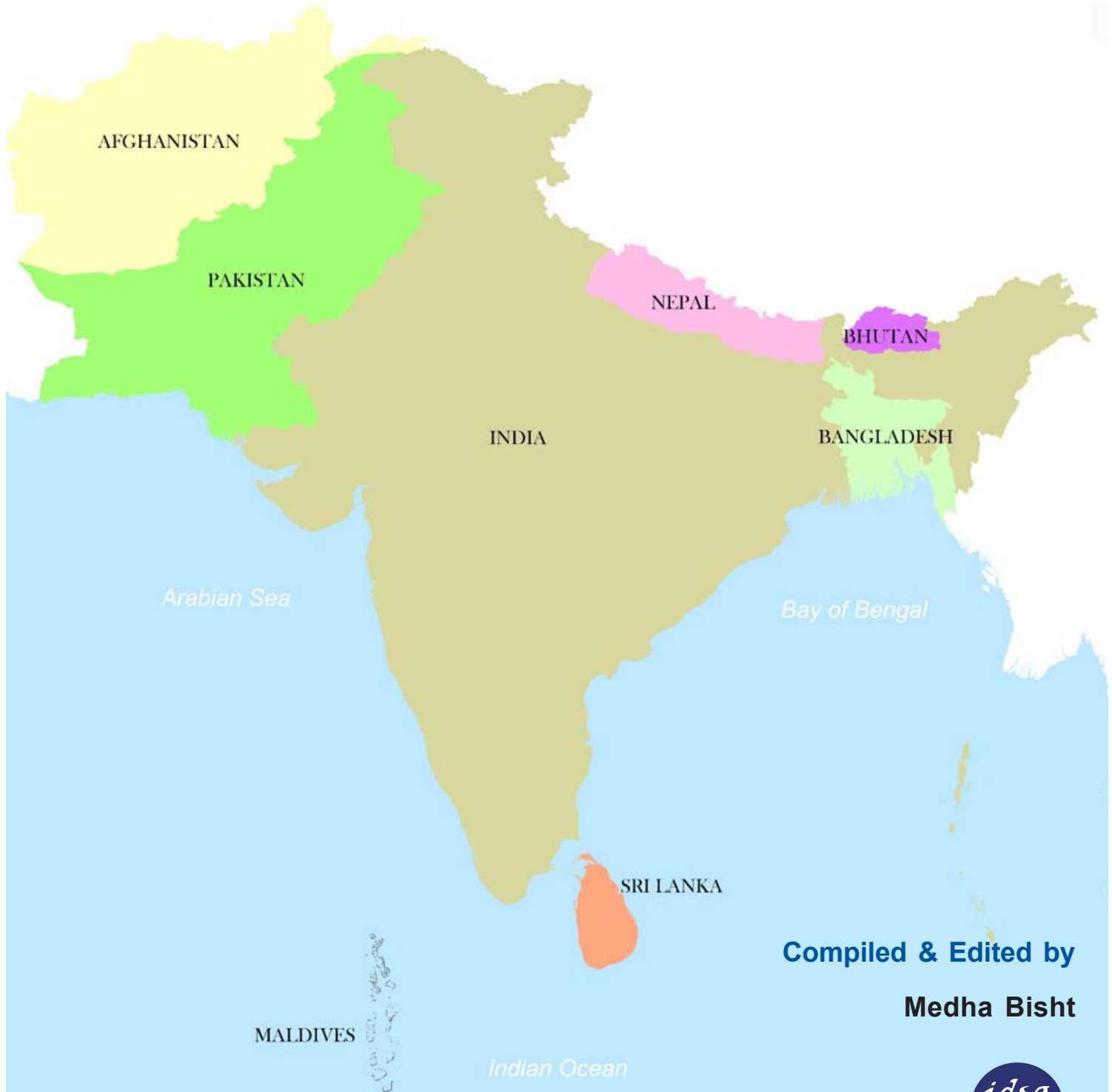


SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

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South Asia Trends is a fortnightly 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

Though there were looming fears that the sixteenth SAARC summit would be hijacked by the gnawing Indo-Pakistan relations, the South Asian countries were quite successful in pushing the zone of agreement on trade in services, an area which can unleash much of the untapped economic potential amongst SAARC countries. While an early ratification of the Agreement is on the cards, there was a consensual recognition on the appeal and relevance of the overarching concept of Gross National Happiness, which rests on the four basic principles of good governance, culture, environmental preservation and socio-economic development. Meanwhile the SAARC Development Fund was officially launched on April 29, 2010 at Thimpu, which is also the permanent secretariat of the SDF.

Conflictual bilateral issues were also picked up by some countries on the sidelines of the SAARC summit. Bhutan and Nepal have decided to resume the stalled talks on refugee repatriation. In an interview to Business Bhutan, Nepal described the bilateral relations between Bhutan-Nepal as "excellent." India-Pakistan picked up the strands for kick-starting the dialogue process. While the talks between Yousuf Raza Gilani and Dr Manmohan Singh were described as "very positive" by the media, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi claimed that "all issues that are of concern are on the table and will be discussed." On May 5, 2010, Qureshi announced in the National Assembly that two issues would dominate Indo-Pak relations-water rights and Kashmir. Meanwhile, Pakistan has decided to take the issue of Kishenganga Hydroproject to the International Court of Arbitration.

The urge to cope with the much talked about "energy famine" in Bangladesh can be gauged from prime-minister Sheikh Hasina's relentless efforts to secure power agreements with various countries. While according to the Xinhua News Agency, the Bangladeshi government is inviting bids from local and foreign firms to set up plants on build, own and operate basis ; according to another source, Hasina has expressed interest to import electricity through regional cooperation with South Asian and South East Asian countries. The Indo-Bangladesh cooperation on energy sector is evolving at a fast pace. Bangladesh cabinet has formed a high-powered committee to finalise the agreement on power import from India.

However the highlight of the past week was the domestic crises in Nepal, as more than twenty thousand Maoist supporters took to the streets . With the political process reaching a naught in the initial days due to the polemics being played out in the public domain, crises management was seemingly conspicuous through its absence. While Pushpa Kamal Dahal was questioned and criticised by the ruling coalition, and accused of capturing power through forceful means and unacceptable tactics, the Maoists unabatedly reprimanded Nepali Congress for being the "main obstacle" to the peace process, also demanding the resignation of premier Madhav Kumar Dahal. Nepali Congress was however insistent on its stand of framing the bargain along the six point agenda. Possibilities of mobilising the army,

option of presidential rule were also doing rounds in Nepal's political circles. However, after a week of lingering uncertainty, Maoists called off the general strike on May 7, 2010. Consensus has emerged for solving the political deadlock through the six-point-agenda, also known as the "package deal". The package deal would include issues related to the management of Maoist combatants, power sharing and constitution drafting among others. How the six-point-agenda is taken forward by the political parties is however yet to be seen! At present, the crises seem to have fizzled out due to factionalism brewing up within the Maoists themselves, an aspect which has favoured the ruling coalition.

Afghanistan

Fuel Trucks Attacked in Afghanistan

New York Times, April 25, 2010

Twelve trucks, most of them carrying fuel to a NATO base in eastern Afghanistan, were burned by an angry crowd on April 25, 2010. The attack was thought to be in retribution for two raids by a joint Afghan-American force over the weekend. It was the first significant attack on a convoy in Logar Province, south of Kabul, in the past 18 months, said the provincial governor's spokesman, Din Mohammed Darwish.

(Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/26/world/asia/26afghan.html?ref=asia>)

Fight against terrorism dominates Manmohan-Karzai talks

Times of India, April 26, 2010

The fight against terrorism and extremism topped the agenda of talks between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Afghan President Hamid Karzai as the two leaders discussed a range of bilateral issues in New Delhi on April 26, 2010. While India reaffirmed its commitment towards assisting the people of Afghanistan, the upcoming Afghanistan Peace consultations was also the focus of talks.

(Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Fight-against-terrorism-dominates-Manmohan-Karzai-talks/articleshow/5859495.cms>)

Battle for Kandahar may be tougher than expected

Philadelphia Daily News, April 27, 2010

The American-led effort to gain control of southern Afghanistan is off to a slow start and the political clock is ticking as U.S. troops head into what could be the bloodiest fight yet in the eight-year war. The U.S. and its NATO allies have set a goal of starting to transfer control of Afghanistan to the central government by the end of the year (2010). President Barack Obama has declared that U.S. troops must start leaving in 2011.

(Source: http://www.philly.com/philly/wires/ap/news/politics/20100427_ap_battleforkandaharmaybetougherthanexpected.html)

Afghanistan war: surge on cusp of bringing 'real change'

Christian Science Monitor, April 28, 2010

According to a new Pentagon report insurgents in Afghanistan think 2009 was their most successful year of operations since 2002. That perception stems from a plentiful supply of weapons, including roadside bombs and money, apart from the narrative in Washington for the last several years that the US was losing the Afghanistan war. However armed with the confidence that comes from a surge of 100,000 American forces, US officials now believe they are on the cusp of change, and that insurgent perceptions of their own strength will begin to change, too. "We have the beginnings for the potential for real change," says a senior defense official, who spoke on background to reporters at the Pentagon.

(Source: <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2010/0428/Afghanistan-war-surge-on-cusp-of-bringing-real-change>)

Afghan support for Karzai govt low, says Pentagon

Siasat Daily, April 29, 2010

The government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai commands support or sympathy in only a quarter of 121 Afghan areas considered "key" by the US military, a Pentagon report has said." The overall assessment indicates that the population sympathizes with or supports the Afghan government in 24 percent (29 of 121) of all Key Terrain and Area of Interest districts," according to the quarterly report to Congress.

(Source: <http://www.siasat.com/english/news/afghan-support-karzai-govt-low-says-pentagon>).

Eight Taliban bombers attack Afghan government buildings

Siasat Daily, May 5, 2010

Eight Taliban fighters equipped with suicide vests and automatic weapons attacked government buildings in western Afghanistan on May 5, 2010. Interior Ministry spokesman Zamarai Bashary said seven attackers were killed by Afghan forces in Zaranj, the capital of the western province of Nimruz." The people have deserted the city and the fighting is still ongoing," he said.

(Source: <http://www.siasat.com/english/news/eight-taliban-bombers-attack-afghan-government-buildings>)

Taliban leaders to be offered exile under Afghanistan peace plan

Guardian, May 5, 2010.

Top Taliban leaders could be offered exile outside Afghanistan if they agree to stop fighting the government of Hamid Karzai. The far-reaching proposals, seen by the Guardian, also call for "deradicalisation" classes for insurgents and thousands of new manual jobs created for foot soldiers who renounce violence. The long-delayed Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme has emerged just as Karzai prepares to go to Washington for talks with Barack Obama, where the issue is likely to be top of the agenda. The plan will then be presented later in the month to a gathering of representatives from across Afghanistan called the National Consultative Peace Jirga. Once agreed upon, the government will be able to start spending around \$160m (£100m) pledged by the international community to lure fighters away from the conflict.

(Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/05/afghanistan-taliban-leaders-offered-exile-peace-plan>)

Militants Hit Afghan City, but Are Killed in Firefights

New York Times, May 6, 2010

Suicide bombers and militants armed with automatic weapons attacked government buildings in southern Afghanistan on May 5, 2010, striking a region where the United States has added thousands of troops as it tries to rout Taliban fighters. At least three Afghan police officers and one provincial council member were killed in the attack in the capital of Nimruz Province, along Afghanistan's border

with Iran. All nine militants - who were reported to have been wearing police uniforms - were killed in the fighting. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, a Taliban spokesman, Yousef Ahmadi, said in a telephone interview.

(Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/06/world/asia/06afghan.html>)

Captured Leader Offers Insight Into the Taliban

New York Times, May 6, 2010

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the most senior Afghan Taliban leader in custody in Pakistan, is providing important information to American officials on the inner workings of the Taliban, pivotal insights as the United States looks ahead to negotiations to end the war in Afghanistan, according to senior American intelligence and military officials. Mullah Baradar is describing in detail how members of the Afghan Taliban's leadership council, or shura, based in Pakistan, interact, and how senior members fit into the organization's broader leadership, officials said. He is also offering a more detailed understanding of what prompted Mullah Omar to issue a new code of conduct for militants last year that directed fighters to avoid civilian casualties.

(Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/06/world/asia/06baradar.html?hp&ex=&ei=&partner=>)

Bangladesh

Bangladesh invites tenders for 550mw power plants

Xinhua News Agency, April 25, 2010

The Bangladeshi government has invited bids from interested local and foreign firms for setting up three more power plants in the country on build, own and operate basis for generation of up to 550 megawatts of electricity. The Power Development Board (PDB) official, on condition of anonymity, told Xinhua that the power plants will be run by either furnace oil or natural gas. He, however, said two of the plants will have 150 megawatts (MW) to 225 MW electricity generation capacity each for around 22 years while the third one with 100 MW will produce power for 15 years.

(Source: <http://www.istockanalyst.com/article/viewiStockNews/articleid/4058292>)

Bangladesh to Buy Power from Neighbours Urgently

Energy Bangla, April 26, 2010-05-09

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated her government has taken the initiative to import electricity through regional cooperation with South Asian and South East Asian countries. The present government has taken effective steps to import electricity on urgent basis from India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and China," she said. Hasina mentioned that the government is working on the possible ways to import electricity from these countries as soon as possible and for import of electricity from India, technical expert teams from both countries are working hectically.

(Source: <http://www.energybangla.com/index.php?mod=article&cat=AboutBangladesh&article=2444>)

Bangladesh awards \$500 mln in deals for power plants

Reuters, April 26, 2010

Chinese, Korean and local firms have won separate deals in Bangladesh worth \$496.61 million to set up five power plants to generate 420 megawatts of electricity by August 2011, officials said. Chinese firm Guangdong Power Engineering Corporation won a \$271.35 million deal to set up two power plants for generating 200 megawatts. A local consortium of Energypac Engineering Ltd and Energypac Power Generation Ltd won a \$155.38 million deal to set up two plants to generate 150-MW of electricity. Hyundai Heavy Industries of South Korea also won another \$69.89 mln deal to build a 70-MW plant power plant, also by August 2011.

(Source: <http://in.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idINSGE63P0RH20100426>)

Hasina plans to buy electricity from India

Sify, April 26, 2010

Purchasing 500 MW power from India and setting up ten new power plants to generate another 1,000 MW tops Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's agenda, a media report said on April 26, 2010. The government is reportedly poised to sign up to 10 contracts by May 31 to deliver up to 1,000 MW power. Most of the projects would take almost three years to complete, except for two large coal power plants that will begin operation in early 2015. The contracts will require more than a \$5 billion investment.

(Source: <http://sify.com/news/hasina-plans-to-buy-electricity-from-india-news-international-ke0oucjhfa.html>)

Hasina eyes electricity from Nepal, Bhutan

Daily Star, April 28, 2010

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on April 28, 2010 announced that Nepal and Bhutan could generate more hydro-electricity by using their water resources and export to Bangladesh. The Himalayan state Nepal has ample opportunity to produce more hydro-electricity tanks to its geographical location, Hasina. Along the sidelines of SAARC summit, Hasina described poverty as a common enemy in South Asia. The Nepalese prime minister expressed his government's firm commitment to work together with Bangladesh and with other Asian countries to economic benefit of the people in the region.

(Source: http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/latest_news.php?nid=23455)

Bangladesh to examine power deal with India

News Tiger, May 3, 2010

The Bangladesh cabinet has formed a high-powered committee to finalise the agreement on power import from India. India had agreed to supply to Bangladesh 250 MW electricity from the national grid during the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to New Delhi in January 2010. India's Power Grid Corporation and Power Grid Company of Bangladesh are working to set up an Inter connector grid to

facilitate transfer of 250 MW of power from India to Bangladesh. In addition to this India's NTPC and the Power Development board of Bangladesh have also agreed to set up a 1320 MW joint venture power plant at a cost of nearly 1.74 billion US dollars to meet the power requirements of Bangladesh.

(Source: <http://newstiger.in/?p=23764>)

Bangladesh seeks India's help to nab Mujib killers

Times of India, May 6, 2010

Bangladesh has sought New Delhi's help to nab two of the six fugitive killers of its founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was assassinated 35 years ago. Home minister Sahara Khatun, who made the request to Indian High Commissioner Rajeev Mitter, did not say when the fugitive killers visited India. Mitter assured full cooperation.

(Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/South-Asia/Bangladesh-seeks-Indias-help-to-nab-Mujib-killers/articleshow/5897123.cms>)

Bangladesh team meets Indian power minister

Bangladesh Financial Express, May 6, 2010.

Bangladesh delegation met the Indian Power Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde on May 6, 2010. The delegation, led by Prime Minister's Adviser Mashiur Rahman, came to India to push for implementation of the Bangladesh-India joint communiqué that included a power deal. Rahman, who advises Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on economic affairs, and a senior foreign ministry official are scheduled to discuss deals on sharing of Teesta waters and importing power from India.

(Source: http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=99461&date=2010-05-07)

Bhutan

UK to take in Bhutanese refugees

Republica, April 25, 2010

United Kingdom has expressed its willingness to help resettle Bhutanese refugees living in seven camps in eastern Nepal. As part of Gateway Protection Program operated by the UK Border Agency in partnership with the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), official sources state that, "necessary preparations are underway in the context of UK expressing its willingness to help resettle Bhutanese refugees. The UK government has announced to resettle up to 750 refugees in 2010-2011 from different locations including eastern Nepal. It plans to take in around 100 Bhutanese Refugees from Nepal in the year 2010.

(Source: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=17871)

Two strategic roads to come up near Tibet, Bhutan

PTI, April 26, 2010

On April 27, 2010, the Lok Sabha was informed by the Defence Minister of India, that two strategic roads were being built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) near the tri-junction of Tibet, Bhutan and India. The two roads are Track Junction Bheem Base-Dokala for a length of 13.48 km and Flag Hill-Dokala for a length of 33.8 Km. The Minister said the projects are worth Rs 96.93 crore. Work on the Track Junction-Bheem Base-Dokala road has started and it is expected to be completed by 2012. Work on other road will take five years to be completed and it will start after getting clearance of the National Board of Wild Life, he said.

(Source: http://www.ptinews.com/news/627099_Two-strategic-roads-to-come-up-near-Tibet--Bhutan)

Bhutan proposes high-level talks on refugees

Republica, April 28, 2010

Expressing its commitment to resolve more than a decade long Bhutanese refugee crisis, Bhutan has proposed a ministerial-level meeting for the same. The proposal was made during the meeting between Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and his counterpart, Jigme Y Thinley, Tuesday. However, although PM Nepal has accepted the proposal it has not been specified where and when such a meeting would be. Finance Minister and acting foreign minister of Bhutan Khandu Wangchuk stated that "This is a difficult problem and we are constantly discussing all options and we will continue to talk."

(Source: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=18010)

Trade in services to benefit Bhutan

The Kuensel, April 28, 2010

Bhutan could benefit in a big way from the SAARC Trade in Service Agreement, which is expected to be signed during the course of the two-day Summit on April 28 and 29, according to the economic affairs minister, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk.

The draft agreement, which will open up new vistas of trade cooperation among the SAARC countries, according to the minister will be signed at the summit. Speaking to Kuensel, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk said that in the long run Bhutan will have more service as to offer as it was already talking and working towards becoming a hub for international quality services. The Trade in Service will mutually benefit member countries, as benefits would be 50-50, said the SAARC Secretary General, Dr Sheel Kant Sharma. "It provides scope for development and people to people connectivity. When trade and service increases, so is employment," said Dr Sheel Kant Sharma.

(Source: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=15311>)

SAARC development fund launched in Bhutan

People's Daily, April 29, 2010

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Development Fund (SDF) has been officially launched on April 29, 2010, by Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley. The permanent secretariat of the SDF will be based in Bhutanese capital Thimphu and serve as a regional funding mechanism. The important role of SDF is building a strong and dynamic SAARC through poverty alleviation and the promotion of economic integration among our countries," said Bhutanese Prime Minister Thinley in his inaugural speech.

(Source: <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/6967797.html>)

Business Bhutan

Nepal Talks, May 7, 2010.

In an exclusive with Business Bhutan, Madhav Kumar Nepal said his country is interested to invest in Bhutan and welcomed local investors to put money in Nepal. His answer to whether Nepal was interested to invest in Bhutan was a resolute question "why not?" and remarked "If Nepali business communities can invest in Maldives, the UAE, Singapore, Malaysia, and other countries, why should they not invest in Bhutan?" He further welcomed Bhutanese investors to find their investment in Nepal. Describing Bhutan-Nepal relations as "excellent," Madhav Kumar Nepal said the two countries shared similarities in culture, social and historical accounts with further realities of being land locked and least developed countries.

(Source: <http://www.businessbhutan.bt/?p=1483>)

US official Blake calls on PM

The Himalayan Times, April 26, 2010

US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O Blake Jr called on Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal. Blake inquired about the ongoing peace process, constitution-drafting, latest political developments and issues of development and democracy during his meeting with the PM, said Bishnu Rijal, PM's Press Advisor.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=US+official+Blake+calls+on+PM+&NewsID=241243>)

Will step down for anyone but Prachanda, says Nepal prime minister

DNA India, April 25, 2010

Nepal prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said he would quit for Maoist chief Prachanda, though he would be willing to make way for a consensus candidate if that could resolve the political crisis. With the Maoists preparing for a massive protest rally against the 22-party ruling coalition, Nepal said Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal could not be accepted as the prime minister as he has been instigating violence in the country.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=US+official+Blake+calls+on+PM+&NewsID=241243>)

Pakistan, Nepal agree to promote bilateral relations

Daily Times, April 27, 2010

Pakistan and Nepal have agreed to enhance their bilateral relations and decided to further promote trade, economic, people-to-people, defence and cultural relations. This was decided in a meeting between Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and Nepalese Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal on the side lines of SAARC summit. Gilani said Pakistan greatly values its relations with Nepal, which is based on mutual respect, trust and shared perceptions on regional and international issues. Gilani also revealed to his Nepalese counterpart that Pakistan has finalised projects worth Rs 13 million for development in Nepal.

(Source: http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\04\27\story_27-4-2010_pg7_27)

PM emphasises need for Nepal political parties to join hands

PTI, April 29, 2010

Along the sidelines of the SAARC summit, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh emphasized to his Nepali counterpart, Madhav Kumar Nepal, the need for all political parties to sink their differences and come together to push the peace process. The premiers of both countries held detailed discussions on the status of the peace process in Nepal, including the redrafting of the Constitution. Mr Nepal, while apprising Singh about the latest on the peace process front, said that differences persisted among the parties because of which much progress could not be made on redrafting of the Constitution. He particularly talked about the stiff attitude of the Maoists which was hampering the process of redrafting the Constitution.

(Source: http://www.ptinews.com/news/631291_PM-emphasises-need-for-Nepal-political-parties-to-join-hands)

Nepal wants to use Mongla, Chittagong ports to boost its trade

Nepal News, April 30, 2010

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal has asked Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to permit Nepal to use Mongla and Chittagong ports. In her response, Hasina said that she had already raised the issue with Indian Prime Minister Dr Man Mohan Singh in her India visit in January 2010. A joint communiqué, co-signed by Indian Prime Minister Dr Man Mohan Singh and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina has promised to give Nepal and Bhutan access to Mongla and Chittagong ports. The prime ministers - in the joint communiqué - also agreed that Rohanpur-Singabhad broad gauge railway link would be available for transit to Nepal.

(Source: <http://www.nepalnews.com/main/index.php/business-a-economy/5747-nepal-wants-to-use-mongla-chittagong-ports-to-boost-its-trade.html>)

Officials from Indo-Nepal border districts meet

PTI, April 30, 2010

According to official sources, Nepal authorities have assured full co-operation to their Indian counterparts to crackdown on sources of fake currency and other unlawful activities along the Indo-Nepal border. The decision was taken in a Co-ordination Committee meeting of officials from different districts along the Indo-Nepal border on April 29, 2010. It was resolved that both the sides would step up vigil against the movement of Maoists and smuggling of narcotics and illegal weapons. The Nepali officials also assured their Indian counterparts on action against alleged illegal activities by certain madrasas on their side. On the recurring problem of floods caused by rivers originating from Nepal, it was decided that the irrigation department officials of both the countries would step up coordination and make the early warning system more effective.

(Source: http://www.ptinews.com/news/633163_Officials-from-Indo-Nepal-border-districts-meet)

Anything can happen if Maoist stir turns violent: PM Nepal

Himalayan Times, April 30, 2010

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal warned that anything can happen in the country if the Maoists try to capture state powers through violent means. PM Nepal said that the situation may take any turn if Unified CPN-Maoist tries to capture the state by exploding bombs. His reaction came as a response to queries from journalists about the possibility of army mobilisation during the Maoist protests as hinted by a few ministers. Stating that the problems won't be resolved through violent means, the PM hinted the possibility of army mobilisation if the situation turns violent.

(Source: <http://thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Anything+can+happen+if+Maoist+stir+turns+violent%3A+PM+Nepal+&NewsID=24203&a=3>)

Maoist strike shuts down Nepal; gov't urges talks

China Post, May 3, 2010

Maoist opposition supporters armed with bamboo sticks enforced a general strike that closed transportation, schools and markets across Nepal to demand the prime minister's resignation. Thousands of supporters of the former communist rebels marched in the streets of the capital, Katmandu, waving sticks and the political party's red flag. They gathered at main intersections, chanting anti-government slogans and sometimes singing and dancing. Home Ministry spokesman Jay Mukund Khanal said the general strike had shut down much of the country.

(Source: <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/asia/other/2010/05/03/254917/Maoist-strike.htm>)

Presidential rule after May 28: Bijukchhe

Republica, May 3, 2010

Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party (NWPP) chairman Narayan Man Bijukchhe

has said the Constituent Assembly's tenure should be extended by imposing Presidential rule if the constitution is not drafted within the stipulated May 28. Bijukchhe pointed out that presidential rule should be imposed to extend the CA tenure if timely promulgation of the constitution is not possible.

(Source: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=18210)

UNMIN extension on cards

Himalayan Times, May 4, 2010

The cabinet meeting held at the Prime Minister's official residence on May 4, 2010, assessed the ongoing general strike organised by the main opposition party Unified CPN-Maoist. Emerging from the meeting, Minister for Information and Communications Shankar Pokhrel said the cabinet decided to authorise Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal to extend the term of United Nations Mission to Nepal beyond May 15. Asked about the Maoist demand to quit the premiership, Pokhrel said the government had already made it clear that if the PM quitted, a wrong precedent would be set to topple a government through strike.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=UNMIN+extension+on+cards&NewsID=242757>)

No govt change sans accord: NC tells Maoists

Republica, May 4, 2010

The Nepali Congress (NC) has reiterated its stance to the Maoists that Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal will not step down unless the parties reach a comprehensive agreement on the entire six-point agenda. At a meeting held between NC and the Maoists on May 3, 2010, the NC made it clear that the government would not bow to pressure from the streets. The NC also asked the Maoists to immediately withdraw their general strike in order to create conducive environment for negotiations and resolve the ongoing political deadlock.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=UNMIN+extension+on+cards&NewsID=242757>)

Ruling allies ask Maoists to call off stir

The Himalayan Times, May 5, 2010

An all party meeting of the ruling coalition urged the Unified CPN-Maoist to call off their indefinite general strike as soon as possible. The meeting which held in Biratnagar also asked the Maoists to come for talks. After the meeting, Pramod Kumar Shah, regional member of Madhesi Janadikar Forum Nepal said that they also urged the Maoists to stop extortion. Representatives of Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party, Sadbhawana Party, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal and Chure Bahawar among others were present in the meeting.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Ruling+allies+ask+Maoists+to+call+off+stir&NewsID=242999>)

NC is the main obstacle to peace process: Nepal Maoist leader Kiran

The Telegraph, May 5, 2010.

The Unified Maoists' Party vice chairman Mohan Baidya Pokharel 'Kiran' told journalists that the Nepali Congress party was the main obstacle to the peace process and constitution drafting. Mohan Baidya Kiran who is known to be a hardliner said that the UML has exhibited its flexibility and is exhibiting its willingness towards the formation of a National Unity government. He added that, "The Nepali Congress on the other hand has turned as one of the major obstacle to the conclusion of the peace process."

(Source: http://www.telegraphnepal.com/news_det.php?news_id=7641)

Consensus key to prolonging crisis, envoys tell PM

The Himalayan Times, May 6, 2010.

A delegation of 44 foreign diplomats in Kathmandu called on Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and expressed their grave concerns over the prolonging political complication including the Maoists' indefinite general strike and its impact on foreigners in Nepal. Drawing the prime minister's attention to difficulties by foreign nationals over the last four days of the strike, the envoys informed that they might need to issue travel advisories, barring their citizens from traveling to Nepal. During the joint meeting, they urged PM Nepal for forging a national consensus to end the deepening political crisis in the country, by narrowing down differences among political parties. In reply, PM Nepal said he has been working hard to diffuse the deepening political crisis of the country and expressed willingness to take a bold decision to give a way out the present political standoff.

Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Consensus+key+to+prolonging+crisis%2C+envoys+tell+PM&NewsID=243023>

Nepal brought to standstill by strike

BBC News, May 6, 2010.

The national strike called by the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is into its fourth day, with no end in sight. The country has ground to a standstill. Shops, businesses, schools and offices have closed under the orders of tens of thousands of Maoist supporters, who have taken over the streets. Leaders from Nepal's main parties have been in talks since the crisis began on 1 May with a mass rally through Kathmandu by more than 100,000 Maoists. Although they say they have resolved some issues, two main sticking points remain. There is still disagreement on the makeup and leadership of the new unity government and how and when some 20,000 former Maoist fighters will be integrated into the national army. "We have to find a solution," says Maoist Vice-Chairman Baburam Bhattarai. "Otherwise the alternative is confrontation, which we don't want."

(Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8663390.stm)

EU urges PM to negotiate solution by weekend

Republica, May 7, 2010.

Urging Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal to negotiate a solution to present political impasse, six ambassadors of the European countries and the European Union Delegation have asked the government and the Maoists to refrain from making provocative statements and actions. "The peace process is under strain, and all parties should avoid provocative statements and actions," said Ambassador Gilles-Henry Garault, local Presidency of the European Union said in a statement.

(Source: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=18317)

UML blames Maoists for impasse

Republica, May 7, 2010.

The ruling CPN-UML has claimed that the main opposition UCPN (Maoist)'s rigid stance has been a major stumbling block to forging consensus among the political parties. UML Chairman Jhala Nath Khanal, at a press meet urged Maoist leaders to be flexible and call off the general strike as it had made life difficult for the common people. "Our repeated efforts to find solution through dialogues have yielded no result due to Maoists rigid stance to topple the government through pressure from the streets and its precondition to form new government under its own leadership," Khanal said in his statement.

(Source: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=18312)

Maoists withdraw general strike

Republica, May 7, 2010.

Bowing to intense pressure from people across the country, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) has called off its six-day general strike. UCPN-M's standing committee meeting decided to call off the strike after over three-hour long deliberations. The party said it will hold a mass rally in the capital and in the district headquarters on May 9, 2010 and apprise people of the party decision.

(Source: http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=18365)

Pakistan

Five killed in North Waziristan drone strike

Dawn, April 26, 2010

Three missiles fired by US drone aircraft struck a militant compound in Pakistan's North Waziristan region near the Afghan border on April 26, 2010, killing five militants, intelligence officials said. The strike took place about 24 km (15 miles) east of Miramshah, the main town in North Waziristan, known as a hotbed of Taliban and al Qaeda militants, they said. "We have got confirmed reports of five dead but the number could be higher," said a Pakistani intelligence official in the region.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/03-three-killed-in-north-waziristan-drone-strike-ss-02>)

India, Pakistan leaders likely to talk: Krishna

Dawn, April 26, 2010

According to official sources, prime ministers of India and Pakistan are likely to hold talks on the sidelines of a regional meeting in Bhutan. All bilateral issues between India and Pakistan will be discussed as and when the prime ministers meet," Krishna was quoted as saying. Foreign secretaries of the two sides held a brief round of talks in February 2010, but India says Pakistan has to bring militants responsible for the Mumbai attacks to justice before New Delhi agrees to a resumption of a full-fledged dialogue.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/03-india-pakistan-leaders-likely-to-talk-krishna-ss-07>)

Key militant commander among six killed in Swat

Dawn, April 27, 2010

A key militant commander was killed along with his five comrade-in-arms in two different incidents in Swat on April 26, 2010, a security official said. One security man was also wounded in the action. In a major raid, since the end of Operation Rah-i-Rast in July 2009, security forces surrounded a house in Kanju in Kabal tehsil and after intense 12-hour siege killed a key militant commander, Ihsanullah alias Pir, along with his three fighters. Curfew was imposed in Kanju, Dheri, Koza Banda and surrounding areas of Taliban in Swat. "Ihsan was sent to organise a new round of insurgency in Swat. We have had intelligence but couldn't trace him and finally came the tip-off."

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/national/19-key-militant-commander-among-six-killed-740-hh-01>)

U.S. Begins Inquiry on Spy Network in Pakistan

New York Times, April 27, 2010.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has opened an inquiry into whether a top Defense Department official violated Pentagon rules by setting up a network of private contractors to gather intelligence in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pentagon spokesman said that Mr. Gates was also demanding greater oversight over the millions of dollars the Defense Department spent annually to carry out "information operations," to ensure that such missions did not "stray off course" into secret intelligence collection. At the center of the Pentagon inquiry is Michael D. Furlong, a civilian official working for the Air Force who last year used a web of private contractors to clandestinely gather intelligence in Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to current and former government officials, some of that information was turned over to Special Operations troops to help fight militants.

(Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/world/asia/28contractor.html>)

China to Build Two Nuclear Reactors in Pakistan

Bloomberg Businessweek, April 29, 2010

China has agreed to build two civilian nuclear reactors in Pakistan, the Financial

Times reported. The Chinese government gave approval for the construction of at least two 650-megawatt reactors in Chashma in Punjab province, according to the report. The FT didn't say the agreement was for which phase of construction. China's accord to build the reactors in Pakistan heightened concerns about the safety of nuclear equipment in the South Asian nation, which is battling Taliban militants in the northwest. U.S. President Barack Obama won commitments from 46 nations, including China and Pakistan, to lock down nuclear material and keep it out of the hands of terrorists after a two-day summit in Washington which ended on April 14, 2010.

Pak-China relations to strengthen further

Dawn, April 28, 2010

China's Vice Foreign Minister, Wang Guangya, said China supports Pakistan's efforts aimed at creating normal and peaceful relations with India. He said it was incumbent upon the international community to stand by Pakistan and extend full support to the Pakistani government in its counterterrorism strategy. Wang Guangya assured that China would always be supporting Pakistan on important regional and international issues.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/04-pak-china-ties-qs-06>)

SC verdict rocks PM's bureaucracy

Dawn, April 29, 2010

The Supreme Court struck down Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's order of promoting 54 bureaucrats to grade 22 and said that the discretion exercised by the prime minister was not in consonance with the well-known principles of fair play and good governance. "Petitions are accepted, as a consequence whereof notifications (of promoting civil servants) are declared having been passed without taking into consideration merits amongst officers promoted from BS-21 to BS-22," said the verdict announced by a bench comprising Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, Justice Chaudhry Ijaz Ahmed and Justice Ghulam Rabbani. Analysts are of the opinion that the landmark judgment will go a long way in discouraging the use of discretionary powers by governments to elevate their favourites to senior positions and will set guidelines for future promotions.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/04-sc-strikes-down-pm-order-fed-secs-02>)

Energy conservation plan more than successful

Dawn, April 29, 2010

Director General Pepco Mohammad Khalid on Wednesday said that through the energy conservation plan Pepco has saved 400MW more than the set target for electricity per day. Khalid said that they had set a target of saving electricity up to 500MW per day but the energy conservation plan had in fact saved around 900MW per day. While addressing a press briefing at WAPDA House, he said that federal and provincial governments and private organisations have to pay Rs1 billion to

WAPDA. He said that WAPDA has issued notices to those who have failed to pay their dues and that such people will be facing power cuts. He said that if administrations belonging to the private housing schemes do not cooperate with the plan strict action will be taken against them

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/12-energy+conservation+plan+more+than+successful--bi-04>)

Pakistan closer to a nation under siege: US

Siasat Daily, April 30, 2010

Having pumped billions of dollars in military assistance and rushing guerrilla warfare experts to train soldiers to shore up Pakistan's capabilities to tackle militancy, influential US Congressmen and Pentagon officials feel that the nation is still closer to siege. "I don't think the dynamic is as distinct as a nation at war or a nation at peace. It's probably closer to a nation under threat or a nation under siege," Lt Gen John Paxton, Director for Operations, Joint Chief of Staff, told the US Congress. "It (Pakistan) is probably more a nation under threat, and they realise that they have to respond now, that they have both the opportunity and the obligation, and that failure to do so now -- things could conceivably get worse and get worse quickly."

(Source: <http://www.siasat.com/english/news/pakistan-closer-nation-under-siege-us>)

US must reassure Pakistan about India, says official

Times of India, April 30, 2010

With Pakistan's traditional defence posture still geared to conventional military conflict with India and not counter insurgency, a top Pentagon official says the US needs to reassure an Islamabad wary about growing India-US relations. "Although extremist attacks have led to the repositioning of substantial Pakistani forces, Pakistan's strategic concerns about India remain pre-eminent," Michele Flournoy, Under Secretary for Policy in the Department of Defence, told the House Armed Services Committee. "We must continue to reassure Pakistan that as it combats the terrorist threat, it is not exposing itself to increased risk along its eastern border," she said noting that Pakistan is also wary about the increasing Indo-US relationship.

(Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/US-must-reassure-Pakistan-about-India-says-official/articleshow/5875342.cms>)

Indian army foils Kashmir infiltration bid, three dead

Dawn April 30, 2010

The Indian military said it had killed three suspected militants and foiled an attempt by militants to enter Indian-administered Kashmir from the Pakistani side of the disputed region. The fresh violence came a day after the prime ministers of India and Pakistan agreed to work towards resuming their frozen peace dialogue when they met in Bhutan for their first direct talks in nine months. "The army has foiled an attempt by militants to infiltrate into (Indian-administered) Kashmir from

across the Line of Control (LoC) by killing three militants," army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel J.S. Brar told AFP.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/04-kashmir-infiltration-bid-foiled-qs-04>)

Mumbai's long shadow finally recedes

Dawn, April 30, 2010

Pakistan and India agreed to revive, without any precondition. Both sides termed the meeting between Yousuf Raza Gilani and Dr Manmohan Singh "very positive". Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi described the meeting as "warm, cordial and engaging". He said that all issues, including Kashmir, Sir Creek and Siachen, were on the table. "All issues that are of concern are on the table and will be discussed," Mr Qureshi said, adding that this was "a step in the right direction". "It (meeting) was very positive and concluded very positively. We have decided to move forward and have overcome suspension of the process," he told reporters after the meeting.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/gilani%2C-singh-want-roadmap-to-walk-the-talk-mumbais-long-shadow-finally-recedes-040>)

Hakimullah Mehsud threatens US in new video

Dawn, May 3, 2010

Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud has appeared in a new video issued months after his reported death, vowing revenge attacks on the United States, US monitoring groups said. Mehsud was reported to have been killed in a US drone strike in northwestern Pakistan on January 14, 2010, but his militant group denied his death and Pakistani intelligence officials were quoted as saying last week that he had survived.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/19-hakimullah-mehsud-threatens-us-in-new-video-hh-02>)

Pakistan to move arbitration court on Kishanganga project

Dawn, May 3, 2010

Pakistan has finally decided to approach the International Court of Arbitration against construction of the controversial Kishanganga Hydropower Project by India in alleged violation of 1960 Indus Waters Treaty and has formed a team of legal experts to fight the case. Informed sources told Dawn that Professor Kaiyan Homi Kaikobad, an international legal expert of Pakistan origin, would lead the team at the International Court of Arbitration.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/19-construction-of-kishanganga-project-by-india-pakistan-to-move-arbitration-court-350-hh-01>)

Taliban terrorizes Swat Valley

Denver Post, May 3, 2010

Two weeks after the Pakistani government gave in to Islamist demands and imposed Islamic law throughout the Swat Valley, armed militants are patrolling the streets of the district capital and masked gunmen have taken control of outlying districts, where they're terrorizing residents and using intimidation to close girls' schools. The Pakistani government has portrayed the deal that it struck with the militants in February, which President Asif Ali Zardari signed April 13, as the means to re-establish the writ of the state. Residents and officials said, however, that the Taliban appears to be in control and is pushing Swat toward becoming an independent extremist fiefdom.

(Source: http://www.denverpost.com/nationworld/ci_12281853)

India wants to bridge trust deficit, says minister

Dawn, May 4, 2010

As an Indian court convicted 20 Pakistanis in absentia for the 2008 Mumbai massacre, New Delhi expressed the hope that Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani would help remove the trust deficit dogging the two countries by acting against some of the perpetrators believed to be at large in his country. Mr Krishna told both houses of parliament in a suo motu statement that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who met Mr Gilani in Thimphu had "a cordial and frank discussion" with him. "(Dr Singh) told him that if the trust deficit between India and Pakistan can be eliminated all issues can be resolved through dialogue," Mr Krishna said.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/india-wants-to-bridge-trust-deficit%2C-says-minister-450>)

NY bomb suspect said to admit plot, Pakistan training

The Star, May 5, 2010.

A Pakistani-American admitted, trying to detonate a bomb in New York's busy Times Square and receiving bomb-making training in a known Taliban and al Qaeda stronghold in Pakistan. Prosecutors charged Faisal Shahzad, 30, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Pakistan, with five counts, including attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction and trying to kill and maim people within the United States." If successful it could have resulted in a lethal terrorist attack, causing death and destruction in the heart of New York City, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said of the bomb plot.

Source:http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/5/5/worldupdates/2010-05-05T040148Z_01_NOOTR_RTRMDNC_0_-482263-7&sec=Worldupdates

March Old Kashmir policy stands revived: FM

Dawn, May 5, 2010

It was Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi's day in the National Assembly when he said Pakistan had returned to its 'historical' stand on Kashmir issue after "wavering" by the previous regime and would fight all possible legal battles with

India for water rights. In an absorbing speech on an opposition motion to discuss the present government's Kashmir policy, he rejected critics' fears Pakistan's position could be harmed in future peace talks with India after the two sides discarded the nomenclature of 'composite dialogue' last week and allegations it was not doing enough to prevent India from curtailing Pakistan's share of river waters guaranteed by a 1960 treaty. The minister said the term 'composite dialogue' was coined by India before the process began in 2004 while Pakistan had originally sought a 'comprehensive dialogue' and assured the house all eight points specified under the previous format would be on the table in future talks as well.

(Source:<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/old-kashmir-policy-stands-revived-fm-550>)

Pakistan probes NY suspect link to Waziristan

Dawn, May 5, 2010.

Pakistan's military warned that it had yet to establish a link between the Pakistani-American charged with trying to bomb New York and the country's main militant stronghold in Waziristan. Army spokesman Athar Abbas told AFP that a link between Faisal Shahzad and Waziristan had "yet to be established

Source:<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/03-pakistan-doubts-taliban-times-square-claim-ss-01>

US ambassador to India meets Zardari

Dawn, May 5, 2010.

US Ambassador to India Timothy Roemer discussed with Pakistani leaders on a possible model of re-engagement between India and Pakistan after the Thimphu accord between the prime ministers of the two countries to resume talks. Ambassador Roemer, who arrived here from Kabul, met President Asif Ali Zardari and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. Although a US embassy spokesman described the visit as exploratory and said that the ambassador was trying to familiarise himself with Pakistani issues and the government's position on them, but diplomatic sources said that the visit was significant because of upcoming talks between the foreign secretaries and foreign ministers of the two countries for chalking out a roadmap for the renewed engagement suspended in the aftermath of Mumbai attacks.

(Source:<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/us-ambassador-to-india-meets-zardari-550>)

Pakistan receives \$468 million from US security fund

Dawn, May 6, 2010

Pakistan's central bank stated that it had received \$ 468 million from the United States in compensation for some of its costs in battling militancy. The US embassy in Islamabad said it had released \$ 656 million to Pakistan from its so-called coalition support fund (CSF) for some costs incurred last year, with \$188 million transferred last week and another \$468 million May 3, 2010. The CSF is a US programme to reimburse allies that have incurred costs in supporting counter-terrorist and

counter-insurgency operations.

<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/04-pak-receives-468-mn-csf-qs-04>

Evidence Mounts for Taliban Role in Car Bomb Plot

New York Times, May 5, 2010.

American officials said that it was very likely that a radical group once thought unable to attack the United States had played a role in the bombing attempt in Times Square, elevating concerns about whether other militant groups could deliver at least a glancing blow on American soil. Officials said that after two days of intense questioning of the bombing suspect, Faisal Shahzad, evidence was mounting that the group, the Pakistani Taliban, had helped inspire and train Mr. Shahzad in the months before he is alleged to have parked an explosives-filled sport utility vehicle in a busy Manhattan intersection.

(Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/06/nyregion/06bomb.html?hp>)

NY suspect probably didn't act alone: Malik

Dawn, May 7, 2010

Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik said that he thought it unlikely that a Pakistani-American arrested over a failed plot to bomb New York's Times Square had acted alone. Investigations in Pakistan have uncovered possible links between Faisal Shahzad, 30, the Pakistani Taliban and a Kashmiri group, officials and news reports said. "According to the available information he says it was his individual act," Malik told Reuters in an interview during a visit to Beijing. "I would not tend to believe that."

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/03-ny-suspect-probably-didnt-act-alone-malik-ss-12>)

US tones down tirade against Pakistan

Dawn, May 7, 2010.

Three key pillars of the US administration - the White House, the Pentagon and the State Department - joined hands in an effort to tone down anti-Pakistan tirade stirred by the arrest of a Pakistani-American in the Times Square bombing attempt earlier this week. The most forceful attempt to deflect anti-Pakistan rhetoric came from the State Department, where Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley said he would not allow the department's platform to be used to suggest that all terrorist activities in the world originated in that country. "I'm not going to entertain a question that implicates one country, and to suggest that all terrorism in the world is the responsibility of one country. That's not true," said Mr Crowley.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/us-tones-down-tirade-against-pakistan-750>)

Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan government adopting strict measures to combat human trafficking

Asian Tribune, April 27, 2010

The Sri Lankan government is to tighten its coastal security to combat the human trafficking trade which has evolved into becoming one of the largest rackets to hit the country. The government has made plans to develop a special unit in the Sri Lanka Navy and to have a large fleet of boats in a bid to crackdown on illegal asylum seekers. A senior official who spoke to Asian Tribune on ground of anonymity said that the Sri Lanka Navy is now in the process of increasing its fleet of vessels and boats in order to strengthen its coastal security. "Piracy in Sri Lankan coastal waters is rampant and we have now a new menace since the war is over, it is the human smuggling racket.

(Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/04/27/sri-lankan-government-adopting-strict-measures-combat-human-trafficking>)

India, Lanka for expeditious resettlement of Tamils with dignity

One India News, April 28, 2010

Indian External Affairs Minister S M Krishna met his Sri Lankan counterpart G L Peiris have called for the expeditious rehabilitation and resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) with dignity. Sources said that Peiris informed Krishna that out of the 300,000 IDPs, 240,000 had been moved out of the rehabilitation camps. Both leaders also resolved to increase the content and depth of bilateral ties and noted that there should be a sense of participation and equality among all ethnic groups.

(Source: <http://news.oneindia.in/2010/04/28/indialanka-for-expeditious-resettlement-of-tamils.html>)

Build new structures to achieve full potential of SAARC - Sri Lanka President

Asian Tribune, April 29, 2010

If there is a need, we should not hesitate to build new structures and mechanisms, to enable SAARC to reach its full potential," said President Mahinda Rajapaksa in his address to 16th SAARC Summit at Thimphu, Bhutan. Having a common South Asian voice in issues of Climate Change, with those who historically contributed to climate change now sharing the burden of mitigating it; continued cooperation in the battle against terrorism; taking economic progress beyond statistics to reach the village level where most South Asians live, carrying out policies that strengthen the rural sector and prevent the unwelcome movement from village to city; and, the search for South Asia's own home grown solutions to current and future problems were among the highlights of the President's address.

(Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/04/29/build-new-structures-achieve-full-potential-saarc-sri-lanka-president>)

Pakistan, Sri Lanka agree to promote defence, trade relations

Daily Times, April 29, 2010

In a meeting between Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse on April 28, 2010, it was decided that bilateral relations in all fields, especially in defence, trade and commerce should be promoted. During the meeting, which was also attended by Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, both the leaders emphasised the need to strengthen the SAARC organisation for the betterment of the region. Gilani said Pakistan greatly valued its traditionally close and cordial relationship with Sri Lanka, adding that both the countries had always stood by each other in difficult times. He said both the countries shared commonality of views on numerous issues of mutual interest.

(Source: http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\04\29\story_29-4-2010_pg7_26)

Foreign policy to focus on unique opportunities available in Sri Lanka: Prof. G L Peiris

Asian Tribune, May 4, 2010

The new Minister of External Affairs, Prof. Gamini Lakshman Peiris said the approach of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy as underlined in the Mahinda Chinthanaya was to ensure that it was homegrown, indigenous and reflects Sri Lanka's history, culture, social and economic values which are considered sacrosanct, and our own relations with countries. Sri Lanka would continue engaging with other countries and that it would be on the basis of partnership and participation, he said. The External Affairs Minister said that one of the main objectives of the country's foreign policy would be to focus on the unique opportunities available in Sri Lanka and encourage countries to explore them and be partners in Sri Lanka's progress.

(Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/04/foreign-policy-focus-unique-opportunities-available-sri-lanka-prof-g-l-peiris>)

Reconciliation Commission - what Asian Tribune was lobbying for the past one year

Asian Tribune, May 6, 2010.

Sri Lanka Government has made a belated announcement in the floor of the Parliament about the setting up of a Reconciliation Commission. This was announced by Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne who said that the Reconciliation Commission is needed to build mutual trust among communities.

(Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/06/reconciliation-commission-what-asian-tribune-was-lobbying-past-one-year>)

Relevance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to Sri Lanka Emphasized

Asian Tribune, May 7, 2010.

Minister of External Affairs, Prof. G. L. Peiris when signing a Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU), conferred the status of a Dialogue Partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on Sri Lanka, emphasized the great relevance of the Organization to Sri Lanka. He noted that the MoU enables cooperation between SCO and Sri Lanka on areas such as ensuring security through combating terrorism, economic cooperation and collaboration in science and technology, education, healthcare, culture and sports. All of these spheres of engagements are of particular interest to Sri Lanka in the current post conflict scenario, where rapid and equitable economic growth accompanied by the continued safeguarding of security and peace remain the priorities. The MoU was signed at the Ministry of External Affairs on behalf of the SCO by its Secretary-General, Mr. Muratbek Sansyzbayevich Imanaliev.

(Source: <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2010/05/07/relevance-shanghai-cooperation-organization-sri-lanka-emphasized>)

No conditions says EU

Daily Mirror, May 7, 2010.

The Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka and the Maldives says no list of conditions have been communicated to the Government of Sri Lanka in order to obtain the GSP plus trade concessions. A Government delegation will visit the European Commission headquarters later this month for talks on retaining the key trade concessions. The discussions, foreseen in Brussels on the 20th and 21st of May will address issues highlighted in the European Commission's final report on Sri Lanka's eligibility for GSP Plus issued in October 2009, the EU office in Colombo said.

(Source: <http://www.dailymirror.lk/index.php/news/3594-no-conditions-says-eu.html>)