointed out that labourers, tour operators, porters, transporters and hotel owners had been facing economic difficulties due to decline in tourists to the region. The minister blamed the wrong policies of PML-N government and non-political approach of Imran Khan, and Tahirul Qadri for deepening crisis. She said that democracy in Pakistan was at stake while the country's economy was taking brunt of the turmoil. She urged the government and protesting parties to initiate dialogue to resolve issues peacefully.

Federal agency asks for Rs 1.5 billion for displaced persons⁶¹

The Fata Disaster Management Authority (FDMA) has asked the federal government to give it Pakistani Rs 1.5 billion to cater for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) of North Waziristan Agency. According to the relevant officials, the authority requires funds to distribute cash to the IDPs and fulfil their basic needs during the current month. The federal government had announced payment of Pakistani Rs 12,000 monthly assistance to every displaced family of North Waziristan. Only the families, whose cases are okayed by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) are getting cash assistance. Until now, the NADRA has verified 55,183 families. The FDMA had initially registered a total of 95,830 displaced families. The army had launched the Zarb-i-Azb operation against militants in North Waziristan Agency on June 18 causing displacement of hundreds of thousands of families. The IDPs have either taken shelter with local residents or rented houses, while only 725 of them had taken shelter in Bakkakhel camp adjacent to the conflict-hit area. The army is managing the camp.

Army chief reiterates resolve to counter 'provocation' at LoC⁶²

Forces of India and Pakistan engaged in exchanges of fire along the LoC in recent weeks, resulting in civilian and military deaths on both sides. Expressing complete satisfaction on the state of readiness and vigil being maintained by troops, Pakistani Army Chief Genreal Raheel Sharif reiterated that any provocation along the Line of Control (LoC) would be responded effectively. A statement issued by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) visited troops deployed in forward localities along the LoC near Jhelum on September 26. He was briefed by local commanders about the prevailing security situation along the de facto border that divides the Kashmir region between Indian and Pakistani administered sectors. While interacting with the troops, the army chief appreciated their state of morale and operational preparedness on front line.

Pakistan successfully test-fires Hatf-IX⁶³

Pakistan conducted a successful test-fire of short-range surface-to-surface missile Hatf-IX (Nasr), the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated in a press release on September 26. The test-fire was conducted with successive launches of 4x Missiles from a state of the art multi-tube launcher with salvo mode.

Pakistan wants to build more N-power plants⁶⁴

Pakistan has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it needs to build more nuclear power plants to ease its severe energy crisis. Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) Chairman Dr Ansar Parvez told the annual general conference of the IAEA in Vienna on September 25 that Pakistan was committed to synergising its efforts with those of the agency to harness the vast potential of nuclear technology. Pakistan had the experience, credentials and potential to become a recipient as well as a supplier of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, Dr Parvez said.

"Timing of meeting with Hurriyat leader was not totally right", Aziz⁶⁵

Responding to the recent breakdown of a scheduled meeting between Indo-Pak foreign secretaries, Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign

Sri Lanka

Affairs Sartaj Aziz said that the timing of Pakistani High Commissioner Abdul Basit's meeting with Hurriyat leader Shabir Shah was 'perhaps not right'. At the same time, Aziz said the timing of India's message expressing reservations against the meeting was 'not right' either. The PM's adviser also called Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's move to express willingness to hold bilateral talks with Pakistan during his maiden United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) address as 'encouraging'.

Xi Jinping visits Sri Lanka⁶⁶

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Sri Lanka on September 16, 2014. This was the first visit by any president of China after 28 years. During his visit to Sri Lanka, President Xi along with President Mahinda Rajapaksa commissioned the third and final phase of the China-funded and built Norochcholai Coal Power Plant in Puttalam. The Chinese and Sri Lankan leaders launched the US\$ 1.5 billion Colombo Port City Project to build a modern city on a 233 hectares of land reclaimed from the sea. Before his departure Jinping met with Prime Minister D. M. Jayaratne and the Speaker Chamal Rajapaksa. Meeting with the Prime Minister Jayaratne, President Xi called on the two sides to implement and expedite major cooperative projects including the negotiations on the Sri Lanka-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Chinese submarines visits Colombo Port⁶⁷

The Chinese submarine 'Great Wall 03292' docked at the Colombo International Container Terminal in Sri Lanka from September 7 to 14, just before the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Sri Lanka. Geng Yansheng, spokesman of the Chinese Ministry of National Defense (MND), said that the PLA Navy submarine was on its way to the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia to join the PLA Navy escort task force in conducting escort mission, and on its way to the mission area, the PLA Navy submarine anchored at the Port of Colombo in Sri Lanka. "What needs to be pointed out is that it is a common practice for navies of all countries to have their submarines and ships replenished at certain intervals at ports. The escort task force, as well as the submarine joining the escort mission, is the regular activity included in the PLA Navy's annual program," he said.

Sri Lanka, China pledge to boost military cooperation⁶⁸

Xu Qiliang, Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission hailed the friendship with Sri Lanka when Secretary of Defence and Urban Development Gotabhaya Rajapaksa called on him on September 23 in Beijing. He said the leaders of the two countries attach great importance to military-to-military ties and the Chinese military is willing to strengthen pragmatic cooperation in various fields with the Sri Lankan military. Secretary Rajapaksa said that Sri Lanka will continue to enhance cooperation with China to advance military-to-military ties.

Shinzo Abe's visit to Sri Lanka⁶⁹

Japanese Prime Minister (PM) Shinzo Abe visited Sri Lanka on September 7, 2014. Abe is the first Japanese PM to visit after 24 years. During the visit, Abe expressed his intention to increase cooperation with Sri Lanka in the maritime area for open and safe seas. He urged Sri Lanka to engage in international community in

addressing human right violation allegation. He visited a Buddhist temple in Keleniya. Former Sri Lankan President J. Jayawardene was cremated at the temple grounds. Abe paid tribute to Jayawardene, because, Jayawardene made an impassioned plea on behalf of Japan at the 1951 peace treaty signing in San Francisco which officially ended Second world War. Jayawardene also declined compensation from Japan, which had carried out aerial bombings in Colombo and Trincomalee. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his visit to Sri Lanka on September 7, inaugurated the construction work of Phase 2 of Bandaranaike International Airport Development Project and signed the agreement on exchange of notes for Yen loan for the "Digitalization of Terrestrial Television Broadcasting Project", memorandum of cooperation on the Vitalisation of Intergovernmental Economic Policy Dialogue between the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, memorandum of cooperation in Agriculture and Related Fields between the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan and the Ministry of Agriculture of Sri Lanka and Letter of Intent between the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan and the Ministry of Technology and Research of Sri Lanka on Cooperation in the Fields of Science, Technology and Innovation. Japan's Mizuho Bank Ltd. Also signed a Memorandum of Understanding for business cooperation with Board of Investment (BOI) of Sri Lanka on September 7, 2014.

President attends the 69th session of the UNGA⁷⁰

President Mahinda Rajapaksa returned to the island on September 29 after successfully completing the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly held in New York, USA. He chaired a very fruitful meeting with the US business community during the visit. During the visit President Rajapaksa met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Malta Prime Minister Malta Joseph Muscat, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Mr. Iyad Ameen Madani, Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas, Nepali Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma. Addressing the UN General Assembly, President Rajapaksa stated although the role of the UN in advancing international peace, security and prosperity is crucial in the contemporary world, in order to gain the confidence and goodwill of the international community as a whole, one of the essential requirements is consistency of standards across the board without any perception of selectivity or discrimination. "It is in this context that the current functioning of the system needs fresh examination in order to enhance its credibility. To be successful, this process must involve de-politicisation of the UN systems and mechanisms and they must stop being hostage to different forms of funding," President added. President Rajapaksa addressing a briefing hosted by Business Council for International Understanding (BCIU) said peace and stability in the country is the greatest benefit Sri Lanka can offer to incoming companies. President Rajapaksa also noted that the country is also able to offer a high-skilled workforce. During the visit, president chaired Commonwealth meet in New York. President Mahinda Rajapaksa officially handed over Sri Lanka's US\$1 million donation to Palestine when President met President Mahmoud Abbas on September 25, 2014.

The UPFA wins Uva Provincial Council⁷¹

The UPFA won 19 seats (including 2 bonus seats) in the Uva Provincial Council Elections held on September 20, 2014, while the main opposition United National Party (UNP) won 13 seats and JVP 2 seats. However, analysts in Sri Lanka argue that the opposition party made a massive gain at election for the Province when compared to what the party received at the 2009 election. The UNP more than doubled its votes in the Province winning 274,773 votes at this year's election as opposed to the 129,144 it got at the 2009 election. The party secured 13 seats, 6 more than the 7 seats it won in 2009. Tamil Net said that UPFA's victory was manipulated victory. 50000 upcountry Tamils working in different parts of the country could not vote, because they were given just half day leave. UPFA tried to woo the voters by providing draught relief package which include Sri Lankan Rs, 2500 per family. These packages however, are not provided in other draught affected provinces. Shashindra Rajapaksa took oaths as Chief Minister of the Uva Province on September 30 before President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the Presidential Secretariat. Shashindra Rajapaksa polled the highest number of preferential votes of 96,619 from the Moneragala district.

Pakistani asylum seekers in Sri Lanka⁷²

The Court of Appeal gave permission to Sri Lankan authorities to send back scores of Pakistani asylum seekers, after the government said they were a threat to the island's security and public health on September 1, 2014. Deputy Solicitor General Janak de Silva asked the Appeal court to lift an earlier suspension of deportations, saying there was evidence Pakistanis were committing crimes and bringing malaria into the country, which was otherwise virtually free of the disease. The Sri Lankan Government says the Pakistanis are part of an influx of economic immigrants in the past year who have become a burden on the country's resources and potentially compromised state and regional security. Most of the Pakistanis are from the Ahmadiyya Islamic sect. The Ahmadi consider themselves Muslims, but a 1984 Pakistani law declared them non-Muslims and many Pakistanis consider them heretics. Sri Lankan government freed 60 Pakistanis from Boosa camp and allowed them to go to their temporary home.

Sri Lanka-Bangladesh talks conclude successfully⁷³

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh successfully inked their second bilateral Joint Working Session on September 23 in Colombo. During the discussions both parties sought possibilities to further strengthen the trade agreements between them. Minister Bathiudeen addressed the six member Bangladeshi official trade delegation led by Manoj Kumar Roy, Additional Secretary (FTA), Ministry of Commerce of Bangladesh at the concluding session of two day bilateral sessions at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. On the occasion, the mutually agreed minutes were inked by RDS Kumaratne, DG-Department of Commerce of Sri Lanka and Bangladeshi Additional Secretary Kumar Roy in the presence of Minister Bathiudeen. Sri Lanka's leading exports to Bangladesh in 2013 were apparel and enzymes. Leading imports from Bangladesh in 2013 were medicaments, apparel, electric accumulators, and potatoes. The first meeting of the Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) on Trade was held in Dhaka in February 2014.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba visits Sri Lanka⁷⁴

Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Bruno Eduardo Rodriguez Parrilla says he sees a promising future for bilateral relations with Sri Lanka. The Cuban Minister, who arrived in Sri Lanka on September 7 for a two-day official visit, made this comment when he called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa on September 8 at Temple Trees. President Rajapaksa thanked Cuba for supporting Sri Lanka at international forums, particularly at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and also for the higher education scholarships that the Caribbean country has provided for Sri Lankan students. Minister Parrilla said that Cuba is always happy to assist Sri Lanka whenever possible. Minister Parrilla commended Sri Lanka's non-aligned foreign policy and stated that his country will do its best to continue supporting Sri Lanka because Cuba sees a promising future for Sri Lanka - Cuba relations. The discussion also focused on other matters of mutual interest such as fighting the spread of dengue, learning from Sri Lanka's agricultural practices and overall international relations, including regional cooperation.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain meets President⁷⁵

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain Mr. José Manuel García-Margallo Marfil called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees on September 6. The discussion focused on strengthening both diplomatic and economic relations between the two nations. During the meeting, Margallo requested Sri Lanka to consider supporting Spain's candidacy for a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the term 2015-2016. President Rajapaksa said his Government will take the request into consideration.

India funded language lab inaugurated in Kandy⁷⁶

The Minister of Education Bandula Gunawardana and the Indian High Commissioner jointly inaugurated a Language Lab in Kandy on September 29. The Language Lab in Kandy is one of the nine Language Labs that the Government of India has set up in each of the nine provinces of Sri Lanka. The Language Lab project is being implemented as part of an MoU signed between India and Sri Lanka in 2011 for "Setting up of a Three-Tier English Language Training System in Sri Lanka". The total cost of the project is SLR 84 million, which is being implemented by the Government of India under full grant assistance through M/s Metropolitan Office (Pvt) Limited, Colombo. As part of the project, Government of India has provided 30 computer units and other related equipment, software and latest sophisticated teaching aids to each Centre, and has also trained five master trainers for each Centre. The objective of the project is to help enhance English Language training infrastructure in Sri Lanka; raise the general level of proficiency in English language of various sections of society; impart training in the use of English language; familiarise English language teachers from schools, colleges and universities in Sri Lanka with recent trends in English language teaching; and upgrade their skills.

BBS gives ultimatum to Sri Lankan Government⁷⁷

Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) President, the venerable Kirama Wimalajothi, speaking at a BBS conference at the Sugadathasa indoor stadium, insisted that Sri Lanka is not

a multi-religious country. He said Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese, Buddhist country and Buddhism in Sri Lanka is now facing a threat from some groups, including according to him, extremist Muslim and Christian groups. Speaking in front of a large gathering of monks and guests, including the venerable Ashin Wirathu, the dreaded leader of the 969 Movement in Myanmar and the Vedda chief, the venerable Kirama Wimalajothi said that a BBS policy statement will be presented to the Government detailing the concerns of Buddhists in Sri Lanka and if the Government fails to address the issue then the BBS and Buddhists in Sri Lanka will “bring a man from the village” to lead the country and make the change. The Government however, played down the views expressed by the BBS and insisted that it stands for coexistence among all communities. Cabinet spokesman, Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said that the Government did not endorse the views of the BBS expressed at a conference in Colombo. He also said that if anyone felt threatened by the views expressed by any group or individual then there is a legal system in place where the concerns on such issues can be addressed. On the other hand, stressing that a world without extremism was the essence of Buddhism, the founder leader of the 969 organisation of Myanmar, the Venerable Ashin Wirathu Thera said on September 28 that his organisation would work with the BBS to achieve this goal. He was in Sri Lanka to attend the BBS convention in Colombo. The venerable thera thanked President Mahinda Rajapaksa for mediating in order to grant him visa to visit Sri Lanka when some forces were trying to stop his visit to the island.

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