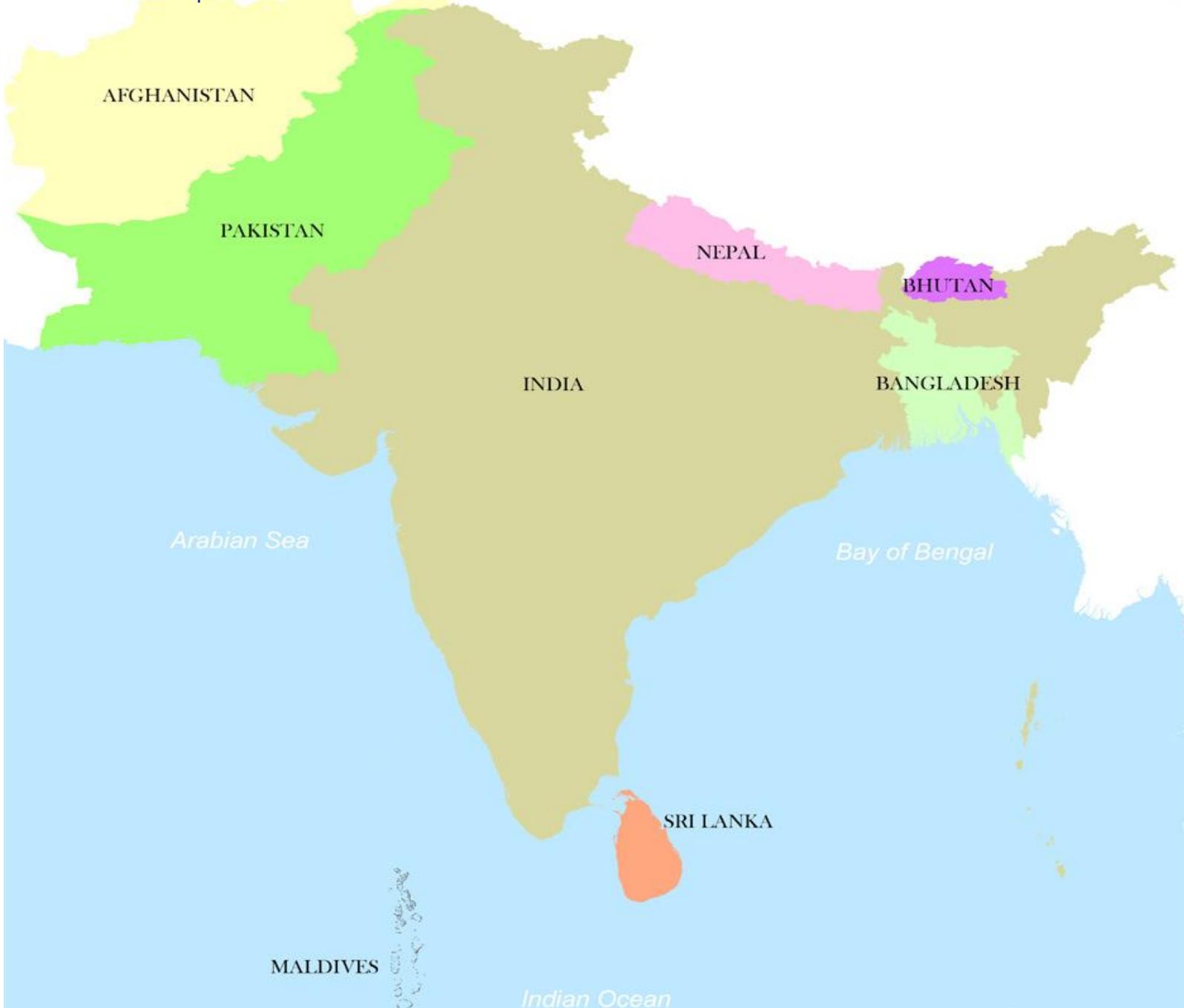


SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

July 2014

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



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Editor's Note

The first round of Afghan presidential election was held on April 5, and the controversial runoff on June 14. However, the result of the runoff election is yet to be announced as both the Presidential candidates demanded auditing of all the votes polled. Both the candidates, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani, agreed to an audit of results after successful mediation by US Secretary of State John Kerry. They agreed to abide by the results of the audit and according to the deal the winner would have to form a government of national unity with participation of the losing side. Independent election commission initiated auditing the fraudulent votes and recounting as per the guidelines of the United Nations (UN).

Due to the slow counting process, it is unlikely that results will be declared anytime soon. Meanwhile, both the candidates are discussing power sharing arrangement, but have not come out with any consensus yet. All this has deepened the political uncertainty in Afghanistan. At the same time, Afghanistan is facing cross-border shelling along the AF-Pak border, due to Pakistan's military operation against the Taliban. Afghan government alleged that Pakistani militia forces were attacking the Afghan forces in Helmund and other parts of the country and raised doubt about the seriousness of the Pakistani army's fight against terrorism.

In the midst of the ongoing military operation in Pakistan against the Taliban, a political turmoil started raising its head in Pakistan over the issue of electoral fraud by Nawaz Sharif's party in 2013 elections raised by Imran Khan, leader of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), and also over the killing of some of the supporters of cleric Tahirul Qadri by the Punjab police in June in Lahore during a demonstration against the local government. Throughout the month of July, both Qadri and Imran Khan were seen preparing for a protest march against the central government. While Afghanistan and Pakistan are having domestic problems, OHCHR team is all set to conduct the international investigation on the war crimes in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government, however, rejected the international probe and appointed three international experts to advise its domestic Presidential Commission on Missing Persons to make the domestic investigation more credible.

While Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were in the limelight in the month of July, India's relationship with Bangladesh and Nepal took a positive step forward. Important developments were also observed in Bhutan. Bhutan emphasised that its foreign policy would focus on consolidation of relations rather than expansion. In conformity with this policy decision, the Bhutanese Prime Minister visited Japan. It also had bilateral talks with Bangladesh and Nepal on the sideline of the SAFTA ministerial council meeting in Thimphu on July 24. Bhutan had boundary talks with China where both the countries discussed the disputed area in the northern border. Meanwhile, the International Arbitral Tribunal has resolved the Indo-Bangladesh maritime border dispute by awarding 19,467 sq km area to Bangladesh out of the disputed 25,602 sq km. In a positive development, India resumed the joint commission with Nepal after 23 years during Sushma Swaraj's visit to Nepal from July 25 to 27.

Afghanistan

Election impasse over fraudulent votes¹

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the first instalment of publicly released results from the June 14 runoff on July 7. The preliminary figures put Ashraf Ghani ahead by over one million votes, garnering about 56.4 percent of votes, while Abdullah trailed with 43.5 percent. Abdullah's team however rejected the preliminary result saying that the result was invalid because it did not throw out all the fraudulent votes. Abdullah's team accused the electoral bodies of committing an "industrial-scale fraud" in favor of Ghani, calling for a nationwide audit. UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Jan Kubis discussed the election impasse with President Hamid Karzai, the chief justice, head of the Commission for Monitoring Implementation of the Constitution, chairmen and members of the election bodies and suggested an investigation into votes from over 8,000 polling stations - 43 percent or 3.5 million ballots. The United Nations had presented its proposal to the IEC on July 24 in the context of the technical agreement reached by the two Presidential candidates, which asked the UN to propose the manner for the supervision of the audit. Both candidates indicated to the United Nations that they had their own respective concerns with the proposal, but were prepared to proceed with it as a good faith effort based on international best practice to bridge their positions. The United Nations welcomed the statesmanship shown by the candidates in coming to the difficult decision as well as the sincere engagement by their technical teams in the preparation of the UN proposal. Based on this support from the two parties and recognising the legal mandate of the IEC, the UN has encouraged the IEC board to rapidly meet and adopt the necessary regulatory decisions so that the next stage of the audit can commence.

Presidential candidates discuss "national unity government"²

Presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah and opponent Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai continued to discuss ballot audits and other agreements made during the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to Kabul. One of the main topics of discussion between the candidates was the role of the second candidate in the country's future government. "The candidates talked in regards to important issues such as their political frameworks as well as the start of the ballot audit process, the audit results, the review and the announcement," Abdullah's campaign spokesman, Said Fazel Agha Sancharaki, said. The two presidential teams have agreed that the losing candidate will perform an executive position in the future government and become the prime minister after the country shifts to a parliamentary system in two years. Electoral analysts believe that unifying the two teams will make for an accountable government, calling it the only way to overcome the current crisis in the country. The most important agreement between the two candidates, the announcement of the national unity government-strengthening national unity by political power-sharing- has been welcomed by many.

US plays important role to avowed electoral crisis³

Afghanistan's electoral crisis has dragged two prominent U.S. Senators to Kabul to find an end to the electoral deadlock. Senator John McCain and Senator Lindsey Graham visited Kabul on July 3 and met with presidential candidates Abdullah

Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai in separate meetings. Abdullah's campaign team has expressed satisfaction over their meeting with the U.S. senators and is said to have discussed the issue of electoral fraud, emphasizing on the transparency of the elections. Ghani's campaign team also expressed satisfaction over discussions with the U.S. Senators, stating that the American senators emphasised on the transparency within the framework of the election timeline. US President Barack Obama also phoned both the presidential candidates and stressed the need for political dialogue. He reiterated all parties should avoid steps that undermine Afghan national unity and should come together to work toward a resolution that represents the will of the Afghan people and produces a government that can bring Afghanistan together. Obama noted there was no justification for resorting to violent or extra-constitutional means, which would result in the end of US assistance to Afghanistan. He indicated Secretary of State John Kerry would continue close consultations with the candidates and President Hamid Karzai. Accordingly U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Kabul on July 11 for talks with the two presidential candidates. Secretary of State talked to the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Ján Kubiš, who proposed mechanisms on auditing polling sites and votes in a two-week time frame and then discussed the issue with Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmedzai separately at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. He announced that both the candidates have agreed to abide by a 100 percent, internationally supervised audit of all ballots in the presidential election in Kabul and agreed to a national unity government. Kerry also met with current Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Ghor victims killed by freed Taliban militants⁴

Reportedly, a number of Taliban commanders who have been released from prison have returned to the battlefield. President Hamid Karzai himself has been a major proponent of releasing suspected militants from custody, especially those who were arrested with the help of NATO forces. This policy has further aggravated tensions between him and the Western countries that support the Afghan government, and caused major backlash among top Afghan leaders as well. Residents and activists from around Ghor province gathered in the capital of Ferozkoh on July 26 to voice criticism of the government for releasing Taliban militants who they claim were involved in the mass killing of 16 civilians in Ghor. The Ghor Police Chief has said that the group of militants that brutally shot down the civilians was led by Qari Rahmatullah and Mullah Farooq, who were both previously released from the prison of Ghor province. Since they were freed, Ghor police claim the two men have formed a band of over 2,000 militants that are disrupting security in the province. President Karzai's First Vice President Muhammad Younus Qanooni also strongly criticised the government's policy toward the Taliban, stating that the released Taliban commanders have returned to insurgency and contributed to rising insecurities in the country.

400 oil tankers torched outside Kabul⁵

At least 400 tankers reportedly transporting oil for security forces caught fire overnight in Paghman district outside Kabul. The Taliban said they launched a rocket attack on the tankers parked at the Arghandi market, destroying hundreds of the vehicles with logistics for foreign troops.

89 Afghans die in deadly suicide attack in Paktika⁶

At least 89 civilians were killed and nearly fifty others were wounded when a suicide bomber detonated his explosive-laden truck in a marketplace in Argon district in eastern Paktika province, bordering Pakistan on July 15. The Afghan Ministry of Interior blamed the Taliban for the attack. However, the Taliban rejected the blame. The UN has condemned the attack in strongest terms. Religious scholar Mawlawi Hedayat also condemned the attack, saying it was against Islam's principles, particularly during the month of Ramadan.

Pakistan has direct link in Helmand clashes: Spanta⁷

Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, national security advisor to President Hamid Karzai, visited Islamabad along with a delegation of high level government officials in the last week of June to hold talks regarding cross-border shelling in Kunar and other issues. Spanta said he is still doubtful regarding Pakistan's sincere cooperation in fight against terrorism, despite he called his recent trip to Pakistan satisfactory. Spanta added that the issue was shared during his recent visit to Islamabad and serious talks were held in this regard with the Pakistani officials. He said Pakistani militia forces were seen in Helmand clashes and other parts of the country where major attacks have taken place against the Afghan forces.

57 project proposals signed with Kabul: India⁸

India and Afghanistan have signed 57 project proposals for which financial approvals have been received from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, the Indian Embassy in Kabul said. Since 2002, India has committed \$2 billion to socio-economic rebuilding of the Afghan state and society in accordance with development priorities of the government and the people of Afghanistan. As part of India's bilateral and demand-driven development partnership with Afghanistan, the Small Development Projects (SDP) scheme was launched in 2006 to address the socio-economic and development needs of rural communities in Afghanistan. The Afghan Ministry of Economy was designated as the coordinating body for the scheme on the Afghan side. Phase I and II of the SDP scheme had an outlay of \$20 million. In November 2012, India and Afghanistan signed an MoU for Phase III of the SDP scheme. The projects are to be identified by provincial authorities, mainly governors, and the project proposal is prepared/fine-tuned by the relevant line ministry. On July 16, 2014 the Embassy of India, the Afghan Ministry of Economy and the relevant line ministry signed 51 project proposals approved under Phase III of the SDP scheme. The proposals pertain to the public health sector in Afghanistan and involve the construction of Basic Health Clinics (BHCs) and Community Health Clinics (CHCs) in 17 provinces of Afghanistan. The provinces are Badakhshan, Bamyan, Balkh, Dai Kundi, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kapisa, Laghman, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Paktika, Panjsher, Sar-i-Pul, Samangan, Takhar and Zabul. Of the six project proposals, four are related to education sector (construction of schools) in Badakhshan, Nimroz and Paktika. The other two projects are related to the agriculture sector in Kandahar. In July 2013, 60 MoUs pertaining to SDP Phase III projects were signed. With the signing of MoUs for another 51 SDP Phase III projects, the total value of approved projects under SDP Phase III scheme stands at US\$ 24.704 million.

Bangladesh

Afghanistan ranks 169 in the UNDP's human development report⁹

Afghanistan has been ranked 169th among 187 countries and territories in UNDP's new Human Development Report that was released in Japan on July 24, 2014.

Hasina attends Girl Summit in London¹⁰

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina led a 20-member delegation to London to attend the first ever Girl Summit in London organised by the United Kingdom and the UNICEF. Ministers and officials of 55 countries, and UN officials attended the summit from July 21-23. It was Hasina's first visit to any Western country after the Awami League (AL) assumed office through January's controversial elections of which the Western powers were critical.

Bangladesh condemns Israeli aggression on the civilian population in Gaza¹¹

Bangladesh has strongly condemned the Israeli aggression and called for an immediate cessation of its atrocities on the civilian population in Gaza. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement said that Bangladesh maintains its principled position on a comprehensive solution of the Palestine issue in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions, the Arab Peace Plan and the Road Map and firmly believes that Palestinians must have their own independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Bangladesh calls upon all parties to exercise maximum restraint to avoid further loss of lives and resume dialogue to revive the peace process at the earliest towards a two-state solution. Addressing an open debate at the UN Security Council on 'Situation in the Middle East including question of Palestine' Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations AK Abdul Momen urged the Security Council and the world leaders to take necessary steps to stop killings of the Palestinians. He hoped the Security Council will play a role of mediator for finding a sustainable political solution to the crisis, ensuring peaceful coexistence of both Israel and Palestine as independent states.

BSF and BGB officials discuss border killings at the courtesy meeting in Panchagarh district¹²

Director General of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) DK Pathan said efforts would be taken to bring the killings on the Bangladesh-India border to zero level. He assured this during a courtesy meet with the BGB officials at Banglabandha Zero point of the border in Tentulia upazila of Panchagarh district on July 19, 2014. Regional Commander of Rangpur Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Brigadier General Latiful Haidar appealed him not to hand over Bangladeshi nationals to Indian police following detention on charge of intrusion. BGB asked BSF to hand the Bangladeshis over to BGB who cross the border illegally. During the short meeting, the two sides also agreed to maintain peace along the border and resist different trans-border crimes through joint cooperation. They also stressed on showing highest restraint in special circumstances and resolving border problems through discussion. The other issues discussed at the meeting included curbing drug smuggling, intrusion and trafficking of women and children.

Bangladesh and Bhutan sign MoU on money laundering & terrorist financing¹³

Bangladesh and Bhutan have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to exchange information on money laundering and terrorist financing. Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) and the Financial Intelligence Unit of Bhutan inked the deal in Macau on July 16, 2014. The deal was signed on the sidelines of the 17th annual meeting of Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering in Macau.

International tribunal awards Bangladesh 19,467 sq km area out of the disputed area¹⁴

The international arbitral tribunal awarded Bangladesh 19,467 sq km area out of the disputed 25,602 sq km. The verdict ensured Bangladesh more than 1,18,813 sq km of waters comprising territorial sea, exclusive economic zone and also undeniable sovereign rights in the seabed extending as far as 354 nautical miles from the Chittagong coast in the Bay. The judgment is final and binding on both India and Bangladesh, and cannot be appealed against. "It is a victory for both states, it is the victory of friendship and it is a win-win situation for the people of Bangladesh and India because it finally resolves [the issue] peacefully and according to international law," Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali told a press conference at the foreign ministry. Syed Akbaruddin, spokesperson for the Indian external affairs ministry, said, "we respect the verdict of the tribunal and are in the process of studying the award and its full implications..."

Allocation for Bangladesh cut by 40 percent¹⁵

The Indian government in its new budget has cut the grants and loans to Bangladesh by about 40 percent. In the last budget, the allocation for Bangladesh was Rs 580 crore, but this fiscal year (2014-2015) the amount has been slashed to Rs 350 crore.

Inflation drops to a 17 month low¹⁶

Inflation slipped below 7 percent for the first time since January 2013 on the back of big drops in food prices. It slowed 51 basis points month-on-month to 6.97 percent in June, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The significant decline in food inflation was propelled by the drop in rice prices with the harvesting of what reportedly has been a bumper boro crop.

Remittances decline by 1.6%¹⁷

For the first time in 13 years, Bangladesh experienced a decline in remittances in the just concluded fiscal year, when the country received \$14.23 billion, a fall by 1.6 percent from \$14.46 billion a year ago, according to central bank data. Remittances from Saudi Arabia, which has been the biggest market for Bangladeshi workers for years, fell 18.55 percent year-on-year to \$3.12 billion in 2013-14. Inward remittances were \$2.86 billion from the United Arab Emirates, down by more than \$144 million or 5.1 percent than a year ago. Remittances also declined by \$80 million from Kuwait, another major destination for Bangladeshi workers. Of the top-performing markets except the US, earnings from Malaysia grew 6.74 percent year-on-year to \$1.06 billion. Only 450,000 Bangladeshis managed overseas jobs in 2013, down by more than 33 percent from 680,000 in 2012, government data shows. Overall remittances from eight Middle East countries stood at \$8.4

billion in 2013-14, down from \$9.16 billion in the previous year, while the combined inflow from other countries increased to \$5.82 billion from \$5.29 billion a year ago.

Non-resident Bangladeshis in the USA urge Congressmen to revive GSP¹⁸

Leaders of Bangladeshi American Democratic Caucus, a platform of non-resident Bangladeshis in the USA, sought cooperation of congressmen in the reinstatement of a trade privilege -generalised system of preferences (GSP)- that was blocked last year. They also demanded duty-free access for Bangladeshi garment items to the US market. The demands were made during a series of meetings held in the USA with 12 congressmen or their representatives. The caucus leaders met congressmen Sander Levin, John Conyers, Gary Peters, Chris Van Hollen, John Dingell, and representatives of congressmen George Miller, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Chris Van Hollen, Mike Honda, Keith Ellison, Gerry Connolly and Rush Holt. The Obama administration suspended the GSP for Bangladesh in June last year, citing serious shortcomings in workplace safety and labour rights. Currently, Bangladeshi garment exporters pay 15.61 percent duty on exports to the US. In 2013 garment exporters paid \$828 million as duty to the US customs for exporting a little above \$5 billion worth of products.

Leather sector sees record exports¹⁹

The leather industry has set records for exports that soared 32.12 percent year-on-year to \$1.29 billion in the immediate past fiscal year, according to Export Promotion Bureau. Competitive prices and improved quality of Bangladeshi products that rope in more and more European and Japanese consumers and rising costs in China have led to the growth. Also, the earnings in fiscal 2013-14 were 6.59 percent higher than the target set at \$1.21 billion for the sector.

Ban on marriage with Rohingya refugees²⁰

Bangladesh government has prohibited marriages between Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis, considering that such marriages create social and cultural problems and force it to give citizenship to refugees. The inspector general of registration under the law ministry issued a circular on July 10, 2014 asking the marriage registration offices across the country to prevent kazis from conducting any marriage between refugees, who are the nationals of Myanmar, and Bangladeshi citizens. Rohingya refugees, who live in a certain area in the country, wed Bangladeshi nationals, and after the marriage they get citizenship and Bangladeshi passport, according to IGR Khan Md Abdul Mannan. With the passports, Rohingyas went to different countries, including Saudi Arabia, and committed crimes there tarnishing the image of the country. The government even faced many problems because of them, Abdul Mannan added.

Bangladesh ranks 142 in the HDI²¹

Bangladesh has moved one notch up to the 142nd place in the Human Development Index (HDI) among 187 countries for its progress in health sector and reducing gender gap, says a UNDP report titled "Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience". It puts Bangladesh among the 18 countries

Bhutan

showing extraordinary progress in human development. This year, the UNDP has also introduced a Gender Development Index (GDI) where Bangladesh ranks 107th, well ahead of India and Pakistan at 132nd and 145th places respectively.

PM visits Japan²²

Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay, accompanied by the agriculture and foreign ministers went to Japan on a four-day visit on the invitation of the government of Japan. During the visit, Tshering Tobgay met with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and discussed bilateral, regional, international and issues of mutual interests. During the meeting, the Japanese Prime Minister pointed out that relations between the two countries are advancing "remarkably" as a result of a state visit to Japan by Their Majesties the King and Queen in 2011. Prime Minister Abe said that he would like to further strengthen relations with the country. He proposed for establishing director-general level consultations to broadly discuss Bhutan-Japan bilateral relations, including politics, economics and culture. He also assured that Japan would continue to support Bhutan particularly in the fields of agriculture and basic infrastructure. Japan has agreed, in principle, to provide Bhutan with 1,450 power tillers. Under the KR-II grants, Japan has provided 2,795 power tillers so far. In an effort to encourage and strengthen people-to-people and sports exchanges, Prime Minister Abe said that Japan intends to donate 100 judo uniforms to Bhutan as a start. Lyonchhoen added that he hopes more Japanese will visit Bhutan so that people-to-people exchanges are strengthened. Lyonchhoen extended Bhutan's support to Japan to become a permanent member of the UNSC. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced that the Japanese government and private sector will examine how to support Bhutan's electric vehicle efforts during a joint press conference following the meeting. Meetings to discuss areas of cooperation with the economic revitalisation minister Akira Amari, agriculture, forestry and fisheries minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, and parliamentary vice minister Seiji Kihara also took place. Lyonchhoen also met with the president of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and executives of various companies to explore trade and investment opportunities between the two countries.

Bid to make Kyoto and Thimphu sister cities²³

The mayor of the Japanese city Kyoto has officially proposed to the foreign ministry of Bhutan to make Thimphu and Kyoto sister cities. Kyoto city mayor's concept to tie up the two cities goes back to the visit, the King made to Japan after the royal wedding in 2011.

22nd round of boundary talks between Bhutan and China²⁴

Delegations from Bhutan and China met in Wutai Shan, Shanxi province in China for the 22nd round of boundary talks on July 25. During the talk both the countries endorsed the report of a joint technical field survey of Bayul Pasamlung. Bayul Pasamlung comprises of 495 square kilometres of disputed territory in the north of the country. The joint survey was carried out in September last year. This was followed by an expert group meeting in March this year to discuss and draft a joint report for submission to the two governments. It was also decided at the meeting that the expert group would meet in Bhutan later this year. The Bhutanese

delegation was led by the foreign minister Rinzin Dorjee and includes foreign secretary Yeshey Dorji, ambassador of Bhutan to India Major General Vetsop Namgyel, international boundaries secretary Dasho Pema Wangchuk, and other senior government officials. The Chinese side was led by vice foreign minister Liu Zhenmin.

Bhutan hosts the SAFTA meeting for the first time²⁵

The SAARC Secretary General, Commerce Ministers and heads of delegation from SAARC member countries attended the SAFTA ministerial council meeting in Thimphu. The delegates made a joint call on to Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay and discussed the need for more economic integration, ensuring regional connectivity, increasing competitiveness and diversifying trade opportunities within the SAARC member countries.

Bhutan and Nepal hold bilateral discussions²⁶

Tourism, indigenous crafts, and hydropower are the three areas, which Bhutan and Nepal have identified to explore for expertise and resources. This was discussed at the bilateral meeting between the Bhutan's economic affairs minister Norbu Wangchuk and the Nepalese minister for commerce and supplies Sunil Bahadur Thapa on July 24 in Thimphu. The meeting also identified areas where the two countries could share expertise and experiences in the crafts industries. This, according to the economic affairs minister, would not only help Bhutanese handicraft artisans, but also help the craft industry. In hydropower, the ministers agreed to share experience and exchange the expertise, which would be beneficial for both countries. The meeting also agreed that people to people contact must continue, in which both the countries explored the possibilities of meeting at the political level frequently.

Bhutan-Bangladesh discuss bilateral trade²⁷

Economics affairs minister Norbu Wangchuk and Bangladesh's commerce minister Tofail Ahmed met on July 23 and discussed bilateral trade. The first bilateral trade agreement between two countries was signed in 1980 and renewed in 2008. From the renewed agreement, 18 major categories of duty free import items from Bangladesh were identified. "Bangladesh is the only country in the SAARC region with which Bhutan's trade is surplus," Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuk said, referring to the country's export value exceeding the import value. However, under the SAFTA revised sensitive list, Bangladesh has 987 different commodities in the list, including fish, fruits, petroleum oil, cosmetics, chemicals and tobacco products, among others. Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuk said the Bhutanese government has asked Bangladesh to reduce their sensitive list. "They assured us they'll look at it favourably," he said. Another agenda on the discussion was the inland water transit route. During the secretary level meeting held in April this year, Bangladesh agreed to allow the use of its inland water route and port for Bhutanese imports and export from the third countries. The inland water transport routes will stretch from the Indian territory through the Brahmaputra river till Mongla and Chittagong in Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh.

Rupee inflow surpasses outflow²⁸

In first quarter of the year, the inflow of rupees has surpassed the outflow by Rs 6.9 billion, setting a record high in many years. This is mainly attributed to the increased grant portion received from the government of India. Within the first three months of this year, total INR inflow stood at Rs 23.7 billion against the total outflow of Rs 16.8 billion. Of the total inflow, government of India grants constituted Rs 8.7 billion. Earning from the export of hydropower was Rs 548 million in the three months. The total rupee reserve in the country has increased by about INR 9.5 billion within a month. As of May 31 this year, the total INR reserve was 14.3 billion, and in April it was just INR 4.8 billion. The Royal Monetary Authority (RMA) alone has maintained a reserve of INR 13.4 billion, and the remainder was with the four commercial banks. However, as of March this year, the rupee debt stood at 62 billion, covering 62.5 percent of the total debt. This is an increase of about INR 1 billion compared with the previous year.

Maldives

Maldives calls for greater commitment towards development of SIDS²⁹

Maldives minister of state for environment and energy Abdulla Majeed, speaking at the first session of UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), has called on the international community to pay adequate attention to the issues of the of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The First Session of the UNEA was held from June 23 to 27 at the UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. Abdulla Majeed reaffirmed Maldives' commitment towards sustainable development, and highlighted the difficulties faced in the Maldives in the aspect in terms of ecological fragility and structural vulnerability. Majeed also assured the UNEA gathering of Maldives' commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and noted its progress thus far, having achieved 5 of the 8 MDGs, making Maldives a front-runner in the South Asian region.

Maldives for stronger action against Israel³⁰

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has condemned the continued Israeli aggression and the gross violation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory. In a statement issued by the President's Office on July 10, the President described the aggressions as a deliberate massacre of innocent civilians by Israel, and noted that Maldivians empathise with the suffering that their Palestinian brothers and sisters are enduring during the holy month of Ramadan. Later, Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon has urged the United Nations Security Council to take urgent and stronger action against Israel. This came in a statement issued by the Foreign Minister on July 24, 2014 condemning the Israeli bombing of a UN shelter in Beit Hanoun in Palestine which killed nearly 30 Palestinians, including infants. "It is a cowardly and shameful act on the part of Israel to target a UN shelter whose exact coordinates were given to the Israeli military by the UN. It again underscores the need for the UN Security Council to take urgent and stronger actions against Israel. The international community has a duty to put pressure on Israel to stop the killing and to end the crippling blockade of Gaza," read the statement. Maldives has co-sponsored Resolution at the UN Human Rights Council to set up an International Commission of Inquiry to investigate the atrocities committed by Israel in the current conflict. Maldivian government has banned the

import of Israeli products to the Maldives with effect from July 25, in condemnation of the Israeli offensive on Palestine. According to customs records, products worth about MVR 9 million were imported last year and products worth about MVR 3 million have been imported so far this year to the Maldives from Israel. In addition to the ban on the import of Israeli products, the government has also annulled three agreements signed with Israel by the administration of former President Mohamed Nasheed.

UN resident coordinator in Maldives meets vice president³¹

UN resident coordinator in Maldives Dr. Makjema Magtymova called on Vice President Dr. Mohamed Jameel Ahmed on July 14, 2014. At the meeting held at the President's Office, Dr. Magtymova expressed her gratitude to the Maldivian Government for their continued assistance to the UN Offices in the Maldives. She also commended the government on its laudable socio-economic programs that have assisted the development of the country. Accordingly, Dr. Magtymova noted that the UN was keen to support the further advancement of the country's developmental aspirations, particularly through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). She also stated that the UN was eager to offer technical and other assistance to the Maldives to overcome the existing socio-economic challenges in the country. On behalf of the government, Vice President Jameel extended his appreciation to the UN country office for its continued support and assistance to the Maldives.

Minister of Foreign Affairs discusses the arrest of Russian hacker with Russian officials³²

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon and Attorney General Mohamed Anil have departed to Colombo to discuss the arrest of Russian hacker Roman Valerevich Seleznev in the Maldives. During the visit, they met with senior officials of the Russian embassy in Colombo and share information related to Seleznev's arrest. Seleznev, the son of Russian member of parliament, was arrested on July 5 at Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA) in the Maldives. Russian paper RT has reported that he was put on a flight to Guam, a U.S. territory in the Western Pacific Ocean. The Russian government has said that it considers Seleznev's arrest as "a new hostile move by Washington", and has accused the U.S. of ignoring proper procedure in dealing with foreign nationals suspected of crimes. Moscow has also demanded that the Maldives government provides necessary explanations for Seleznev's arrest.

President congratulates Joko Widodo³³

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has sent a congratulatory message to the President-elect of the Republic of Indonesia Joko Widodo following his recent victory in the presidential elections.

EC reinstates eight political parties³⁴

Elections Commission (EC) has included eight political parties in the political party registry after removing them in February for failing to maintain a minimum of 3,000 members. EC said that following a Supreme Court ruling that said that the

parties still existed as political entities in the Maldives, the commission decided to reinstate the parties and declared that the parties were no longer dissolved. The eight parties reinstated by EC are: Islamic Democratic Party, Maldives Social Democratic Party, Social Liberal Party, People's Party, Maldives National Congress, People's Alliance and Maldivian Labour Party. Registered political parties in the Maldives receive funds from the State.

Maldives tourist arrivals increased by 11 percent³⁵

Maldives welcomed a total of 518,166 tourists from January to May 2014, registering a strong growth of 11.9 percent compared to the same period of 2013. According to numbers published by the Tourism Ministry on June 25, Maldives received 91,296 tourists in May 2014, a 14.9 percent increase compared to May last year. Tourist arrivals from the European region reached a total of 253,602 at the end May 2014. Total arrivals from the Asia and the Pacific region for the period from January to May 2014 were recorded to be 229,847, a 24.7 percent increase over the same period of 2013. America, which was the third leading region with 3.4 percent shares, brought in 17,470 tourists to the Maldives during the period January to May 2014, a growth of 32 percent. Maldives received a total of 141,249 tourists from China at the end of May 2014, a 23.3 percent increase over the same period of 2013, the most arrivals received from a single country.

Nepal

Sushma Swaraj co-chairs Nepal-India Joint Commission in Kathmandu³⁶

The Nepal-India Joint Commission meeting on July 26 held after an interval of 23 years. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj co-chaired the meeting. The joint commission signed a 26-point agreement, including the one on holding discussions at the secretary level on political, security, boundary-related issues and review of the Nepal-India Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950. Respective foreign secretaries of the two countries will head a panel of Eminent Group of Persons such as parliamentarians, lawyers, economists and civil society members for preparing a report and a set of recommendations within two years. The two sides also agreed to harness the abundant hydropower potential of Nepal for shared benefits and to set up a Boundary Working Group to settle border disputes in three particular areas—Susta (Uttar Pradesh), Kalapani (Uttarakhand) and Ilam (West Bengal) and to complete boundary mapping. At the joint-commission meeting, the Nepali side sought Indian aid for infrastructure projects such as Kathmandu-Tarai Fast Track, blacktopping of the eastern sector of the Mid-Hill Highway that links Chiwa Pass in Sikkim (352km), widening the eastern and central sectors of East West Highway (472km), a multi-lane bridge over the Mahakali river in Mahendranagar, another suspension bridge over Mahakali river, and motorable bridge in Baitadi and Darchula districts. Besides co-chairing the third meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission, Swaraj took stock of the political situation in Nepal and urged Nepali leaders to promulgate an inclusive constitution on the promised date during her three day visit to Nepal. Minister Swaraj also called on President Ram Baran Yadav at the latter's office in Sheetal Niwas, Maharajgunj in Kathmandu. The visit also prepared the ground for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal. Wrapping up a three-day visit, Indian External Affairs Minister Swaraj on July 27 said her time in Nepal had been fruitful and the achievements exceeded her expectations.

Nepal-India Bilateral Consultative Group meeting on security³⁷

The 11th meeting of Nepal-India Bilateral Consultative Group (BGC) on Security issues concluded in Kathmandu on July 7. The Nepali delegation was led by Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amrit Bahadur Rai, while Indian delegation was led by Abhay Thakur, joint secretary at the Ministry of External Affairs Nepal, Bhutan Desk (North). The meeting was mainly focused on military training, defence hardware, and information sharing. It also reviewed the progress made on the decision of the 10th BGC meeting. The next BGC meeting will take place in India in 2015. Though the Indian side expressed its readiness to extend support on Nepal's request to resume the military supplies, equipment and stores, both sides maintained silence over modality of such cooperation and its framework. According to media report, the Nepal Army had been seeking to purchase more than 26,000 weapons of various kinds including several thousand Indian-made Insas rifles; more than 11 million rounds of ammunition; bomb disposal equipment and explosives for training purpose. Also on the Nepal Army shopping list are landmine, detonators, safety fuses and time pencils. India will be providing some of the weapons in grant, while some will be on loan after a down payment of 60 percent, according to Nepali officials.

Indian assistance to Nepal³⁸

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on July 7 between the District Development Committee, Kathmandu; Budhanilkantha Narayan Area Management Committee and Embassy of India, Kathmandu for providing Indian grant assistance of Rs. 21.76 million for the construction of Mathadhis Building for Budhanilkantha temple under Nepal- India Economic Cooperation Programme. Indian government has pledged financial assistance of Rs 83.62 million for various projects to be undertaken in Lalitpur and Nuwakot districts. Two separate MoUs were signed on July 29, 2014 with Nuwakot District Development Committee and Tribhuvan Trishuli Higher Secondary School for construction of school building. Similarly, another MoU was signed with Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City Office and the Society for Development of Lalitpur for renovation of sites of historical and cultural importance in the district, said a statement issued by the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. The new building being constructed in Nuwakot with Indian aid of Rs 36.32 million will provide better facilities to over 1,100 students. In addition, building construction of Nuwakot Adarsha Multiple campus is completed with Rs 2.4 million and work is ongoing for five projects at a cost of Rs 86.5 million in the district. India has also provided six ambulances in the district. In Lalitpur, Indian aid of Rs 36.16 million will be used for the renovation of Kul Devata Aagan Ghar, Lukhusi Pati, Shreebachchha Mahabir Aaju Niwas, Bhinchayya Bahal Digi, Bhindya Lachi Chapa and Nahbahal Tole Sudhar Chhen. India is providing assistance of Rs 11.14 million for the renovation of Ganga Pokhari, Mahayan Boudha Samaj Gumba, and remodelling of Mahayan Boudha Samaj Gumba. Likewise, three other projects in Lalitpur have been completed with Indian grant assistance of Rs 85.2 million and two projects at a cost of Rs 52.5 million are under way.

Opposition to India's hydropower proposal³⁹

Five parties including the major opposition UCPN (Maoist) have urged the government to reject the Indian hydropower proposal, concluding that the proposal from the southern neighbour is against national interest. A meeting including the leaders from UCPN (M), CPN-Maoist, Matrika Yadav-led Maoist party, Mani Thapa-led Revolutionary Communist Party and CPN-Unified led by Pari Thapa concluded that the Indian proposal came with the intention to create monopoly on Nepal's water, energy resources, urging the government to take call on the matter only after reaching national consensus. The alliance further warned of protests if the government did not pay heed to their plea. The Indian proposal on 'Cooperation in Power Sector' has generated controversy as several Nepali media have criticised the proposal saying that it would warrant the Indian side's domination in Nepal's energy sector including generation and power trading. The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has, however, refuted the media reports regarding its energy and power proposal claiming that India's proposal of cooperation in the hydro sector is not against Nepal's interests.

Duty-free access in US sought for all Nepali products⁴⁰

Nepal has requested the United States to provide duty-free access facility to all Nepali products. At a preparatory meeting for the Nepal-US Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) in Kathmandu on July 30, Nepali officials made such a request, citing Nepal's "underdevelopment status". During the meeting, Nepal also sought the US support in capacity building of Nepali exporters, preferential treatment to Nepali services and promotion of Nepali products in the US market. Nepal also asked the US to incorporate the issue of strengthening of Nepal's trade sector in the US Development Cooperation Strategy for Nepal. The US side has asked Nepal to carry out reforms in legal and policy sectors to make them more transparent and understandable to US investors.

US provides four emergency bridges to NA⁴¹

The United States has provided four Acrow emergency bridges to the Nepal Army (NA) for use during natural disasters. The bridges can also be used as temporary detours or permanent movable bridges. Addressing the handover ceremony, US Ambassador Peter W Bodde said that his country stands ready to assist Nepal in its disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities by helping develop disaster response capabilities in various agencies.

Finance Minister presents annual budget⁴²

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat on July 13 presented the annual budget of Rs 618 billion focusing on economic reforms, energy, infrastructure and agriculture. The budget has promised amending the existing Company Act, Competition Act and Market Protection Act and Insolvency Act to ease set up, renew and liquidate companies. Industrial Enterprise Act, Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act, Foreign Investment Policy, Industrial Intellectual Property, Special Economic Zone Act, Electricity Act, New Labour Act and Public Procurement Act are among legal and policy documents to be either amended or new Acts will be introduced, according to the budget. The main opposition UCPN (Maoist) has said the

annual budget presented by the government in Parliament is against the spirit of federalism, alleging that the fiscal document fails to address the concerns of the oppressed and marginalised people. The party argues that the neo-liberal economic policy, which the budget is said to promote, and privatisation are not in national interest. The third largest party in the Constituent Assembly has expressed its displeasure saying that the budget is apathetic to the concerns of Dalit, Muslim and marginalised communities. Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal Chairman Kamal Thapa charged that the budget provides no pill for the country's sick economy. He said the document had no measure to address the unemployment problem. Thapa expressed fears that the new policies could fuel inflation. Jitendra Narayan Dev of Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik) said the budget has put development in Tarai on the backburner.

IDA of World Bank provides assistance to Nepal⁴³

International Development Association (IDA) of World Bank (WB) has provided US \$ 72 million to Nepal for the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Improvement Project (RWSSIP). Of the assistance provided by the IDA, US \$ 50 million is loan and US \$ 22 million is grant. The document to this effect was signed between World Bank head of country office Bigyan Pradhan and Finance Ministry Joint Secretary Madhu Kumar Marasini at the Ministry of Finance on July 11.

ADB approves \$ 180 million loan to Nepal⁴⁴

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$ 180 million loan to help Nepal overcome crippling power shortages and export surplus power to neighbouring India. The loan, from the ADB's concessional resources will be complemented by a co-financing loan of \$ 120 million from the European Investment Bank, a \$ 60 million grant from the government of Norway, and \$ 11.2 million grant from the ADB-administered Strategic Climate Fund. The loan will help the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) finance a substantial upgrade and expansion of transmission and distribution lines and substations, allowing the transfer of up to 2,000 MW of power to main load centres in the Kathmandu valley. This network expansion will also give Nepal the ability to export at least 1,200 MW of electricity to India, once a second 400 KV cross-border transmission line from Bardaghat to Gorakhpur in India is complete.

Sub-committee to find consensus on issues settled by previous CA⁴⁵

A meeting of the Constituent Assembly's (CA) Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (PDCC) formed a sub-committee to forge consensus on the issues settled by the Dispute Resolution Subcommittee of the previous CA. The members of the new subcommittee are Arjun Nar Singh KC, Keshav Prasad Badal, Dimpal Kumari Jha, Dil Nath Giri, Prem Bahadur Singh, Laxman Rajbansi, Laxman Lal Karna and Shiva Kumar Mandal. CPN-Maoist Chairman Mohan Baidya, however, has refused to hold talks with the Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee under the CA. He said that there was no point in holding discussion with a committee under the CA which cannot give a people's constitution.

Seven party alliance for single identity-based federalism⁴⁶

The UCPN (Maoist), the Federal Socialist Party-Nepal (FSPN) and five Madhes-based parties have formed an alliance to advocate for a single ethnicity-based federalism with right to self-determination, political prerogative and full autonomy of provinces. Besides the UCPN (Maoist) and the FSPN, the alliance members include Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Nepal, Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Loktantrik, Sadbhawana Party, Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party and Tarai Madhes Sadhbhawana Party. The objective of the alliance, according to its leaders, is to launch a joint struggle for a progressive constitution that addresses the aspirations of various political movements and against the status quo mindset of the big parties. The ruling NC and UML are opposed to single ethnicity-based federalism, saying that it could disintegrate the country. The UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal said the alliance will pressure NC and UML into respecting the agendas of change and ensuring a proportional and participatory constitution.

UCPN (Maoist) forms committee to settle intra-party conflict⁴⁷

After senior party leader Baburam Bhattarai intensified formation of parallel party structures, the UCPN (Maoist) has formed two committees to manage the escalating intra-party conflict. The party's Standing Committee meeting formed ideological debate management committee led by Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal with Bhattarai as a member and a second committee under Barsha Man Pun to find out the problems within the party's organisational structures. The other members are Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Post Bahadur Bogati, Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Top Bahadur Mahara. The committee would try to hold a healthy discussion among the party cadres about the ideological differences between Dahal and Bhattarai and resolve them.

Nepal ranks 145th in the HDI⁴⁸

Nepal has improved its human development index (HDI) value in the latest Human Development Report (HDR) 2014. According to the HDR 2014, Nepal's HDI value increased to 0.540 from 0.463. The HDR 2014 has ranked Nepal 145th, up from last year's 157th.

Pakistan

Operation Zarb-i-Azb⁴⁹

The Pakistan Army launched 'Zarb-i-Azb' in the tribal region a week after an attack on the airport in Karachi by deploying troops, tanks and jets to the area in the crackdown on foreign and local militants. Taking complete political ownership of the 'Zarb-i-Azb' operation, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said the decision had been taken after exhaustive deliberations. "Full fledged offensive has now started and all foreign fighters and local terrorists will be wiped out without exception and no sanctuary will be spared by the Pakistan Armed Forces," the PM said in an official statement. "The state will enforce its writ in the tribal areas," the PM said in a warning to terrorists. "We have planned the development of tribal areas after completion of the operation," Nawaz said. After clearance of Miramshah, Boya and Degan areas from terrorists, Pakistani military claimed that 70 percent of Mirali town along with its neighbouring villages – the second largest stronghold of militants – has been cleared by the security forces. Reportedly, a total of 570 terrorists

have been killed since the start of Zarb-i-Azb operation. 98 terrorist hideouts and 30 IED factories, three ammunition making factories and a number of suicide bomber training centres were destroyed during Operation. A key Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander, Adnan Rashid has also been reportedly arrested by Pakistani security forces in Shakai valley, on the border of North and South Waziristan during the operation. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), however, has not confirmed the development as yet. It has also been reported that one of the key al Qaeda commanders, Mufti Zubair Marwat and his two guards Anwar and Faheem were also arrested with Rashid. Mufti Zubair is the brother of Mufti Sajjad Marwat – an al Qaeda spokesman for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Assistance to the IDPs⁵⁰

Nearly 500,000 people have fled the offensive in North Waziristan. Tens of thousands of families have left for the town of Bannu, close to North Waziristan, while hundreds more have moved further afield to the towns of Lakki Marwat, Karak and Dera Ismail Khan since the Operation Zarb-i-Azb began in mid-June. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has agreed to spend \$3.75 million to support the authorities looking after the people displaced by the military operation in North Waziristan and engage them in productive work through enhancement of livelihood opportunities to meet their immediate needs like cash for work, basic skills training and business grants. The United States Embassy also announced contribution of \$9.3 million to help Pakistan meet the health, water, sanitation, and livelihood needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from North Waziristan Agency. The German government has announced one million Euro in immediate assistance to support the relief activities of the World Food Programme (WFP) in the north-west of Pakistan through a project 'Enhancing Food and Nutrition Security and Rebuilding Social Cohesion for the IDPs. Meanwhile, sources in the World Health Organization (WHO) said that the organisation has provided medicines worth US\$ 250,000 for the IDPs.

Government decides to summon the army under Article 245 to secure the capital⁵¹

Federal Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan announced the government's decision to call in the military to take control of Islamabad from August 1 for a period of three months. Various political parties have criticised the federal government for its decision and said that it was tantamount to giving an invitation to martial law in the country. In their separate statements, Qaumi Watan Party chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, Pakistan Peoples Party provincial president Khanzada Khan and Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid provincial president Intikhab Khan Chamkani condemned the government's decision to call for the army's assistance and termed it a failure of the rulers. Mr Sherpao said that the rulers were acting in panic as they had no idea how to overcome the crisis or face the emergency situation. The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf said that it would not accept the ruling Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz's (PML-N) decision to invoke Article 245 in Islamabad. PPP president Khanzada Khan also strongly opposed the government's move to call out the military in Islamabad and described the decision as a total failure of the government. He demanded of Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan to accept his failure and resign. Chaudhry Nisar rejected a perception that the army was being summoned to stop a march on the capital by

a political party and said the decision had nothing to do with any public meeting or sit-in. He accused the critics of the decision of trying to make the army controversial at a time when the country was in a war-like situation. Answering a question, he said the notification would not be withdrawn even if the PTI called off its protest march. The Islamabad Bar Association has filed a petition with the Islamabad High Court (IHC) against the government decision to call out the army to secure the federal capital.

Fatemi and Burns discuss Pakistan-US relations⁵²

Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Syed Tariq Fatemi called on American Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns at the State Department and discussed Pakistan-US relations. Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Jalil Abbas Jilani accompanied Fatemi during the meeting. Deputy Secretary Burns was assisted by Dan Feldman, Principal Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Tariq Fatemi briefed the deputy secretary on the ongoing operation in North Waziristan and highlighted the government's commitment to combat terrorism and extremism in all its forms, in a comprehensive and consensus-based approach. He further expressed the government's commitment to eliminate all terrorists without any distinction. The special assistant reiterated Pakistan's commitment in maintaining cordial relations with all its neighbours, including Afghanistan and India. He reaffirmed the US support for the prime minister's economic development plan with special focus on energy and fighting extremism. He also lauded the Prime Minister's peace initiative with India and hoped that it would help bring prosperity to the people of the two countries. Special Assistant Fatemi thanked the United States for its continued support for Pakistan's major energy projects including the Dasu Hydral project.

Foreign Office registers protest over clash on Pak-Afghan border⁵³

Pakistan summoned a senior Afghan diplomat and registered a protest over a skirmish during which Pakistani security forces foiled a militant attack on a check post on the Pak-Afghan border. Military sources were quoted as saying that six attackers were killed and nine wounded during a cross-border militant assault on a check post on the Pak-Afghan border in Lower Dir region which was repulsed by Pakistan's security forces.

India-Pakistan exchange lists of prisoners lodged in each other's prisons⁵⁴

The governments of Pakistan and India on July 1 exchanged lists of prisoners lodged in each other's respective prisons under the Consular Agreement signed between the two countries in May 2008. Lists of prisoners are to be exchanged twice a year, on January 1 and July 1 respectively. Foreign Office spokesperson Tasneem Aslam said consistent with the provisions of this agreement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handed over a list of 296 Indian prisoners in Pakistan to the High Commission of India in Islamabad. According to the list of Indian prisoners, there are currently 47 common citizens, 237 fishermen and 12 youthful offenders languishing in Pakistani jails. According to the list provided by the Indian government there are 380 Pakistani prisoners in Indian jails, including 116 fishermen and 264 common citizens. However spokesman for Pakistan High

commission to New Delhi Manzoor Ali Memon said that there are 487 Pakistani's in Indian jails adding that this is the official record which the government of Pakistan maintains.

Pakistan condemns Israeli aggression in Palestine⁵⁵

Foreign Office spokeswoman Tasneem Aslam said that Pakistan condemns Israeli aggression and supports the international community's efforts in bringing about a cessation of unilateral Israeli strikes killing Palestinians, including women and children. "Pakistan is deeply concerned over the recent escalation of violence and loss of lives in Gaza and has consistently supported the Palestinian cause, especially the two-state solution which paves the way for a viable, geographically contiguous Palestinian state, created on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with Al Quds Al-Sharif as its capital," she added. The Pakistan Army observed July 25 as a 'day of mourning' to show solidarity with the innocent people of Palestine who are being brutally subjected to terror by Israel. Throughout the day the national flag at Headquarters Southern Command, Garrison Head-quarters, Log Area Head-quarters, Staff College, Infantry School and Orchard House remained at half mast, according to Inter-Services Public Relations.

Nawaz meets Saudi leaders to discuss bilateral ties⁵⁶

Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Crown Prince, Advisor and Special Envoy of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques called on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during his private visit to Saudi Arabia. The prime minister was accompanied in the meeting by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and Hussain Nawaz. Prime Minister also met Crown Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, Saudi deputy premier and minister of defence.

Operational accord on Tapi gas pipeline signed⁵⁷

An operational agreement on the TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) gas pipeline was signed by Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India on July 8. Federal Minister for Petroleum Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Inter-State Gas Systems' managing director Mubeen Saulat represented Pakistan in the meeting and hailed the progress as a 'great milestone.' In addition to recording of pressure, points of compressors etc. all technical details, specifications of gas, gas flow, pipe length, diameter were discussed during a meeting of the Tapi Steering Committee held in Ashgabat. The accord relates to the 1,735-kilometre TAPI pipeline, which would carry gas from Turkmenistan to India while crossing through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Pakistan receives fourth IMF tranche of \$556 million⁵⁸

Pakistan has received \$556 million as the fourth instalment of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan approved last year to bolster the country's struggling economy. The fourth payment of the Extended Facility Fund (EFF) was released after an IMF team reviewed the economic performance of the country in June. Pakistan was granted the \$6.8 billion IMF bailout package last year to help the country achieve economic reforms, particularly in its troubled energy sector.

Sri Lanka

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves stood at \$7.8 billion before the EFF was approved, but now they have doubled to \$14.8 billion.

Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk appointed as the new chief justice of Pakistan⁵⁹

Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk took oath as the new chief justice of Pakistan on July 6 at Aiwan-e-Sadr. Justice Mulk will remain chief justice of Pakistan till August 16, 2015, according to information posted to the official website of the Supreme Court.

Pakistan ranks 146 in the HDI⁶⁰

Pakistan is ranked as 146th position in the current UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) list, the same as last year.

G.L. Peiris visits India⁶¹

Sri Lanka and India comprehensively discussed several issues significant to the two nations when Sri Lanka's External Affairs Minister Prof. G. L. Peiris met his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi. Among the subjects discussed, enhancing the bilateral trade between the two countries and the nagging issue of Indian fishermen dominated the discussions. With regard to issues relating to economic cooperation, the ministers discussed a range of practical modalities for enhancing the volumes of trade and investment. In this regard there was satisfaction that investment is now a two-way process between the two countries. Discussing the security and defence cooperation, both sides agreed to continue open and transparent dialogue. The two ministers also discussed regional cooperation and SAARC-related issues. Prof. Peiris complimented India on reinvigorating the Indian Ocean Rim Association during its Chairmanship. With regard to education and cultural matters, the ministers discussed scholarships and placements granted to Sri Lankan students annually under several schemes to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Indian universities. Reportedly, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had raised concerns about the media report according to which, China was allowed to build an aircraft base maintenance center in Trincomalee. G.L Peiris however, gave the assurance that Sri Lanka would not be used to target India.

Basil Rajapaksa visits China as president's special envoy⁶²

Sri Lanka's Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa visited China as the Sri Lankan president's special envoy. Minister Rajapaksa met with the Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang and discussed further strengthening the trade relations between the two countries. The Vice Premier said the Chinese government was willing to work with the Sri Lankan side to implement the consensus reached by the two presidents and deepen bilateral economic and trade cooperation. Wang called on both sides to begin negotiation on their proposed free trade agreement as soon as possible, encourage Chinese enterprises to expand investment in Sri Lanka and strengthen the strategic partnership cooperation between the two countries.

Indian air force chief visits Sri Lanka⁶³

Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha, called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees and discussed ties between both the countries. The talks with the President

focused on a number of matters pertaining to defence cooperation, including continued training and joint air force exercises. Raha, who went to Sri Lanka on July 15, also held discussions with Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka Air Force Commander Air Marshal K.A. Gunatilleke, the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army Lt. Gen. Daya Ratnayake and the Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy Vice Admiral Jayantha Perera.

Senior BJP leaders visit Sri Lanka⁶⁴

Chairman of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Committee for Strategic Action Subramanian Swamy visited Sri Lanka along with Seshadri Chari, national convener of the BJP's foreign policy cell, Suresh Prabhu, former union minister, Swapan Dasgupta, journalist and political commentator, and Madhavan Nalapat, professor of geopolitics, Manipal Academy of Higher Education. The group discussed a number of issues of bilateral and regional significance, including the functions carried out by the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Sri Lanka's strategic importance in relation to this work. They pledged their fullest support for a continued Sri Lankan role in this regard. President Rajapaksa told the team of Sri Lanka's interest in establishing a centre of excellence in maritime and environmental studies.

Japan's State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry meets President⁶⁵

Japan says President Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit to Japan in March 2013 and discussions between the President and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made it possible for the two countries to renew their relations with each other and work towards further strengthening those bilateral ties. The views were expressed when Japan's State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Kazuyoshi Akaba called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees on July 28. The primary focus of the discussion was enhancing the trade and economic relations between the two countries.

South African President Zuma's special envoy visits Sri Lanka⁶⁶

South African President Jacob Zuma's special envoy to Sri Lanka, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and his delegation visited Sri Lanka from July 7 to 8, 2014. During his two-day visit, Ramaphosa visited Jaffna and met with the representatives of Tamil political parties including the TNA leader R. Sampanthan. The South African envoy said that his country would try to help the Sri Lankans with the Truth and Reconciliation process and own constitutional reform to ensure Sri Lanka as a stable country enjoying human rights. An extremist Buddhist organisation in Sri Lanka, Ravana Power said that it would protest any attempt to manipulate South African Vice President Cyril Ramaphosa to mediate any talks between the government and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) aiming at power devolution. Addressing a media briefing in Colombo, the secretary of the Ravana Power, Ittekande Saddhathissa Thero said that the tour of the South African Vice President was a part of a pre-planned project and rejected the government's claim that it had no connection with Ramaphosa's tour.

Sri Lanka-Belarus trade talks⁶⁷

Belarus, a key member of upcoming Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), has offered Sri Lanka support in agriculture to achieve total food security, a goal Sri Lanka aims to reach by the year 2020. Sri Lanka-Belarus official trade talks commenced in Colombo on July 9 amidst avowed assertions from both sides towards forging sustainable trade links while making inroads to the huge 'New Asian; and upcoming Eurasian Union markets'.

President congratulates Joko Widodo⁶⁸

President Rajapaksa had telephoned newly elected President of Indonesia Joko Widodo to offer congratulations on his decisive victory at the recently concluded Presidential elections. During the telephone conversation, President Rajapaksa extended an invitation to him to undertake a state visit to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka expresses concerns about escalating violence in Gaza⁶⁹

President Mahinda Rajapaksa had telephoned Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and discussed the situation in Gaza. The President's office said that Rajapaksa offered his condolences to the lives lost in Gaza. The Sri Lankan Government says it welcomed the convening of a special session of the Human Rights Council held on July 23 to address the current human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and refer the Council to the statement made by Iran on behalf of the Non Aligned Movement. A statement by the External Affairs Ministry said the Government of Sri Lanka is deeply concerned at the recent escalation of violence in Gaza, resulting in the tragic loss of civilian lives, and extensive damage to property adding that one cannot remain unmoved by the cruel fate of children who are innocent victims of violence.

ADB approves \$ 300 million loan for Sri Lanka⁷⁰

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$300 million dual-tranche loan to help Sri Lanka scale up its use of clean energy and cut its reliance on costly petroleum oil for electricity generation. The first \$150 million tranche will finance a 30 MW, run-of-the-river hydropower plant at Moragolla in Central Province and expand and upgrade transmission lines and other infrastructure in needy areas, including the former conflict-affected Northern and Eastern Provinces. The hydropower plant will generate an additional 97.7 million units of hydropower for the grid, saving about 72,300 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions every year while improved transmission lines will further reduce annual CO₂ emissions by 98,400 tons. The second tranche, expected to be delivered in 2016, will include expanding the 33 kilovolt medium voltage network to improve distribution of electricity to consumers and the development of transmission network facilities to allow power delivery from two 100 MW wind parks due to be built in the Northern Province in 2017 and 2020.

President appoints international experts as advisor to the commission on missing persons⁷¹

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has expanded the mandate of the Presidential Commission on missing persons and appointed three international experts as its members— Sir Desmond de Silva, QC (Chairman), Sir Geoffrey Nice, QC and Prof. David Crane. Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said that the government would decide what advice must be accepted and implemented. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) said it had no faith in the Presidential Commission on missing persons even after the government broadened its mandate to investigate civilian deaths during the war. A spokesperson at the US Embassy in Colombo said that the US had long said that it strongly supported a credible domestic Sri Lankan process to ensure meaningful national reconciliation and resolve outstanding concerns from the conflict and therefore, hoped that the experts chosen to advise the Commission can provide the assistance needed to help it meet international standards for credibility and independence. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) says it is monitoring the latest developments in Sri Lanka after President Rajapaksa had expanded the mandate of the Missing Persons Commission. United National Party (UNP) however, criticised the development. UNP accused the Government of making a U-turn on investigations over the war by expanding the mandate of the missing persons commission and also appointing three foreign experts to oversee the investigation. "Since the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), over five years ago, the UPFA government has consistently maintained that no war crime probes were necessary since Sri Lankan troops have not committed any of them. This position has been enunciated at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and locally at different occasions. Addressing the nation on Victory Day, President Rajapaksa has repeatedly reiterated that the troops fought with the UN Human Rights Charter on one hand and a gun on the other. At last year's elections to Southern and Western Provincial Councils, he exhorted from public platforms that he would rather face the 'electric chair' than betray the troops of Sri Lanka," the UNP said. The UNP says now the UPFA Government seems to be concurring with the views of the international community that alleged war crimes should be investigated.

Australia to transfer 157 detained Sri Lankan asylum seekers⁷²

A group of 157 Sri Lankan asylum seekers being detained on a Customs ship are being transferred to the Australian mainland, ABC Radio Australia reported. According to ABC Radio 157 men, women and children are being transferred to the Cocos Islands, and from there they will be flown to the Curtin detention centre in remote Western Australia. The boat carrying the group left India early June and was intercepted by an Australian vessel nearly four weeks ago. Since then the asylum seekers have been held on board the Customs ship at an unknown location, while their legal status is determined. Their case is set to be heard by the full bench of the High Court in Canberra in August. Lawyers for one of the asylum seekers are seeking a court order preventing the Federal Government from sending the asylum seekers to Sri Lanka, Nauru, or Papua New Guinea. Instead, the group wants to be sent to Australia or another country that "has assumed the international law non-refoulement obligations".

UK's supply of weapons to Lanka increased⁷³

The British Parliament Committees on Arms Export Controls said in a report published on July 23 that the value of extant licences to Sri Lanka has risen from £8.1m (49 licences) to £49.6m (79 licences) – a rise of 614%. The Committee has sought a response from the government over the arms exports to Sri Lanka and a list of other countries. On Sri Lanka, the Committee has recommended that the British Government states in its response the reasons it considers its approved extant arms export licences to Sri Lanka for assault rifles, body armour, combat shotguns, components for assault rifles, components for body armour, components for combat shotguns, components for pistols, components for sniper rifles, components for rifles, equipment employing cryptography, pistols, rifles, small arms ammunition, sniper rifles, software for equipment employing cryptography, sporting guns and weapons.

Lanka probe from three foreign countries⁷⁴

The UN team, which has been put together to investigate allegations of human rights violations and war crimes against the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, will be holding hearings in New York, Geneva and Bangkok. The team constituted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), would seek permission to hold sittings in Sri Lanka. But it is unlikely to get it as the Lankan government has rejected any international probe. Tamil expatriates and Lankan Tamil rights groups which are very active in North America, Europe and Australia, would testify at New York, Geneva and Bangkok. Tamils living in Lanka would be interacting through telephone, video conferencing and skype. Rights groups in Lanka might organise such interactions besides travelling abroad to testify. There is no law in Sri Lanka to bar any citizen from testifying before a UN body, but government ministers have publicly warned that those bad mouthing Lanka at the UN inquiry would be dealt with. In the absence of a witness protection law, witnesses could be subjected to intimidation as has been the case in Lanka so far. However, as the proceedings of the Lankan government's own Disappearances Commission show, witnesses could brave threats and testify fearlessly. To protect witnesses against intimidation by pro-government groups, the UN team might keep their identities secret for 20 years as the earlier Darusman panel on Lanka did.

Restriction on NGOs⁷⁵

A circular from the NGO Secretariat, an institution under the Defense Ministry announced that the NGOs are not allowed to hold news conferences, workshops, training of journalists and issuing news releases stating these activities went beyond their mandate. The Civil Society Collective (CSC), an umbrella organisation of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) in Sri Lanka said that the move by the Defense Ministry to ban NGOs from conducting news conferences and workshops was unconstitutional and therefore they would ignore the ban. The EU Heads of Mission and the Ambassadors of Norway and Switzerland said they were "very concerned" about the recent efforts to restrict legitimate public activities of civil society and non-governmental organisations in Sri Lanka. In a joint statement issued by the EU office in Colombo, the Heads of Missions and Ambassadors urged the Sri Lankan authorities to respect the right of every individual to exercise their

freedom of expression, opinion, association and assembly and to take part in the public affairs without undue interference. Canadian Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights Deepak Obhrai said Canada was deeply concerned by reports of efforts to restrict legitimate activities of civil society and non-governmental organizations in Sri Lanka.

Four top LTTE cadres arrested in Malaysia⁷⁶

Malaysian Police Counter Terrorism Unit has arrested four men suspected to be top level members of the now-defunct LTTE.

G.A. Chandrasiri reappointed as governor to the north⁷⁷

Ignoring the Tamil National Alliance's (TNA) strong objections, President Mahinda Rajapaksa reappointed Major General (Retd.) G.A. Chandrasiri as governor to the Northern province. TNA leader R. Sampanthan said the government's move had indicated the careless attitude of the government about the Tamils. TNA general secretary said that the government was disturbing the reconciliation process by not listening to the northern people's concerns. The Tamil party has demanded to appoint a civil administrator in place of the former military officer. Chief Minister (CM) of Northern Province C. V. Wigneswaran has discussed about the issue of the Governor when he met the President recently. The CM has repeatedly accused the Governor of running his own administration in the Northern Province and hindering the work of the publicly elected Provincial Council.

50 Indian fishermen were arrested, 37 released⁷⁸

Reportedly in the month of July, Sri Lankan Navy arrested 50 Indian fishermen for poaching in Sri Lankan waters and seized seven boats and Sri Lankan court released 37 Indian fishermen.

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