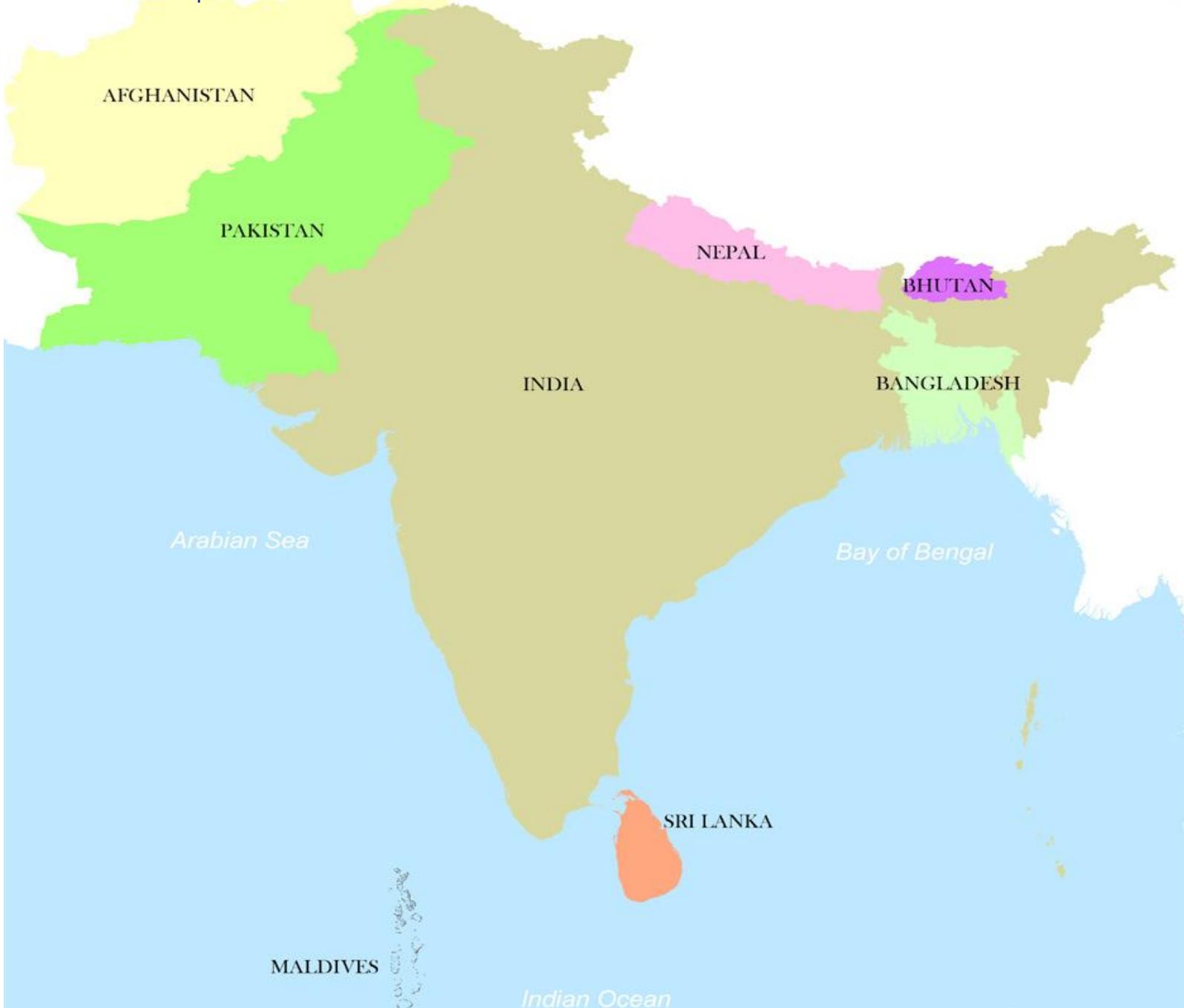


SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

June 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

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his first foreign visit to Bhutan in consonance with NDA government's emphasis on neighbourhood policy. During his oath taking ceremony in May, Modi made it very clear by inviting all the heads of the South Asian countries. Therefore, his choice of Bhutan as the first foreign destination came as no surprise. Moreover, since there is no tension between the two countries and bilateral engagement has been mutually beneficial, the visit did not require any major preparation. Following Modi's visit to Bhutan, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj made three days' official visit to Bangladesh on June 25. Unlike the PM's visit to Bhutan, Ms Swaraj's was a familiarisation visit. Meanwhile, during the month, internal security situation in Pakistan and Sri Lanka worsened- in Pakistan, due to launching of military operations against the Taliban in Pakistan following militant attack on Karachi airport, and in Sri Lanka, because of communal clash between the Muslims and Sinhala Buddhists. Afghanistan witnessed second round of Presidential election which was held despite Taliban's attempts to derail the exercise. However, both the candidates alleged massive fraud in the elections. These allegations are likely to delay the process as well as threaten the smooth transfer of power by democratic means.

South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended the 2nd China-South Asia Expo and the 22nd China Import & Export Fair at Kunming from June 6-10, 2014 with enthusiasm. High level delegation from all these countries attended the events. Nepal was the 'Theme Country' at the expo this year. Prime Minister of Nepal Sushil Koirala addressed the opening ceremony as the guest of honour.

All these important events and other developments in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the month of June are discussed in detail in this issue.

Afghanistan

Second round of presidential elections¹

Second round of presidential elections were held on June 14, 2014. Millions of Afghans, undeterred by the attempt to derail the vote by the Taliban came out for voting. The turnout was estimated by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) at more than seven million, in line with numbers in the first round. Abdullah Abdullah questioned the IEC's figures, putting the turnout at more like five million out of an estimated 12 million eligible voters. The Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA) reported that the runoff turnout was not more than six million, a figure much lower than the first round. The report also indicated that the runoff witnessed more challenges, riggings and violations compared to the first round. Abdullah led first-round results in April with 45 percent of the vote, while Ashraf Ghani lagged behind by more than 13 points. According to initial reports received by Abdullah's staff, Ghani led by close to a million votes. Abdullah said that his opponent's apparent million-vote lead in the second round elections was due to massive fraud. The Abdullah team released an unverified audiotape of Afghanistan's chief electoral officer, Zia-ul-Haq Amarkhail's conversations with his provincial staff asking them to stuff ballot boxes ahead of the runoff. At the press conference in which Ammarkhail announced his resignation, Ammarkhail denied the authenticity of the tapes and said he was stepping down only for the sake of the process and the nation's best interests. Tens of Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets of Kabul City marching alongside Abdullah Abdullah in protest of frauds that took place in the presidential runoff elections. Abdullah has suspended his relation with the electoral commissions declaring that he would not cooperate with the commissions unless the fraudulent votes are separated from the genuine votes. It is said that Dr. Abdullah's team has sent a letter to the IEC stating their every demands. Spokesperson for IEC Noor Mohammad Noor assured that the commission would separate the fraudulent ballots from the genuine votes and announce the preliminary results as scheduled on July 2. Observers fear allegations of fraud on both sides could lead to a lengthy and paralysing struggle for power along ethnic lines, threatening to derail attempts to transfer power democratically for the first time in Afghanistan's history.

1,800 US troops for Afghan counter terror: Dunford²

Following a meeting of NATO and ISAF Defense Ministers in Brussels, Afghan Minister of Defense Besmellah Muhammadi expressed immense satisfaction with the coalition's talk of continued support for the Afghan security forces. Although the exact nature of what NATO's involvement in Afghanistan after the combat mission ends in December will remain unclear, Minister Muhammadi said with confidence that support from the 28 member countries of NATO was welcomed by Afghan officials. According to Muhammadi, NATO and ISAF officials have readied plans for post-2014 support to the Afghan forces and Afghanistan's national security as a whole.

Kabul wants curbs on released taliban men lifted³

The five Taliban leaders, Mulla Muhammad Fazal Akhund, Mulla Noorulla Noori, Mulla Khairulla Khairkhwa, Mulla Abdul Haq Waseeq, Moulavi Muhammad Nabi, were released from Guantanamo detention facility in swap for the abducted US

soldier, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl. Afghan high peace council (HPC) welcomed the release of five senior Taliban leaders from Guantanamo jail. HPC officials said the release of Taliban prisoners would help Afghan peace process with the Taliban militants group. Taliban group following a statement said the prisoners exchange took place as a result of an indirect negotiation between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the United States mediated by Qatar. Taliban said the released leaders would remain with their families inside Qatar and would lead a normal life. The White House Press Secretary, Jay Carney however, said that the condition for release of five Taliban prisoners included a travel ban and information-sharing on the detainees between the United States and Qatar. "I can also tell you that the assurances were sufficient to allow the Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, in coordination with the national security team, to determine that the threat posed by the detainees to the United States would be sufficiently mitigated and that the transfer was in the US national security interest," he said. The Afghan government criticised the US for putting restrictions on the movement of five senior Taliban leaders. Afghan government wanted explanation if the freed Taliban men would remain in custody and would have no freedom in the gulf state. According to the Afghan foreign ministry, earlier, it was agreed that the five Taliban leaders would be given into the Afghan custody after their release and would be reunited with their families in any country they want, but they were taken to Qatar against all the previous agreements. The Afghan government has submitted a memorandum with the US Embassy in Kabul and also sent that to the Qatari government requesting further details about the development.

CSO releases population, GDP and inflation data for 2013⁴

According to data released by the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) on June 16, 2014 Afghanistan's population was 28.1 million, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was 6.4 percent and inflation rate was 5.6 percent in 2013.

Wolesi Jirga approves anti-money laundering Law⁵

Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of parliament, approved a draft law against money laundering by a majority vote on June 16, 2014. The anti-money laundering draft, containing 10 chapters and 70 articles, was debated for three days in the Wolesi Jirga.

Senate endorses international conventions on human trafficking and silkworm farming⁶

Already ratified by the Wolesi Jirga, the Senate on June 17 endorsed Afghanistan's membership of two international conventions on human trafficking, especially women and children, and silkworm farming.

Death toll from Baghlan floods soars to 100⁷

More than 100 people have reportedly died after flash floods swept through the Guzarga-i-Noor district of northern Baghlan province, rendering thousands of families homeless. An Afghanistan Natural Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) official said they had started the process of shipping stockpiles of food

and other supplies to the affected area. Two Army helicopters had also been sent to the area to provide assistance.

Six killed as Abdullah survives car suicide attack⁸

Six people were killed and 22 others wounded when a suicide attacker in a car targeted presidential runner Dr. Abdullah Abdullah's convoy in Kabul on June 6. Ministry of Interior Spokesman Siddiqui Siddique said the blast occurred as Abdullah's supporters started leaving the Ariana Hotel, where Abdullah addressed a rally. Soon after the blast, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah said he escaped unhurt from the assassination attempt that left some of his bodyguards mildly injured. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Bangladesh

Sushma Swaraj's visit to Bangladesh⁹

Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj made a three day official visit to Bangladesh on June 25. During the visit, Ms. Swaraj called on President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and the leader of the opposition Raushan Ershad separately. She handed over Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to Hasina for a visit to India at her earliest convenience. During the half-an-hour meeting, Khaleda congratulated the new government of India and told the visiting Indian minister that Bangladesh people want deeper relations with India. According to diplomatic sources, Khaleda at the meeting said her party would never allow Bangladesh territory to be used for terrorist activities against India or any other country. She also called upon Swaraj to resolve all the pending bilateral issues, including the Teesta water sharing treaty, for mutual benefits. During the visit, the Indian minister spoke on the theme of India-Bangladesh Relations: A Framework for Cooperation organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel. Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali and India's spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin briefed the media separately on the outcome of the meetings. "We've discussed all the issues of mutual interest in a cordial atmosphere," said Mahmood Ali, who had an hour long meeting with his Indian counterpart at the foreign ministry. Indian spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin said Bangladesh and other countries would be considered for on-arrival visa if a decision to this effect was taken. Dhaka and New Delhi also agreed to increase the service frequency of Maitree Express and AC coaches between the two countries, besides setting up four new border haats on the Meghalaya border. Moreover, he said the Indian side assured of continued efforts to bring down border killings at zero level, introduce Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati bus service on an experimental basis, provide 100-MW more electricity from Palatana plant in Tripura, extradite Bangladeshi criminals from India and hold the meeting of Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) at a convenient time. There was no discussion on the issue of illegal migration. However, extradition of fugitive Narayanganj seven-murder accused Nur Hossain from India and ULFA leader Anup Chetia from Bangladesh was discussed.

Hasina visits China¹⁰

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made a six days official visit to China on June 6, 2014. During her visit, Prime Minister Hasina met Deputy Prime Minister of China

Wang Yang at the Kunming international conference centre. She attended and addressed the opening ceremony of Second China-South Asia Exposition at Kunming International Convention and Exposition Centre. Five deals including one for building a large power plant in Patuakhali were signed between the two countries during the visit. The four other deals signed include an agreement, a memorandum of understanding and two exchange of letters to enhance cooperation in sectors like trade and investment, and climate change. During official talks with Chinese premier Li Keqiang in Beijing, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sought support for five other mega infrastructure projects such as, National ICT Network for Bangladesh government (Phase-III), construction of Rajshahi Wasa Surface Water Treatment Plant, construction of second railway/road bridge over the Karnaphuli at Kalurghat point, construction of a new dual gauge railway line from Chittagong to Cox's Bazar via Ramu and Ramu to Gundum near Bangladesh-Myanmar border, and establishment of Eastern Refinery Unit-2 and Single Point Mooring Project. The issue of constructing the Sonadia Deep-Sea Port figured prominently in the talks, and the two sides agreed to continue discussions. Sheikh Hasina also met Chinese President Xi Jinping and Yu Zhengsheng, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Cambodian Prime Minister visits Bangladesh¹¹

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen made a three-day official visit to Dhaka on June 16, 2014. The Cambodian Prime Minister led a 27-member team that included deputy prime minister and foreign minister Hor Namhong, minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries Oku Rabun, minister of culture and fine arts Phoeurng Sackona, and several other ministers and senior government officials. During the visit, both the countries signed three agreements on the establishment of a joint commission for promoting bilateral cooperation, promotion and reciprocal protection of investments and on cultural cooperation and one memorandum of understanding on scientific and technical cooperation in the field of agriculture.

OIC lauds Bangladesh's development¹²

Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Iyad Ameen Madani has lauded socio-economic development achieved by Bangladesh, and assured support for further cooperation in various fields. He paid tribute to Bangladesh for its constructive role in OIC endeavours for peace and development in the Muslim world, while Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali held a meeting with him at the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah on June 18. The Foreign Minister went to Jeddah in connection with the 41st session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) on June 18-19.

Dhaka keen to establish shipping connectivity with Sri Lanka¹³

Dhaka is keen to be a partner of Colombo's development endeavours and move forward towards establishing shipping connectivity to enhance trade between the two countries, foreign minister AH Mahmood Ali said. He spoke during a meeting with visiting Sri Lankan health minister PGYM Sirisena at the foreign ministry on June 23. Ali congratulates the Sri Lankan minister for signing a deal on procurement of pharmaceuticals and medical devices between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Tense situation in Bangladesh-Myanmar border¹⁴

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Nayek Mizanur Rahman was shot on May 28, 2014 when Border Guard Police (BGP) of Myanmar without provocation opened fire on a BGB patrol team near Border Pillar-52. The Myanmar border troops had reportedly intruded into Bangladesh territory and took away injured Mizanur. When a BGB team went near the spot on May 30 looking for Mizanur, the BGP opened fire on them that led to a gun battle. Myanmar border police finally handed over the body of Nayek Mizanur Rahman at the frontier near Painchhari of Bandarban on May 31 amid high tension on the border and diplomatic manoeuvres.

AL dismisses possibility of talk with the BNP before 2019¹⁵

Khaleda Zia told an European Union (EU) delegation on June 8 that her party was ready for a dialogue with the government anytime to reach a consensus for holding an inclusive parliamentary election. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chief came up with the remark when the delegation led by Ugo Astuto wanted to know whether her party was ready for the dialogue. The ruling Awami League (AL) leaders however, dismissed possibility of any talks before 2019, saying the country was not having a situation that warranted dialogue. The ruling party leaders also asked the BNP leadership to wait till 2019 when the next parliamentary election is due to be held. Before that, there is no scope for dialogue regarding polls, but talks can be held on important national issues, they said.

Protest against attacks on indigenous population¹⁶

Eleven rights bodies including Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, Adivasi Poribesh Rakkha Andolon, Ain o Salish Kenrda, Association for Land Reform and Development, BLAST, IED, Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, Kapaeeng Foundation, Nagorik Udyog, Green Voice and Manusher Jonno Foundation formed a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka on June 4, demanding arrest of the alleged land grabbers who attacked Khasis in Moulvibazar's Srimangal upazila. According to the human rights organisations, the attacks on the indigenous population have become more vicious than ever before while the state takes no steps to protect them. The main reason behind the violence was to evict them and grab their ancestral lands where they have been living for centuries.

Cabinet committee approves \$199 million Russian hard-term export¹⁷

The cabinet committee on purchase approved \$199 million procurement proposal under Russian hard-term export credit for the first phase of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant. Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission will procure services and goods from Russian contractor Atomstroyexport under a deal between Bangladesh and Russian governments. In the first phase, Russia is providing \$500 million hard-term loan for various activities for the construction of the power plant in Pabna. \$190 million will be used for constructing a pioneer base for the power plant, constructing and erecting a base for first stage of the construction, and for other necessary works to be performed on the site. On October 2, 2013 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the project, and set the deadline for completing the work of the first phase in June 2017.

Japan provides \$1.18 billion loans¹⁸

Japan gave Bangladesh \$1.18 billion loans for Matarbari coal-fired power plant and four other projects on June 16. Of the amount, \$406 million will be spent only to build the power plant, part of a \$4.4 billion project on the Matarbari Island of Cox's Bazar, according to a deal signed between Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Economic Relations Division (ERD). JICA will lend Bangladesh \$3.74 billion in phases for the mega project in fulfilling an earlier commitment. Bangladesh and JICA have identified Matarbari, located 60 km south of Chittagong city, as the tipping point for carrying out the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt Initiative (BIG-B).

Bangladesh signs deal with CMBEC Ltd. to construct Padma bridge¹⁹

Bangladesh government struck a deal with China Major Bridge Engineering Company Ltd. for the construction of the main part of Padma bridge on June 17, 2014. According to the agreement, the Chinese company will have to pay Tk 1,820 crore to Bangladesh as advance payment. The Chinese contractor will have to complete the construction work by 2018.

Bangladesh elected to the governing body of the ILO²⁰

Bangladesh has been elected to the governing body of International Labour Organization (ILO) for the term 2014-2017. Voting took place during the ongoing 103rd session of International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva beginning on June 2. Bangladesh received 234 votes.

Bangladesh navy contributes two more ships to the UNIFIL²¹

Bangladesh navy formally contributed two more battleships to the peacekeeping of Lebanon. Bangladesh Navy Ship Ali Haider (FFG) and Corvette BNS Nirmul replaced two other ships that Bangladesh Navy had contributed to the maritime task force (MTF) of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). BNS Osman and BNS Madhumati have been stationed in Lebanon since 2010 continuously in the world's only maritime peacekeeping by the UN.

Parliament passes budget without opposition²²

Bangladesh parliament passed the national budget for fiscal 2014-15 without any opposition from the Jatiya Party and independent members on June 29, 2014. The budget outlines a gross expenditure of Tk 382,340 crore and net expenditure of Tk 250,506 crore. Like every year, the defence ministry received the highest allocation of Tk 16,492 crore among the 56 ministries and divisions. The education ministry received the second highest allocation of Tk 15,550 crore, followed by the local government division at Tk 15,468 crore and the primary and mass education ministry Tk 13,676 crore. Some Tk 12,396 crore has been allocated to the agriculture ministry, Tk 11,370 crore to the home ministry and Tk 11,176 crore to the health and family welfare ministry. The GDP growth target has been fixed at 7.3 percent.

Inward remittances declines by 3.57%²³

Inward remittances declined by 3.57 percent in the first 11 months of the fiscal year on the back of a shrinking outflow of migrant workers. Between July last year

and May this year, Bangladesh received nearly \$12.93 billion in remittance compared to \$13.41 billion in the same period last fiscal year, according to data from the Central Bank. Migrants sent \$1.2 billion in May, down by nearly \$28 million from April this year. Analysing data of the last 10 months, the Centre for Policy Dialogue said inflow of remittances from six major Middle East countries declined by 16.2 percent.

12.56 percent increase in export earnings²⁴

Exports rose 7.22 percent year-on-year to \$2.72 billion in May, riding on higher clothing sales. Total export earnings in the first 11 months of the fiscal year stood at \$27.37 billion, an increase of 12.56 percent from a year ago.

Deposits by Bangladeshi citizens at Swiss banks rose by 62 percent²⁵

Deposits by Bangladeshi citizens at various Swiss banks rose by 62 percent year-on-year in 2013, mainly due to political unrest and lack of safety throughout the year when many predicted a government changeover. The deposits that stood at Tk 3,236 crore (372 million Swiss franc) at the year end were Tk 1,991 crore in 2012, according to the latest data of Swiss National Bank (SNB).

New gas reserve discovered in Rupganj²⁶

The state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Ltd. (Bapex) has discovered a new gas reserve in Rupganj of Narayanganj, which may produce 10-15 million cubic feet of gas per day. The discovery in Rupganj makes it the country's 26th gas reservoir. It is located in Block-20 of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha's Purbachal plot. The Rupganj gas field could be a boost for the country's industrial sector, which is running short on gas. Setting up new industries and the expansion of existing ones are almost at a halt for the last few years due to shortage of gas. According to the Bapex data, the country is producing 2,300 mmcf/d gas against a demand of over 2,700 mmcf/d.

Bhutan

Narendra Modi's visit to Bhutan²⁷

Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to Bhutan for two-day state visit, at the invitation of His Majesty the King. The Prime Minister was accompanied by external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj, foreign secretary Sujata Singh, national security advisor Ajit Doval and other senior government officials. Modi addressed the joint session of Parliament, and laid the foundation stone for the 600 MW Kholongchu hydropower project. Modi also unveiled the inaugural plaque of the Supreme Court in Hejo. The Supreme Court was constructed at a cost of more than Nu 705.50 million with government of India funding. This was PM's first foreign trip since assuming charge in May. Bhutan's Prime Minister Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay said that the visit was a celebration of friendship between the two countries, where both the countries did not consider any political benefit or economic gains. Prime Minister Modi addressed the joint session of the Parliament. A Bhutan-India joint press statement stated that the two governments recalled the free trade arrangement and the expanding bilateral trade between the two countries. Prime Minister Modi also spoke about the large share of budget Bhutan allocated to education, and said that this reflected Bhutan's investment for the future. India,

he said, was keen to make a contribution to this investment, and announced to double the Nehru-Wangchuck scholarship to Rs 20 million a year. The government of India would also provide grant assistance to establish a digital section/e-library at the National Library of Bhutan and in all 20 districts across the country. India's external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj also called a press conference to convey the Indian delegation's satisfaction on the successful visit of Prime Minister Modi. His Majesty the King hosted a luncheon at the Grand Kuenra of Tashichhodzong in honour of the Indian Prime Minister. The luncheon was the final programme in Prime Minister Modi's two-day visit to Bhutan.

Prime Minister visits Japan²⁸

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay led a Bhutanese delegation to Japan on June 29, 2014 on four-day official visit. This was the first official visit of a Bhutanese Prime Minister to Japan.

JICA to support the 2014 GNH survey²⁹

The next Gross National Happiness (GNH) survey to be conducted later this year will be supported by Japan. The Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH research will receive a little more than Nu 20 million through the Japan international cooperation agency (JICA). The remaining requirement of Nu 5 million will be borne by the government. The Japanese assistance was announced by JICA president, Akihiko Tanaka, during his visit to Thimphu, in June. In his address at an event to mark 50 years of cooperation between the two countries, he said that the visit of the King and Queen to Japan, following the 2011 earthquake, had drawn the attention of the Japanese people to Bhutan and GNH. That same year, the Japan society for GNH studies was established to analyse the concept of GNH and promote activities and policies for its enhancement. Since then, attempts have also been made to include the concept of happiness into local government policy making and administration, he pointed out.

Japan to discontinue its KR-II grants to Bhutan³⁰

Japan will discontinue its KR-II grants to Bhutan from next year. Bhutan has been getting KR-II grants since 1984 under the 'food security for underprivileged farmers' program, and has so far received Nu 1.7 billion under this development assistance. It received Nu 68 million in the present and last KR-II grant. The KR-II makes machinery and other equipment available to farmers to help them increase their production of staple food crops like rice, wheat, and maize, among others, and to also compensate for labour shortage due to rural-urban migration. Its discontinuation had been unofficially communicated to the government, raising some concerns that the withdrawal could slow down farm mechanisation. JICA president Akihiko Tanaka confirmed that KR-II would be discontinued, but he ensured that Japan would continue its development assistance to the agriculture sector in Bhutan under different programs. Tanaka also dismissed unconfirmed reports that Japan would begin reducing its development assistance, given Bhutan's rising per capita income, US\$ 2,420 as of 2012, which is one of the highest in the region. "Per capita income has always been one of the factors that will determine the amount and scope of our international cooperation, but it isn't the only factor,

we continuously take other factors into consideration," he said. "If Bhutan's per capita income reaches US\$ 30,000-40,000 then it might be hard for us to justify our activities as development cooperation", said Tanaka.

Czech delegates visit Bhutan³¹

The nine-member delegation, comprising the committee of foreign affairs of chamber of deputies of the parliament of the Czech Republic, made a three-day visit to Bhutan to establish relations with parliamentarians of Bhutan, and strengthen bilateral cooperation between the two countries. The chairman of the committee, Karel Schwarzenberg, led the delegation, and deputy chairman, Czech ambassador to Bhutan, a film maker, are among the delegates. Czech Republic is one of the donors supporting the protection of environment, education and disaster management in the 11th Plan. The delegation received an audience with the King and Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck. The two countries established diplomatic relations in 2011.

Govt. focuses on consolidating the existing foreign relations³²

Bhutan government's stand on diplomatic relations, which remained suspended since taking office last year, was finally made clear in the prime minister's state of the nation report on June 19. Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay, presenting the report to the joint sitting, said, "our relations must be value-oriented and, therefore, more than expansion, the government has decided to consolidate on the relations we already have, by nurturing the existing relations and focusing on trade, investment and tourism." While he admitted that foreign relation is important for Bhutan to pursue and safeguard its national interests, he said, the absence of diplomatic relations hasn't impeded Bhutan from engaging in economic and other forms of cooperation with the rest of the world. Foreign relation was one sector for which People's Democratic Party (PDP) criticised the previous government for. With its reservations, soon after winning the elections, it dug deep to review existing ties. Lyonchhoen will be busy for the rest of the year with at least seven visits abroad in the pipeline. The visits starts with Japan and will be followed by a trip to Bangladesh, the European Union, New York for the climate summit in September, Thailand, the US for UN General Assembly, and Nepal for SAARC summit later this year. Lyonchhoen said, while Bhutan has strong bilateral ties with neighbouring countries, the government is also active in multilateral meets, demonstrating its political commitment and support to regional and multilateral cooperation. Bhutan has diplomatic relations with 53 countries, of which 28 were established between 2011 and 2013. The government received 154 guests this fiscal year.

Budget 2014-15 presented at the National Assembly³³

The budget for the financial year 2014-15 was presented by finance minister Namgay Dorji on June 6 at the National Assembly. The budget has a total outlay of Nu 35.4 billion, but the projection of total resources available was about Nu 31.9 billion. This leaves a deficit of Nu 3.4 billion, which will be financed through program and project tied borrowings. While presenting the budget report finance minister said that domestic revenue was projected to cover 77 percent (Nu 24.6 billion) and grants would constitute the remaining (7.4billion) of total resources. Compared

with the revised budget of 2013-14 the budget decreased by about Nu 2.2 billion after the incorporation of the economic stimulus plan and other external grants.

India is yet to disburse the money committed for the expansion of Paro airport³⁴

With the department of civil aviation (DCA) broke, expansion work at Paro international airport has almost ground to a complete halt. The department has not been able to pay contractors since April, and has bills pending worth around Nu 20 million. It has been asking the Gross National Happiness commission (GNHC) for the money since then but is yet to receive any budget. The government of India is funding the airport's expansion. This includes the construction of a second passenger terminal, apartment buildings to house security personnel, and a fire station. India committed Nu 680 million for the expansion of Paro airport in the current 11th plan. However, the money is yet to arrive. Government of India also committed Nu 185 million for the airport expansion in the 10th plan, but with most of the fund only being released earlier this year, project delays occurred. Indian government funding also included Nu 83.7 million to improve communications and navigation aid technology at the airport, which has been completed.

Consumption of ODS substance down by 10 percent³⁵

Consumption of ozone depleting substance (ODS), hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFC), has been reduced by 10 percent, National Environment Commission officials say. Bhutan is obligated to phase out some ODS, as required by the Montreal protocol, a treaty that addressed the depletion of ozone layer in the atmosphere. Through the HCFC phase out management plan, Bhutan has committed to phase out HCFCs by January 1, 2025 and progress towards zero consumption.

Bhutan ranks 16 in the Global Peace Index³⁶

Bhutan has been ranked the 16th most peaceful country in the world in the latest Global Peace Index (GPI), an improvement of 91 places since 2012.

Ban on the import of guns and bullets into Bhutan³⁷

The import of guns and bullets into Bhutan has been banned from June. The Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) made this announcement in the media and on its website. In its announcement, RBP referred to section 11 of the Fire Arms and Ammunition Act 1990, which bans the import of firearms and ammunition by the general public. However, section 11 does allow for the purchase and import of ammunition for "authorised firearms". According to the RBP website, an individual, seeking to purchase and import a gun or bullets, has to submit an application to the police chief explaining the type of gun wished to be imported, the reasons for its requirement, and whether the individual already owned a gun. Individuals could apply to purchase only guns of .22, .25, and .32 calibre for pistols and revolvers, and the import of 12 and 16 bore for shotguns and .22 calibre for rifles. The import of automatic rifles and telescopic sights was not permitted. According to the United Nations office on drugs and crime, gun ownership is 3.5 guns per 100 people in Bhutan, with around 22,000 guns in total.

Maldives

Mahinda Rajapaksa visits Maldives³⁸

President Mahinda Rajapaksa and First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa, accompanied by an official delegation comprising of cabinet ministers, members of parliament and other senior government officials of Sri Lanka went to Maldives on a state visit on June 25, 2014. The Sri Lankan President was the first head of state to make a state visit to the Maldives since the assumption of presidential office by President Yameen. During the visit, President Rajapaksa and President Yameen discussed bilateral ties between the two countries. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on health cooperation, an MoU on strengthening cooperation between Board of Investment of Sri Lanka and Ministry of Economic Development of Maldives, and an agreement on search and rescue were signed by the two countries.

'Information & business networking' session between Maldivian and Sri Lankan businessmen³⁹

An 'Information and Business Networking' session was held at Traders Hotel on June 26, 2014 to provide information to the visiting business delegation from Sri Lanka regarding investment opportunities in the Maldives. The session was attended by representatives from local companies, and senior officials of the Sri Lankan business delegation. Speaking at the session, Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed said that the purpose of the session was to establish good relations with Sri Lanka's private sector.

Vice President makes official visit to China⁴⁰

Maldives Vice President Dr. Mohamed Jameel Ahmed went to China on June 4 to attend the 2nd China-South Asia Expo and the 9th China-South Asia Business Forum. Vice President Dr. Jameel Ahmed welcomed Chinese investors to the Maldives and assured that the government would make every effort to ensure that the investment climate in the Maldives remained flexible and efficient. Vice President Jameel made the remarks at the 9th China-South Asia Business Forum at Kunming. During his visit, Vice President Jameel Ahmed met with Vice Premier of China Wang Yang to discuss avenues of assistance to the Maldives.

Minister of Foreign Affairs visits Jeddah⁴¹

Maldives Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon has departed for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on June 15 to attend the annual Foreign Ministers' meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Minister Dunya is accompanied by Ambassador-at-large Abdullah Hameed and Assistant Director at the Foreign Ministry Mariyam Midhfa Naeem.

Dubai and the Maldives discuss bilateral customs and commercial cooperation⁴²

Dubai and the Maldives will enhance bilateral customs and commercial cooperation amid their increasingly solid trade ties. Top customs officials from both sides held a meeting on June 14 to discuss the customs work mechanisms, procedures at the passenger operations department and the command and control room at Dubai Customs. Bilateral trade between Dubai and the Maldives saw an 18 percent year-on-year growth in 2013 to 296.4 million Dirham (about US\$ 80.82 million),

comparing with \$68.55 million in 2012, Dubai officials said, adding that trade might grow significantly soon after both sides launch a new package of integrated services in ports, airports and customs points.

GMR won the arbitration proceedings in a Singapore tribunal⁴³

GMR Infrastructure has said that it has won the arbitration proceedings in a Singapore tribunal against the government of Maldives over the premature termination of the contract to develop and manage Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA). In a filing with the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), GMR Infrastructure said the tribunal has declared that the concession agreement between government of Maldives and GMR Male' International Airport (GMIAL, a subsidiary of GMR Infrastructure) was valid and binding and "was not void for any mistake of law or discharged by frustration". After 18 months of detailed proceedings, the tribunal's verdict stated that the "government of Maldives and Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL) are jointly and severally liable in demands to GMIAL for loss caused by wrongful repudiation of the agreement as per the concession agreement," said GMR Infrastructure in its filing with BSE. The tribunal has directed the government of Maldives and MACL to pay \$4 million to GMIAL as compensation for legal costs within 42 days. However, the tribunal has yet to declare compensation amount for the unlawful termination of the contract. GMR is seeking \$1.4 billion in damages from the Maldives government.

"India can help changing the Maldives government"-Nasheed⁴⁴

The best relief the Indian government can provide to the Maldivian people over the premature termination of the GMR airport contract and the subsequent compensation pay-out, would be to help change the Maldives government, former president Mohamed Nasheed, leader of the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has said. Nasheed made the remarks at a party gathering on June 22, where he said that the Indian government must fully understand the circumstances under which the current government came to power. Speaking at the event, Nasheed said Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, in his campaign to expel GMR and oust Nasheed, had worked to foster animosity amongst the public against the Indian people.

India provides 74 scholarships to Maldives for the year 2014-15⁴⁵

The government of India has provided 74 scholarships to Maldives for the year 2014-15. According to the Indian High Commission in Maldives, 5,530 Maldivians have completed courses under the \$5.3 million Technology Adoption Project funded by the government of India, which includes 3,053 teacher certifications, 1,674 youth certifications in IT, and 803 certifications in ICT related vocational courses.

19 percent increase in revenue from import duty⁴⁶

Statistics published by Maldives Customs show that goods worth MVR 252.5 million was imported in May 2014. This is about 62 million more than the value of goods imported in May 2013. There was also a 19 percent increase in revenue collected as import duty and other charges. Total revenue collected in May 2014 was MVR 153.2 million, while it was MVR 129.1 million in May 2013. Looking at exports, goods worth MVR 111 million was exported in May 2014, compared to MVR 320

million in the corresponding period last year. Thailand, with 62 percent, leads the list of countries exported to by Maldives in May 2014. France and South Korea follow in the second and third position with 9 percent and 6 percent share respectively.

Religious NGO opposes deployment of Maldivian troops in the UN peacekeeping operations⁴⁷

Maldivian government signed an agreement with the United Nations (UN) on May 28 regarding participation by Maldives in UN peacekeeping operations. Religious NGO Jamiyyathul Salaf has urged the government to recall its decision to deploy Maldivian troops to join UN peacekeeping operations. In a statement issued on June 5, Salaf said that UN peacekeeping troops would be forced to fight against Muslims, and participation by Maldivians in military efforts against Muslims is, regardless of the circumstances, unacceptable.

Ministry of Home Affairs dissolves the Maldives Bar Association⁴⁸

Ministry of Home Affairs has dissolved the Maldives Bar Association, a local non-governmental organisation of lawyers. Home Ministry informed the Maldives Bar Association on April 9 to change its name following a Supreme Court ruling stating that the establishment of a Bar Association, and the operation of such an association in activities related to the justice system of the Maldives, will not be allowed. Maldives Bar Association was registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs by former Attorney General Husnu Al Suood and group of local prominent lawyers on April 11, 2013. Husnu Al Suood, who was also the President of Maldives Bar Association expressed deep concerns on the Home Ministry's decision.

Nepal

Prime Minister visits Kunming⁴⁹

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala went to Kunming on June 5 to attend the China-South Asia Exposition in the provincial capital of China's Yunnan from June 6-10. Prime Minister Koirala addressed the event's opening ceremony as 'Guest of Honour'. Nepal was the 'County of Honour' at the expo this year. In a meeting with Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, Chinese officials expressed Chinese government's willingness to support Nepal to hold the 18th SAARC summit in November in Kathmandu. During the visit, Koirala met with vice-premier of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yang and discussed various issues of mutual interests between the two countries. On the occasion, PM Koirala urged vice-premier Wang for the financial support and investment in Nepal. Prime Minister Koirala also visited the under construction hydropower project at the bank of Whang Liken River in China. Prime Minister Koirala met with Governor of the Yunnan Province Lee Zhihang and Yunnan Province Secretary of the Community Party, China, Qin Guangrong.

Aung San Suu Kyi visits Nepal⁵⁰

Myanmar's democratic icon and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi came to Kathmandu on June 13 on a four-day visit. Suu Kyi called on President Ram Baran Yadav at the latter's office in Sheetal Niwas, Maharajgunj. During the meeting, the two discussed the bilateral issues and shared their experiences regarding the

democracy and development issues. During her meeting with Prime Minister Sushil Koirala in Baluwatar, Suu Kyi discussed the prospect of development and democracy in the region, as well as pressing socio-economic and gender disparities in Nepal and Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi also visited Lumbini, the birth place of Gautam Buddha.

UK pledges a grant worth 23.5 million pounds to Nepal⁵¹

The United Kingdom (UK) has pledged a grant worth 23.5 million pounds to Nepal for access to Finance for the Poor Programme. Madhu Kumar Marasini, joint secretary of the Ministry of Finance, and Philip Smith, acting Head of the Department for International Development (DFID), signed an MoU regarding the aid on behalf of the Nepal government and the DFID respectively on June 9. The objectives of the programme are to improve access to finance for micro-enterprises and small farmers, mainly through micro-finance institutions. The programme will be implemented in Manang, Humla, Dolpa, Kalikot, Mugu, Jajarkot, Bajhang, Bajura and Darchula. A steering committee consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Finance, National Planning Commission, Department of Cooperatives, Nepal Rastra Bank and DFID Nepal will provide overall guidance and steer the programme.

Nepal-Turkey Chamber and Istanbul Chamber join hands⁵²

Nepal-Turkey Chamber of Commerce has partnered with the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ICOC) for enhancing trade relationship between the two countries. An agreement to this effect was signed by Nepal Turkey Chamber of Commerce President Akhil Chapagain and ICOC Executive Board Vice-president Dursun Topcu in Istanbul. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Chapagain said the tie-up would help Nepal attract Turkish investment, find out issues of investors, and work towards creating favourable investment climate.

Nepal offers to host the second meeting of Nepal-India Joint Commission⁵³

The Foreign Ministry of Nepal has offered to host the second meeting of Nepal-India Joint Commission at the ministerial level in mid-July. Though the Indian side is yet to respond positively to Nepal's request, the ministry officials said initial signals from India are 'positive'.

'Nepal's GDP will grow by 4.3 percent in 2015 and 2016'-GEP report⁵⁴

The World Bank (WB) has projected Nepal's economic growth at 4.4 percent for 2014. The lender's Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report launched on June 11 has projected Nepal's GDP will grow by 4.3 percent in 2015 and 2016. The report states Nepal's fiscal balance moved into surplus in 2013, partly because of delays caused by insufficient capacity for public expenditure on capital projects. Among South Asian countries, Nepal has the lowest non-performing loans (NPLs), according to the report.

CA members divided over federal structure⁵⁵

The Constituent Assembly (CA) members are sharply divided over the modality of federal structures in the new constitution. Speaking in the full house CA about the

state restructuring and distribution of powers in the federal set up, CA members expressed divergent views about the number, name and demarcation of provinces. The UCPN (Maoist) CA member Prabhu Sah said parties should agree on nine provinces— five on the basis of identity and four on the basis of economic viability— in the new constitution. The UCPN (Maoist) is championing for the single ethnic-identity based federalism. Chairman of Nepal Workers and Peasant party Narayan Man Bijukchhe however, said that federalism on the basis of ethnic lines would create tensions in the country. He said that the number of provinces should be 14 and there should be proper distribution of natural resources. Ashok Rai, Chairman of Federal Socialist Party-Nepal (FSPN) said ethnicity-based federalism would not create problems in the country. “The suppressed and marginalised communities should be given an identity. Only the economic viability is not sufficient,” Rai said. He criticised the concept of multiple identity based federalism saying it would not solve the problem. Rai was a senior leader of CPN-UML before the CA election. He formed FSPN saying that UML stood against the identity based federalism. Chairman of CPN-UML CP Mainali said all the people should have an equal access to natural resources while going for federalism. He said country cannot sustain more than three provinces and while craving the provinces north-south approach should be adopted.

Five communist parties announced alliance under the leadership of UCPN (Maoist)⁵⁶

The five communist parties that announced a working alliance under the leadership of UCPN (Maoist) is preparing to organise a joint interaction programme. UCPN (Maoist), CPN-Maoist, CPN (Maoist), Revolutionary Communist Party and CPN (United) made an official announcement of the alliance on June 28, underscoring a party unification as their ultimate goal and ‘to ensure a pro-people constitution with an identity-based federalism’. Likewise, the cross-party taskforce has been given the responsibility to hold the discussion and interaction programmes.

Five armed Indian nationals held from Biratnagar⁵⁷

Five armed Indian nationals were held by a team of Armed Police Force deployed at Biratnagar customs. They were apprehended during a checking carried out at the number two check point of Rani border transit on June 7. They possessed an Italian-made 7.65 mm pistol along with 10 rounds of ammunition. Police also recovered Indian currency notes of denomination 500 and 100,000 worth Rs 111,000. They were travelling in a micro van (BR11T2465) and identified themselves as proprietors of Mahindra Distributors in Poornia, Bihar. The armed police has handed them over to Nepal Police for necessary action.

Pakistan

TTP claims attack on Karachi ASF camp⁵⁸

Heavy firing was reported at the ASF camp in the metropolis on June 10 after unidentified men entered the premises. Initial reports suggest that the number of attackers could be between four and seven. Following a search operation in Gulistan-e-Jauhar, two suspects were detained by security forces. The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack near the Karachi airport. The camp is situated near the Jinnah International Airport which the

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) had cleared on June 9, after a long battle between security forces and terrorists. A Twitter account allegedly operated by Omar Khorasani of the TTP Mohmand faction tweeted on claiming that the group has carried out the second attack.

Pakistan army commences 'Operation Zarb-i-Azb'⁵⁹

On the directions of the government, the Armed Forces of Pakistan have launched a comprehensive operation against foreign and local terrorists who are hiding in sanctuaries in North Waziristan on June 15. The operation has been named as 'Zarb-i-Azb'. Azb was the name of the sword of Prophet Muhammad. The announcement came after an overnight assault by Pakistani F-16s on suspected militant hideouts in Daigan and Boya, located 25 km to the west of North Waziristan's regional headquarters of Miramshah. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, during a speech delivered in the National Assembly on June 16, justified the government's decision to initiate a full-scale operation in North Waziristan tribal region and said that the 'Zarb-i-Azb' operation would continue until terrorism is eliminated from the country. Sharif added that the government had tried patiently to pursue peace talks but it was unfortunate that after four and a half months of trying peace, dialogue could not be fruitful. The military operation was welcomed by most political parties including the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Opposition in Senate extended full support to the military operation in North Waziristan. According to a statement issued by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), army's infantry troops and Special Services Group (SSG) conducted door-to-door searches in Miramshah town to ensure that the civilian population had evacuated the area. 376 suspected militants were killed while 19 others surrendered to authorities as of June 30, according to the ISPR's tally. Prime Minister's Adviser on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said security forces were conducting operation in North Waziristan Agency against militants without discrimination. Speaking at a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs on June 25, the adviser presented the 'Strategic Vision of Pakistan's Foreign Policy' and said: "There is no distinction between good Taliban and bad Taliban and the military operation was being conducted across the board." Brushing aside some accusations that Pakistan was backing some Taliban groups, he said: "no non-state actor is being backed by the government."

Assistance to NWA IDPs⁶⁰

The total number of internally displaced persons from North Waziristan Agency has reached 457,048 individuals, comprising 36,904 families. Of the total figures, 120,276 are male, 144,112 are female and 192,660 are children. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited the camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bannu, and said that the government would work with the military and would not hesitate to spend any sum for their rehabilitation. PM Nawaz said a sum of Rs 40,000 per family would be granted to the refugees in the month of Ramadan. The United States has contributed an additional \$8 million to help Pakistani government meet food and nutritional needs of the IDPs from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata).

“US committed to helping Pakistan fight terrorism”, says Kerry⁶¹

US Secretary of State John Kerry has assured the Pakistani people of America’s “steadfast commitment” to help them defeat terrorists. According to a statement issued by his office in Washington, Secretary Kerry made this pledge during a meeting with Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz in London on June 13, 2014. Both leaders were there to attend the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Pakistan-Afghanistan joint working group against terrorism⁶²

Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on June 26 to form a working group on security to oversee their joint efforts against terrorism. The on-again, off-again relationship between the two countries received a boost when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Afghanistan’s National Security Adviser Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta agreed at a meeting to go after all terrorists without any discrimination. Agreeing that terrorism was their common enemy the two sides stressed the need for working in close cooperation at the institutional level to deal with the menace. The joint working group will be co-chaired by Pakistan’s foreign secretary and Afghanistan’s deputy foreign minister and will have representatives from the security institutions concerned. Dr. Spanta was accompanied by Janan Mosazai, Afghanistan’s Ambassador to Pakistan; Atiqul-lah Hatifmal, Deputy Foreign Sec-retary; Maj Gen Asadullah Akram-yar of the Ministry of Defence and Hakimullah Hakmatullah Foush-a-n-ji, Director International Affairs. During the meeting, Dr. Spanta delivered a letter from President Hamid Karzai to the prime minister. Dr. Spanta also attended delegation-level talks with Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz. The Pakistani side reiterated its full support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. The Afghan delegation met Chief of the Army Staff General Raheel Sharif. The leadership of the two countries have been in regular contact since Pakistan launched a military operation against militants in North Waziristan. The Afghan president called Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on June 20 and the Afghan ambassador met Mr. Sharif and Gen Raheel.

Pakistan condemns US drone strikes in North Waziristan⁶³

The government of Pakistan condemned the two incidents of US drone strikes that took place near Miramshah in North Waziristan on June 11 and 12, said a statement from the foreign office of Pakistan. Reportedly, the second strike in Dand-i Darpakhel area killed key Haqqani network commander Haji Gul as well as prominent Afghan Taliban commanders. These were the year’s first such strikes in Pakistan’s tribal belt bordering Afghanistan.

PAT chief Tahirul Qadri to start a “peaceful revolution”⁶⁴

The PML-Q and the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) decided to launch a movement against the government. The decision was made by the two parties at a meeting in London which set a 10-point agenda they intend to achieve either “through pressuring the government or sending it home”. The meeting was attended by PML-Q chief Chaudhry Shujaat Husain, Pervaiz Elahi, Moonis Elahi and PAT leader Dr Tahirul Qadri and his team. A joint declaration issued after the meeting said that the formation of a new “real democratic government” was inevitable

because the incumbent government had come to power “through rigging”. Accordingly, PAT chief Dr Tahirul Qadri, a Canada based Islamic cleric, returned to Pakistan on June 23, 2014 to try to start what he called a “peaceful revolution” against the government.

Prime Minister Sharif visits Tajikistan⁶⁵

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif arrived in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on June 17 on a two-day visit at the invitation of President Emomali Rahmon to discuss energy, infrastructure, connectivity and security. The prime minister was accompanied by a high-level delegation including the Minister for Water and Power, Minister for Textile Industry, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and senior officials. The Prime Minister’s visit is part of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries and was reflective of this high priority and the commitment to further deepen Pakistan’s engagement with Central Asia.

President Mamnoon Hussain visits Nigeria⁶⁶

Pakistan and Nigeria agreed to cooperate in the fields of counter-terrorism and defence, besides giving impetus to enhancement of trade, commerce, industry, agriculture, infrastructure, investment and human resource development. The two countries also agreed to intensify cooperation at international forums and efforts for reforms in the UN Security Council. This was announced by President Mamnoon Hussain and Nigerian President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan at a press conference after holding delegation level talks. President Mamnoon Hussain was in Nigeria on a four-day official visit. Mr. Hussain said the government of Pakistan was establishing a “Look Africa Policy” to further fortify their relations in all areas of cooperation to the mutual benefit of their peoples.

COAS General Raheel Sharif visits China⁶⁷

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif left for China on an official visit on June 2, 2014 at the invitation of Chinese defence authorities. It was General Sharif’s first ever visit to China since he assumed the command of the country’s military last year.

China to finance, develop airport in Gwadar⁶⁸

Pakistan government disclosed that the financing and development of Gwadar International Airport had been taken over by China and that the Civil Aviation Authority would not be involved with the process. In addition, the controversy over the change in the route of the \$35 million Pak-China Economic Corridor deepened as government officials continued to contradict each other over the reasons for the change. The government currently favours the Gwadar-Karachi-Lahore route, also known as the ‘eastern route’; whereas opposition members preferred the original ‘western route’ of Gwadar-Dera Ghazi Khan-Dera Ismail Khan.

Finance Minister unveils budget for 2014-15⁶⁹

The federal cabinet approved the federal budget for the year 2014-15, with a total outlay of Rs 3.945 trillion, and a Public Sector Development Programme allocated

at Rs 525 billion. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar told parliament in his budget speech that he aimed to reduce the budget deficit to 4.9 percent of economic output in the 2014-15 fiscal year from 5.8 percent a year earlier. Budget spending has been set at Rs 3.8 trillion (\$39.3 billion), while tax revenues that Pakistan would be able to collect in the next fiscal year are estimated at 3.94 trillion rupees. With the budget, the government has introduced welfare schemes for farmers, homeless, the unemployed, businessmen and 10 percent relief for government employees. Dar also said Pakistan would invest at least Rs 205 billion (\$2.08 billion) in power projects in the next fiscal year as part of a plan to reform the struggling sector.

Remittances rose to \$12.89bn in 10 months⁷⁰

Remittances coming from Pakistanis working abroad increased to \$12.89 billion during the first 10 months of the current fiscal year from \$11.57 billion of the corresponding period in 2012-13, said the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. The remittances that the country received during the entire previous fiscal year totalled \$13.92 billion.

US Senate committee approves \$960 million for Pakistan in 2015⁷¹

The US Senate Committee on Appropriations approved a bill that allocates around \$960 million in assistance for Pakistan in the 2015 fiscal year. However, it is \$65.8 million less than President Obama's request of \$1.03 billion. Of this amount, the bill is said to have allocated \$816 million for assistance programs. For women development, promoting education, merit and need-based scholarships, the education fund was allocated \$3,000,000. The bill said no less than 50 per cent of the scholarships would be given to women. The bill increases funding for polio prevention programs to \$59 million, including \$7.5 million in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to support a multilateral campaign to eliminate the disease, which is \$9 million above the President's request. The committee asked the State Department to ensure that the funds are not used for the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.

IMF disburses \$555.9 million to Pakistan⁷²

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) disbursed \$555.9 million to Pakistan on June 27, completing the third review of the country's economic performance. A statement issued by the IMF headquarters in Washington noted that Pakistan was on track with the conditions of the IMF loan programme. On September 4, 2013, the IMF Executive Board approved the 36-month extended arrangement under the extended facility of \$6.78 billion, or 425 percent of Pakistan's quota at the IMF. The arrangement saved Pakistan from possible default.

Prime Minister hails 'historic' \$700 million World Bank loan⁷³

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif termed the approval for a loan of US\$700 million for Pakistan by the World Bank as a 'historical achievement.' He was speaking with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar who called on him in his chamber at the National Assembly and apprised him on the World Bank's approval for financing the 4500 MW Dasu Hydro power project. The prime minister said that about \$600 million will be utilised for Dasu Hydro Power Project and \$100 million for the Sindh Irrigation project. Prime Minister Sharif congratulated Ishaq Dar and his team for

this remarkable achievement and said “it shows the confidence of multilateral donors and foreign countries in the economy of Pakistan.” Federal Minister Dar later told the National Assembly that the World Bank has allocated \$588 million for the Dasu Dam by approving it unanimously. The minister also said that the government has allocated Rs 55 billion for the construction of the dam while there is no need to get a No Objection Certificate (NoC) from any neighbouring country in this regard.

Russia lifts its embargo on arms supplies to Pakistan⁷⁴

Russia has lifted its embargo on arms supplies to Pakistan and is holding talks on supplying Islamabad with combat helicopters, according to the ITAR-TASS news agency report.

Sri Lanka

President attends the G77+China Summit⁷⁵

President Mahinda Rajapaksa went to Bolivia to attend the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Group of 77 and China (G77+China) that took place on June 14 and 15 in Santa Cruz. President Rajapaksa and Namibian Prime Minister Hage Geingob discussed cooperation to overcome challenges their countries were facing when they met on June 14 on the sidelines of the G77 summit in Bolivia. Cuban President Raul Castro also met President Mahinda Rajapaksa on the sidelines of the G77 Summit. During the visit, President Mahinda Rajapaksa was awarded with the ‘Parliamentary Order Merit Democratic Rep. Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz’, the highest honor presented by the Plurinational State of Bolivia, by the Bolivian Government on June 16, 2014. Bolivia said President Rajapaksa was selected for this prestigious award for defeating terrorism and restoring peace and development in Sri Lanka. It also recognises President Rajapaksa’s commitment to human rights and his initiative to improve and expand relations with South America, including Bolivia.

President visits Maldives⁷⁶

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has agreed to help to develop the defence services in the Maldives including air combat training during a meeting with Defence and National Security Minister of Maldives Col (Ret.) Mohamed Nazim at the Kurumba Island Resort. The Defence Minister also requested to explore the possibility of Sri Lanka manufacturing boats for the Maldivian coast guard and sought assistance from the Bank of Ceylon to obtain credit facilities for this purpose.

President makes official visit to Seychelles⁷⁷

President Mahinda Rajapaksa made three day official visit to Seychelles on June 27. During his visit, President Rajapaksa opened the High Commission office in the Capital City building in the Seychelles’s capital of Victoria in the presence of Seychelles President James Michel, Vice President Danny Faure and officials of the two countries. Seychelles has announced that it would also open a diplomatic mission in Sri Lanka later this year.

High level Sri Lankan delegation attends China-South Asia Expo in Kunming⁷⁸

A high level Sri Lankan business delegation led by the Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiyutheen went to China to attend the 2nd China - South Asia Expo and the 22nd Kunming Import and Export Commodities Fair in Kunming, Yunnan Province.

Chief of staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force meets President⁷⁹

Admiral Katsutosi Kawano, the chief of staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the President's House in Anuradhapura on June 12, 2014. The discussion centered mainly on enhanced cooperation between the two countries in the area of maritime security and other maritime sectors. Admiral Kawano said the Japanese Navy would like to learn from Sri Lanka's experiences with anti-terrorism operations. Admiral Kawano's visit was the first of a Japanese four-star admiral to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan navy receives gift from Australia⁸⁰

The second patrol boat gifted by Australia to the Sri Lankan Navy arrived at the Port of Colombo on June 25. The Bay Class boat had served the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service under the name "Hervey Bay" before being gifted to Sri Lanka. It is 38.2 meters long and has a 2.3 meter draft. With a maximum speed of 24 knots, the boat can cover a range of 3,000 nautical miles. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, while in Sri Lanka to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting pledged the gift of two patrol vessels to Sri Lankan Navy as a capacity enhancement measure. The first patrol boat gifted by Australia arrived at the Port of Colombo on April 24, 2014 and was named P350. It had served the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service under the name "Corio Bay" before being gifted to the Sri Lanka Navy.

Three Russian naval ships arrived at Port of Colombo⁸¹

The three Russian naval ships of the Pacific Fleet arrived at the Port of Colombo for replenishment and crews' relaxation. The three Russian naval ships "Marshal Shaposhnikov", "Irkut" and "Alatau" arrived under the Command of Rear Admiral Vladimir A. Dmitriev. The ships were on combat duty in the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka revokes on arrival visa facility for Pakistani nationals⁸²

According to revised visa policy of the government of Sri Lanka, the Pakistani nationals desiring to visit Sri Lanka would require a valid pre-departure visa. Reportedly, rise in political asylum trend by Pakistanis have provoked Sri Lankan authorities to revoke "On Arrival Visa" facility for Pakistani nationals.

UNHRC appoints team to investigate war crimes in Sri Lanka⁸³

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay has appointed the team as mandated by the UN Human Right Council (UNHRC) to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the alleged war crimes committed by the security forces and the Tamil terrorists during the last seven years of the three-decade long war. Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commission for

Human Rights (OHCHR), has confirmed to media the appointment of senior UN official Ms. Sandra Beidas, who was expelled from South Sudan as a persona non grata, as coordinator of the UN inquiry team to Sri Lanka. The OHCHR investigative team comprises 12 members, including two forensic experts, a legal analyst, a gender specialist and investigators. There is also a secondary team comprising three external experts who would accompany the investigation team and provide independent verification of the investigation's integrity. Three experts include the former President of Finland Martti Ahtisaari, former New Zealand's Governor Silvia Cartwright and Pakistani lawyer Asma Jahangir. The team is expected to conduct its operations for a 10-month period beginning in mid-June 2014 to mid-April 2015. A UN official source has said that if the UN team is not allowed to enter Sri Lanka, as indicated by the Lankan government, the team will collect information from outside the country and present a report.

Parliament passes resolution against the UNHRC probe⁸⁴

The resolution against the UNHRC probe on Sri Lanka was passed in Parliament with 144 votes in favour while ten Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs voted against it. The United National Party (UNP) abstained from voting and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and Janatha Vimukthi Peremuna (JVP) were absent at the time of the voting.

Sri Lanka accuses Canada of making unsubstantiated claims⁸⁵

Sri Lanka 'strongly rejected' a statement made by the Canadian delegation at the UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva that referred to the military presence in the conflict affected zones in Sri Lanka contributing to the vulnerability of women and girls in the areas. Exercising a 'Right of Reply' at the General Debate on June 22 under Agenda Item 4, the Sri Lankan delegation stated the references on Sri Lanka made by the Canadian delegation remains at the level of 'allegations unsubstantiated by verifiable data'. They further went on to state that no evidence has been directly brought to the attention of government authorities by any claimant, to enable the conduct of credible investigations and prosecutions.

Communal clash erupts between the Muslims and Sinhala Buddhists⁸⁶

Communal clashes between the Muslims and Sinhala Buddhists erupted in Southern coastal towns of Aluthgama and Beruwala after a Buddhist extremist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) held a rally calling for reprisals against the Muslims for an alleged attack on a Buddhist monk and his driver by a Muslim youth in the Muslim-dominated Dharga Town in Aluthgama. The clashes left three dead and scores injured while mobs on both sides have made considerable damage to shops, businesses and common properties. Ms. Manisha Gunasekera, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva exercising a 'Right of Reply' in response to comments made by Germany, Norway and Canada during the General Debate at the UNHRC on June 20, informed that the government had taken prompt action to bring back normalcy to Aluthgama and Beruwala, the areas affected by recent incidents of the communal violence between the Sinhala and Muslim residents. The envoy told the Council that President Mahinda Rajapaksa has assured all communities that an impartial inquiry would be held to bring to justice

those responsible for the violence, irrespective of race, religion or ethnicity. The Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Mr. Iyad Ameen Madani has expressed serious concern at the recent incidents of violence by extremist.

Sri Lanka ranks 105 in the GPI⁸⁷

Sri Lanka ranks at 105th place in this year's Global Peace Index (GPI) which ranked 162 nations according to their 'absence of violence'. The GPI, the world's leading measure of national peacefulness, ranked Sri Lanka 110th in 2013 out of 162 countries.

Arrest of fishermen by Indian Coast Guard and Sri Lankan Navy⁸⁸

The Indian Coast Guard arrested 12 Sri Lankan fishermen for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line and fishing in Indian waters on June 6, 2014. The following day, 73 Tamil Nadu fishermen were arrested by Sri Lankan navy for poaching in Sri Lankan waters. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking an end to the arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy. Again Sri Lankan naval personnel arrested 11 fishermen on June 24 and 17 on June 28 for fishing in Sri Lankan waters. The fishermen were taken to Kankensanthurai port by the navy personnel and produced before a local court, which remanded them to judicial custody. Sri Lanka however, released 46 Indian fishermen on June 25 who were arrested on charges of poaching.

119,546 people affected due to floods and landslides⁸⁹

According to the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) of Sri Lanka, 119,546 people belong to 29,209 families were affected by floods and landslides in Sri Lanka. However, 18,285 people from 4,493 families were housed in shelters. At least 23 people were killed and one was missing after torrential rains lashed the island in June for five days causing floods and landslides, mostly in Western and Southern Province.

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