

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

As 2010 gears up to open way for 2011, the review of Afghan War Strategy has also paced up inside the White House. How is the Afghan strategy shaping up and what course should it take in the months to come is perhaps the question which will linger for some time. Recently, a statement made by the U.S. administration that, "the Afghan operation is a psychological operation," points towards the much known Clausewitzian strategy in countering the enemy through factors other than military means alone. However at this point of time three patterns seem to shape the Afghan theatre: Engagement, emphasising peace and reconciliation; sustaining and securing the support/commitment from allies against the war against terror and phased and conditioned withdrawal. However reconciling these could be a herculean task; while the Afghans appear to favour engagement and reconciliation with the Taliban along with withdrawal of security forces, the strategic priority for the Americans at this point of time is the commitment from its allies. This is well reflected in Mike Mullen's statement, who announced that, "the 2014 date would give a symbolic deadline for ending the war and bringing most combat forces home. The war is already in its 10th year and unpopular in the U.S. and Europe."

The much talked about transit facility to be provided by Bangladesh to its South Asian neighbours-India, Bhutan and Nepal, witnessed some controversy in Bangladesh. While Khaleda Zia has criticized Bangladesh's willingness to provide transit to India without charging any duty for its facilities, some experts claim that Bangladesh in the next thirty years could reap a profit of \$2.3 billion.

The incidence of sectarian attacks in Pakistan is meanwhile on a sharp rise. Sufi shrines according to one report have become "danger zones." A report claims that Pakistan since 2005 has witnessed more than 70 suicide attacks. Meanwhile the November 11 attack on the headquarters of Karachi's counterterrorism police claimed by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is being understood as retaliation to drone strikes and the militant operations being undertaken by the Pakistan government's consent. Just a week before the attack, around six members of the Sunni sectarian groups had been arrested. Coping with homeland security could be one of the important engagement for the Pakistani establishment in the months to come.

Afghanistan

Senators Warn of Bad Consequences of Nato-Russia Raid

Daily Afghanistan Outlook, November 1, 2010.

Some Afghan senators urged the Afghan government to react seriously against the joint Nato-Russia attack and warned of bad consequences of the operation. Nato forces included four Russian anti-drug soldiers in their operation that was conducted to target a number of drug laboratories in eastern parts of the country. The Afghan senators criticised the joint offensive and called for more details about the operation. Deputy Minister of Defence, Enayatullah Nazari said: "We were not informed of the operation in advance and we object it as a violation of national sovereignty

(Source: http://outlookafghanistan.net/news_Pages/main_news.html#01)

U.S.: No High-Level Afghan Peace Talks Under Way

Daily Afghanistan Outlook, November 1, 2010.

Despite news reports of high-level talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, no significant peace negotiations are under way in Afghanistan, U.S. officials and Afghanistan experts said. These same experts said the reports, which appeared in a number of U.S. media outlets, could be part of a U.S. "information strategy" to divide and weaken the Taliban leadership. "This is a psychological operation, plain and simple," said a U.S. official with firsthand knowledge of Afghan President Hamid Karzai's outreach effort.

(Source: http://outlookafghanistan.net/news_Pages/main_news.html#01)

Afghan attorney general investigates alleged voting fraud

Washington Post, November 3, 2010.

The Afghan attorney general's office has launched a number of criminal investigations into allegations that the country's election commission participated in fraud during parliamentary elections in September, officials said. Deputy Attorney General Rahmatullah Nazari said his staff has begun investigating nine cases in which election officials, all but one of them at the Kabul headquarters of the Independent Election Commission, are accused of rigging votes. Nazari did not say whether the probes are targeting the election commissioners themselves or members of their staff.

(Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/03/AR2010110304950_pf.html)

US to spend \$511 million to expand Kabul embassy

Associated Press, November 3, 2010.

The U.S. government will spend \$511 million to expand its embassy in Kabul, the U.S. ambassador said, describing the work as a demonstration of America's long-term commitment to Afghanistan. "We make this commitment by commemorating the recent award of a \$511 million contract to expand the U.S. Embassy here in Kabul," Ambassador Karl Eikenberry said during a ceremony at the construc-

tion site that marked the formal announcement of the contract.

(Source: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101103/ap_on_re_as/as_afghan_us_embassy)

Taliban Demand Privileges in Afghan Peace Talks

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, November 5, 2010.

The Taliban have demanded privileges to join the Afghan peace process, the High Peace Council said. The spokesman for the High Peace Council, Qiamuddin Kashaf, told reporters that the council has urged the Pakistani government to play a direct role in these talks, as well as the Saudi Arabian king to cooperate in this field. "The Saudi Arabian government has an influence both on Pakistan and the Taliban. I even suggest that the leadership of these talks be handed over to the Saudi king," Mr Kashaf said. He emphasised over the Afghan government's demands in these talks as well. The council said it will accept the legitimate demands of the Taliban, and urged them and all the factions involved in the Afghan war to renounce violence and work for the peace building process in Afghanistan.

(Source: [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/archive/November%2004,%202010/news_Pages/mai\)n_news.html#02](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/archive/November%2004,%202010/news_Pages/mai)n_news.html#02))

Karzai for Greater Russo-Afghan Trade

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, November 6, 2010.

Afghanistan has stressed a greater role for Russia in grappling with the problems facing the conflict-devastated country and the region at large, a spokesman for President Hamid Karzai said. In a telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev, Karzai underlined the need for intensifying Russo-Afghan trade and economic cooperation. The two leaders called for enhanced collaboration, including stronger counter-narcotics efforts, based on bilateral and multilateral formats, which were agreed at their meeting in Sochi in August, the presidential spokesman said in a statement. Although the press release gave no further details, the Kremlin said Medvedev and Karzai conferred on a joint response to shared challenges and threats.

(Source: <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/archive/November%2006,%202010/index1.html#>)

Third Afghan Peace Talks Held in Maldives

Yolo News, November 6, 2010.

The third round of Afghan peace talks led by Humayoon Jareer, the son-in-law of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was held in Maldives. Some members of the Hezbi Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Party of Afghanistan), as well as members of Afghan parliament have also participated in the meeting. Representatives from the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network are also reported to have participated in the meeting, but the report was not confirmed by the organisers. Firoz Hekmatyar, the son of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is representing the Hezbi Islami Afghanistan in the Maldives meeting.

(Source: <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/1002>)

NATO allies want Canada to keep some troops in Afghanistan as trainers

Washington Post, November 7, 2010.

The United States and other NATO allies are trying to persuade Canada, whose troops are due to withdraw from Afghanistan next year, to leave a hundreds-strong residual force as trainers for Afghan security forces. The buildup of Afghan forces is a crucial component of President Obama's plans to begin a gradual U.S. withdrawal next summer. But while coalition leaders have cited significant recent improvements in Afghan recruitment and capabilities, NATO members consistently have fallen short on pledges to provide more trainers.

(Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/07/AR2010110703744_pf.html)

Peace Process Can Go on Without Saudi Role: MP

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, November 7, 2010.

The peace process set in motion by the government of President Hamid Karzai could be taken forward without help from the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an Afghan lawmaker said. A day earlier, Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud al-Faisal said his country would not take part in the peace effort until the Taliban insurgents cut off ties to all terrorist groups. Last month, the Karzai-nominated High Peace Council requested Saudi Arabia to help end the nine-year conflict in the impoverished South Asian country. "Our role in the Afghanistan peace process will be effective at time when Taliban cut off their relations with extremists, including Al Qaeda and (its leader) Osama Bin Laden," the Saudi minister said.

(Source: http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/archive/november%2008,2010/news_Pages/main_news.html#01)

Kai Eide Criticises Obama Over Afghanistan

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, November 8, 2010.

The former UN special envoy for Afghanistan criticised the Obama administration over political deals with the Taliban. The former United Nations special envoy for Afghanistan, Kai Eide, criticised the role of the Obama administration and the United States special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke over peace talks with the Taliban. Mr Eide said the US pressures over Afghan president Hamid Karzai will harm peace efforts in the country and that the only solution to the Afghan war is to continue peace talks with the Taliban. He said Mr Holbrooke had a damaging effect over relations between the Afghan government and the US by humiliating president Karzai.

(Source: <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/archive/November%2004,%202010/index1.html#>)

Pentagon chiefs: Afghans can manage by 2014

Associated Press, November 8, 2010.

Afghanistan should be ready to handle its own security by the year 2014, the top U.S. defense chiefs said. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Joint Chiefs of Staff

Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen said NATO should endorse the 2014 timeline proposed by Afghan President Hamid Karzai when the alliance holds its annual summit later this month. "As a target at this point that makes sense, so I am comfortable with it," Mullen said. The 2014 date would give a symbolic deadline for ending the war and bringing most combat forces home. The war is already in its 10th year and unpopular in the U.S. and Europe.

(Source: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101108/ap_on_re_as/as_us_afghanistan)

Afghans more optimistic about future - poll

BBC, November 8, 2010.

Afghans are more optimistic about the future than they were previously, a national poll has found. Forty-seven per cent of those quizzed by the Asia Foundation thought Afghanistan was moving in the right direction, compared with 41% last year. The survey, funded by the US Agency for International Development, found strong support for President Hamid Karzai's attempts to engage with the Taliban.

(Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11716016>)

NATO says 900 trainers needed for Afghan forces

Associated Press, November 8, 2010.

Canada's government has agreed to keep 750 military trainers in Afghanistan until 2014, a pledge of support which may help plug a critical shortage of 900 trainers for NATO's year-old mission to bolster Afghan security forces. Afghan President Hamid Karzai wants his nation's police and army to take the lead in protecting and defending their homeland by 2014 – a deadline that will be reached only if the stepped-up training effort continues with support from foreign capitals weary of the war. U.S. Lt. Gen. William Caldwell, the commander of NATO's training mission, said that the NATO mission faced a shortage of 900 trainers.

(Source: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101108/ap_on_re_as/as_afghan_trainers)

Audio recordings raise new questions about Afghan elections

'Heart' of al Qaeda in Pak-Afghan border: Gates

Dawn, November 9, 2010.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said the "heart" of al Qaeda remained in the Pak-Afghan border area even as it spread its influence to the Arabian peninsula and northern Africa. As al Qaeda's leaders continued to operate out of the border area, "they provide the guidance, they provide the priorities, they provide legitimacy to other al Qaeda affiliates that are developing in other places, including in the Arabian peninsula, in Yemen in particular and in northern Africa, in the Maghreb," Gates told reporters.

(Source: <http://public.dawn.com/2010/11/09/%E2%80%98heart%E2%80%99-of-al-qaeda-in-pak-afghan-border-gates.html>)

Hillary Clinton : Parts of Afghanistan to Be Under Local Control By Next Year

Daily Outlook Afghanistan, November 9, 2010.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced parts of Afghanistan will be under the control of Afghan forces by next year. Clinton touched down in Australia as part of the AUSMIN (Australia-United States Ministerial) meeting, attended by Australian foreign and defense ministers, and the U.S. secretaries of state and defense. Clinton gave the assessment after the annual AUSMIN meeting, reaffirming the coalition strategy of handing over security to Afghan forces in Afghanistan. "We are convinced that starting next year there will be parts of Afghanistan that will be under the control of the Afghan government and its security forces," Clinton told reporters in Melbourne. She said she does not expect the change in the composition of the U.S. congress after the mid-term elections would affect U.S.'s plan to begin drawing part of its troops in Afghanistan.

(Source: http://outlookafghanistan.net/news_Pages/main_news.html#02)

Audio recordings raise new questions about Afghan elections

Washington Post, November 10, 2010.

After some friendly chitchat, the man referred to as "your excellency" got down to business: In a cellphone call, he instructed the Afghan election official which candidates should be named winners in the parliamentary elections. But the election official was worried. He had already doctored some votes, he replied, and the election staff was being searched every day at work, according to audio copies of alleged conversations between the two men. The audio files, broadcast on Afghan television and obtained independently by The Washington Post, represent the latest in a gathering storm of recriminations against the Afghan organization responsible for administering the Sept. 18 elections for the lower house of Afghanistan's parliament.

(Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/10/AR2010111006389_pf.html)

U.S. Tweaks Message on Troops in Afghanistan

Washington Post, November 10, 2010.

The Obama administration is increasingly emphasizing the idea that the United States will have forces in Afghanistan until at least the end of 2014, a change in tone aimed at persuading the Afghans and the Taliban that there will be no significant American troop withdrawals next summer. In a move away from President Obama's deadline of July 2011 for the start of an American drawdown from Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all cited 2014 this week as the key date for handing over the defense of Afghanistan to the Afghans themselves.

(Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/11/world/asia/11military.html?_r=1)

EU Parliament Calls for New Exit Strategy

Afghan Daily Outlook, November 12, 2010.

The European parliament called for a new strategy for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. Members of the European parliament proposed to the European Union (EU) a new strategy for the pullout of foreign troops from Afghanistan bringing the Afghans and even the Taliban at the negotiation table. These parliamentarians said that the military intervention of western countries in Afghanistan had led to the deterioration of security and socio-economic situation in the country, as foreign forces increased their military operations. Improving coordination of international donations to Afghanistan, increasing the quality of police training and struggle against the cultivation of opium are among the main proposed strategies for the EU.

(Source: http://outlookafghanistan.net/news_Pages/main_news.html#02)

Karzai wants U.S. to reduce military operations in Afghanistan

Washington Post, November 14, 2010.

President Hamid Karzai said on that the United States must reduce the visibility and intensity of its military operations in Afghanistan and end the increased U.S. Special Operations forces night raids that aggravate Afghans and could exacerbate the Taliban insurgency. In an interview with The Washington Post, Karzai said that he wanted American troops off the roads and out of Afghan homes and that the long-term presence of so many foreign soldiers would only worsen the war. His comments placed him at odds with U.S. commander Gen. David H. Petraeus, who has made capture-and-kill missions a central component of his counterinsurgency strategy, and who claims the 30,000 new troops have made substantial progress in beating back the insurgency.

(Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/13/AR2010111304001_pf.html)

U.S. Plan Envisions Path to Ending Afghan Combat

New York Times, November 14, 2010.

The Obama administration has developed a plan to begin transferring security duties in select areas of Afghanistan to that country's forces over the next 18 to 24 months, with an eye toward ending the American combat mission there by 2014, officials said Sunday. The phased four-year plan to wind down American and allied fighting in Afghanistan will be presented at a NATO summit meeting in Lisbon later this week, the officials said. It will reflect the most concrete vision for transition in Afghanistan assembled by civilian and military officials since President Obama took office last year.

(Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/15/world/asia/15prexy.html>)

NATO summit a turning point in Afghan war: U.S. envoy

Reuters, November 15, 2010.

The NATO summit in Lisbon this weekend will mark a turning point in the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan as it lays out a roadmap to end combat

operations by 2014, the top U.S. envoy to the region said on Monday. But that won't spell the end of the international presence in Afghanistan, said U.S. special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke. "From Lisbon on, we will be on a transition strategy with a target date of the end of 2014 for Afghanistan taking over responsibility for leading the security," he told reporters in the Pakistani capital. "We have a transition strategy. We do not have an exit strategy."

(Source: http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20101115/wl_nm/us_pakistan_holbrooke)

Bangladesh

Dhaka could reap \$2.3 bn from transit facilities to India, others

Economics Times, October 31, 2010.

Bangladesh could reap a profit of \$2.3 billion in a period of 30 years by giving transit facilities to India, Nepal and Bhutan, a think tank has said. To earn that profit, Bangladesh would, however, have to invest \$1.17 billion in capital expenditure, operation and maintenance costs for over 30 years to develop corridors for transit traffic, says the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). Of the amount, \$53.74 million and \$769 million would be required to set up road and rail links, \$79 million and \$129 million to upgrade the Chittagong and Mongla ports, and \$99 million to operate and maintain them.

(Source: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/Dhaka-could-reap-23-bn-from-transit-facilities-to-India-others/articleshow/6845573.cms>)

WB Concern over Bangladesh's Expenditure of Electricity Buying

Energy Bangla, November 6, 2010.

The multilateral lending agency World Bank has expressed its concern over higher expenditure of the Bangladesh government to buy electricity from rental power plants and import fuel. The burden may restrict the country's economic growth in the range between 6.1 percent and 6.3 percent. Sanjay Kathuria, lead country economist of WB, in his presentation said in FY11, additional fiscal cost for the rental power will be ranged between Tk 52 billion and Tk 56 billion, which is about 0.6 per cent or 0.7 per cent of the GDP. The additional fuel import bill can be between \$300 million and \$350 million, he said. The government has approved 28 rental power plants to provide electricity on emergency basis and those will be run by diesel and furnace oil.

(Source: <http://www.energybangla.com/index.php?mod=article&cat=PowerSector&article=2875>)

India, Bangladesh to set up 'Border Haats'

Calcutta Tube, November 7, 2010.

India and Bangladesh have agreed to set up 'Border Haats' (bazars) along their border in Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura to boost local trade and business, a Tripura minister said. 'India and Bangladesh governments have recently signed an agreement to establish two Border Haats along the border in Meghalaya. Similar such initiative would be taken subsequently along the borders in Tripura and

Assam,' Tripura's Minister for Commerce and Industry Jitendra Chaudhury said. These marts, to be set up within 5 km of the international border, will sell local agricultural and horticultural products, spices, minor forest products (excluding timber), fresh and dry fish, dairy and poultry products, cottage industry items, wooden furniture, handloom and handicraft items.'

(Source: <http://calcuttatube.com/india-bangladesh-to-set-up-border-haats/129541/>)

Zia opposes transit facility to India

Hindustan Times, November 8, 2010.

Bangladesh's opposition leader Khaleda Zia has demanded that the government scrap all deals, including one on transit, with India. Zia claimed that India would not pay any duty for the transit facilities. "Earlier, they (government) said Bangladesh will be Singapore and crores of taka will be earned. But now we hear India will not pay any duty against transit facilities." She said she would resist the government's anti-state activities "even if it costs her life", the Daily star reported. "Giving India transit, corridor, and Chittagong and Mongla ports was not in their (ruling Awami League's) election manifesto. But this is what they are now busy doing," she told the rally organised to mark the "National Revolution and Solidarity Day".

(Source: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Zia-opposes-transit-facility-to-India/Article1-623341.aspx>)

US keen to train armed forces

Daily Star, November 10, 2010.

The US government wants to provide technical support and training to Bangladesh Armed Forces, said Gen Gary L North, commander of US Pacific Air Forces, yesterday. General North expressed the US keenness when he paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the city. Prime Minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed reporters after the meeting.

(Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=162013>)

Chinese navy hospital ship concludes visit to Bangladesh

People's Daily Online, November 15, 2010.

Chinese navy hospital ship Peace Ark concluded its visit to Bangladesh as well as the "Mission Harmony-2010" and departed for China. Rear Admiral Bao Yuping, the commanding officer of the mission, said at the concluding ceremony held in Bangladesh's Chittagong city, 242 kms southeast of capital Dhaka, "during our stay here, all personnel of the ship experienced the profound traditional friendship between the two nations and the two peoples and the brotherhood between the two navies." Peace Ark set sail from Zhejiang province in east China on Aug. 31 to carry out the mission code named "Mission Harmony-2010".

(Source: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7199726.html>)

Bhutan

After king, Bhutan PM comes to India

Sify News, October 29, 2010.

Against the backdrop of concerns about China scaling up its influence in Bhutan, India will host Bhutanese Prime Minister Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley on a four-day visit starting October 30, 2010, a trip that comes close on the heels of the Bhutanese monarch's 10-day visit. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will hold wide-ranging talks with Thinley that will focus on wide-ranging development and energy cooperation between the two countries. During the Bhutanese prime minister's visit, the two sides are expected to discuss a slew of developmental projects and some new joint initiatives in the hydropower sector. Thinley's visit will build upon the visit of King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk to India. In his discussions with Manmohan Singh, the Bhutanese monarch allayed India's concerns over reports of Chinese inroads into the Himalayan state and underlined the special relationship that exists between India and Bhutan.

(Source: <http://sify.com/news/after-king-bhutan-pm-comes-to-india-saturday-news-national-kk3wugbegae.html>)

Inflation 7.2 percent in third quarter

Kuensel, November 1, 2010.

Annual inflation, as reflected by the consumer price index, rose to 7.2 percent for the quarter ending September 30, up from 6.1 percent in the previous quarter, driven by increases in both food and non-food items. Prices of food items went up by 2.3 percent and non-food items by 1.3 percent from the previous quarter according to the national statistical bureau. Among food items vegetable prices went up by 12 percent, bread, cereals, milk, egg and cheese by almost 2 percent but fruits prices fell by more than 12 percent. Of non-food items fuels and lubricants went up by more than two percent as a result of an increase in dealer's commission and base price in July and September. The purchasing power of 100 ngultrums was worth only Nu 68 at 2003 prices in the third quarter. This means that the value of the ngultrum has depreciated by 32 percent in the past seven years, according to NSB.

(Source: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/2010/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=17208>)

Households in Rural Bhutan to get Electricity with ADB assistance

Washingtonbanglaradio, November 2, 2010.

Bhutan is receiving fresh Asian Development Bank (ADB) assistance to help it reach its target of providing electricity to all rural households, which will spur growth and reduce poverty in the mountainous, landlocked South Asian country. ADB's Board of Directors approved a grant of almost \$21.6 million for the Bhutan Rural Renewable Energy Development Project. "The project will connect more than 5,000 households to on-grid electricity supplies sourced from hydropower, while nearly 1,900 homes in remote areas that can't be readily connected to the grid will get solar power packs. A further 2,500 existing solar power

users will have their systems upgraded. Pilot wind power and biogas production plants will also be established.

(Source: <http://www.washingtonbanglaradio.com/content/111378810-households-rural-bhutan-get-electricity-adb-assistance>)

Bhutan: recognition ahead for Christian community

Inspire Magazine, November 5, 2010.

For the first time in Bhutan's history, the Buddhist nation's government seems ready to grant much-awaited official recognition and accompanying rights to a miniscule Christian population that has remained largely underground. The authority that regulates religious organizations will discuss in its next meeting – to be held by the end of December – how a Christian organization can be registered to represent its community, agency secretary Dorji Tshering told Compass.

(Source: <http://www.inspiremagazine.org.uk/news.aspx?action=view&id=4913>)

4-nation link by June 2012

Kuensel, November 5, 2010.

Work has begun on creating an information superhighway linking Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. Expected to be completed by June 2012, the information superhighway, using the Indian city of Siliguri, will directly connect the four countries, specifically linking rural communities in the region. The connection is part of the Asian development bank's (ADB) south Asia sub-regional economic cooperation (SASEC) project. The objective of the project is to not only allow social and cultural exchanges, but present opportunities for economic activity between rural communities at an affordable cost. At present, connecting through the internet with a counterpart in Nepal, the connection has to be routed through the United Kingdom. This makes the activity costlier and more time consuming, explained chief information communications technology (ICT) for the information department, Karma Wangdi. ADB has funded the project at a cost of USD 3.1M, with the government adding USD 1.2M.

(Source: <http://www.kuenselonline.com/2010/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=17248>)

Dhaka Plans to Provide Transit to Thimpu

Financial Express, November 6, 2010.

Bangladesh plans to provide transit facility to Bhutan by opening up its Mongla port to the Himalayan kingdom in a deal, expected to be signed shortly, officials said. The Ministry of Commerce (MoC) has recently sent a draft of the agreement, prepared by Tariff Commission, to different ministries seeking their comments. Bhutan has been asking for the transit facility to enable its export-import cargoes pass through the Mongla port, a senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

(Source: http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=116933&date=2010-11-07)

Nepal

Urged by China, Prachanda seeks better ties with India

Hindustan Times, October 31, 2010.

Having attacked India at every available opportunity for the past year, Nepal Maoists chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' now apparently wants to cozy up to it – on China's advice. In an interview to The Kathmandu Post and Kantipur dailies after his recent China trip, the former prime minister spoke of a "strategic tripartite partnership" involving India, China and Nepal. He also indicated a possible visit to Delhi. "There's some confusion between us. Our party feels it is needed to clear them," Kantipur quoted him as saying on Sunday. In the interviews, Prachanda said he was advised by Chinese leaders to better relations with India.

(Source: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Urged-by-China-Prachanda-seeks-better-ties-with-India/H1-Article1-620410.aspx>)

India 'concerned' over Nepal Maoists' link with Naxalites

Hindustan Times, November 6, 2010.

India has expressed "concern" over Nepal's former Maoist guerrillas providing arms and training to Indian Naxalites, prompting Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala to assure an investigation into the issue. Indian Ambassador to Nepal Rakesh Sood had handed over separate letters to Nepal Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary in late October, expressing India's concern over the issue, Indian embassy sources said. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Koirala confirmed the receipt of a letter from the India which expressed concern over the Maoists involvement in imparting training to the Naxalites, and said the government will investigate the matter.

(Source: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-concerned-over-Nepal-Maoists-link-with-Naxalites/Article1-622839.aspx>)

Singh, Paudel return to Kathmandu after completing UK trip

Nepal News, November 8, 2010.

Two of the three leaders who had gone to the United Kingdom on October 21 to study the British federal system have returned to Kathmandu Sunday. Nepali Congress leader Prakash Man Singh and UML leader Bishnu Paudel returned to Kathmandu after completing the UK trip, while Unified CPN (Maoist) leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha, another member of the three-member delegation, is still in the UK. Talking to journalists at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) upon his arrival NC leader Singh said, UK had reiterated its pledge for support to conclude the peace process in Nepal.

(Source: <http://www.nepalnews.com/main/index.php/news-archive/2-political/10359-singh-paudel-return-to-kathmandu-after-completing-uk-trip.html>)

India steps up agro-diplomacy in Nepal

Economic Times, November 8, 2010.

New Delhi is stepping up its agro-diplomacy in Nepal's Terai plains, known as the "food bowl" of the country, pledging more than NRS 300 million for the con-

struction of over 3,000 shallow tubewells for better irrigation. As part of the Indian government's economic cooperation projects in Nepal, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu and the Nepali finance ministry have already signed a memorandum of understanding to erect 1,000 tubewells in the two Terai districts of Mahottari and Dhanusha.

(Source: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/India-steps-up-agro-diplomacy-in-Nepal/articleshow/6887863.cms>)

PM Nepal says 'secret-talks' failed due to lack of honesty

Nepal News, November 8, 2010.

Caretaker Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said on Sunday the recent two-day talks among top leaders of the major three parties at Hattiban resort, Pharping failed due to lack of honesty among political parties. Addressing a function organised to mark the beginning of Nepal Sambat 1131 in Bhaktapur, PM Nepal said, the talks will succeed only if the parties become sensitive to each other's positions. The current problem cannot be solved with just 'secret talks' until the parties trust each other and become more honest, he said.

(Source: <http://www.nepalnews.com/main/index.php/news-archive/1-top-story/10353-pm-nepal-says-secret-talks-failed-due-to-lack-of-honesty.html>)

No progress in consensus-building yet: Paudel

Himalayan Times, November 9, 2010.

Neither any significant progress has been made in the effort to build up political consensus or any exercise has been carried out for the same after the Hattiban confab, Nepali Congress Parliamentary Party leader Ram Chandra Paudel revealed on Tuesday.

The major three parties—UCPN-Maoist, Nepali Congress and CPN-UML—had held rounds of secret meetings in Hattiban on Friday and Saturday in a bid to narrow down their differences over various issues at the time the political crisis in the country has been intensified following the failure to elect the new prime minister even after four months of resignation of Nepal.

(Source: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=No+progress+in+consensus-building+yet%3A+Paudel&NewsID=264907>)

India to invest Rs 300 million to construct tubewells in Nepal

Economic Times, November 9, 2010.

India will deepen its economic cooperation with Nepal by investing Rs 300 million to construct some 3,000 shallow tubewells in the country's Terai districts to provide irrigation facilities in the region. New Delhi will allocate over Rs 300 million to construct altogether 2,700 shallow tube wells in nine districts of southern Nepal in the near future, according to Indian Embassy sources.

(Source: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/India-to-invest-Rs-300-million-to-construct-tubewells-in-Nepal/articleshow/6890730.cms>)

Pakistan

US drone strike kills six militants in North Waziristan

Dawn, November 1, 2010.

A US drone attack killed at least six militants and injured two others in North Waziristan, Pakistani security officials said. The attack targeted militants sleeping in a compound in the Haider Khel village of Mir Ali district in North Waziristan, 25 kilometres east of the region's main town of Miranshah. "Six militants were killed," said a senior Pakistani security official on condition of anonymity. "The drone fired two missiles," he added. "The compound belonged to local tribesman Ahmad Ali and had become a hub of militants' movement," a local security official said. The identities of those killed were not immediately clear, he added.

(Source: <http://public.dawn.com/2010/11/01/four-killed-in-us-drone-strike-in-north-waziristan.html>)

In Pakistan, militant attacks on Sufi shrines on the rise

Christian Science Monitor, November 5, 2010.

Shrines in Pakistan are spectacles of devotional singing and dancing, colorful garlands, and decorative tokens of vows to Sufi saints, often festive spots for families to gather and devotees to perform. But under increasing threat by Al Qaeda-linked militants, they have also become danger zones. More than 70 suicide attacks at shrines have killed hundreds of worshipers in Pakistan since 2005, but the attacks have escalated recently, and the revelry has been increasingly replaced by metal detectors, paramilitary troops, and shrapnel. In October alone, the Pakistani Taliban were believed to have been behind the deaths of some 17 pilgrims and the injuring of 100 more in separate bombings in two cities.

(Source: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/1105/In-Pakistan-militant-attacks-on-Sufi-shrines-on-the-rise>)

UNSC seat: Pakistan warns against endorsement of Indian bid

The Hindu, November 7, 2010.

Ahead of U. S. President Barack Obama's India visit, Pakistan warned that any endorsement of the Indian bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) would have a negative impact on issues relating to peace and security in South Asia. Pakistan's contention is that endorsing the candidacy of any one of more States for a permanent seat on the UNSC would be at variance with the spirit of the U. N. Charter and infringes upon the principles of sovereign equality. "Creating a new class of privileged members, with or without veto, is not an option. The issue of the UNSC's expansion cannot be divorced from the broader questions relating to the restructuring of the global system."

(Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article871012.ece>)

Zardari to visit Lanka

Hindustan Times, November 8, 2010.

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari will be making his maiden visit to Sri Lanka later this month. Zardari is expected on a three-day visit beginning November 28.

He will lead a delegation of more than 30 people including foreign minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi. Colombo expects purely business and diplomatic exchanges with Islamabad during Zardari's visit as Pakistan has never been keen to raise Sri Lanka's ethnic issues.

(Source: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Asif-Ali-Zardari-to-reach-Colombo-as-SM-Krishna-flies-out-late-November/Article1-623552.aspx>)

Pakistan is not doing enough in war on terror: Kabul

DNA India, November 8, 2010.

The Afghan government today accused Pakistan of failing to help bring peace to the region, saying "certain circles" in its neighbour were funding an insurgency plaguing both countries. The Islamist insurgency that has been raging in Afghanistan for more than nine years was likely to continue unless Pakistan "joined the world" to stop it, Waheed Omer, spokesperson President Hamid Karzai, said. "The stance of the Afghan government has always been this: Pakistan can play a very effective role in bringing peace to Afghanistan, the region and Pakistan itself," he told reporters.

(Source: http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report_pakistan-is-not-doing-enough-in-war-on-terror-kabul_1463979)

China to build another nuclear reactor for Pakistan

Telegraph, November 8, 2010.

Pakistan's increasing reliance on China will be seen as headache for the US, which uses civilian and military aid to gain leverage over Islamabad in the fight against al-Qaeda and Taliban extremists. "It's no secret that this is in the pipeline. We have a power shortfall and this is one of the ways of meeting it," said an official speaking on condition of anonymity. Plans for a fifth atomic energy reactor follow confirmation of a deal to build two 650MW reactors at Chashma, in Punjab province, on top of one civilian reactor which has already been completed and another due to be finished next year. The US has opposed the plans because Pakistan has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. There are fears that fissile material might fall into the hands of Islamic extremists which are headquartered along the border with Afghanistan.

(Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/8117442/China-to-build-another-nuclear-reactor-for-Pakistan.html>)

Obama stands by US support for Pakistan

Irish times, November 8, 2010.

US President Barack Obama has defended Washington's support for Pakistan and said India was the country with the biggest stake in Islamabad's stability. "My hope is that, over time, trust develops between the two countries, that dialogue begins, perhaps on less controversial issues, building up to more controversial issues," he told college students in India's western port city of Bombay (Mumbai), on the second day of his three-day visit to India. Mr Obama, who faces a

diplomatic tightrope in fostering ties with India as its economic and geopolitical importance grows while at the same time helping Pakistan with billions of dollars in aid and weaponry, told the students the US could not impose peace on the neighbouring nuclear rivals.

(Source: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2010/1108/1224282865457.html>)

US should facilitate peace process between India and Pakistan: Omar Abdullah

Times of India, November 8, 2010.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today said that he expected America not to “mediate” but “facilitate” the dialogue process between India and Pakistan. Addressing a press briefing in the winter capital on the opening of the government offices after ‘Durbar Move’ chief minister Omar Abdullah said, “I would like to see President Obama or any US administration to facilitate the process between India and Pakistan.

“The US administration has always facilitated dialogue between the two countries when it was required and if the US really wants to help and if it can, it should facilitate Indo-Pak dialogue but anything which is close to ‘mediation’ is not acceptable to us,” Omar said.

(Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/US-should-facilitate-peace-process-between-India-and-Pakistan-Omar-Abdullah/articleshow/6889289.cms>)

Qureshi ‘deflects’ Obama, Singh’s ‘Pak epicenter of terror’ accusations

Economic Times, November 9, 2010.

Rebuffing Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s recent remarks regarding regional stability, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has said that terror groups were active in India as well as Pakistan, and that one cannot be specific towards any country in this regard. Qureshi told a TV channel that terror networks should not be linked to a specific country, as it is a global phenomenon, The Nation reported. “We cannot be selective and specific towards a country... No one country on its own can deal with it,” he said.

(Source: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics/nation/Qureshi-deflects-Obama-Singhs-Pak-epicenter-of-terror-accusations/articleshow/6893700.cms>)

EU govts okay Pak trade aid package

Daily Times, November 12, 2010.

European Union governments have approved a raft of trade concessions for Pakistan, diplomats said on Thursday, a move to help the country rebound from the floods which caused nearly \$10 billion of damage. The final package is less extensive than the EU had hoped to agree but still covers 75 Pakistani exports – from cotton sheets to clothing and ethanol – which will be allowed to enter the EU duty-free from 2011, an EU spokesman said. The duty waiver now needs ap-

proval from the World Trade Organisation and the European Parliament. Following pressure from EU industries that feared losing market share to cheaper Pakistani imports, the tariff suspensions will now apply for two years, with a third year only granted after an assessment, EU diplomats said.

(Source: http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\11\12\story_12-11-2010_pg1_5)

Lashkar-i-Jhangvi behind Karachi attack: Malik

Dawn, November 12, 2010.

Interior Minister Rehman Malik said the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ) was behind the attack on the Crime Investigation Department (CID) offices in Civil Lines. The blast that killed at least 17 people took place at around 8.20pm in what is supposed to be a most secure area of the city, at a walking distance from the Chief Minister's House and two five-star hotels located on the Club Road. Only a day prior to the blast, the CID had disclosed the arrest of seven militants belonging to the banned LJ. "The men were involved in the murder of several Shia doctors in the city," SSP Aslam Khan told journalists.

(Source: <http://www.dawn.com/2010/11/12/lashkar-i-jhangvi-behind-karachi-attack-rehman-malik.html>)

Sri Lanka

China pledges more assistance for Sri Lanka development

Colombo Page, November 1, 2010.

China has given assurance to continue to support the mega development projects in Sri Lanka currently in progress with the assistance of the Chinese Government. Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao has pledged to support Sri Lanka to uplift the living conditions in the country during a bilateral discussion he and a high-powered Chinese delegation had with the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his delegation on Sunday at the Xijiao Guest House in Shanghai. Sri Lanka's External affairs Minister Prof. G. L. Peiris, Housing Minister Wimal Weerawansa, Parliamentarian Sajin de Vass Gunawardena, President's Secretary Lalith Weeratunga, Sri Lanka Ambassador to China Karunatileka Amunugama also participated in the discussions.

(Source: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10B/Nov01_1288589250CH.php)

TMVP against re-merge

Daily Mirror, November 7, 2010.

The TMVP, as an ally of the Tamil Political Parties Forum (PTTF), has opposed the proposal to re-merge the Northern and Eastern Provinces despite all the other political entities in the Forum being in favour of it. The forum consists of ten Tamil parties such as the EPDP, EPRLF (Pathmanabha) Group, PLOTE and the Tamil National Liberation Alliance (TNLA). TNLA General Secretary, M.K. Sivajilingam said that the forum would find it difficult to reach consensus on this issue as a result

(Source: <http://www.dailymirror.lk/index.php/news/7601-tmvp-against-re-merge.html>)

Sri Lanka signs hydropower project deal with China

Hydro World, November 8, 2010.

Sri Lanka's state-run Ceylon Electricity Board has awarded a US\$82 million hydropower plant deal to China, government officials told media outlets. The 35-MW run-of-river hydro plant (known as the Broadlands project) on Sri Lanka's Kelani River will be built by China National Electric Equipment Corporation (CNEEC) and connected to the grid by 2014. In other news, the Adavikanda small hydropower project in Sri Lanka has been registered as a Clean Development Project under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The hydro project has an installed capacity of 6.5 MW and was developed by Alternate Power Systems Ltd, reports indicate.

(Source: http://www.hydroworld.com/index/display/article-display/1887257670/articles/hrhrw/hydroindustrynews/smallhydro/2010/07/sri-lanka_signs_hydropower.html)

Iran aid to Sri Lanka amounts to US\$ 520 million

Colombo Page, November 9, 2010

Iran has supported technical and engineering services in Sri Lanka to the extent of US\$ 520 million, Iranian Commerce Minister Mehdi Ghazanfari has said on Monday. Ghazanfari has told Sri Lanka's External Affairs Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris that Teheran is ready to further boost economic cooperation with Sri Lanka during a meeting between the two ministers on the sidelines of the 9th Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), the Iranian News Agency, IRNA reported.

(Source: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10C/Nov09_1289289034CH.php)

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LTTE remains a threat to India: Sen tribunal

The Island, November 12, 2010.

A special tribunal headed by a Delhi High Court judge on Friday upheld the Centre's

decision to extend the ban on terrorist outfit LTTE for two more years, stating that the organisation remains a threat to the security of the country."Indian soil is being used for unlawful activities propelled by the remnant cadres of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). There is sufficient material to declare the LTTE as unlawful association as contemplated under the Prevention of Unlawful Activities Act. According to a notification issued by the Union Home Ministry, even though LTTE had been "decimated in Sri Lanka, recent reports reveal that remnant LTTE cadres and leaders are regrouping in Tamil Nadu".

(Source: http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=11118)