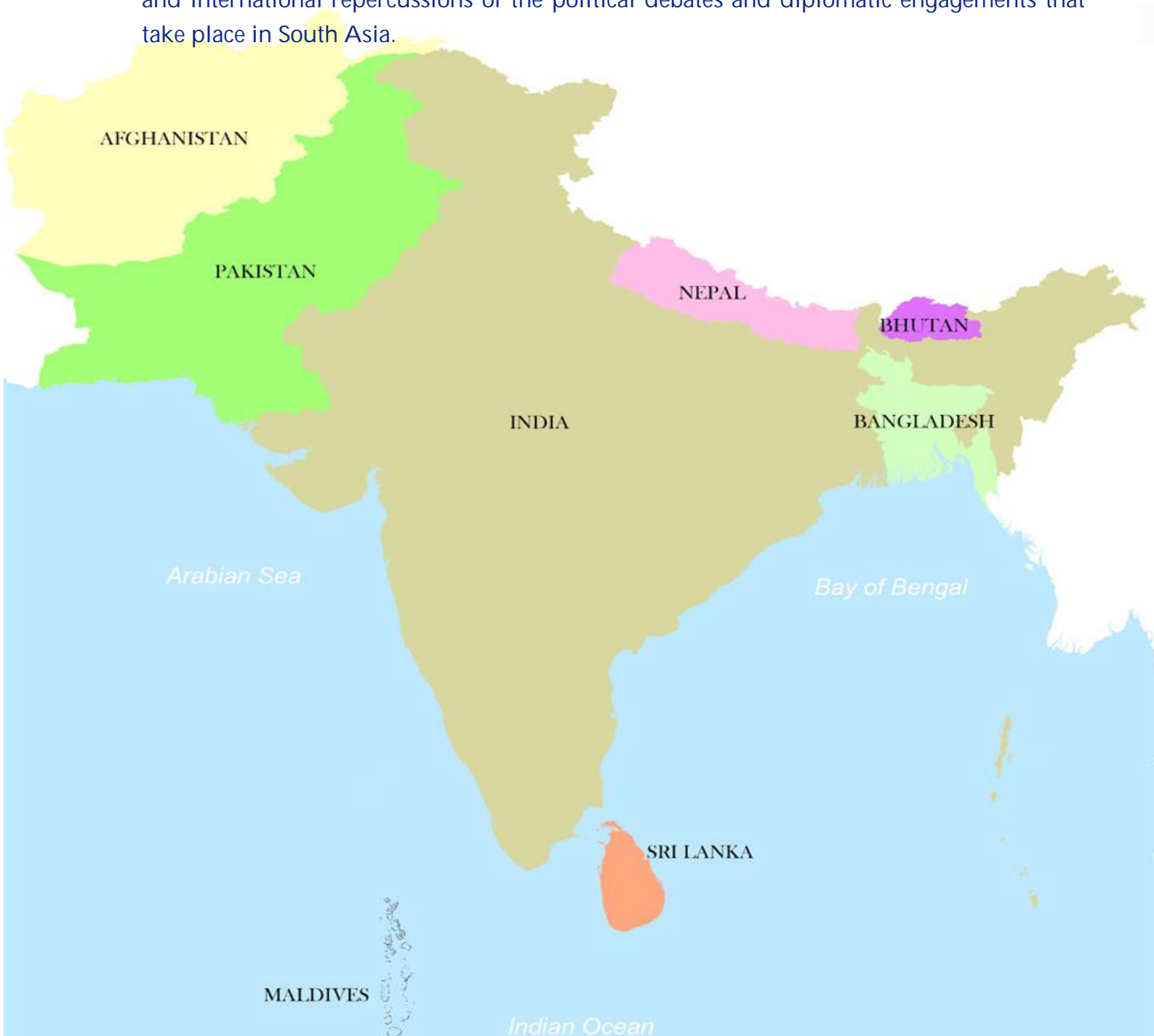


SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

May 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

All the heads of the SAARC countries except Sheikh Hasina attended the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi led National Democratic alliance (NDA) government. Sheikh Hasina was represented by Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury. Prime Minister Modi had bilateral discussions with all the leaders on May 27. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal expressed their satisfaction after the first meeting with Modi. While Mahinda Rajapaksa and Nawaz Sharif were positive about their meetings with Modi, outcome of their visits however was not appreciated in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Sri Lankan media reaction was very positive about Modi's election. They were satisfied about the fact that since NDA got absolute majority, the central government does not have to listen to Tamil Nadu now while formulating its policy towards Sri Lanka. This was clear when Narendra Modi ignored Tamil Nadu protest against invitation to Mahinda Rajapaksa for attending the oath taking ceremony. However, when Modi asked Rajapaksa to implement the 13th amendment during the bilateral discussion on June 27, all the accolades for Modi's victory turned into criticism. In Pakistan also, Nawaz Sharif's meeting with Modi was not taken positively. Imran Khan said that "Nawaz Sharif was treated as school boy". Critics of the government said that he failed to raise the Kashmir issue and could not even managed to meet the Hurriyat conference. Given the nature of Indo-Pakistani relations, this kind of criticism was not very surprising. By extending the invitation to the SAARC members, Modi tried to start a fresh innings with the South Asian neighbours. By inviting the SAARC country Heads of Governments, Modi has sent a message that he wants to reach out to the neighbours, but at the same time he will be assertive if it is required. India's neighbourhood policy faced lots of criticism under previous government as the government failed to sign bilateral agreement with Bangladesh and its relations with Sri Lanka was strained over fishermen and Tamil politics. The increasing Chinese inroads to South Asia were seen with a degree of concern. Its engagement with Pakistan did not bore much fruit as the Pakistan government is yet to provide Non Discriminatory Market Access to India. In spite of the election rhetoric Modi government is going to be closely engaged with immediate neighbours and fighting terrorism, economic integration and connectivity are going to be key features in India's neighbourhood policy.

Afghanistan

Presidential elections go into second round¹

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced on May 15 that a second round of elections would be held on June 14 between leading candidates Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai. The IEC Chief Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani said at the press conference in Kabul that none of the candidates received over 50 percent of votes to avoid a runoff. From the total 7,018,849 votes casted, Dr. Abdullah led the final results with 2,973,706 votes making up 45 percent of the total votes as Dr. Ahmadzai trailed in with 31.6 percent totaling 2,084,547 votes. Zalmay Rassoul was in third with 11.4 percent, Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf coming in fourth with 7 percent, Outbuddin Helal carrying 2.8 percent, Gul Agha Sherzai with 1.6 percent, Daoud Sultanzoy with 0.5 percent and Hedayat Amin Arsala coming in last with 0.2 percent. Meanwhile, Gul Agha Sherzai and Zalmay Rassoul declared that they would endorse Abdullah Abdullah in the runoff. Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan, led by former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, will boycott the run-off election as the two leading candidates favour a long stay of the American troops. Hizb-e-Islami, fighting the US-led NATO troops, took part in the April 5 elections and supported presidential candidate Outbuddin Hilal.

2500 people died due to landslide in Northern Badakshan province²

A landslide triggered by heavy rains buried a village of Hobo Barik on May 2, 2014 in North Eastern Afghanistan, killing around 2500 people. Afghan authorities gave \$400,000 to the provincial governor to use in the aid effort. Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development Wais Ahmad Barmak has been appointed as the disaster relief coordinator. Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan, Deng Xijun, provided the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) with US\$50,000 donated by the Red Cross Society of China as emergency humanitarian aid. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) of Pakistan has despatched two consignments of relief goods to Afghanistan for the landslide victims.

NCS approves 12-Year Strategic Perspective for ANA³

The National Security Council (NSC) on May 17 approved a 12-year-long strategic perspective concerning Afghan National Army (ANA)'s strength, equipment and recruitment at a meeting chaired by President Hamid Karzai. High-ranking government officials, including Defence Minister Bismillah Khan Mohammadi and Chief of Army Staff Gen. Sher Mohammad Karimi attended the NSC meeting.

Afghan forces killed 275 militants⁴

At least 275 Taliban militants were killed during military operations conducted by Afghan national security forces during the second week of May. Interior ministry spokesman, Sediq Sediqi said the militants were killed during 53 separate operations conducted in various provinces of Afghanistan. Sediqi further added that nearly 80 militants were also arrested during the operations. The remarks by interior ministry came as the Taliban militants group launched its summer offensive. Militants carried out a deadly attack on a government building in eastern Afghanistan and fired rockets near Kabul's main airport and the US-run Bagram airfield. Taliban also carried out attacks in 21 provinces of Afghanistan including eastern Ghazni province where around 300 militants attacked various check posts of the Afghan security forces.

Attack on Indian consulate in Herat⁵

Gunmen armed with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades attacked the Indian consulate in western Afghanistan's Herat province on May 23. All Indians at the consulate were safe. A day after the attack, the Afghan Ministry of Interior said that it was a plot planned beyond Afghan borders and appealed the UN Security Council to act against those supporting proxy war in Afghanistan. On May 26, President Karzai had told the Indian television channel Headlines that the banned terrorist group Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) was behind the attack on the Indian consulate at Herat. India has sent a team comprising of senior officials in the intelligence agencies and National Security Guard as well as the Indo-Tibetan Border Police to assess the security of its diplomatic missions in Afghanistan. The National Directorate of Security and other agencies of Afghanistan have also launched a probe into the attack.

78 violence cases recorded against journalists⁶

The free media support organisation Nai has said that 78 cases of violence against journalists were recorded throughout the country in 2013. Nai Director Sadiqullah Tawhidi said six journalists had been killed, four injured, nine arrested, 35 maltreated and 24 others threatened since May 3, 2013. Speaking at a ceremony to mark International Press Freedom Day, he alleged the government was directly involved in 50 cases of violence against journalists, Taliban in eight, warlords in five and unidentified people in 10.

Afghanistan launches its maiden satellite⁷

Afghanistan's first satellite 'AFGHANSAT 1' was formally launched on May 10, 2014. Eutelsat Communications (NYSE Euronext Paris: ETL), one of the world's leading satellite operators, and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) had signed a memorandum of understanding to the effect in February 2014. Ministers of Communications and Information Technology Amirzai Sangin said they paid \$4 million to Eutelsat annually but the income of the satellite would add \$15 million to the country's income.

Karzai visits India⁸

Afghan President Hamid Karzai was on a two-day visit to India for the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi as the new Prime Minister of India. On May 27, President Karzai separately met Prime Minister Modi and President Pranab Mukherjee. In their more than half-an-hour long meeting, Modi and Karzai discussed ways to enhance cooperation in the wake of the upcoming NATO withdrawal from the war-torn country.

India signs deal with Russia to supply arms to Afghan military⁹

India has signed an agreement under which it will pay Russia to supply arms and equipment to the Afghan military as foreign combat troops prepare to leave the country. Under the deal, smaller arms such as light artillery and mortars will be sourced from Russia and moved to Afghanistan. But it could eventually involve the transfer of heavy artillery, tanks and even combat helicopters that the Afghans have been asking India for since last year.

Karzai discusses Pakistani shelling with Sharif¹⁰

President Hamid Karzai in a phone conversation with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif raised his serious concerns over Pakistan's cross-border shelling on eastern Kunar province. During the conversation, President Karzai said that Pakistan continuously fire artillery shells on the eastern parts of Afghanistan. Pakistan's Prime Minister Sharif reportedly said that that "terrorists come from Afghanistan to Pakistan and conduct terrorist activities". However, Mr Sharif promised to discuss the cross-border shelling with responsible institutions within his government. President Karzai also discussed the shelling with top US commander in Afghanistan General Joseph Dunford who promised to discuss it with Pakistani authorities. The Pakistani military reportedly has been targeting some regions in eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan for about three years. Pakistan's military has however denied its role in the shelling.

US to keep 9,800 troops in Afghanistan¹¹

US President Barack Obama has announced that the US would keep 9,800 American troops in Afghanistan at the beginning of 2015 if the new president agreed to sign the bilateral security agreement. The US would withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2016. However, the US is open to continued efforts in Afghanistan on two narrow missions: training Afghan forces and supporting operations against the remnants of Al Qaeda. The Afghan lawmakers gave mixed reactions on the announcement. While some lawmakers warned that Afghanistan would run into a severe economic crisis with the pullout of foreign forces others felt that Afghans would be able to rebuild national unity if foreign forces leave.

CIA plans to close its Satellite Bases in Afghanistan¹²

The US officials have said that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is planning to close its satellite bases in Afghanistan and pull all its personnel back to Kabul by early summer. The officials further added that the US military commanders were informed of the plan by CIA Director John Brennan in March. CIA will remove all its case officers and analysts as well as National Security Agency specialists responsible for intercepting insurgent phone calls and other communications, a rich source of daily intelligence. The US military fears that the unexpected abrupt withdrawal by CIA will deprive it of vital intelligence while thousands of American troops remain in the country and insurgent attacks are normally at their peak. In the meantime, the CIA also plans this summer to stop paying the salaries of Afghan paramilitary forces that it has armed and trained for more than a decade to help fight the Taliban-led insurgency in Eastern Afghanistan, near the Pakistani border.

Obama calls Karzai, praises successful elections¹³

President Hamid Karzai and his US counterpart Barack Obama held a telephonic conversation on May 25, 2014. Both presidents held talks after Obama landed at the Bagram Airbase in central Parwan province following a secret trip to Afghanistan. This was Obama's fourth visit to Afghanistan as president, but his first since winning re-election in 2012. A statement from the Presidential palace said Obama congratulated Karzai on holding successful presidential and provincial

council elections and the key role played by Afghans in the democratic process. The Afghanistan peace process also came under discussion.

Afghans will face Blacklist if Anti-Money Laundering Law is not Passed¹⁴

Western countries have told Afghanistan that its banks would be put on an international blacklist if it did not pass an anti-money laundering law. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international body that sets standards on how countries combat money laundering, is due to decide at its meeting on June 22 on whether to blacklist Afghanistan. If it is Blacklisted Afghan banks would be cut off from most international financial institutions. Chinese banks have already halted dollar transactions with most Afghan banks without warning.

Karzai calls for Sino-Afghan fight against terror¹⁵

President Hamid Karzai went to China to attend the fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia in Shanghai. President Hamid Karzai, who met his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Shanghai, said that Afghanistan was willing to make joint efforts with China to combat terrorism and transnational crime. On the sideline of the meeting, President met UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon, who ensured continuous UN support to Afghanistan beyond the elections.

Iran pays Afghan refugees \$500 a month to fight in Syria¹⁶

Reportedly, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has been recruiting thousands of Afghan refugees to fight against the rebel forces in Syria. The Afghan refugees are granted Iranian residency, \$500 a month, school registration for their children and charity card to help the Assad regime.

Taliban releases Bowe Bergdahl in return of five Taliban detainees¹⁷

US Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl, held for nearly five years by the Taliban after being captured in Afghanistan, has been released and is now in US custody, US President Barack Obama said. As part of Bergdahl's release, the United States is turning over five Taliban detainees at the US prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to the custody of Qatar. Bergdahl's freedom follows months of indirect US-Taliban talks with Qatar acting as intermediary.

Bangladesh

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury meets Indian Prime Minister¹⁸

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury represented Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony on May 26. Speaker Chaudhury met Indian Prime Minister in New Delhi on May 27 and handed over a letter from Hasina. At a media briefing in New Delhi, Indian Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh said, "Modi requested the Bangladesh Speaker to convey his warm greetings and best wishes to Hasina, and said he looked forward to receiving her in India at an early date". Sujatha said, "Modi appreciated the cooperation extended by Bangladesh to work together with India in all areas of mutual interests, including security, power, border management, and rail and road transport". Speaker Shirin also called on Indian President Pranab Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Hasina visits Japan¹⁹

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made a four-day official visit to Japan on May 24, 2014. This was her first bilateral tour after the January 5 general elections. Hasina led a 109-member delegation including a 45-member business team. During her meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, both the leaders discussed about a Comprehensive Partnership Agreement between the two countries which would cover comprehensive economic cooperation, with the private sector playing a key role. Hasina signed a 21-point joint statement with Abe. At the joint press conference after the formal talk, Abe announced economic assistance worth \$5.9 billion to Bangladesh over the next four to five years. The economic aid will be given through implementation of the concept of the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B), proposed by the Japanese premier. During the visit, Bangladesh offered 40 industrial plots in export processing zones exclusively to Japanese entrepreneurs by signing an agreement on May 27. Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) and Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) signed the agreement in presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

CMBEC will construct the padma bridge²⁰

The Padma bridge project finally sees a breakthrough after a three-year delay over allegations of a corruption conspiracy, with the cabinet purchase committee awarding the project to the lone bidder, China Major Bridge Engineering Company (CMBEC).

China's congress representative visits Bangladesh²¹

Yan Junqi, vice chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China, came to Dhaka on a three-day visit on May 13, 2014. Junqi, who was leading a 16-member delegation, arrived in Bangladesh at the invitation of Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury. Besides the Speaker, Junqi met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson Khaleda Zia, among others. The purpose of the visit was to promote friendly contacts and exchanges between the parliaments of the two countries. Junqi is also the chairperson of China Association for Promoting Democracy, which is one of nine political parties of China.

Bangladesh-China sign treaties to enhance military cooperation²²

Bangladesh and China signed four treaties to enhance military cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries on May 12, 2014. Under the treaties, China's armed forces will provide military assistance to the Bangladesh armed forces free of cost. The assistance includes providing training and logistic support to the armed forces and setting up a language laboratory at the Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). Visiting Chinese Air Chief Marshal General Xu Qiliang, Principal Staff Officer of Armed Forces Division Lt. Gen. Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiul Huq, Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Mainul Islam and BUP Vice Chancellor Maj Gen Sheikh Mamun Khaled signed the treaties on behalf of their respective governments.

Bangladesh becomes full member of CICA²³

Bangladesh became a full member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) on May 20, 2014.

German business delegation comes to Bangladesh on fact finding mission²⁴

A 10-member German business delegation headed by Wilhelm G Clasen, member of the Board of the German Asia-Pacific Business Association (OAV) and chairman of OAV Bangladesh Committee, called on Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali at state guesthouse Padma on May 23 during their five-day visit to Bangladesh. The delegation head informed that this was a fact finding mission on Bangladesh's economy and trade. The delegation conveyed that Germany intends to invest in the expansion and upgradation of Bangladesh's railway network, in-land water transportation, water treatment and waste management sectors. The European country is also highly interested in investing for a spare parts machinery factory here for the regional market and considering producing electricity from garbage and waste.

Bangladesh to lease 10 Gbps of bandwidth to India²⁵

Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd. signed a memorandum of understanding with the BSNL, the state-owned telecom company of India, to lease internet bandwidth to the neighbour. Monwar Hossain, managing director of Bangladesh Submarine Cable, said BSNL will initially lease 10 Gbps of bandwidth from Bangladesh and take another 30 Gbps within eight months. The contract of the lease will be for three years and could be extended later.

Attack on minorities²⁶

A mob of nearly 3,000 attacked hindu households and a temple in eastern Bangladesh after two youths from the community allegedly insulted the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook. Police arrested 17 people, including the principal of Bagmara Madrasa, for the attack on the temple and over two dozen households at Homna in Comilla district, about 100km south east of Dhaka. The High Court has directed the local administration to immediately take steps to ensure safety and security of religious minority people and their properties in Comilla.

Law and order worries NHRC²⁷

In the wake of an alarming rise in abductions and secret killings, the National Human Rights Commission expressed concern over human rights situation in the country. "The country is at a critical juncture. Fear and anxiety are consuming people and society. We too are anxious and concerned," said NHRC Chairman Mizanur Rahman. Mizanur made the remarks while addressing the inauguration of a two-day workshop on human rights at Kuakata of Patuakhali. According to legal aid and civil rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra, at least 39 people have disappeared in the first quarter of this year and there have been allegations that law enforcers were involved in abductions.

Bhutan

Prime Minister visits India²⁸

Prime Minister Lyonchhoen Tshering Tobgay attended the swearing in ceremony of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During the visit, Lyonchhoen met President Pranab Mukerjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Secretary of Power PK Sinha, Joint Secretary North Abhay Thakur, President of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Ajay S Shriram, members of the Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad (ARSP) and the India-Bhutan Friendship Association (IBFA) and senior BJP leaders.

Indian assistance trippled²⁹

The Government of India has confirmed that it would release Rs 550 million for Small Development Project (SDP) and another Rs 850 million by June end. Finance minister Namgay Dorji claimed the Indian assistance had almost trippled in the first year of the 11th plan compared with the same period under the 10th plan. This would take India's assistance to the country to Rs 10.4 billion in the first year of the Plan, including the fund for economic stimulus plan, project tied assistance, program grant and funding for spill over projects from the last plan. So far, the government received Rs 9 billion from India.

WB Vice President visits Bhutan³⁰

World Bank's (WB) vice president of South Asia region, Philippe Le Houérou was in Bhutan from May 17 to 20 to take stock of the partnership between the WB and country, and how it can best support Bhutan. The vice president was in the country also to consult on a proposed new World Bank group-Bhutan country partnership strategy currently being developed, which would cover the next five years of cooperation. During his visit, the vice president signed an agreement with finance minister Namgay Dorji, to provide an additional US\$ 17.4 million for the second urban development project on May 19. The World Bank has four investment operations for a net commitment of US\$ 33.9million and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank group's private sector arm, has a committed investment portfolio of US\$ 31million.

Bhutan seeks to buy bandwidth from Bangladesh³¹

Bhutan is seeking to purchase internet bandwidth from Bangladesh. Bhutan's ambassador to Bangladesh, Pema Choden, made this request when she met with the Bangladeshi foreign affairs state minister, Shariar Alam, on May 7. The Bangladeshi government in February this year decided to sell or "export" half the country's bandwidth to any country in the region, given that it was hardly using any of it. The Bangladesh Submarine Cable company maintains an undersea cable to a connection point to the internet in Europe. The SEA-NE-WE 4 (South East Asia-Middle East-Western Europe) cable has a bandwidth of 200Gbps (gigabits per second), but only 40Gbps is used by Bangladesh. In response to Ambassador Pema Choden's request, Mr Alam said that necessary steps would be taken, according to Bangladeshi media.

Inflation on food items surpassed that of imported food³²

While policy makers and economists have been linking the country's spiralling

inflation to that of India, rise in price of food, housing and electricity equally contributed to it. Going by the National Statistics Bureau's (NSB) consumer price index of December 2013, domestic inflation on food items surpassed that of imported food. Domestic inflation on food was almost 19 percent, compared with the 13 percent inflation on imported food. NSB officials said, almost half, 47 percent, of the inflation is derived from within. Overall domestic inflation on food commodities is recorded at 11.68 percent in the past one year. Although the country is self sufficient in eggs and 98 percent self sufficient in vegetables, the inflation on food items was mainly driven by the price of egg, cheese, vegetables and milk, all by more than 4 percent.

External debt is likely to rise to 121 percent of GDP³³

The country's external debt is projected to rise to 121 percent of GDP in fiscal year 2016-17. This is according to the recently released World Bank report – Bhutan Development update. Currently, according to the report, the four hydropower projects that are under construction – Punatshangchhu I, II, Mangdechhu, and Dagachhu – guzzles investment worth 28 percent of the GDP annually.

Bhutan was reviewed on its human rights situation³⁴

Bhutan was commended for the progress it made in promoting and protecting human rights during its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva. But it had to also once again, explain its stand on the people in the camps in Nepal and respond to questions on freedom of religion. This was the second time Bhutan was reviewed on its human rights situation, the last being in 2009. Home minister Lyonpo Damcho Dorji presented the national report, which detailed how the country responded to the 75 of 99 recommendations it accepted in 2009. The country was commended on its progress in strengthening democracy, the institutional framework for protection and promotion of human rights, increasing right to education and health, reducing poverty and on its measures to improve the situation of vulnerable groups, which include women, children and the disabled.

EU development assistance to Bhutan³⁵

The European Union (EU) will triple its development assistance to the country by committing Euro 42 million during 2014-2020. The EU ambassador to Bhutan João Cravinho announced this in Thimphu on April 30, 2014. Most of the money will be injected into the decentralisation and devolution of power process, reinforcing civil society organisations and public finance management support. The rest would go into supporting sustainable agriculture and forestry. EU assistance to Bhutan began in 1982, and amounted to Euro 46 million during 1982-2002, Euro 15 million during 2002-2006 and 14 million during 2007-2013. EU assistance is provided in seven-year cycles.

Maldives

President visits India³⁶

President Abdulla Yameen visited India to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During the visit, President met the new Prime Minister of India and discussed the scope of enhancing cooperation between the two countries. The future of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and issues of regional security were also discussed during the meeting. President Yameen extended an invitation to Modi to visit the Maldives next year to take part in the 'Golden Jubilee' celebrations marking 50 years of the country's independence. President Yameen also met senior leaders of Bharatiya Janatha Party and Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Maldives stand on the GMR compensation remains unchanged³⁷

Maldives government's stand on the GMR compensation issue remains unchanged, President's Office Spokesperson has said. The statement followed SMS messages and social media posts being circulated saying that the government has agreed to pay MVR 878 million, in addition to 37 uninhabited islands and Hanimaadhoo Airport to GMR, as compensation for the premature annulment of the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA) agreement in November 2012. Spokesperson at the President's Office Ibrahim Muaz Ali told Sun Online on May 31 that the government would not pay compensation to GMR before the matter is settled by the arbitration court in Singapore. He said that the government of Maldives has not, at any point, discussed the matter with the government of India and that there was no pressure from the Indian government regarding the compensation issue.

Indian Chief of Army Staff visits Maldives³⁸

Chief of the Army Staff of India, General Bikram Singh paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom on May 8 at the President's Office. At the meeting, President Yameen and General Bikram discussed the historic close friendly relations that exist between the Maldives and India, and ways to enhance these relations in the years ahead.

Defence minister denies Indian offer to build Thilafalhu dockyard³⁹

Minister of Defence Mohamed Nazim has told local media that no official offer from India to build a dock yard in the Maldives has been received. Following reports in the Indian media that India's Army Chief General Bikram Singh has offered to build a dockyard worth US\$ 500 million in the Maldives during his official visit, Nazim told media that the job would not be awarded to a foreign military. Nazim did say that many offers had been received for the Uthuru Thilafalhu lagoon project, in the archipelago's north, but that no decision had yet been made. Reclamation work is already underway in the area. Once completed, it will serve as the Maldivian Coastguard's primary operations base and will provide a much-needed berthing space to naval ships and ocean liners. Reportedly, India's Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh visited the Uthuru Thilafalhu project site during her visit to the Maldives in February.

Executive Director of the Asian Development Bank calls on President⁴⁰

Executive Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Mr. Muhammad Sami Saeed has paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom on May 18, 2014 at the President's Office.

The Minister of Health and Gender appointed as the Chairperson of the Executive Board of the WHO⁴¹

The Minister of Health and Gender Dr Mariyam Shakeela has been appointed as the Chairperson of the Executive Board of World Health Organisation (WHO). This appointment took place at a meeting of the WHO Executive Board following the World Health Assembly in Geneva on May 26.

Maldives Parliament elects its speaker⁴²

The Maldives parliament elected its speaker and deputy speaker on May 28 in a move that ended the coalition between the main Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and Jumhoory Party. PPM nominee Abdulla Maseeh was elected as speaker and opposition Maldives Democratic Party's Moosa Manik as deputy speaker of parliament. With the dissolution of the coalition between the PPM and Jumhoory Party, only MP Ahmed Siyam Mohamed's Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) remains in the ruling coalition.

Police seize over 3 kg of illicit narcotics⁴³

An operation carried out by Police Drug Intelligence and the Drug Enforcement Department has resulted in the seizure of over 3 kg of what is suspected of being illicit narcotics that were being trafficked into the Maldives. A Thai woman and an African woman were taken into police custody in relation to the case.

National Security Council holds first meeting⁴⁴

President Abdulla Yameen's National Security Council held its first meeting on May 14. The council is set up under the Military Act to advise the President on matters relating to national security. Defense Minister Mohamed Nazim told local media that the discussions were held on developing facilities for the military and on compiling policies on national security.

Synohydro will build parking apron at the INIA⁴⁵

China's state-owned engineering and construction company, Synohydro, is to build a US \$ 9 million parking apron at the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA). The agreement was signed between the Maldives Airports Company (MACL) and Sinohydro on May 8. MACL Managing Director 'Bandhu' Ibrahim Saleem said the new apron – to be built on the northern tip of the runway – will be 350 meters long and 75 meters wide. Four Boeing 777 airplanes can park on the apron. The project is to be completed within 12 months.

Nepal

PM visits India⁴⁶

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala came to New Delhi on May 26 to attend the swearing-in function of the Indian Prime Minister Modi, leading a 13-member delegation. Koirala had called on the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi on May 27. Koirala said that during bilateral talks Modi looked forward to working with Nepal in order to optimise the hydropower potential and requested Koirala to initiate mega hydro projects for India to invest in. While water resource issues figured prominently at the meeting, Koirala said he suggested his counterpart for increased support in other sectors like trade, tourism and agriculture. Bharatiya Janata Party senior leader Lal Krishna Advani, Congress senior leader Karan Singh and Janata Dal United Chairman Sharad Yadav met PM Koirala at Maurya Sheraton hotel in New Delhi. During the visit, Koirala held talks with Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai and Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Koshiyari visits Nepal⁴⁷

Two days after Prime Minister Sushil Koirala returned from New Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party leader Bhagat Singh Koshiyari and Ajit Kumar went to Kathmandu on May 30, 2014 on a two-day visit.

Minister of Foreign Affairs attends 17th NAM conference for ministers⁴⁸

Minister for Foreign Affairs Mahendra Bahadur Pandey has called for enhanced solidarity and unity among the member countries of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) on all outstanding issues and problems as well as a cohesive approach to problem-solving to make NAM more effective and dynamic. Addressing the 17th NAM Conference in Algiers on May 29, Pandey said, "the movement's core principles, values and ideals were as relevant today as they were at the time of its founding", according to a statement issued by Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the sidelines of the conference, Minister Pandey held a bilateral meeting with Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel García Margallo Marfil and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davuto.

Bhutanese PM in Kathmandu⁴⁹

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, who was forced to stop in Kathmandu following inclement weather in Thimphu, visited Pashupatinath temple and Bouddhanath stupa in the Capital on May 29 on his way back to Thimphu from the swearing-in ceremony of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Norwegian delegation calls on PM Koirala⁵⁰

The Norwegian delegation led by Tima Lyer Utne, senior vice-president of the Norwegian International Hydropower Sector looking after southeast called on Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and held talks on investments in the hydropower sector on May 8.

Japanese vice minister for Foreign Affairs visits Nepal⁵¹

Visiting Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Seiji Kihara paid a courtesy call on President Ram Baran Yadav at the latter's residence in Shital Niwas on May 8. During the meeting, matters related to bilateral relations, mutual cooperation and interests, current political issues, regional and international interests were discussed.

Irish consulate opens in Kathmandu⁵²

The Honorary Consulate of Ireland in Nepal has opened its office in the Kathmandu on May 23. With the opening of the Irish consulate, the number of honorary consulates of different countries has reached 35.

Khanal visits China⁵³

Chairman of the CPN-UML Jhala Nath Khanal went to the People's Republic of China on a 10-day visit leading a 19-member delegation on May 6. The UML chairman is visiting China at the invitation of the Communist Party of China. During the visit, Khanal met Qin Guangrong, secretary of Yunnan Provincial Committee of Communist Party of China Wang Jiarui, vice chairman of National People's Consultative Conference of China and Chen Fengxiang, vice-minister of International Department of Communist Party of China. Khanal had called on Chinese Vice-President Li Yuwanchao before returning Nepal. Khanal said that Li advised Nepal to strengthen its relations with India. During the meeting, Li said China is ready to provide any kind of assistance to Nepal if the latter comes up with concrete plan to achieve its development goals. Khanal said he requested the Chinese vice-president to initiate the task of extending the Lhasa-Shigatse railway upto Kathmandu and help Nepal construct the international airport in Bara. During his visit, Khanal also met Wang Jiarui, Vice minister for the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee.

Chief of Army Staff returns from America⁵⁴

Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) Gaurav SJB Rana returned to Nepal on May 12 after a two-week official visit to the United States to participate in the International Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. During his stay in the US, Rana held talks with high officials of US Army, Defense Ministry and State Department focusing on Nepal's contribution to maintain world peace and stability, and bilateral relations.

Nepal urges ADB to resume grants⁵⁵

The government has requested the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to resume providing grants to Nepal as it is still in transition and though its repayment capacity may have improved, economic growth and per capita income are still poor. The Asian multilateral lender stopped providing grants to Nepal from last year citing its enlarged debt servicing capacity. Currently, the ADB has been providing only soft loans to Nepal. The country's outstanding foreign debts shrank to 17.6 percent in fiscal 2012-13 from a high of 45.4 percent in fiscal 2002-03, according to the Economic Survey 2012-13. Government and ADB officials have confirmed that Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat made this plea to ADB President Takehiko Nakao during the bank's recent annual meeting in Kazakhstan.

World Bank okays \$ 84.6m for Kabeli-A hydel project⁵⁶

The World Bank Group has approved financing worth \$ 84.6 million for the Kabeli-A Hydroelectric Project. The funding package includes a \$ 40 million loan and a \$ 6 million grant from the International Development Association (IDA) besides a \$ 19.3 million loan from International Finance Corporation (IFC). Additionally, the package includes a \$ 19.3 million loan from the Canada Climate Change Program (CCCP) for which the IFC acts as the implementing agency.

CA Constitution drafting committee begins its work on statute⁵⁷

The Constitution Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly (CA) formally began its task of drafting the statute on May 30. Five subcommittees, each serving specific function in the constitution drafting process, have been formed. Each subcommittee can have a maximum of 15 members to study the relevant reports passed by the CA and prepare the first draft of a new constitution. The Drafting Committee is tasked with preparing the draft of the constitution as and when it receives the agreed issues from the full house of the CA on the reports of the last assembly. The disputed issues will be sent to the Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee for consensus building. The modality of state restructuring is likely to be the major bone of contention in the new CA as well with the top leaders of Nepali Congress and UCPN (Maoist) getting into a heated debate during deliberation on the subject. UCPN (Maoist) senior leader Baburam Bhattarai, also the chairman of the CA Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee, said the unitary model, which was built under the command of King Prithivi Narayan Shah out of small principalities by defeating them in wars, must be dissolved in favour of federal setup. Noting that the demand made by one section for carving out provinces even for small ethnic minorities and the call of the other section for eschewing federal model based on ethnicity are both extreme viewpoints, Bhattarai recommended that the country should try to find a middle ground on federalism. He added that economic viability and identity should have equal roles in defining Nepal's federal system. Responding to Bhattarai's view, NC Vice Chairman Ram Chandra Poudel said the nation cannot afford to waste its vital time weighing the pros and cons of dividing Nepal into small principalities in the name of federating the country. Poudel accused Bhattarai of confusing the issue of identity in the federal discourse with dividing Nepal into ethnic states. The NC vice-chairman added that delimiting the country along ethnic lines would only invite trouble and divide the country. Poudel recommended taking a pragmatic approach to resolve the contentious issue on federal setup.

RPP-N reiterates its demand for Hindu state⁵⁸

Newly elected Chairman of Rastriya Prajatantra Party- Nepal (RPP-N), the fourth largest party with 24 seats in the CA, Kamal Thapa has said that his party would not accept a constitution without the identity of 'ageless Hindu state' with equal respect to all religions and complete religious freedom. He added that a referendum should be held if there was no consensus on the issues of secularism, republic and federalism in course of drafting the new constitution.

President approves TRC bill⁵⁹

President approved the transitional justice bill on May 11, paving the way for the formation of the Commission on Investigation of Enforced Disappearances, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement had envisaged the commissions within six months of its signing in 2006. After two earlier attempts by the UCPN (Maoist)-led government, the present coalition of the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML finally drafted the bill that was passed by a majority in Parliament. The controversy, however, continued to dog the bill since its drafting began—first over the formation of an experts' taskforce and then over the contents. The government had formed a bureaucratic panel to draft the bill, which was ultimately reviewed by a six-member team of political leaders, two members each from the three major political parties—NC, UML and UCPN (Maoist). After Parliament passed the bill last month, the President's Office took two weeks to scan through the bill and approve it. According to President's legal advisor Surya Dhungel, the President took his time consulting the law minister, the attorney general and the law secretary for clarity. The bill has now become an Act, but the provisions of amnesty and reconciliation remain controversial. While the government is adamant on reconciliation, victims' groups object to amnesty for perpetrators of grave human rights violation.

Tarai armed outfits tamed, says Home Minister⁶⁰

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Bam Dev Gautam has claimed that the government has contained the criminal activities of armed outfits operating in Tarai and eastern Hills. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, the number of armed outfits operating in Tarai and hilly districts grew considerably, prompting the Home Ministry to publicise a list of 120 armed outfits operating across the country. It is learnt that the ministry has held talks with 21 outfits and, consequently, the latter have surrendered their weapons to the government.

Seventh Republic Day was celebrated with fanfare⁶¹

The seventh Republic Day was observed amid colourful programmes on May 30, with the function organised at the Army Pavilion in the Capital taking the centre stage. President Ram Baran Yadav, Vice President Paramananda Jha, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, ministers, high-ranking army and police officials, civil servants and representatives of diplomatic missions attended the programme.

Late GP Koirala given highest national honour⁶²

The late Nepali Congress leader Girija Prasad Koirala has been posthumously awarded the Nepal Ratna Man Padavi, the highest honour given to a Nepali with unparalleled contribution to the motherland.

Pakistan

Nawaz Sharif visits India⁶³

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi. Prime Minister Sharif held bilateral discussions with Prime Minister Modi on May 27. The decision for talks between foreign secretaries of the two states was taken during the meeting. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said the inauguration of Narendra Modi as his Indian counterpart was a "great opportunity" for the two nuclear neighbours to open a new chapter in relations. "This could help in turning a new page in our relations," he said.

Pakistan protest against cross border fire⁶⁴

Pakistan lodged strong protest with the Afghan chargé d'affaires against a cross-border attack from Afghanistan and the matter had also been taken up with the Afghan Foreign Ministry by Pakistan's Ambassador in Kabul. Foreign Office spokesperson in a statement said that a Pakistan military post at Nao Top came under fire raid and physical attack by over 200 terrorists crossing from the Afghan side. During the attack, one Pakistani soldier was killed while two were seriously injured. The spokesperson said that in a bid to repulse the terrorist attack, Pakistani troops responded with artillery and aviation support.

Prime Minister inaugurates Nandipur power project⁶⁵

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif inaugurated the first phase of the Rs 58 billion (Pakistani Rs.) Nandipur power project on May 31, 2014. The first turbine of the 425 megawatt power project has started producing 95 megawatts of power in the initial stage. The four-unit project would be completed by the end of this year in cooperation with Dongfang Electric Corporation of China.

China releases fund for Neelum-Jhelum hydropower project⁶⁶

The Chinese government released \$49 million through Exim Bank of China for Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Project on May 30. The Exim Bank of China is among five major funding agencies besides Saudi Fund, Islamic Development Bank, Opec Fund for International Development, Kuwait Funds contributing millions of dollars to the \$2.74 billion project.

Thirty seven Pakistani prisoners released from Indian jails⁶⁷

Thirty seven Pakistani prisoners, among them 32 fishermen, reached their home country via Wagah border on May 30 following their release by the Indian government. According to a Rangers official, India reciprocated a decision of the Pakistani government which had released as a goodwill gesture 151 Indian prisoners on May 26, ahead of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to New Delhi to attend Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony.

Infighting in TTP⁶⁸

A key faction of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) announced that it was splitting from the militant outfit following bloody clashes with a rival group. The break-away faction belongs to the Mehsud tribe, widely considered the most important

of the various groups that comprise the umbrella TTP which has fought the Pakistani government since 2007. Azam Tariq, a spokesman for the group, said the breakaway faction would be led by Khalid Mehsud, famously known by the name of Khan Said alias Sajna. Khalid Mehsud was a key ally of former Mehsud Taliban chief and former TTP number two Waliur Rehman Mehsud, who was killed in a US drone strike in May last year. Two factions of the TTP, the umbrella grouping for disparate militant organisations, have been locked in bloody clashes for the past several weeks. Differences emerged in the militant organisation after former chief Hakimullah Mehsud was killed by a US drone in November last year and a crisis developed over the future leadership of the group. Khalid Mehsud was a contender for the TTP's top slot after Hakimullah's death, but the post eventually was handed to Maulana Fazlullah who hails from the Swat valley and is the first non-Mehsud to lead the TTP. The conflict brought those backing Khalid Mehsud against supporters of Taliban commander Sheheryar Mehsud, who claim to be the followers of the late Hakimullah Mehsud. Infighting among the factions has also impeded and undermined what little progress had been made in peace negotiations with the government.

President urges the OIC to resolve Kashmir dispute⁶⁹

President Mamnoon Hussain asked the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to play its role for early and peaceful resolution of Kashmir dispute. The president said this during a meeting with ambassadors and high commissioners of OIC countries at the Presidency.

US puts drone strike on hold⁷⁰

US President Barack Obama has put drone attacks in Pakistan on hold, CNN reported on May 24, noting that Islamabad's decision to step up its military actions in Fata contributed to the decision.

Pakistan–China joint air exercises⁷¹

Pakistan and China have begun their third joint air exercises, code named "Shaheen-III" at an operational base in Pakistan. Shaheen-III is the third in a series of multidimensional joint air exercises with the PLA Air Force conducted annually on alternate basis in both the countries.

President Mamnoon meets his Chinese counterpart⁷²

During his meeting with the Chinese President, Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), President Mamnoon said Pakistan highly values its relations with China which are unparalleled in the contemporary era of inter-state relations. Press Secretary to the President Saba Mohsin Raza said the two leaders held wide-ranging discussions on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. President Mamnoon Hussain and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping also agreed to strengthen cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts.

PM discusses security situation with Army chief⁷³

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif on May 8 as part of ongoing consultations over security in tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Security situation in Karachi and Balochistan was also discussed.

PM chairs high level meeting on national and regional security⁷⁴

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chaired a high level meeting on May 20 to discuss matters pertaining to national and regional security. The meeting was attended by Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif, Chief of General Staff Lt Gen Nadeem Ahmed and Director General military operations Major Gen Amir Riaz. Prevailing National and regional security situation was reviewed in the meeting which also discussed the law and order situation in Balochistan and Karachi. General Raheel Sharif gave a briefing regarding his talks with the NATO and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commanders, and Afghan leadership in Kabul on May 19 and security for second phase of Afghan Presidential elections. The prime minister during the meeting said that national security was of paramount importance for the country.

Govt eyes 7.2 percent growth rate by 2016-17⁷⁵

After missing the economic growth target in its first year because of a poor show by agriculture and services sectors, the PML-N government has set an ambitious target to expand the economy at a rate of 7.2 percent by the financial year of 2016-17. A meeting of the cabinet, presided over by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on May 15, cleared the "Budget Strategy Paper 2014-17", envisaging fiscal deficit at 4.8 percent for the next financial year, rate of inflation at 7.5 percent, federal development programme at Rs 525 billion and tax revenue at Rs 2.810 trillion.

Commerce minister attends TIFA meeting in Washington⁷⁶

Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan went to Washington on May 12 with a high-level delegation to attend the two-day meeting of the US-Pakistan Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council, established in 2003 to facilitate discussions on bilateral issues. The United States and Pakistan unveiled a joint action plan on May 13 to expand trade and investment over the next five years. At a meeting in Washington, Minister Khan and US Trade Representative Michael Froman signed a memorandum of understanding on women's economic empowerment.

US chief of Naval operation visits Pakistan⁷⁷

Admiral Jonathan Greenert, US chief of naval operations, came to Islamabad on May 13 on an important visit aimed at enhancing professional cooperation between the navies of the two countries. Admiral Jonathan held a meeting with Chief of Naval staff Admiral Asif Sandila at Naval Headquarters in Islamabad. Admiral Jonathan also held a meeting with Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif at the army's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, according to an Inter Services Public Relations spokesperson.

Protestors demand protection to religious minorities⁷⁸

Human rights activists and members of Hindu community held a demonstration on May 11, demanding protection to religious minorities and their worship places, and arrest of culprits involved in desecration of temples. Speaking at a press conference at the Karachi Press Club, they said the recent attacks on temples had been made under a conspiracy to create a sense of insecurity among religious minority communities and force them to leave their motherland. But such a conspiracy, which was bringing bad name to the country internationally, would be foiled, they said.

PM visits Iran⁷⁹

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Iran on the invitation of President Rouhani. During a meeting with the Iranian president at Saadabad Palace, both the leaders reiterated their commitment to increasing bilateral trade. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani agreed to continue with the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. The prime minister also held a meeting with First Vice-President Eshaq Jehangiri and the Supreme Leader of Iran Syed Ali Ayatollah Khamenei in Tehran. The visit came amid tensions between the neighbours following the kidnapping in February of five Iranian soldiers by Sunni extremists. Tehran says the soldiers — four of whom returned home after being held for two months — were taken across the border into Pakistan, a claim Islamabad denies.

Iranian interior minister visits Pakistan⁸⁰

Iranian Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli came to Islamabad on May 5 on a day-long visit to hold talks with Pakistani leadership on regional security and bilateral matters.

Prime Minister visits UK⁸¹

Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif undertook a visit to the United Kingdom (UK) at the invitation of British Prime Minister David Cameron. During the visit, he held important meetings with the British leadership to strengthen strategic relations between Pakistan and the UK. He returned from the visit on May 5, 2014.

NATO convoy was attacked⁸²

Two people were killed and three were injured on May 5 when unidentified militants attacked a NATO convoy of trucks carrying military vehicles in the Jamrud tehsil of Khyber tribal region.

WB approves \$12 billion loans for Pakistan⁸³

The World Bank (WB) has approved \$12 billion loans for Pakistan to be disbursed in five years. Rachid Benmessaoud, the bank's director for Pakistan, told journalists on May 2 that the WB group approved a \$1 billion to support the country's economic reforms, aimed at improving performance of power sector and triggering growth and investment for poverty reduction and shared prosperity. The bank also approved a new Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for Pakistan envisaging a

'notional financing envelop' of \$11 billion for the next five years (fiscal years 2015-19) for development work in both public and private sectors. The two loans had a maturity of 25 years and a grace period of five years.

Conference on Middle East⁸⁴

Pakistan has summoned its envoys from key Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Egypt and Yemen to meet in Islamabad on May 4 for urgent consultations over situation in Syria in particular and Middle East in general. Addressing the concluding session of the Envoys Conference, Prime Minister categorically stated that Pakistan desired peace and tranquility in the Middle East and would maintain the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of states.

Commander US Central Command met Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif⁸⁵

Commander US Central Command Gen Lloyd Austin met Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif on May 1, 2014 for discussions on Afghanistan and bilateral military-to-military cooperation.

Sri Lanka

Mahinda Rajapaksa visits India⁸⁶

President Mahinda Rajapaksa came to New Delhi on May 26 to participate in the swearing-in ceremony of India's Prime Minister-elect Narendra Modi. Accompanying the President in the delegation were Minister of External Affairs Prof. G.L. Peiris, Minister of Livestock and Rural Community Development Arumugam Thondaman, Monitoring MP of the Ministry of External Affairs Sajin de Vass Gunawardena, Mayor of the Jaffna Municipal Council Mrs. Yogeswaray Patgunarajah, Secretary to the President Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs Mrs. Kshenuka Senewiratne. Rajapaksa invited Chief Minister of Northern Province C.V. Wigneswaran to join the delegation, but he refused to accompany President to India. During the visit, President Mahinda Rajapaksa and new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met for bilateral talks on May 27 at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi. The key issues of rehabilitation and reconstruction and the 13th amendment were the subject of conversation between the two leaders. President Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Modi also discussed the issue of fishermen of both countries and measures that can be taken to find a permanent solution through a process in which the views of fishermen from both countries can be taken into consideration. Both agreed that talks between the fishermen and the meeting of the joint committee of officials must continue. India has agreed to release 85 Sri Lankan fishermen who are lodged in different jails in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. This was conveyed to Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa when he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi. President Rajapaksa also met Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and briefed him on the steps Sri Lanka has taken with regard to development and the ongoing reconciliation process in the country.

Rajapaksa meets Maldivian President⁸⁷

President Rajapaksa met Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom in New Delhi on May 26. The two leaders discussed a number of matters of mutual interest, including the joint economic commission. The progress of the

memorandums of understanding (MoUs) on youth and skills development, sports and training in various sectors was discussed. The MoUs were signed when the Maldivian President was in Sri Lanka on a state visit in January of this year. President Gayoom had a specific request for President Rajapaksa – to make a visit to Maldives.

India-Sri Lanka talk on comprehensive civil nuclear cooperation⁸⁸

The second round of talks between India and Sri Lanka on comprehensive civil nuclear cooperation was held on May 5-6, 2014 in Colombo. Discussions were held on the draft text of a comprehensive Agreement on Bilateral Civil Nuclear Cooperation. It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in India in the second half of 2014 to take forward the issues under discussion.

Fishermen level talks ends with no breakthrough⁸⁹

Fishermen level talks between Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen, held in Colombo ended on May 12, 2014 with no breakthrough, Fisheries Ministry spokesman Narendra Rajapaksa said. He said that Sri Lankan fishermen maintained their stand and rejected requests by the Indians to be allowed to fish in Sri Lankan waters. The Sri Lankan fishermen had said that while allowing such a move would affect their day to day livelihood and fishing resources, it would also be a violation of international maritime laws. During the talks the Indians said it would take three years to stop bottom trawling in Sri Lankan waters. The Sri Lankan fishermen opposed this and the talks eventually ended with no agreement. The Fisheries Ministry spokesman said that the talks will now shift to Ministerial level in an attempt to resolve the issue. He said that Sri Lanka has already proposed that the Ministerial level talks be held next month. Prior to the fishermen level talk, Fisheries Minister Rajitha Senarathne and Indian External Affairs Ministry joint secretary and the official in charge of Sri Lankan affairs, Suchitra Durai had talks on maritime security and the fishermen issue. Suchitra Durai also visited Jaffna on May 9, 2014 and met the Northern Province Governor Major General (Retd) GA Chandrasiri at his office and had discussions on the ongoing Indian housing project for the war displaced in the north.

Sri Lankan arrested in terror probe⁹⁰

India's Central intelligence agencies and the Tamil Nadu police claim to have busted a major terror network with the arrest of a Sri Lankan man in Chennai. A 37-year-old man of Sri Lankan nationality, Zakir Hussain, allegedly linked to a Pakistani terror outfit, was picked up in a joint operation of Central and state police forces. The terror suspect, hailing from Kandy, has been remanded in judicial custody by a magistrate court in Chennai. Allegedly, Hussain has been tasked by a senior official in the Pakistan High commission in Colombo to recruit youths from south India, especially in Tamil Nadu for terror activities. The Tamil Nadu police told a city court that suspected ISI agent Zakir Hussain was working on a plan to sabotage the navy bases at Kochi and Visakhapatnam. The Sri Lankan government rejected claims that Muslim extremist groups are undergoing training in Sri Lanka to carry out attacks in India. Defence Ministry spokesman, Brigadier Ruwan Wanigasooriya said that such claims were baseless and were not backed by evidence.

Sri Lankan arrested in Malaysia⁹¹

The Malaysian Bukit Aman Special Branch counter-terrorism division has helped thwart a planned attack on foreign consulates in India with the arrest of four suspected terrorists including a Sri Lankan man. The Sri Lankan, who has been indirectly linked to Al-Qaeda, is on the wanted list for alleged terror activities in Sri Lanka and other countries. Police believe that he had a terrorist network in Malaysia involving foreigners.

Three LTTE suspects were arrested in Malaysia⁹²

Three men suspected of being Tamil Tigers have been arrested in Malaysia, accusing them of attempting to revive the Sri Lankan separatist group.

G.L. Peiris attends ministerial meeting of the NAM⁹³

External Affairs Minister Professor G. L. Peiris had bilateral discussions with Manuel Garcia Marfil, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, on the sidelines of the 17th Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Algiers. Minister Peiris briefed his Spanish counterpart on Sri Lanka's current situation, with particular reference to issues connected with development and reconciliation. Trade, investment and tourism were other major topics, which the Ministers discussed at their meeting. Minister Marfil informed Prof. Pieris about plans by the government of Spain to open an Embassy in Colombo in the near future.

President of the UNGA meets President⁹⁴

The President of the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) Dr. John W. Ashe called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees on May 7. Dr. Ashe was in Sri Lanka to attend the World Conference on Youth which began on May 6.

Sri Lanka is granted Accreditation Status in the African Union⁹⁵

The Commission of the African Union granted Sri Lanka Accreditation Status in the African Union (AU) with effect from April 2014 as a non-African State. Sri Lanka is the 3rd South Asian country along with India and Pakistan to have obtained Accreditation Status in the African Union.

Annual Armed Forces Staff Talks between Sri Lanka and Pakistan⁹⁶

The second round of the annual Armed Forces Staff Talks between Sri Lanka and Pakistan commenced at the Joint Staff Headquarters in Pakistan in the second week of May. The Armed Forces Staff Talks were initiated in 2012 to promote professional and mutually beneficial relations between the Armed Forces of the two countries.

Sri Lankan fishermen arrested⁹⁷

The Indian Coast Guard had apprehended 31 Sri Lankan fishermen at Nagayalanka in Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh for trespassing into Indian waters on May 7 and 11 Sri Lankan fishermen on two trawlers, who were found fishing inside the Indian Maritime Boundary on May 10.

Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan visits Sri Lanka⁹⁸

Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Seiji Kihara made an official visit to Sri Lanka on May 9. During his visit, the minister met President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Makoto Matsuda, Director, South West Asia Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Nobuhito Hobo, Ambassador of Japan in Sri Lanka accompanied the Japanese parliamentary official.

India extends ban on the LTTE for five more years⁹⁹

Central Government of India has extended its ban on the LTTE for five more years on May 14, 2014.

President visits China¹⁰⁰

President Mahinda Rajapaksa went to China on May 19, 2014 to attend the 4th Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Sri Lanka participated in the CICA summit for the first time. President Rajapaksa met the UN Chief Ban Ki Moon, Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the Conference in Shanghai. During the visit, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Chinese President Xi Jinping held bilateral talks in Shanghai and discussed the progress of ongoing collaborative projects as well as new areas of cooperation.

Chief of Staff of the Chinese People's Armed Police visits Sri Lanka¹⁰¹

The six-member delegation, headed by Chief of Staff of the Chinese People's Armed Police Lieutenant General Niu Zhizong was in Sri Lanka on a three-day official visit. The delegation met the Sri Lankan army commander on May 22, 2014.

Sri Lanka-China signs agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters¹⁰²

Sri Lanka and China have reached an agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, following discussions held in Beijing. The negotiation of the Treaty between China and Sri Lanka was held from May 6 to 8, 2014, following which the agreement was reached.

Chinese military delegation visits Sri Lanka¹⁰³

The Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission Air Chief Marshal Xu Qiliang called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa on May 16 at Temple Trees. The purpose of his visit, Xu said, was to further enhance the "strategic mutual trust" between China and Sri Lanka and to elevate "relations between the two countries and the armed forces to a new level." This was the highest military delegation from China to ever visit Sri Lanka.

Prime Minister makes his stance on South China Sea clear¹⁰⁴

Vietnamese media reported on May 9 that the visiting Sri Lankan Prime Minister D. M. Jayaratne told the Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung that the East China Sea (South China Sea) disputes must be settled through peaceful measures in respect of international law. The parties involved should not conduct unilateral

moves which may intensify tension, according to these reports. Regarding China's oil rig 981 in South China Sea, the report said that Sri Lanka supported Vietnam's stance, requested for China's strict adherence to international law and withdrawal of its oil rig 981 from Vietnam's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, so as to ensure peace and stability in the region. However, almost immediately the External Affairs Ministry issued a statement insisting that the Sri Lankan government took a contrary stance. "It is reiterated that the disputes concerning the South China Sea need to be settled bilaterally through negotiations by the concerned parties. This has been Sri Lanka's consistent position on the said issue," the short statement by the External Affairs Ministry said. Upon his return from Vietnam the Sri Lankan Prime Minister met with the Chinese Ambassador and made his and the Sri Lankan government's stance clear and emphasized support to China on the South China Sea situation.

Victory day celebration¹⁰⁵

A massive military parade was held in Matara on May 18 to commemorate five years since the end of the 30 year war against the LTTE. However, people in the North were not allowed to organise any public event to commemorate the people died during the last phase of the war. The Northern Provincial Council (NPC) staged a remembrance event on May 22 for the civilians killed in Mullivaikal during the final stages of the war. Students of the Jaffna University staged a memorial on May 21. The students held candles and erected a poster in the university premises during the silent commemoration event focused on those killed in Mullivaikal. Canadian Government boycotted the victory day parade held in Matara as it felt holding a victory day parade was not what Sri Lanka needed and instead they should be more focussed on the reconciliation efforts.

Sri Lanka condemns attack on Indian consulate in Afghanistan¹⁰⁶

A statement by the External Affairs Ministry said that the Government of Sri Lanka unequivocally condemns the terrorist attack on the Indian Consulate in Herat Province, Western Afghanistan. "The targeting of a diplomatic mission is a matter of serious concern that should draw the attention of the wider international community, and underscores Sri Lanka's consistent call for concerted and decisive action to combat the menace of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," the External Affairs Ministry said.

Australia will push Lanka on the LLRC¹⁰⁷

The Australian Government has said it would push Sri Lanka to implement the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and to engage with domestic and international stakeholders to advance an effective and transparent reconciliation agenda. Brett Mason, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Australia, in a letter to the Australian Tamil Congress, said that Australia would also continue to urge Sri Lanka to ensure that all allegations of serious international crimes committed by both sides to the conflict are investigated and prosecuted in a transparent and independent manner. The Australian Senator said that the recent listing by Sri Lanka of some Tamil diaspora does not constrain the freedom those groups have in Australia to operate in

accordance with Australian law.

No confidence motion against government¹⁰⁸

The no confidence motion presented against the Sri Lankan government by the main opposition United National Party (UNP) was defeated in the parliament on May 21, 2014 after two-days of debating.

The JVP apologises for killing people during 1988-89¹⁰⁹

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has apologised for some of the incidents which took place during 1988-89, where several people were killed by JVP cadres and supporters.

18500 people missing during and after war¹¹⁰

The Presidential Commission to Investigate Complaints regarding Missing Persons during and after the war said as of May 20, 2014, 13590 civilians and 5000 security forces personnel have been reported missing.

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