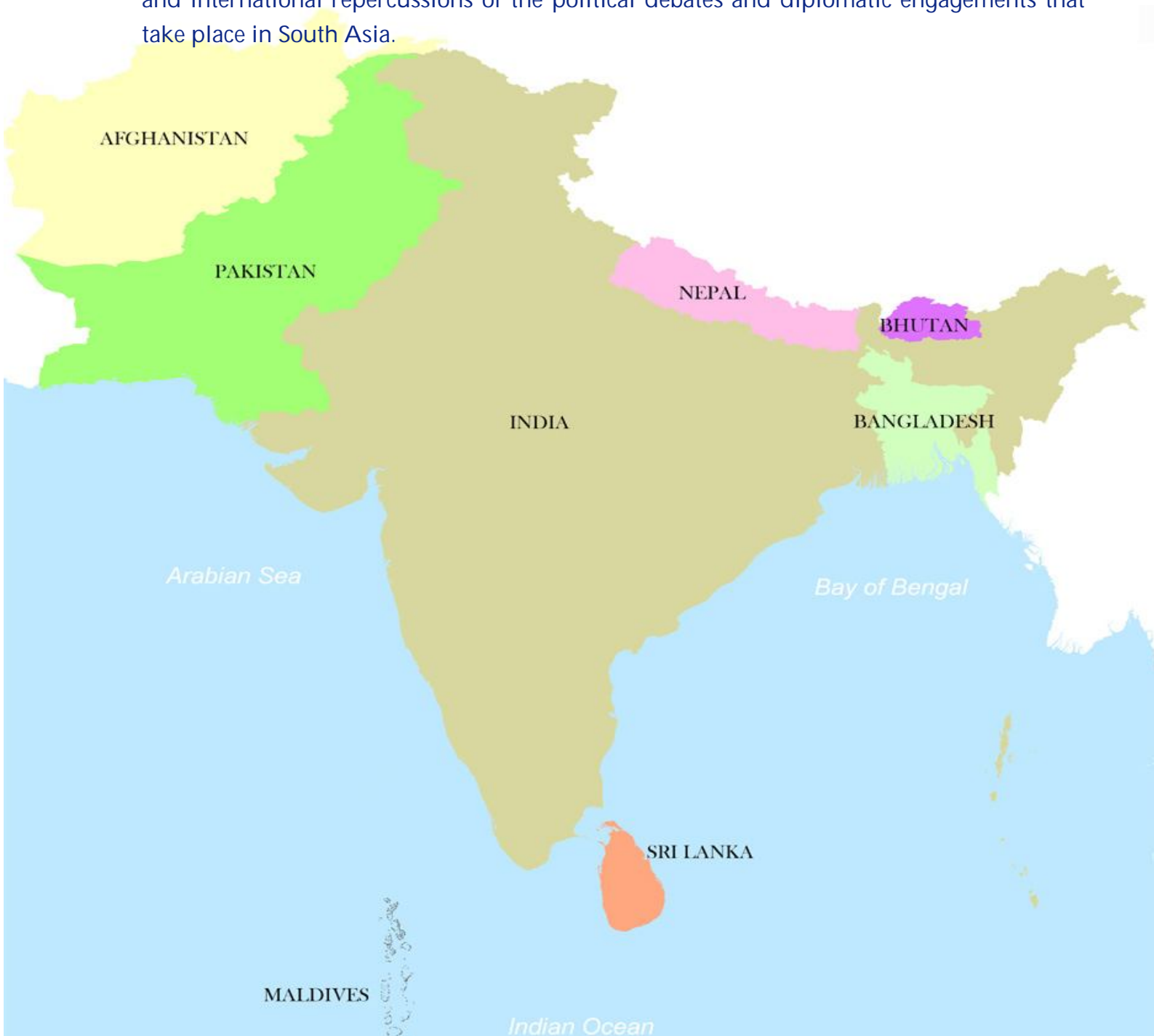


SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

April 2014

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



Compiled & Edited by:
Gulbin Sultana

idsa
INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
STUDIES & ANALYSES
रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

Editor's Note

Presidential election in Afghanistan was the highlight in the month of April. The election that had been entirely managed by the Afghans marked the beginning of democratic political transition. Voters turned out in large number despite the threats of violence. This proves that the Afghans are determined to have their say in shaping their future. This transition is significant as Afghanistan is going to have a new President after the long tenure of Karzai that was marked by allegation of corruption. The security transition that already begun is going to culminate in the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. It is likely that the new government is going to sign a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the US which will allow the stationing of some US troops for training purpose. The new government is likely to start the process of talking to the Taliban. It is to see how the new President would avail these opportunities and lead the country towards peace and stability.

Afghanistan

Presidential Election¹

Presidential and Provincial Council election was held in Afghanistan on April 5, 2014. World leaders have come out left and right to praise Afghans following the vote. Although insurgents had threatened to derail the elections, they were carried out peacefully and saw turnout that surpassed expectations. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) estimated that over seven million Afghans participated in the presidential and provincial council elections, which was twice as many as did in 2009. Addressing a press conference in Kabul, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) spokesman Nadir Mohsini said 3,274 complaints were registered across the country, with 1,892 of them were supported by documents. Under the commission's procedure, 870 complaints supported by documents were falling in A- category, of which 338 complaints were against presidential runners, 537 against provincial council contenders and 1,017 against the employees of the IEC. More than 95,000 security personnel were deployed across the country to ensure security for presidential and provincial elections. Only 211 of the over 6,000 polling centers available nationwide were closed by officials on the election day due to security threats. A number of voting centres in Bamyan, Takhar, Nangarhar, Daikundi, Samangan, Badakhshan, Kabul and Herat provinces ran out of the papers. Observers who monitored polling centers around the country said that this year's elections were more transparent than the 2009 election. The Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) said it had recorded 11,000 incidents of fraud, irregularities, militant threats and closure of polling stations during elections. The watchdog released a report, saying it observers had noted 9,500 cases of electoral fraud, including 2,600 of a serious nature. It said people's participation was beyond expectations, but there had been election law violations. According to the preliminary results of the April 5 Presidential elections announced by the IEC, Abdullah Abdullah is leading with 44.9 percent. Presidential candidate Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai is trailing with 31.5 percent and Zalmay Rassoul still behind with 11.5 percent and Sayyaf in fourth with 7.1 percent. There might be a possibility of runoff. If runoffs were to take place, it will be held on June 7, 2014. Meanwhile, the Presidential candidates are meeting each other to discuss possible coalition.

Local Afghans withstood against Taliban²

Some twenty villages had been cleared of insurgents as hundreds of locals withstood against the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban and driven them out of the vast regions in eastern province of Laghman province. The anti-Taliban rebellion was staged and led by a local elder Hazrat Noor Pashaye who had equipped his local subordinates with primary devices to stand against the insurgents in Alingar and drive them out of the district. The villages cleared of the insurgents in Alingar district, included Dara-e-Norlam, Parwaye, Paryana, Jabar Khil and Mandal. In another incident, at least 15 senior Taliban commanders were killed on April 1, 2014 in Ghazni province by a suicide bomber reportedly attempting to keep them from carrying out plans to disrupt the elections. In addition to the 15 confirmed dead, nine other militants were wounded by the blast, which occurred in the Gelan district of Ghazni, according to the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Among the casualties were said to be Pakistani Taliban leaders. The Taliban commanders

were reportedly meeting to plan election day attacks when one of their own decided to turn against them using the very tactic made infamous by the insurgent group.

President Karzai chairs National Security Council meeting³

Speaking at a National Security Council (NSC) meeting chaired by President Hamid Karzai, Amin Habib, chief of the military bases transition commission, said the commission was handed over 335 bases used by foreign soldiers since its establishment. A statement from the presidential palace said the bases surrendered by NATO-led coalition forces should be retained by the defense and interior ministries for proper use by the Afghan security forces. Present in the meeting, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the National Security Advisor, suggested to evaluate remaining bases whether they were suitable to be used as industrial parks by the private sector. During the course of meeting, defense and interior ministers spoke at length over the prevailing security situation of the country. They noted remarkable improvement in law and order and security throughout the country.

Debate on numbers of troops presence in Afghanistan post 2014 continues⁴

US Senators warned the Obama administration against leaving a fewer number of troops in Afghanistan beyond this year, saying it would be a fatal mistake. "We hope a recent press report that the White House is considering a post-2014 force in Afghanistan well below the recommendations of our military commanders is incorrect," Senators Lindsey Graham, Kelly Ayotte and John McCain said in a joint statement. Reuters reported that the administration is considering leaving "well below" 10,000 troops in Afghanistan after 2014. That is the minimum number military commanders say would be necessary to continue training Afghan forces and conducting a counterterrorism mission there. They also urged the White House to consider "the lesson of Iraq," where all US troops were pulled from the country after the US and Iraq failed to sign a bilateral security agreement. The statement said they believed the number of troops recommended by US military leaders represented sound military advice and would allow for continued US support in the areas still needed by Afghan security forces. However, the Obama Administration ruled out it had taken any decision on troop numbers as yet. "Until we have concluded a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), we would not expect to announce any potential troop numbers," State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters at her daily news conference.

WJ approves strategic cooperation agreement with Norway and Finland⁵

Wolesi Jirga (WJ) or the lower house of parliament approved two agreements of strategic cooperation with Norway and Finland by majority of votes. Under the agreement reached between Afghanistan and Norway in 2012, Oslo had committed to assist Kabul in regional, development, economic, security and political sectors. Norwegian government had also pledged to pay expenses of commute of illegal Afghan migrants based in Norway and facilitate ground for their return to their homeland. The lawmakers also approved similar agreement with Finland. Under the agreement, Finland would provide 30 million euro in annual aid to Afghanistan in development sectors after 2014 for ten years.

Iranian and Afghan diplomats discuss comprehensive cooperation pact⁶

Iranian and Afghan diplomats in a meeting in Kabul on April 14 discussed progress in preparing draft of a comprehensive cooperation pact between the two countries. During the meeting Iranian Ambassador to Kabul Mohammad Reza Bahrami and Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ershad Ahmadi also discussed the trend of a trilateral agreement which is to be signed by Iran, Afghanistan and India soon.

3.3 percent growth in 2013⁷

Afghanistan economic growth sharply tumbled in 2013, amid a 9.7 percent hike in food prices, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB). ADB country director in Afghanistan Joji Tokeshi told reporters in Kabul that the bank was committed to supporting Afghanistan. He said Afghanistan economic growth reached 11.9 percent in 2012, but fell to 3.3 percent in 2013, with investments in the private sector declining from 4.9 percent to 3.6 percent. The ADB official said there had been a 4.8 percent cut in rates of non-food items, but the overall inflation rate increased from 6.2 percent in 2012 to 7.4 percent in 2013. Tokeshi said the Asian Development Bank had invested \$3.8 billion in various sectors of Afghanistan since 2002 and vowed stepped-up efforts to reverse the declining economic growth in two years. Linking the sharp decline in economic growth to dwindling foreign assistance and political pressures at home, the ADB official said the bank assisted Afghanistan with \$585.1 million for infrastructure development projects such as ring roads, railway lines and electricity last year. He said the ADB planned to donate \$400 million to Afghanistan over the next two years and predicted 3.5 percent increase in Afghanistan gross domestic production in 2014 and 4.5 percent in 2015.

Afghanistan signs agreement with the WB⁸

Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal, leading a high-powered delegation to the annual spring meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), signed an agreement on four projects worth \$255.5 million with WB South Asia Vice President Phillipe Le Houérou. Topping the list is the \$40 million for CASA-1000 - Community Support which provides access to electricity and other social and economic infrastructure services to communities along the 1,000 transmission line. Zakhilwal also signed project worth \$ 5 million, Non-Formal Approach to Training Education and Jobs in Afghanistan (NATEJA) to increase the potential for employment and higher earnings of targeted young Afghan women and men in rural and semi-urban areas through non-formal skills training. The other two projects for which agreements were signed with the WB are \$10 million Kabul Municipal Development Program (KMDP) and \$90.5million for Kabul Urban Transport Efficiency Improvement (KUTEI).

Afghanistan objects to the construction of the Dasu Dam⁹

Afghanistan's foreign ministry on April 15 rejected the remarks made by Pakistani ministers that Kabul had withdrawn its opposition to the Dasu dam, which would have serious negative environmental repercussions for Afghanistan. Afghanistan has insisted that it has not withdrawn objections to the Dasu Dam – a project

Pakistan plans to build on the Indus River at an estimated cost of nearly \$7.5 billion and expected to produce 4,300 megawatts of electricity. Afghanistan had also urged the WB and other international lenders to stop funding for the project unless its concerns were addressed. It claimed that Pakistan neither informed Afghanistan about the project through diplomatic channels nor was any agreement signed between the two countries.

Taliban leader under house arrest in Dubai freed¹⁰

A veteran Taliban leader Agha Jan Mutasim, who had been placed under house arrest in Dubai after he launched his own group and held talks with Afghanistan-backed negotiators, arrived in Kabul on April 19 from Dubai. A senior member of the High Peace Council in Kabul, Qazi Amin Waqad said that Mutasim will soon resume his routine peace efforts. The Afghan presidential palace reportedly in an angry reaction had described Mutasim's detention in the UAE as a step to foil peace efforts in Afghanistan. Aimal Faizi, spokesperson for President Hamid Karzai, said that Kabul had informed all sides about Mutasim's peace efforts. Mutasim, former chief of the Taliban's powerful political commission, had moved to Turkey after he was shot and injured in Karachi in 2010.

Deputy minister of public works was kidnapped¹¹

Deputy Minister of Public Works, Ahmad Shah Waheed was kidnapped by four unknown gunmen on April 17 from Khair Khana area of Kabul city. Special Forces launched an operation in Deh Sabz district of Kabul to release the Deputy Minister but the operation was unsuccessful. An Afghan police officer said that Minister Waheed was injured during a gunfire battle between the police force and kidnappers. Afghan police claim that Minister Waheed was shot twice in his leg during the shootout.

Bangladesh

BNP's march towards Teesta¹²

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) begins its two-day long march towards the Teesta Barrage in Nilphamari on April 22 and 23 amid a warning by the government that stern action would follow if the party created anarchy during the programme. On April 16, BNP announced the programme demanding due share of the Teesta water from India. Reportedly, Boro farmers in four northern districts are suffering because of India's massive withdrawal of Teesta water. The water flow in the Teesta river has dropped to 650 cusecs from 3,500 cusecs around this time last year. The partners in the ruling Awami League-led 14-party alliance recommended that the government ensure proper sharing of the Teesta river water through bilateral talks with neighbouring India. They said the government should persuade Indian authorities to meet Bangladesh's demand.

ICT issues warrant against Syed Md. Hasan¹³

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 (ICT) on April 3, issued warrant of the arrest for Syed Md. Hasan, a suspected Razakar Bahini commander at Tarail thana in the erstwhile Kishoreganj sub-division, during Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971. The tribunal issued the warrant after taking into cognizance of a petition submitted by the prosecution that sought arrest of the suspected 'Razakar commander.'

Bangladesh agrees to offer transit facilities to India¹⁴

Dhaka has agreed to offer transit facility for 6,000MW power transmission line from Assam to Bihar through Bangladesh's north in exchange for part of the power. The joint steering committee on bilateral power trade at its seventh meeting made the decision. Bangladesh's power secretary Monwar Islam and India's power secretary P Uma Sankar told reporters about the deal after the meeting. The meeting, however, did not estimate the amount of power Bangladesh would receive from India as charge. The issue will be settled after a joint technical committee, set up at the meeting, submits a feasibility report on the plan to carry power from the Rangia Raota substation in Assam to Borakpur in Bihar through Jamalpur and Barapukuria in Bangladesh.

Forged Indian currency recovered at Dhaka International Airport¹⁵

A consignment of forged Indian currency notes of Rs 6.40 crore was recovered at Dhaka Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on April 27, 2014.

Dhaka protests against killing of Bangladeshi in Meghalaya¹⁶

Dhaka protested the killing of a Bangladeshi in Meghalaya on April 8, and demanded investigation into the incident and punishment for the persons responsible. The foreign ministry officially conveyed this protest to New Delhi, and asked the Indian side to hand over the body. According to press reports, Indian civilians shot dead a Bangladeshi youth Delwar Hossain, 17, at Bichanakandi border under Goainghat upazila in Sylhet when he went there to collect wood.

Construction of barrage on the Gildari river worries villagers¹⁷

According to Bangladesh media the barrage being constructed by India on the Gidari river, just 400 metres upstream from the no man's land at Putibari village of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat, to divert its water for irrigation would seriously affect water flow in Bangladesh. Farmers of Putibari, Dighaltari, Durgapur and Namatari villages fear that once the barrage is built, at least 800 acres of cropland would be facing drought and at least 500 families affected directly.

TICFA meeting¹⁸

Michael J Delaney assistant US trade representative for South Asia has come to Dhaka to attend the first meeting of the Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA). During the meeting, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed urged the visiting delegation of the United States Trade Representatives to reduce discriminatory duty on shipments of garment items to make Bangladeshi products more competitive in the American market.

Third Bangladesh-USA dialogue on security issues¹⁹

Third Bangladesh-USA dialogue on security issues at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) was held in Dhaka. Among the members of the US delegation were US Ambassador in Dhaka Dan Mozena, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Atul Keshap and senior civil and defence officials. Bangladesh delegation was composed of foreign ministry

director generals Saida Muna Tasneem and Mahfuzur Rahman and officials from Prime Minister's Office, home ministry, Armed Forces Division, Bangladesh Coast Guard, Border Guard Bangladesh and the Department of Narcotics Control.

Bangladesh abstained from voting on UNGA resolution on Crimea²⁰

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution on Crimea which Bangladesh has abstained from. The resolution, which passed with 100 votes in favour, 11 opposed, and 58 abstentions, represents the world's general opinion on the matter of Ukraine's territorial integrity and Russia's decision to seize Crimea. The United States regretted Bangladesh's abstention from joining the large majority regarding the resolution adopted by the UNGA on Crimea issue while Russia appreciated Bangladesh's position. When his attention was drawn to it, state minister for foreign affairs Shahriar Alam said that they did not have any 'headache' which country was happy or unhappy over Bangladesh's position. Shahriar Alam clarified, "being a G77 member-country and being a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), we don't take specific side on any country's internal issue. We haven't deviated from that policy. That's why we abstained from voting."

Bangladesh signs deal with China to set up coal power plant²¹

The government signed a deal with China to set up a 1,320-megawatt coal-based power plant in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar. Abduhu Ruhullah, chairman of Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB), and Zhao Longjun, president of Huadian Hong Kong Company of China, signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) at Bidyut Bhaban in Dhaka. Under the agreement, BPDB and the Chinese company will jointly build two units with a capacity of 660MW each by 2019. The cost of the plant over 550 acres of land will be finalised during a feasibility study. Bangladesh and China will finance 30 percent of the project while the remaining amount will be taken as loan from other sources. The plant will use 11,000 tonnes of coal a day, which will come from Indonesia, South Africa, Australia and Mozambique. It is the second deal with the Chinese government. Earlier, the state-owned North West Power Generation Company reached an agreement with China National Machinery Import Export Corporation for setting up a coal-fired power plant of the same capacity in Patuakhali.

ADB and IMF projection on economy²²

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on April 1 lowered the GDP growth projection for Bangladesh to 5.6 per cent in the current fiscal year because of disruption in economic activities amid political unrest. This was the lowest growth projection among the estimates made by the government, Bangladesh Bank and other international lenders for the 2013-14 financial year. The ADB in October last year projected that growth of gross domestic products would be 5.8 per cent in the current fiscal year. The IMF on the other hand, has projected a less than six percent growth rate for Bangladesh this year, saying that months of unrest and uncertainty in the run up to the January general elections has taken a toll on the country's economy.

'Bangladesh suffers a production loss of \$1.4 billion due to political turmoil': WB²³

Bangladesh has suffered a production loss of \$1.4 billion (around Tk 10,857 crore), which is more than one percent of its gross domestic product, in the current fiscal year due to political turmoil from July last year to January, according to a World Bank study. The WB revealed the findings on April 9 at the launch of Bangladesh Development Update Report 2014 at its Dhaka office. In late January, local think-tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) also came up with an estimate of the country's economic losses, almost five times that of the WB. The CPD estimated that nationwide shutdowns and blockades from July to December last year caused a loss of Tk 49,017 crore to the transport, garment, agriculture and tourism sectors.

Trade deficit declines in the first eight months of the current fiscal year²⁴

Trade deficit in the first eight months of the current fiscal year fell 22 percent to \$3.56 billion year-on-year due to higher exports and slow import growth. The fall in trade deficit raised the current account surplus to \$2.02 billion during July-February despite a decline in remittances. The foreign exchange reserves were \$15.31 billion on June 30, 2013 and in the last eight months it broke four records to reach \$20.08 billion on April 15. During the period, remittances fell 6.63 percent but exports rose around 14 percent and imports 6.24 percent, which were the main reasons behind the decline in trade deficit and a surge in the reserves.²⁵

Foreign Minister meets the EU Commissioner for Climate Change²⁶

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali met with European Union (EU) Commissioner for Climate Change Connie Hedegaard at her office in Brussels on April 3, in the backdrop of the recent release of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s report with worrying predictions for climate vulnerable countries like Bangladesh. The two sides discussed issues concerning the post-election political situation in Bangladesh, reform of labour rights and safety standards in the RMG sector, regional cooperation issues, and Bangladesh – EU relations. The European Parliament members assured of their continued support to facilitating payment of compensations by the EU-based companies for the victims of Rana Plaza tragedy. Hedegaard has said they expect that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would use her high-profile climate diplomacy initiatives to play an effective role in the Climate Change Summit convened by the UN Secretary General in September in New York.

Bangladesh signs MoU to improve safety standards in ship-recycling industry²⁷

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Government of Bangladesh agreed to improve safety and environmental standards in the country's ship-recycling industry through cooperative efforts over the next 18 months. A Memorandum of Understanding formalising the cooperation between the two parties was signed by Nicolaos Charalambous, director, Technical Cooperation Division, IMO and Ashadul Islam, additional secretary, Economic Relations Division of the Ministry of Finance of the Government of Bangladesh on April 11, 2014.

Bhutan

India and Bhutan sign agreement for the development of joint hydropower projects²⁸

India and Bhutan signed an agreement for the development of joint hydropower projects in a bid to further strengthen their bilateral strategic partnership on April 22, 2014. Agreement was signed by P K Sinha, Secretary, Ministry of Power, from the Indian side and Sonam Tshering, Bhutan's Secretary, Ministry of Economic Affairs. The inter-governmental agreement signed provides the framework for implementing four hydro-electric projects (HEPs) - 600 MW Kholongchu project, 180 MW Bunakha project (with 230 MW downstream benefit from Tala, Chukha and Wangchu HEPs), 570 MW Wangchu project and 770 MW Chamkarchu project - totalling 2120 MW. The implementation of the projects is subject to completion of the due process of appraisal of their detailed project reports including techno-economic viability.

India and Bhutan to cooperate in the field of audit of public finances²⁹

India and Bhutan have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to strengthen bilateral cooperation for improving work methodologies and exchange of information in the field of audit of public finances. The MOU was signed by Shashi Kant Sharma, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India and Dasho Ugen Chewang, Auditor General of Bhutan in Thimphu on April 22, 2014. It would be in force for a period of six years from day of signing. Under this MOU, India will impart training every year to two audit officers of the Royal Audit Authority of Bhutan in the IA&AS course, in the National Academy of Audit and Accounts, Shimla.

Gautam Bambawale as India's next ambassador to Bhutan³⁰

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has appointed Gautam Bambawale as India's next ambassador to Bhutan.

75000 Bhutanese refugees residing in Nepal resettled in the US³¹

Of the nearly 89,000 Bhutanese refugees resettled in the third countries so far, the United States of America (USA) alone has resettled 75,000 Bhutanese refugees as of April 2014. The US in close coordination with the government of Nepal, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), began resettling refugees from Bhutan residing in eastern Nepal in 2007. The US and other countries participating in this resettlement program — Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom — have collectively resettled 88,770 Bhutanese refugees.

Second consultative meeting between government of Bhutan and Thailand in Thimphu³²

Second annual bilateral consultation between governments of Bhutan and Thailand was held in Thimphu on April 17, 2014. Thailand's foreign affairs permanent secretary Sihasak Phuanketkeow expressed Thailand's interest to expand its

assistance to the development projects in Bhutan on the sidelines of the meeting. While Thailand already provides assistance for human resource development through education and scholarships, permanent secretary said they wanted to concentrate on development projects in certain areas of the country in agriculture and public health. The Neighbouring Countries Development Agency (NADA) of Thailand included Bhutan in a list of countries eligible for development assistance in 2012. Thailand, Mr Phuangketkeow said was ready to offer Bhutan financial assistance under NADA because it was considered a “good friend” and that it is in Thailand’s interests to help friends. Mr Phuangketkeow also highlighted other areas of cooperation with the country. He said trade figures showed potential. Trade between Bhutan and Thailand increased by 66 percent in 2013. Bhutan’s ambassador to Thailand Kesang Wangdi said the second bilateral consultation besides reviewing commitments made previously also expanded a 2004 agreement to prioritise cooperation in information communications technology. Other areas Bhutan sought cooperation included tourism, human resource development, joint marketing, and employment for Bhutanese in Thailand. Diplomatic relations between Bhutan and Thailand were established in 1989. This year marks the relationship’s 25th anniversary.

Japanese assistance to Bhutan³³

The government of Japan provided US\$ 1.1 million in agricultural aid to Bhutan. The aid was given as part of the ‘food security project for underprivileged farmers’ also known as the KR-II grant. The agreement was signed between the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) at Tashichhodzong on April 16, 2014. Japanese aid for the Bhutanese agricultural sector through the KR-II grant began in 1983.

Foreign assistance to Bhutan’s energy sector³⁴

The Norwegian government allocated US\$ 5.7 million for Bhutan to conduct pre-feasibility studies of 104MW Zhongarchhu in Mongar, 153MW Dagachhu-II and 2,800MW Manas. Economic affairs officials said the money was for the first phase of the climate change initiative called Energy+, first partnership models in the world between the two governments to improve efficiency and access to sustainable energy. The first phase of the project would be envisioned for the preparatory stage and the second and third phases would be directed for the implementation of the projects. The fund would be allocated based on results achieved in second and third phase. The Norwegian government committed US\$ 17 million for the entire project. The Norwegian government directed the fund through Asian Development Bank (ADB) because they did not have the human resources in the country to monitor it. The ADB is, however, charging the administration fee from the grant for monitoring the projects. Meanwhile another US\$ 1.5M grant from the Japanese fund for poverty reduction and US\$ 250,000 grant from the Multi Donor Trust Fund is being channeled through the ADB to manage the water resources. National Environment Commission and agriculture department would be the beneficiaries of the fund to complete the National Integrated Water Resources Management Plan and the National Irrigation Plan.

World Bank projects 7.3 percent growth in 2014³⁵

Bhutan's economic growth is projected to reach 7.3 percent in 2014, if restrictions on imports and housing credits are lifted and timely disbursement of the 11th Plan budget from India are made, according to the World Bank's report, "South Asia economic focus."

43.35 percent increase in trade deficit in 2012³⁶

Bhutan's overall balance of trade deficit has reached Nu 24.67 billion. The recently published trade statistics report shows that Bhutan imported commodities worth Nu 53.09 billion in 2012 against its export of Nu 28.42 billion. This is an increase of 43.35 percent from the 2011 deficit. The deficit in the balance of trade in 2011 was Nu 17.21 billion. The trade officials attributed the deficit in the balance of trade to the mega-hydro power projects, such as Puntsangchu I, which started in 2008, and Mangdechu hydropower project in 2012. The last time Bhutan's export exceeded import was in 2007, when a favourable balance of trade with a surplus of Nu 6.11B was recorded. India remains the country most traded with, with a total business value of Nu 68.46 billion in 2012. Light oils and high-speed diesel, motor spirit (gasoline) including aviation spirit, are the two commodities imported most from India. Coke and semi-coke produce, coal, and husked (brown) rice are other items imported. Ferrosilicon, steel, cement, gypsum, and dolomite are some commodities exported to India. Italy also imported ferroalloys worth Nu 124.97M from Bhutan in 2012. Trade with Bangladesh is second after India. However, export to Bangladesh decreased to Nu 1.17B in 2012 from Nu 1.22B in the previous year.

9.6 percent increase in youth unemployment rate³⁷

The rate of youth unemployment in Bhutan has increased from 7.3 to 9.6 percent in just one year. Unemployment rate of female youth has gone up to 9.9 percent this year from 7.2 percent in the 2012-2013 fiscal year and male youth unemployment rate from 7.3 to 9.3 percent in the same period. The labour minister Ngeema Sangay Tshempo signed an agreement with Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on March 31, 2014 to work towards full employment, which is to maintain the country's employment rate at 97.5 percent. The ministry committed to bring down youth unemployment rate to 2.5 percent for both male and female by the end of the current Plan. Its target is to reduce youth unemployment to at least 5 percent in the fiscal year 2014-2015.

Maldives

President visits Japan³⁸

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom made an official visit to Japan on April 13, 2014 on an invitation extended by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.³⁹

Minister of Foreign visits Sri Lanka⁴⁰

Maldives Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon, who made an official visit to Sri Lanka, pledged the assurance to maintain its continuous support to Sri Lanka in the international arena, during a meeting with President Mahinda Rajapaksa on April 26, 2014. Minister Dunya went to Sri Lanka on an invitation extended by

Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka Prof. G.L. Peiris, to attend an event hosted by President Mahinda Rajapaksa in his capacity as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth to celebrate the Cultural Diversity of the Commonwealth. During her visit, Maldives Foreign Minister also met with diplomats from the EU, UK, Saudi Arabia, France and Kuwait, based in Sri Lanka, accredited to the Maldives.

India to export pulses to Maldives on diplomatic grounds⁴¹

Government run trading firm PEC Ltd. of India has been authorised to export about 291 tonnes of pulses to Maldives till 2016-17, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said. Although exports of pulses are banned, Indian government ships the commodity to the neighbouring country on diplomatic grounds. For 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17, the government has allowed exports of 87.85 tonnes, 96.63 tonnes and 106.29 tonnes respectively to Maldives.

GMR refused to change its compensation claim from the Maldivian government⁴²

Indian infrastructure giant GMR has said that it would not change its compensation claim of \$1.4 billion from the Maldivian government over the premature termination of a contract to develop and operate the Maldives' primary gateway, Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA). GMR's statement follows remarks by President Yameen Abdul Gayyoom that Maldives will try to reduce the compensation amount to GMR. "The government would have to pay the compensation sought by GMR. We are working towards reducing the compensation amount," said President Yameen while speaking to reporters on April 24, 2014, prior his departure to Singapore for the Maldives Investment Forum.

Maldives closed down its High Commission in Dhaka⁴³

Maldives closed down its High Commission in Dhaka. Maldives Acting High Commissioner to Bangladesh Ahmed Adil said that the mission had to be closed down due to "unprecedented fiscal problems" in the Maldives. In the meantime, Maldives will continue to operate in Bangladesh from its mission in New Delhi.

MVR 2.5 million Chinese grants to the Maldives for agricultural research project⁴⁴

China has extended grant aid of MVR 2.5 million to the Maldives, under the "Agreement on Agricultural Research Project Cooperation" signed on April 10, 2014. The agreement was signed at a ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon and Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Maldives Wang Fukang.

Cambodia seeks for cooperation with Maldives in tourism and agriculture⁴⁵

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said that the country wanted to see cooperation with Maldives in tourism and agriculture for the interests of the two countries and peoples. The premier made the remarks during a meeting with Maldives ex- President Mohamed Waheed Hassan at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia.

Export earnings decline in March⁴⁶

According to Maldives Customs Service's monthly Statistical Report, exports for March 2014 have dropped by 65 percent, compared to March 2013. The report states that imports, on the other hand, increased by 30 percent for March 2014 compared to March 2013. Total imports in March 2014 was valued at MVR 2,593.5 million, about 600 million more than that of March 2013. Import of fuel (such as diesel, petrol and jet fuel) accounted for 36 percent of total imports in March, which was twice the value of food items imported during the same period. Third most imported category of goods in March was machinery and electronics which accounted for 15 percent of total imports.

Maldives Investment Forum was launched in Singapore⁴⁷

Maldives Investment Forum, a one-day forum organised by the government to attract foreign investment to the Maldives, was launched in Singapore. The forum was inaugurated by President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom at a ceremony at Marina Bay Sands Hotel in Singapore. The inauguration ceremony was attended by ministers and senior officials of the government. Over 200 investors from 16 countries participated in the forum. Speaking at the ceremony, President Yameen noted that the Maldives was entering a new phase of development, and said that the government has embarked on an ambitious economic agenda to transform the economy, building on decades of sustained and stable economic growth. President Yameen noted that the legal and regulatory environment governing foreign investment needed strengthening and redefining, and assured that a Special Economic Zone Bill would be tabled in the Parliament soon; and the Foreign Investment Act and Companies Act were being revised to cater the needs of the modern foreign investors.

Nepal

Nepal Parliament passes the bill on truth & reconciliation commission⁴⁸

Nepal Parliament passed the bill on Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Commission of Inquiry on Disappearances by a majority vote with some amendments to the original bill on April 26. Although 26 proposals were registered at the House seeking amendments to the government-tabled bill, eight proposals from CPN-UML lawmakers were withdrawn. Of the remaining 18 proposals, nine proposals, most of which were from Madhes-based parties' lawmakers, were withdrawn after Minister for Law, Justice, Constituent Assembly and Parliamentary Affairs Narahari Acharya pledged at the rostrum to include some of their major concerns in the bill. Majority of members voted against the remaining proposals.

UCPN (Maoist) demands war era cases to be dealt through transnational justice mechanism⁴⁹

Top brass leaders of UCPN (Maoist) boycotted the meeting of big three political parties on April 14, 2014 to protest against the government move to file charge-sheet against the accused in a war-era murder case. The party has been standing against the piecemeal approach in dealing with war-era cases, arguing that all such cases should be dealt through transitional justice mechanism. At a meeting convened at Prime Minister's official residence in Baluwatar, the UCPN (M) leaders said the 2004 murder case of Gorkha's Krishna Adhikari should be investigated

after the formation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and those arrested in connection with the case should be released. Earlier, the UCPN (Maoist) had decided not to sit for talks with the ruling parties after a charge sheet was filed against 13 individuals accused in the murder of Krishna Prasad Adhikari. The charge-sheet lodged at Chitwan District Court has sought life imprisonment with confiscation of entire property for the accused. The UCPN (Maoist) central office bearers meeting has decided to start struggle from the streets and the parliament if the government continue to disregard their demands.

Opposition parties agree to work for identity-based federalism⁵⁰

Seven different political parties including UCPN (Maoist) —the major opposition party—have decided to work together to promulgate a constitution with identity-based federalism within a year. In a meeting held at UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal's residence in Lazimpat on April 19, the seven opposition parties decided to move ahead together to ensure the progressive issues in the new constitution concluding that people's agendas were shadowed and chances of addressing the aspirations of changes were slim. The seven parties have also decided to move in unified manner for the implementation of the agreements signed with the Madhes-centric political parties during the Madhes movement. UCPN (Maoist), Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (L), Madhesi Janadhikar Forum- Nepal, Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik Party, Sadbhawana Party, Sanghiya Sadhbhawana Party and other political parties were present in the meeting.

Chief of Army Staff visits Malaysia⁵¹

Chief of Army Staff Gaurav SJB Rana left for Malaysia on April 14, 2014 for a four-day official visit on the invitation of Malaysian Chief of Army General Datuk Raja Mohamed Affandi Bin Raja Mohamed Noor to participate in a Defence Service Asia Exhibition and Conference in Kuala Lumpur.

Sujata Mehta leads high-level delegation to Nepal⁵²

A high-level delegation from government of India led by Sujata Mehta, secretary of Economic Relations and Development Partnership Administration under the Ministry of External Affairs, visited Nepal to assess the progress of various projects implemented in Nepal with the Indian assistance. During the visit, the delegation called on Minister of Finance Ram Sharan Mahat, Minister of Physical Infrastructure and Transport Bimalendra Nidhi, Minister of Urban Development Narayan Khadka and Minister of Health and Population Shri Khaga Raj Adhikari to discuss the status of the India-funded projects in Nepal. During the meeting, the visiting team expressed concerns over the delay in the implementation of some projects, particularly the Tarai postal roads and Trauma Centre in Kathmandu.

Nepal needs highest resources to bridge the investment gap in infrastructure⁵³

The World Bank report released on April 2, 2014 says Nepal has one of the poorest infrastructure services along with Afghanistan and Bangladesh, which resemble the infrastructure situation in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa. The report entitled "Reducing Poverty by Closing South Asia's Infrastructure Gap" states Nepal needs the highest resources for electricity, followed by the transportation sector. The

country will require as high as \$5.3-7 billion for electricity, while the transport sector will require \$3.7-5.5 billion.

Utilisation of aid in Nepal is poor⁵⁴

Nepal spent only 74 percent of the grants and 36 percent of the loans in the last fiscal year 2012-13. Utilisation of aid has remained poor over the last several years due to the country's inability to absorb it, said the Finance Ministry. "Low disbursement of foreign aid is a key problem facing the country," said Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat, speaking at the Nepal Portfolio Performance Review (NPPR) meet on April 23, 2014. "Aid money is primarily being channelised into capital expenditure, therefore, the low disbursement rate of foreign aid adversely affects Nepal's highest priority economic goals." He stressed the need to identify the reasons behind the slow disbursement. Similarly, donors have called for steps to expand the country's absorptive capacity. Speaking on behalf of the donor community, Country Director of the Asian Development Bank Kenichi Yokoyama stressed urgent action to enhance the absorption level to tackle the problem of low disbursement. According to Yokoyama, delays in budget execution, high staff turnover, procurement problems, weak field-level accounting and poor internal control, land acquisition related problems and weak performance of contractors are common problems in donor-funded projects.

Nepal seeks aid from China⁵⁵

Nepal reportedly has asked the Chinese government to provide it with US\$ 400 million in aid to invest in the 750MW West Seti Hydropower Project and the transmission line for the project.

China hands over two MA60 aircraft to Nepal Airline corporation⁵⁶

China Aviation Industry Corporation (AVIC) on April 3, 2014 formally handed over one of two Modern Ark 60 (MA60) aircraft to the Nepal Airlines Corporation (NAC). NAC will receive six Chinese-made aircraft (two MA60 and four Y12e manufactured by Harbin Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation) later this year. Two of the planes are gifts from China. The fleet-less NAC will be receiving one of the four Y12e aircraft on June 30 and the rest by September 30.

Nepal selected for Carbon market⁵⁷

During the ninth meeting of Carbon Fund set up under the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and implemented by the World Bank from April 9 -11 in Belgium, Nepal was chosen as one of four countries best suitable for results-based payment system for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD plus) scheme. Being selected for ER-PIN, Nepal will be now able to access funds worth US\$ 650,000 for preparing a Detailed Emission Reduction Programme Document. Nepal, as part of their report submitted to ER-PIN, has included reducing emissions equivalent to 14 million carbon dioxide from 12 Tarai districts extending from Rautahat to Kanchanpur between 2015 and 2020 through the REDD plus scheme. Nepal is likely to become only the second country after Costa Rica to be involved in the forest carbon market as part of the REDD plus scheme.

Nepal's Permanent Mission in New York stops providing consular services⁵⁸

Responding to the request of the State Department, Nepal's Permanent Mission in New York has stopped providing consular related services. The US State Department had reportedly, been advising Nepal to set up a separate consular office in New York since the missions stationed in New York are only allowed to look after UN related affairs.

Nepal refutes HRW report on status of Tibetan refugees in Nepal⁵⁹

New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a 100-page report titled "Under the China's Shadow: Mistreatment of Tibetans in Nepal" in Kathmandu on April 1, 2014 saying that Nepal had imposed increasing restrictions on Tibetans living in the country as a result of mounting pressure from China. Refuting the report, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said, "Nepal has been making it clear time and again that refugees sheltered in the country cannot indulge in activities that contravene the country's laws and its foreign policy," The report is ill-founded, provocative and malicious in intent as well as an unnecessary meddling into the friendly relationships between the two close neighbours, said the ministry statement. The ministry further said Nepal as an independent and sovereign country makes its own choice in deciding and pursuing foreign and domestic policies. "Nepal is neither a party to 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, nor its 1967 Protocol," it stated. The HRW report also claims the Tibetan refugee communities in Nepal are now facing a de facto ban on political protest, sharp restrictions on public activities promoting Tibetan culture and religion, and routine abuses by Nepal security forces. But the government denied the charges, saying that Nepal has been respecting the principle of non-refoulement and the refugees in Nepal are enjoying rights as per the prevailing laws. The government has turned down the HRW request to open its regional office in Nepal.

Pakistan

PM chairs high-level meeting on security and peace talks⁶⁰

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chaired a high-level meeting, during which matter pertaining to internal security and progress over the peace talks with the Taliban were discussed. During the meeting, the further course of action to be taken regarding the peace talks also came into discussion. The meeting was attended by Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) Director-General Lt-Gen Zaheerul Islam, Federal Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan and special assistant to the prime minister, Tariq Fatmi, The situation in Afghanistan and recovery of kidnapped Iranian border guards were also discussed in the meeting. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that Pakistan was following a policy of non-interference with its neighbours and ordered for all possible assistance to ensure the recovery of the abducted Iranian guards.

Peace Talk to the TTP⁶¹

The meeting of the committees representing the government and the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was held in Islamabad on April 23, 2014. The meeting was convened by Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan and was the first joint meeting of the committees after the TTP's announcement of ending the ceasefire. Speaking to reporters prior to the start of the meeting, chief of the TTP negotiators'

committee, Maulana Samiul Haq said no deadlock existed in the dialogue, adding that the talks were happening after a delay only due to unrelated issues.

One-on-one meeting between Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari⁶²

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and former president Asif Ali Zardari held a one-on-one meeting in Islamabad on April 16 and discussed a host of issues, including the country's political situation, national security issues and legislation to cope with terrorism. Their meeting comes against the backdrop of the tensions between the country's civilian and military leaderships. Both leaders also discussed the ongoing operation in Karachi and other matters of mutual interest besides reviewing dialogue process with Taliban. Earlier, both leaders held delegation-level talks and discussed the country's political situation. Federal ministers Ishaq Dar and Zahid Hamid assisted the prime minister and senior PPP leaders, including Khurshid Shah and Mian Raza Rabbani, accompanied Asif Ali Zardari. It also comes a day after PPP Senator Farhatullah Babar extended his party's support to the PML-N government against any "undemocratic adventurism".

Protest rally by the Hindus in Pakistan⁶³

A large number of Hindus from Badin, Umerkot, Tando Mohammad Khan, Tando Allahyar, Shaheed Benazirabad and Sanghar districts participated in the rally organised by the Hindu Welfare Panchayat Pakistan. The Panchayat chairman Kishanchand Parwani, president Lachman Das Perwani, PML-F MPA Nand Kumar Goklani, press secretary Bheesham Kumar Azad and PML-F leader Nusrat Sehar Abbasi who led the protest said that the Sindh government had completely failed to impose its writ. They warned if the government did not move into action, they would stage a series of protests throughout Sindh and besiege the Chief Minister House. Panchayat chairman Kishanchand Parwani told journalists later at a press conference that a conspiracy was being hatched to force Hindus to migrate from Pakistan. He claimed that Hindus made up 40 percent of the total population of Sindh but they were being deprived of their basic rights.

Attack on Pervez Musharraf⁶⁴

A powerful explosion on April 1, 2014 hit Faizabad bridge just after the convoy of the former president Gen (ret'd.) Pervez Musharraf passed by it. Musharraf was being shifted from the Armed Forces Institute of Cardiology (AFIC) to his farmhouse when the huge blast occurred just after the convoy crossed the bridge. The police claimed that the attack was aimed to target the former president. However, no casualties were reported in the incident.

Pakistan test fires Hatf III⁶⁵

Pakistan conducted a successful test-fire of Short Range Surface to Surface Ballistic Missile Hatf III (Ghazanavi) on April 22, 2014. It can carry nuclear and conventional warheads to a range of 290 kilometres.

Prime Minister visits China⁶⁶

Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif went to China on April 9, 2014 to participate in the 2014 Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) on the invitation of the Chinese

government. Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with his Chinese counterpart on the sidelines of the BFA. During the meeting the PM urged Premier Li Keqiang to encourage Chinese companies to invest in Pakistan, especially in energy and infrastructure. Both the leaders also discussed bilateral, regional and global issues. Reviewing the whole range of bilateral relations, the two leaders focused on enhancing connectivity between China and Pakistan and agreed that expanding economic and trade cooperation, promoting economic integration, fostering economic development of the two countries would not only benefit China and Pakistan but also transform the whole region.

Chinese will set up two coal power plants at Gadani⁶⁷

A Chinese group will set up at Gadani two coal power plants, each of 1,320MW capacity, and invest around \$2 billion in the project. A memorandum of understanding was signed to this effect on April 9, 2014 between the China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) and the Private Power and Infrastructure Board (PPIB).

MoU for \$2 billion Chinese investment in the Quaid-i-Azam Apparel Park⁶⁸

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Punjab government and Chinese company Shandong Ruyi Group at the Chief Minister Office here on April 4 for \$2 billion investment in the Quaid-i-Azam Apparel Park. Besides the investment, the group will also cooperate in designing, planning and construction of the park, while the investor will be offered all facilities on a priority basis. The Chinese group and the Punjab Industrial Estates Development and Management Company (PIEDMC) will jointly work on the project.

Peace Angel 2014 begins⁶⁹

Two week long Pak-China Joint military exercise "Peace Angel 2014" commenced on April 20, 2014 near the garrison city of Rawalpindi. Pakistan Army's Major General Hamayun Aziz and senior colonel Liu Agiou of the People Liberation Army China represented their respective countries in the opening ceremony. The exercise was particularly designed within the scope of disaster relief operations caused due to massive floods and terrorist attacks on relief camps.

US-Pakistan Economic and Finance Working Group meeting in Washington⁷⁰

A meeting of the US-Pakistan Economic and Finance Working Group was held in Washington on April 9, 2014. The United States and Pakistan have held initial discussions on a joint plan to expand trade and investment flows over the next five years during the meeting. Federal Minister of Finance Ishaq Dar and US Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth Catherine Novelli co-chaired the meeting of the working group. Mr Dar also met Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns and discussed a range of strategic and economic issues. The two sides reviewed the status of US economic and development cooperation in Pakistan in the areas of energy, economic growth and agriculture, stabilisation, education, and health.

US will not transfer EDA from Afghanistan to Pakistan⁷¹

The United States has not refused Pakistan's request for excess defence articles (EDA) from its worldwide pool, the State Department said while citing Washington's continued security cooperation with the key South Asian country. The State Department remarks came in response to a series of questions raised at the daily briefing about reports on possible provision of MRAPs to Pakistan. The spokesperson of the State Department noted that the United States "continues to assist Pakistan through many security cooperation programmes to build partnership capacity, including through the provision of worldwide available EDA." However, the spokesperson added: "we note we have not and do not intend to transfer EDA from Afghanistan to any of its neighbouring countries, including Pakistan."

Attack on NATO supply convoy on the Pak-Afghan highway⁷²

Unknown militants attacked a NATO supply convoy on the Pak-Afghan highway in Jamrud Tehsil of Khyber tribal region on April 14, 2014.

Prime Minister seeks Japan's assistance in energy sector⁷³

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif asked Japan to expand its development assistance portfolio in the country particularly in energy and infrastructure sectors. Prime Minister made this request to Japanese deputy foreign minister Shinsuke Sugiyama, who came to Pakistan for the bilateral political consultations.

Iran-Pakistan joint naval exercise⁷⁴

Iran reportedly had a joint naval drill with the Pakistan navy east of the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Iran's official IRNA news agency reported that the Pakistani vessels included a warship, a submarine and logistics vessels.

Indian fishermen are detained by the Maritime Security Agency⁷⁵

The Maritime Security Agency detained 23 Indian fishermen and seized their four boats after finding them fishing inside the exclusive economic zone of Pakistan and handed them over to the police for legal action. The police produced the fishermen before the court of a judicial magistrate (West), which sent them to prison on 14-day judicial remand.

South Korean Prime Minister visits Pakistan⁷⁶

Prime Minister of South Korea Chung Hongwon made an official visit to Pakistan from April 12-15, 2014. This was the first-ever visit to Pakistan by a South Korean premier. During his four-day stay, he met Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Mamnoon Hussain, besides a meeting with members of the Board of Investment. A number of memoranda of understanding aimed at intensifying cooperation in trade, industries and energy sectors were signed during the visit.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka signs UNSC resolution 1373⁷⁷

Sri Lanka signed the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373, which sets out strategies to combat terrorism and to control terrorist financing on April 1, 2014. With the signing of the Resolution 1373, the Sri Lankan government has banned the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and 16 other Tamil diaspora groups that are alleged of having terror links and involved in reviving the terrorist movement in the country. Sri Lanka's major Tamil party, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has called on the government to lift the ban imposed on 16 Tamil Diaspora organisations.

Three LTTE operatives were killed by security force⁷⁸

Three LTTE operatives who were allegedly trying to revive the LTTE were shot dead by Sri Lankan army.

65 persons arrested for allegedly reviving the LTTE⁷⁹

Around 65 persons were arrested for allegedly assisting in attempts to revive the LTTE with the support of the overseas based pro-Tiger Tamil diaspora. Police Spokesman SSP Ajith Rohana told the media yesterday that officers of the Terrorist Investigation Department and Intelligence Units arrested the persons on suspicion of trying to rebuild the Tiger terrorist outfit. These people were apprehended within a period of two months following details unearthed during investigations into the activities of LTTE activists Gopi and a few others, he added. The suspects are mostly from Northern and Eastern provinces with a few from Colombo. Following interrogation, five of the arrested have been released, Rohana said. He said the suspects were arrested in accordance with laws under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and they have not been mistreated in any manner.

Second in command of LTTE's Nediyan group arrested⁸⁰

Kapilan alias Nandhagopan, who is said to be the second in command of the LTTE's Nediyan Group abroad was captured by Sri Lankan authorities with the help of Iranian and Malaysian authorities, According to Daily Mirror report, the LTTE's senior leader Nandhagopan was brought to Sri Lanka on March 6, 2014. Nandhagopan has been functioning as one of the two deputy leaders of the LTTE overseas network controlled by Perinbanayagam Sivaparan alias Nediyan.

Suspected ISI agent from Sri Lanka has been arrested⁸¹

Central intelligence agencies of India and the Tamil Nadu police claim to have busted a major terror network with the arrest of a 37-year-old man of Sri Lankan nationality Zaheer Hussain, an ISI suspect in Chennai on April 29, 2014. The terror suspect, hailing from Kandy in Sri Lanka's Central Province, has been remanded in judicial custody by a magistrate court in Chennai. Allegedly, Hussain has been tasked by a senior official in the Pakistan High commission in Colombo to recruit youths from south India, especially in Tamil Nadu for terror activities.

PIL on the involvement of Indian army during the Eelam War IV⁸²

A public interest litigation (PIL) filed in the Supreme Court has said Indian military personnel took direct part in the Eelam war, and that some were even injured in

the battle. A Sikh officer was commanding the forces, it said, citing eyewitness evidence and international probe. Noting that deploying Indian military without parliamentary or presidential nod is illegal, it sought a special tribunal to probe and prosecute persons who were behind the "illegal war", besides compensation to the immediate families of the victims. The petition filed by Delhi-based advocate Ram Sankar, secretary of Delhi Tamil Advocates Association. Supreme Court however, declined to entertain the plea.

Madras High Court dismisses PIL petition on defence training to Sri Lankan navy personnel⁸³

The Madras High Court Bench dismissed a PIL petition seeking a direction to the Centre to desist from imparting long-term as well as short-term defence training in technical and non-technical streams to the Sri Lankan Navy personnel. A Division Bench comprising Justice V. Ramasubramanian and Justice V.M. Velumani refused to entertain the case on the ground that courts were not empowered to interfere with issues related to the foreign policy of the State and its relationships with the neighbouring countries. K.K. Ramesh, Managing Trustee of Tamil Nadu Centre for Public Interest Litigation, a Madurai-based NGO, had filed the PIL petition claiming that the Centre's decision to impart defence training to Sri Lankan Navy affected the sentiments of millions of Tamils in the State.

Indian coast guard arrests Sri Lankan fishermen⁸⁴

The Indian Coast Guard arrested 16 Sri Lankan fishermen who were caught fishing for sea cucumber in India's exclusive economic zone. The Indian Coast Guard apprehended the Sri Lankan fishermen with bonafide identity cards issued by their government on board Colombo Marine, a high seas tuna long liner at Chereapani reef in the northern most point of Lakshadweep Islands, 188 nautical miles from Mangalore. Coast Guard personnel also recovered two tonnes of sea cucumber. Rajmani Sharma, DIG, Indian Coast Guard, and commander, Coast Guard Karnataka said this was the first instance where the Coast Guard has apprehended Sri Lankan fishermen along the West coast, fishing illegally in India's EEZ. The Coast Guard authorities handed over the Sri Lankan fishermen and the vessel to the state police authorities. City police chief R Hithendra said action will be taken based on a complaint from the Coast Guard authorities.

US to fund programmes for Sri Lankan refugees in India⁸⁵

The United States has offered funding to programs designed to protect and assist Sri Lankan refugees in India, a US State Department statement said. The statement said that for this year the US Government anticipates providing approximately \$1.7 million to fund NGO programs assisting Sri Lankan refugees in India.

Mahinda Rajapaksa visits Bahrain⁸⁶

Mahinda Rajapaksa made a two days official visit to Bahrain. This was the first ever state visit of a Sri Lankan President to Bahrain. Sri Lanka and Bahrain signed three Memorandums of Understanding on sports, culture and arts, and another between the University of Colombo and the University of Bahrain on April 28. During the visit President Mahinda Rajapaksa was presented with the prestigious Khalifa Medal, the highest honor in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Singapore minister for foreign affairs visits Sri Lanka⁸⁷

Singapore Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law, Mr. K. Shanmugam made official visit to Sri Lanka. During the visit, minister Shanmugam met President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Northern Province Chief Minister C V Wigneswaran and Northern province governor among others. During his visit to the north, minister Shanmugam launched community development project by the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) at the Jaffna Library. The Jaffna Library's youth section has also been refurbished with 10,000 English books donated by Singapore's National Library Board. A mobile library was also presented to the Sri Lankans. A revised double taxation avoidance agreement was signed during the visit.

Vietnamese Minister of Public Security visits Sri Lanka⁸⁸

Sri Lanka and Vietnam held discussions on strengthening bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the areas of public security, law and order when the Vietnamese Minister of Public Security Prof. Gen Tran Dai Quang called on Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees on April 7, 2014. Welcoming the visiting Minister, who was on an official visit to Sri Lanka, President Rajapaksa thanked the government of Vietnam for its consistent support to Sri Lanka at international fora, especially during the recent session of the UN Human Rights Council.

China seeks collaboration in the area of higher education⁸⁹

The President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) Prof. BAI Chunli, a well-known chemist and leading scientist in nanoscience, was in Sri Lanka to explore opportunities for collaborations in the area of higher education. Prof. Chunli called on Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees on April 1, 2014 to discuss collaboration in higher education including exchange programs in science.

Sri Lankan government to hand over operations at the NCPP to the CMEC⁹⁰

The government of Sri Lanka has taken steps to hand over all operations at the Norochcholai Coal Power Plant (NCPP) to China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) for three years, Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) sources have been quoted as saying in the local media. The Ceylon Today newspaper has stated that according to a source, the Cabinet approved its paper on handing over the power plant to the Chinese on March 27. An engineer attached to the power plant, on condition of anonymity, has said that although the usual process is signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) after receiving Cabinet approval, in this instance the MOU was signed before Cabinet approval was received. However, Power and Energy Ministry Secretary M.M.C. Ferdinando has said Cabinet approval was received to sign an MOU to consult CMEC for technical instructions and to get equipment from CMEC to check the power plants standards. He says CMEC will spend money for this.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan meets President⁹¹

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan General Rashad Mahmood called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees on April 8, 2014.

Delegation from Balochistan Provincial Assembly visits Sri Lanka⁹²

A Parliamentary delegation of Balochistan Provincial Assembly of Pakistan, headed by Speaker Jan Muhammad Khan Jamali came to Sri Lanka on April 24 on a four-day visit.

Delegation of Gilgit - Baltistan Legislative Assembly members visit Sri Lanka⁹³

A high powered delegation of Gilgit - Baltistan Legislative Assembly members and officials led by Speaker Mr Wazir Baig, recently visited Sri Lanka on an exposure visit to study the Gems and Jewellery sector policy framework. The visit was aimed to help Gilgit - Baltistan to devise policies to support efforts to improve the livelihoods of small-scale gemstone miners in the area. The visit was arranged by government of Gilgit-Baltistan in collaboration with the Agha Khan Rural Support Programme, Pakistan to study the Gems and Jewellery related policy framework as a "best practice" under the European Commission funded Gems and Jewellery value chain development initiative.

General (Retd.) Srilal Weerasooriya receives Sitara-i-Pakistan award⁹⁴

Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain has decorated Sri Lanka's former High Commissioner to Pakistan General (Retd) Srilal Weerasooriya with the Sitara-i-Pakistan award. The former Army Commander of Sri Lanka was honored for his services to Pakistan at an investiture ceremony held at the Aiwan-i-Sadr in Islamabad on the occasion of Pakistan Day on March 23, 2014.

Japanese ships made goodwill visit to Colombo Port⁹⁵

Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) destroyers, Inazuma - 105 and Umigiri - 158 arrived at the Port of Colombo on April 1 on a goodwill and logistic visit. The ships were en route for counter piracy operations off the Coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

South Korea sends its special envoy to Sri Lanka⁹⁶

South Korea sent former Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan as a special envoy to Sri Lanka on a short visit to look at strengthening and expanding ties between the two countries. Myung -hwan had talks with President Mahinda Rajapaksa and External Affairs Minister G.L Peiris.

Canada to suspend its voluntary contribution to the Commonwealth Secretariat

Canada has decided to suspend its voluntary contribution of \$10 million to the Commonwealth Secretariat and reallocate the funds for the next two years in protest over Sri Lanka's human rights issue.

House of representatives of Belarus ratifies mutual legal assistance treaty with Sri Lanka⁹⁷

The House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus has ratified the mutual legal assistance treaty with Sri Lanka on April 2. The Memorandum of

Understanding on Mutual Cooperation between the Ministries of Justice of Belarus and Sri Lanka and Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters were signed in Minsk on August 26, 2013 during Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa's state visit to Belarus.

Sri Lanka to access innovative World Bank disaster risk financing⁹⁸

Sri Lanka became the first South Asian country to access an innovative form of World Bank financing that provides immediate payouts after a major catastrophe such as a tsunami, cyclone or flood. Approved by the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors, the \$102 million Development Policy Loan with a Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option (DPL with a CAT DDO) is a line of credit that can be drawn on partially or in full if a country declares a state of emergency after a natural disaster. The facility was approved by the Board along with a \$110 million Climate Resilience Improvement Project (CRIP), which will finance both short and long term interventions to reduce climate and disaster risk.

Sri Lanka ranks 85th on the Social progress index 2014⁹⁹

Sri Lanka is ranked 85th out of 132 countries on the Social Progress Index 2014.

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