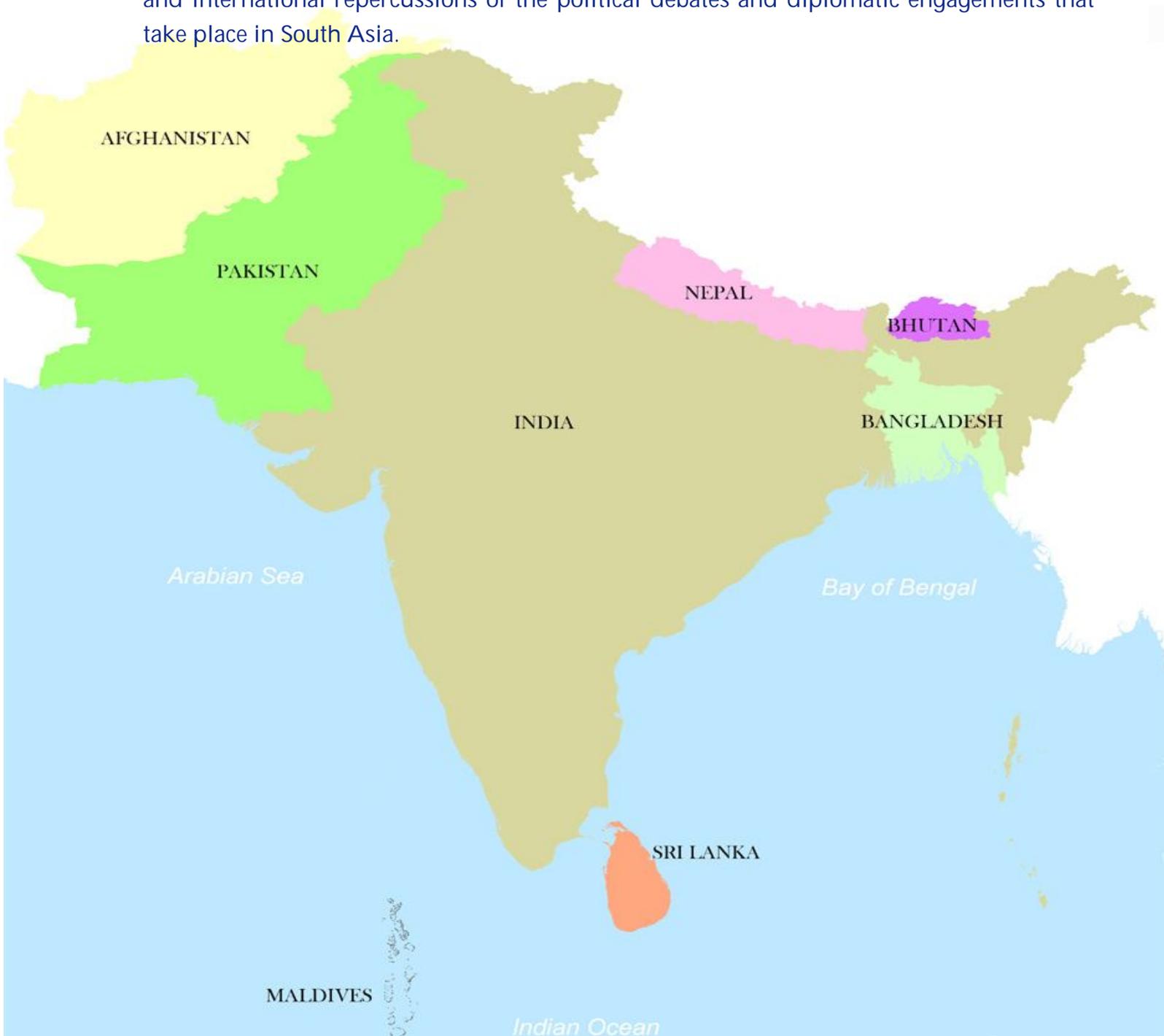


SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

October 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

Important development took place in the bilateral relations of the countries of the region in the month of October. India and Nepal finally signed the Power Trade Agreement (PTA). Initially there was apprehension in signing the agreement, but officials of both the countries fast tracked the PTA process as directed by the Joint Communiqué issued during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal in August.

The month of October saw defence cooperation between India and Sri Lanka receiving further boost. During the visit of Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa to New Delhi, India agreed to supply two naval offshore patrol vessels and other military equipment to Sri Lanka. According to media report, main purpose of Gotabaya Rajapaksa's visit to India was to discuss the India's concerns over Chinese submarine calling on Sri Lankan port in September.

India, Maldives and Sri Lanka held "Dosti 12"-the trilateral exercise of three nations.

India-Pakistan relations which deteriorated due to the cancellation of foreign secretary level talks, further impacted by the continuous indiscriminate firing and violation of ceasefire on the LOC.

After the new government, headed by Ashraf Ghani, assumed power in Kabul Pakistan is making effort to have substantive engagement with the new Afghan President. Pakistani Prime Minister's Advisor on Foreign Affairs and National Security and economic Cooperation made a visit to Afghanistan in this context.

In a disturbing development, CID has found out that bombs are being manufactured in Bardwan district of West Bengal. National Intelligence Agency (NIA) of India has taken over to investigate the case.

Bhutan and China had the technical expert group meeting on the Bhutan-China Boundary in the disputed areas.

The October issue comprised of all these and many other important developments in the region.

Afghanistan

President Ghani appoints key officials on his first day of office¹

President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai introduced his First and Second Vice Presidents, Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum and Sarwar Danish, to the vice presidency office on September 30, 2014. President Ghani emphasised that his vice presidents will play key roles in bringing reforms and maintaining the rule of law in the country. Meanwhile, on his first day of office, President Ghani appointed former Minister of Interior Hanif Atmar as the National Security Council Advisor as a replacement for Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta. Atmar had served as the Minister of Education, Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Minister of Interior at different times during Karzai's 13 year presidency.

Abdullah chaired first Council of Ministers meeting²

The Chief Executive of the National Unity Government (NUG), Abdullah Abdullah, officially began his work by chairing the first Council of Ministers meeting at the Sedarat in Kabul on October 13, 2014. At the meeting, Abdullah stated that the cabinet of the new government will undergo major changes, adding that he and his deputies will stand by their campaign commitments. The agenda for the first meeting of the Council of Ministers included the participation of Afghanistan in the London Summit, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) leaders' summit, winter preparations, transfer of sufficient food items to the provinces and keeping the Salang passage open during winter.

Ahmadzai, Abdullah Invited to White House³

For the first time after the political transition in Afghanistan, US President Barack Obama spoke with his Afghan counterpart Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai over the telephone late on October 22. Also present during the video conference between the two leaders was Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. A brief statement from the Presidential Palace announced the contact but gave no details of the issues the presidents discussed. During the video call, Obama invited Ahmadzai, and Abdullah to the White House early next year. He commended the president and CEO on their political agreement, reaffirmed US commitment to support the unity government and congratulated the two on a productive first month for the new government.

Ghani visits China⁴

President Ashraf Ghani made a four-day visit to China on October 28. During the visit President Ghani met Chinese President Xi Jinping. "We look at China as a strategic partner, in the short term, medium term, long term and very long term," he told President Xi Jinping at Beijing's Great Hall of the People. Hailing Ghani as "an old friend of the Chinese people", Xi said he was prepared to work towards "a new era of cooperation in China-Afghanistan relations" to "take development to a new depth and breadth". China agreed to provide US \$81.8 million in grant assistance to the Afghan government for 2014 and a further 1.5 billion yuan in the next three years from 2015-2017. China and Afghanistan signed four agreements on the same day, including documents on expanding technical and commercial cooperation. China also offered to mediate between bickering South Asian neighbours Afghanistan and Pakistan for the sake of stability in the region.

Istanbul, Kabul ink strategic cooperation pact⁵

Turkey and Afghanistan signed a strategic cooperation agreement on October 18, paving the ground for more robust trade and investment links between the two countries. Presidents Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced signing the pact at a joint news conference after formal talks at the Presidential Palace in Kabul. Both leaders told reporters the accord envisaged greater Turkish investment in Afghanistan's vast mining sector. The two sides will also cooperate in areas of defence, agriculture, health, reconstruction and culture. Erdogan said that the Turkish soldiers, operating within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) framework, had been maintaining security around Kabul and training their Afghan partners. For his part, Ahmadzai said his administration had asked Turkey for the supply of weapons to Afghan forces.

Kabul, Riyadh agree on robust strategic links⁶

President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai has underlined the need for expanding strategic relations between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, according to the Presidential Palace in Kabul. During his visit to Saudi Arab to perform Umrah, Ahmadzai met Saudi Crown Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Saudi Arabia's Deputy Premier and Minister of Defence Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud in Riyadh on October 26. They discussed enhanced strategic cooperation, current problems in the Islamic world and their solutions and the Saudi role in Afghanistan's peace and stability. Economic issues, Afghan traders' problems in Saudi Arabia proper facilities for pilgrims also figured at the meeting. The meeting was attended by several other Saudi officials, mainly Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Saud Al-Faisal, and Deputy Crown Prince and Second Deputy Premier Muqrin bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

Sartaj Aziz visits Afghanistan⁷

President Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai on October 19 urged Pakistan to take practical steps for peace in Afghanistan, saying that mere assurances were not enough to achieve stability. At a meeting with visiting Pakistani Prime Minister's Advisor on Foreign Affairs and National Security Sartaj Aziz in Kabul, the president underlined the role Islamabad could play in bringing stability to his country. Bilateral ties, including security and economic cooperation, as well as regional issues came up for discussion at the meeting. Aziz assured the new Afghan administration of Pakistan's stout support and delivered Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's invitation to Ahmadzai to visit Pakistan.

French assistance to Afghanistan⁸

French Ambassador to Kabul Jean-Michel Marlaud emphasised on the support of his country for making the environment in Afghanistan better, stating that the international community has failed to decrease greenhouse gas in the world. "Our commitments to support Afghanistan will not end in 2014," Marlaud said. "We have strategic commitments and a vision," adding that he launched a 10 million Euro project on behalf of the French Government to improve the environment in Bamyan province.

India to start building Chabahar Port infrastructure⁹

Indian Government said that an Indian company would be building the infrastructure for the long-awaited Chabahar port in Iran in order to increase trade relations between Afghanistan and India at a cost of over US \$ 85 million. The Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI) along with the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Trade welcome the investment in the Chabahar port project, which they say will be an important alternative to the Karachi port in Pakistan that many Afghan businesses rely on. But Afghan officials have warned that there are still some obstacles that need to be resolved. In order to move goods inexpensively, for example, instead of using ships with the capacity of 50,000 tons, ships with the capacity of 100,000 tons should be used.

Provincial poll results unveiled after seven months¹⁰

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the final results from the provincial council elections on October 25 that were held seven months ago. IEC Chairman Ahmad Yousaf Nuristani, unveiling the outcome at a news conference in Kabul, said 458 candidates, including 97 women, had found their way to provincial councils. Among males, the biggest winner polled 21,420 votes and the worst loser got only two ballots. Among females, one contender won 9,409 to emerge on the top. Another settled for 124 ballots to finish at the rock bottom. The delay has been linked to technical problems, including a mechanism for vote invalidation, and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission's failure to send the IEC a list of candidate names. As many as 2,600 candidates, including 308 women, contested the provincial council elections that were held on April 5, simultaneously with the first round of the presidential ballot.

ANSF regains the control of Sangin district¹¹

Reports indicate that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have regained the control of Sangin district of southern Helmand province. After four months of on-going clashes with insurgents, the ANSF was finally able to drive out the alleged Pakistani-backed insurgents out of the district. Former President Hamid Karzai's lack of support for air attacks is considered one of the main reasons for the prolongation of the clashes in Sangin. However, the support of foreign forces has reportedly increased since President Ashraf Ghani and the new administration took office. Meanwhile, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), in a statement, expressed appreciation for the performance of the ANSF in Sangin, emphasizing that if needed, ISAF will provide air support to the Afghan forces after 2015.

Key Al-Qaeda leader killed in Nangarhar¹²

Key Al-Qaeda leader Abul Bara Al-Kuwaiti reportedly, was killed in an operation by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) forces in eastern Nangarhar province on October 18. According to a statement released by the NDS, "Abul Bara Al-Kuwaiti had close relations with the family of Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the Al-Qaeda leader". The statement further said that Al-Kuwaiti was killed in Nazyan district of the province at Al-Qaeda's commander, Abdul Samad Khenjeri's house. During

the operation, the NDS also seized weapons and important documents regarding Al-Qaeda activity.

Senators urge to stop Kunar attack¹³

A number of Afghan senators have expressed anger over the continued Pakistani military missiles attacks into Kunar province, asserting that they should stop immediately. The senators have said that since the Kabul-Washington Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) is signed, the U.S. should defend Afghanistan against such attacks or work with the Afghan government to prevent them. Moreover, while criticizing the security organizations over escalating insecurities in the Kabul-Kandahar highway, the senators have stated that the National Unity Government (NUG) should make security its first priority. In the past year, the Pakistani military has fired 6,828 missiles into Kunar, killing 16 people and injuring 87 others, including women and children, according to Sayedkhili. The attacks have led to the displacement of more than 544 families in the province.

UK's 13-Year Combat Mission Ends¹⁴

British troops formally ended combat operations in southern Helmand province on October 26, paving the ground for the final transfer of security to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Following 13 years of war, UK soldiers stood shoulder-to-shoulder with their US Marine Corps (USMC) and Afghan counterparts to witness the British flag lowered for the last time at Camp Bastion in Helmand province. The ceremony marked the end of operations for UK and US coalition command under the umbrella of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Tonga, Jordan and Bosnia also contributed troops to the command. The British military presence in Afghanistan began in October 2001, when troops deployed as part of the NATO response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US. Control of Camp Bastion and Camp Leatherneck was given over to the Afghan National Army's 215th Corps. Around 10,000 UK troops were once stationed at Camp Bastion, a number that fell to a few hundred. Some 453 British troops were killed during the combat mission.

"UN Has Misspent Millions in Afghanistan": U.S Watchdog¹⁵

A watchdog created by the U.S. congress to monitor the country's funding in Afghanistan has accused the United Nations' chief development agency of fraudulent spending of millions of U.S. funds allocated for the Afghan police. The UN Development Program (UNDP) administrator Helen Clark has rejected the allegation however, according to a letter disclosed by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). Based on the allegations, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) has embezzled \$200 million from the UNDP-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) in the past 10 years. There are also concerns about payments to "ghost employees" who got paid despite not having worked for the government. John Spoko, the special inspector general, is now looking into the claims.

German FM Admits NATO Mistakes in Afghanistan Campaign¹⁶

NATO made a number of mistakes during its Afghan campaign, though, the operation was not a failure, according to Germany's Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. "Many things indicate that our biggest mistake has been to pin big hopes on this mission, without investing significant funds," Steinmeier said. German Foreign minister added that the US-led coalition wanted not only to eliminate the security threat posed by Afghanistan, but also to lead the country into the future matchable with the NATO's ideas. The minister, however, claimed the Afghan campaign has not failed, as local terrorism does not represent an international threat anymore.

"Poppy cultivation at all-time high": SIGAR¹⁷

Despite US \$7.6 billion in American counternarcotics efforts since 2002, poppy cultivation has hit a record high in Afghanistan, according to a US federal watchdog. In a report released on October 22, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said more than 500,000 acres were cultivated with the illicit poppy crop in 2013. Representing a 36 percent jump from the previous year and a historic record, most of the cultivation happened in southern Helmand and Kandahar provinces — the focus of the 33,000-strong American troop surge four years ago. Poppy production had quadrupled in eastern Nangarhar province, which was declared poppy-free in 2008 and previously seen a model for eradication efforts, the SIGAR report said, adding as of June 2014, the US had had spent nearly US \$7.6 billion to combat poppy cultivation. In 2013, the value of opium and its derivative products in Afghanistan stood at US \$3 billion, up from US \$2 billion in 2012. An unprecedented 209,000 hectares of poppy was grown in 2013, surpassing the previous peak of 193,000 hectares in 2007. Between 2002 and 2013, the area under poppy cultivation increased by over 125,000 hectares. More than 780 tonnes of heroin or morphine could be produced with the current crop. But the US Embassy in Kabul said it was making progress in building Afghan institutions to the point that they could tackle all aspects of the drug trade. However, acting Counter-narcotics Minister Din Mohammad Mubarez also acknowledged that government's strategy was a failure and so far no proper effort had been made in this regard. Testifying before the Meshrano Jirga, or upper house of parliament, the acting minister said his ministry had chalked out a new strategy to the illicit combat drug trade and would be soon shared with President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah.

Bangladesh

President Abdul Hamid attends the 10th World Islamic Economic Forum¹⁸

President Abdul Hamid went to Dubai to attend the 10th World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) held from October 28 to 30 at the invitation of Vice-President and Prime Minister of United Arab Emirates and ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

Hasina visits UAE¹⁹

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left Dhaka for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on October 25 on a three-day official visit aiming at strengthening bilateral relations, resuming manpower export and attracting more investment from the oil rich Gulf nation. During the visit, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina invited the Dubai Port World

Authority (DP World) to conduct a feasibility study on constructing a deep-sea port at Paira in Patuakhali. During a meeting with Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, chairman of the DP World, Hasina also requested him to carry out a feasibility study on construction of a marine driveway and a special economic zone in Chittagong. In response to Hasina's request, the DP World said they usually set up a special economic zone near any sea port to make it viable and would send a delegation to Bangladesh soon for the next course of action. Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed three agreements, including a deal on cooperation to fight crime. The two other deals signed are: "Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners", and "Handing over of a piece of land for the UAE embassy in Dhaka". The agreements were signed following a meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the UAE vice-president, prime minister, and ruler of Dubai, at Zabeel Palace in Abu Dhabi on October 27.

Nepalese FM meets PM, hands over invitation²⁰

On behalf of Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, visiting Foreign Minister of Nepal Mahendra Bahadur Pandey invited Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the 18th SAARC Summit. Apart from handing over the invitation letter, Pandey also briefed Sheikh Hasina about the ongoing preparations for the summit when he called on at her official residence Ganobhaban on October 13. Sheikh Hasina told Pandey that Bangladesh always lays emphasis on the cooperation with the neighbouring countries as the problems of the region are identical. PM's Press Secretary AKM Shameem Chowdhury told reporters that Sheikh Hasina and Pandey also discussed some important bilateral issues relating to connectivity between Bangladesh and Nepal. She also underscored the need for signing of a tripartite agreement involving Bangladesh, India and Nepal for physical connectivity with Kathmandu. The Nepalese foreign minister agreed with the Bangladesh prime minister on sharing resources of the region for balanced growth and development. Earlier, the Nepalese foreign minister had a meeting with his Bangladesh counterpart AH Mahmood Ali. Pandey, who arrived in Dhaka on October 12, also invited Ali to attend the 36th Meeting of SAARC Council of Ministers on November 25 in Kathmandu.

Hasina attends 10th Asia-Europe Meeting²¹

Sheikh Hasina went to Milan on October 15 with a 118-member entourage to attend the 10th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Reaffirming her pledge to low-carbon emission and climate-resilient development path, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the large carbon-emitting countries to reciprocate by robust voluntary commitments from countries like Bangladesh. "Bangladesh will never exceed the average per capita carbon emission of the developing world," she said while making a statement at the intervention of the Retreat Session of the 10th ASEM Summit meeting at Milan Congress in Italy. She also expressed Bangladesh's concern over the huge gap between the commitments of the developed world and their initiatives to fulfil the commitments. On the sideline of the meeting, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met Russian President Vladimir Putin, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte, Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang, Italian counterpart Italian Matteo Renzi, Swedish counterpart Stefan Lofven, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah.

Voluntary repatriation only durable solution²²

Dhaka has told the UN refugee agency that Bangladesh considers the voluntary repatriation of Myanmar refugees back to their homes in Rakhine state as the only durable solution to the protracted refugee situation. Newly appointed Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Offices in Geneva and Vienna, M Shameem Ahsan, reiterated this while addressing the annual meeting of UNHCR's governing Executive Committee in Geneva on October 1. He alluded to the positive momentum generated by the recently concluded Foreign Office Consultations between Bangladesh and Myanmar in Dhaka and stressed the need for resumption of voluntary repatriation of the refugees from Bangladesh.

Dhaka asks for info from Delhi²³

Dhaka yesterday asked New Delhi to share more information on the recent bomb blast at Bardhaman in West Bengal for which Indian media pointed fingers at "Bangladeshi militants". The October 2 explosion at a Bardhaman house killed two suspected militants — Shakil Ahmed and Sobhan Mandal — and left a person named Hasan Saheb injured. Three people — Rajira Bibi alias Rumi, Amina Bibi and Hafez Mollah alias Hasan — were arrested. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh sent a note verbale to the High Commission of India on October 8 in this regard and is awaiting response. After confirming that the bomb manufacturing unit that was in operation in Burdwan before the blast there on October 2 was organised and funded by Bangladesh-based terror outfits, the CID identified the destination for the bomb consignments was Rajshahi. The investigators claimed the bombs were being supplied to Bangladesh during the recent political chaos to ensure minorities' protection in the bordering districts of Bengal. The central government of India handed over the probe to the NIA bypassing the state government after one arrestee allegedly told investigators that the bombs they were assembling were meant for terror strikes in Bangladesh.

Shirin elected Commonwealth Parliamentary Association chairperson²⁴

Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury has been elected chairperson of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. She is the first ever Bangladeshi who contested for the post. From 175 parliaments in 53 countries, 321 voters took part in the election held in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, on October 9.

Bangladesh to get 600MW more from India by 2017²⁵

Bangladesh is expected to get at least 600 megawatt of additional power from India between December 2015 and June 2017 under stepped-up power sector cooperation between the two countries. Bangladesh is also expected to get a sizable chunk of about 6,000MW to 6,500MW of power by being the transit point of a proposed ambitious grid connecting the Indian states of Assam and Uttar Pradesh, Bangladesh Power Secretary Monowarul Islam told representatives of Bangladesh media after a meeting with his Indian counterpart PK Sinha. The meeting held on October 10, jointly agreed on a deadline of June 2017 for transmission of 500MW more power from India to Bangladesh besides the existing 500MW through the Bheramara-Bahrampur grid, which began on October 5, 2013.

Bangladesh ranks 57th in 2014 Global Hunger Index²⁶

Bangladesh has been ranked 57th in 2014 Global Hunger Index (GHI), showing improvement in hunger level along with nine other countries. The index was released on October 13 by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Welthungerhilfe, and Concern Worldwide.

India gives fourth instalment of US \$200m²⁷

India handed over a cheque of US \$25 million to Finance Minister AMA Muhith on October 20 as the fourth instalment of the US \$200 million grant approved in 2012 by the Congress government. This was the first instalment of the grant after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government assumed power in India this year. Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran handed over the cheque at Muhith's official residence in Minto Road. With this tranche, India has completed disbursement of US \$175 million assistance to Bangladesh. India approved a US \$1 billion line of credit to Bangladesh in 2011. In 2012, India converted US \$200 million of the amount into grant. Saran also briefed Muhith on the status of the 15 ongoing projects under the remaining US \$800 million Indian line of credit, which are in different stages of implementation, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka said in a statement. Saran thanked Muhith for the country's positive response on the establishment of a special economic zone for Indian companies, the statement said. Alongside China and Japan, the government has decided to allocate an economic zone to India as well, according to a finance ministry official. Muhith and Saran also discussed in detail how the infrastructure can be developed.

Bangladesh becomes UNHRC member for 2015-17²⁸

Bangladesh has become a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the period of 2015-17. During an election held in New York yesterday, Bangladesh won by 149 votes to become a member, according to a foreign ministry statement. Bangladesh has contested for the post from the Asia Pacific region, says the statement signed by Khaleda Begum, senior information officer of the ministry. Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Qatar were the candidates for four member posts reserved for the Asia Pacific region in the election, the statement adds.

Bangladesh signs MoU to join AIIB²⁹

Twenty-one Asian countries that are willing to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as founding members yesterday signed the Memorandum of Understanding on establishing the Bank. Chinese President Xi Jinping met the representatives of the 21 countries after the signing ceremony in the morning. The countries are Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. The AIIB aims to fund rail, road, power and other projects across the region. The Bank's authorised capital is \$100 billion while the initial subscribed capital is expected to be around \$50 billion. The paid-in ratio will be 20 percent. The AIIB will be an inter-governmental regional development institution in Asia. As agreed, Beijing will be the host city for its headquarters.

Banned militant groups unites under a common platform³⁰

Banned Islamist militant outfits of the country have united under a common platform — Bangladesh Jihadi Group — with plans to launch attacks in major cities and on eminent personalities. Detectives made the revelation following arrests of four suspected members of the outlawed Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji) early yesterday. Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Hizbullah, Allahar Dal and Hizb-ut-Tahrir are the other members of the umbrella organisation.

Political violence kills 130 this year³¹

As many as 130 people have been killed in 509 clashes among political parties in the first nine months of 2014, according to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). About 6,587 people have also sustained injuries during these clashes. Of the casualties, 23 have died and 1,134 have been injured in 88 incidents of the ruling Awami League's intra-party clashes. In its nine-month human rights violation report — from January to September — which was released on Tuesday, the rights body said 119 people were killed either in custody or during "gunfights" between their aides and law enforcers. Among the victims, 52 were killed in "gunfights" with police, 29 in fighting with the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), one in a clash with both police and Rab, seven in joint forces' action, four by Rab and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), three by Bangladesh Coast Guard and six at the hands of Detective Branch (DB) of police. Moreover, 10 died from torture in police custody and one each in BGB, Rab and army custody. In a statement yesterday, Rab, however, claimed 17 people were killed in "gunfights" between the force and "criminals" during the time. The ASK report, based on national dailies and its own findings, also said 82 were reportedly abducted by law enforcement agency members this year. In the nine months, 732 Hindu houses, 222 temples and 193 shops were vandalised and set ablaze, the ASK report mentioned. A person died and 209 others were injured in these incidents. Eleven people were shot dead by the Indian Border Security Force and 13 more died from BSF torture. Forty-four people died during imprisonment and 95 were killed in mob beating. Ten women committed suicide following sexual harassment, while 527 women were abused during the time.

Bhutan

Nepal's foreign minister Mahendra Bahadur Pandey visits Bhutan³²

Nepal's foreign minister Mahendra Bahadur Pandey called on the Acting Prime Minister Lyonpo Damcho Dorji on October 14 in Thimphu. As special envoy of the Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr Pandey went to Bhutan to extend invitation for the 18th SAARC Summit and its preceding meetings.

Bhutan-Australia annual bilateral consultations³³

The third annual bilateral consultation between Bhutan and the government of the Commonwealth of Australia was held on October 28 in Thimphu. The Bhutanese delegation was led by the foreign ministry's bilateral affairs director, Kinga Singye, while the ambassador of Australia to Bhutan, Patrick Suckling, led the Australian delegation. Bilateral consultations are hosted by the two countries alternately in Bhutan and Australia. Bhutan hosted the first consultations in 2012. The second consultation was held in Canberra, Australia in 2013. Australian

assistance to Bhutan in human resource development and animal husbandry sectors dates back to the early 1960s. Diplomatic relations between the two countries was established on September 14, 2002.

Home minister addresses at the UNGA³⁴

Home minister Damcho Dorji addressed the United Nations General Assembly held on September 30. On the sidelines of the UN general assembly, Bhutan also adopted the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards, also known as the New York Convention, on September 25. The convention is a foundational instrument for international arbitration and requires courts of contracting states to recognise and enforce arbitration awards made in other contracting states. The home minister also held bilateral meetings with the delegations of the USA, Spain, Turkey, and New Zealand on the sidelines of the 69th session.

EU assistance to Bhutan³⁵

Finance minister Namgay Dorji and European Union's (EU) commissioner for development, Andris Piebalgs, signed the multiannual indicative programmes (MIPs) document in Thimphu on October 22. MIPs represent the strategies and priorities for the EU's aid in the country. The EU has trebled its assistance to the country for the period of 2014-20 to euro 42 million. It is the largest grant by the EU to Bhutan so far. The financial assistance is aimed at addressing challenges, such as strengthening the civil society, supporting local governance, and developing the rural livelihood of people in the country. EU's total contribution to Bhutan's development efforts since 1980s adds up to more than 90 million euros.

Japan donates four compactor trucks to Thimphu thromde³⁶

Japan's grant assistance for grassroots human security projects (GGP) donated four compactor trucks to Thimphu thromde on October 7. The central government of Japan, in collaboration with the local governments of Yokohama and Fujisawa, both in Kanagawa prefecture in Japan, had fulfilled the GGP project this time. While the two local governments offered recycled compactor trucks, the government of Japan allocated a grant fund amounting to US\$ 84,745 for retrofitting and transportation of the four vehicles to Thimphu and other charges. Through the same grant, five compactor trucks were provided to Thimphu city in 2001 and four in 2010.

Technical Expert Group meeting on the Bhutan-China boundary held in Bhutan³⁷

An eight-member Chinese delegation from the People's Republic of China came to Bhutan for the technical Expert Group meeting on the Bhutan-China Boundary from October 9-12. The Bhutanese delegation was led by secretary for International Boundaries, Dasho Pema Wangchuk, and included officials from the foreign ministry and the International Boundaries office. The Chinese delegation was led by the Counselor of the Asian department of the Chinese foreign ministry, Huang Xilian. The expert group meeting in Bhutan was decided during the 22nd round of border talks held earlier in July in Wutai Shan, Shanxi province, China. The Bhutanese expert group was to prepare for further joint technical field surveys of

disputed areas in western Bhutan. The two countries endorsed the report of a joint technical field survey of Bayul Pasamlung during the 22nd round of talks. Bayul Pasamlung is one of two disputed areas. The western areas of Dramana, Shakhatoe, Sinchulung, and Doklam, comprising a total of 269 square kilometres, located in Haa and Paro, are also disputed. Boundary talks with China began in 1984. The basis for boundary negotiations between the two countries are based on two treaties: the guiding principles on the settlement of the boundary issues, signed in 1988, and the agreement on maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the border areas, signed in 1998.

Bhutan-Switzerland sign visa exemption agreement³⁸

Bhutan and Switzerland signed a visa exemption agreement on October 8. Switzerland is the first country outside the region to sign such an agreement with Bhutan. For Switzerland, Bhutan is the 27th country now exempted from visa. Foreign secretary Yeshey Dorji, who signed the agreement with the Swiss ambassador, said this was an exclusive arrangement given to Bhutan. Bhutan and Switzerland formally established diplomatic relations in 1985. Development cooperation started from 1960s.

Debt to GDP ratio at 106 percent³⁹

Bhutan's debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio has reached 106 percent as of June this year, according to latest figures from the Royal Monetary Authority (RMA). While the size of the country's economy is about Nu 99 billion, the external debt stands at US\$ 1.7 billion. Of the total outstanding debt, convertible currency loan represent US\$ 629 million and Rupee denominated loan stands at INR 67.8 billion. This means that 68.2 percent of country's economy is made from borrowings from India, while about 32 percent is from other sources. In March 2014, the total outstanding debt was US\$ 1.66 billion, US\$ 623.5 million convertible currency and INR 62.1 billion. The debt to GDP ratio stood at 100.2 percent during that time. The Royal Audit Authority's report, on public debt management projected that, the debt to GDP ratio would be 121.5 percent by the end of 11th plan. It has also projected the debt to GDP ratio to gradually decline to about 29 percent in 2034, and this would be possible if debt servicing from the hydropower projects begins by the end of the Plan.

Inflation increases⁴⁰

The annual inflation rate from August 2013 to August 2014 stands at 8.71 percent, which is an increase from the 8.08 percent in the previous period (July 2013-July 2014). The National Statistical Bureau's consumer price index (CPI) states that, in the past 12 months, food price increased by 9.66 percent and non-food increased by 8.08 percent. Prices for domestically produced goods and services increased by 9.78 percent, and imported goods increased by 7.87 percent over the period of a year. While inflation in purchase of vehicles increased by 27.65 percent, CPI stated that fuel and lubricants recorded an annual inflation of more than five percent in non-food group. This was attributed to tax revision on vehicles and fuel. In four periods between 2013 and 2014 (March-March, April-April, May-May, June-June) the price of vehicle neither increased nor decreased. There was zero inflation because of the import ban in place.

Maldives

US Navy frigate arrives in Maldives⁴¹

The United States Navy frigate USS Rodney M. Davis came to the Maldives for a routine visit. During the visit, officers and crew of the Rodney M. Davis worked with Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF), including the Coast Guard, to improve regional security through close communication, coordination and information exchanges, while supporting at-sea and ashore training opportunities.

Maldives condemns terrorist ideologies and activities⁴²

Former President Dr Mohamed Waheed has condemned terrorist groups, their ideologies, and their activities, and called on the world to take decisive actions to defeat them. The former President made this remark in his statement, as the Special Envoy of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, at the General Debate of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 30. The former President also highlighted the attacks on Gaza in July this year, and reminded that though “the guns stopped firing” and the “bombs stopped dropping”, the siege is not over. He called on relevant groups to do more to help realise the dream of peace in the Middle East, and a two-state solution; and to resume peace-talks with a clear goal and an endpoint in mind.

Islamic Affairs Minister meets with Saudi Hajj Minister⁴³

Minister of Islamic Affairs Dr. Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed has met with Minister of Hajj of Saudi Arabia Bandar Al Hajjar. During the meeting, the Saudi Hajj Minister said that efforts were ongoing by the government of Saudi Arabia, to use modern resources to make the hajj pilgrimage easier for people. Dr. Shaheem thanked the Saudi government for its cooperation in the organisation of the hajj pilgrimage for Maldivians. He also thanked the Saudi police and security force, for the exceptional arrangements for pilgrims in 2014.

Exports increase by 17 percent⁴⁴

Maldives Customs said that export of Maldives has been increased by 17 percent and import by 16 percent in September this year when compared with September last year. Customs said that Maldives exported goods worth MVR 208.8 million during September last year, compared with MVR 244.7 million in September this year. Customs said that increase in export to Thailand, which is the largest export market of Maldives, by 43 percent was the main reason for export increase in September this year. Apart from this, Customs said that goods exported to France, UK and the US have also been increased by 80 percent during September 2014 when compared with September 2013. Maldives has spent most for fuel among the imported items. Fuel worth MVR 742.1 million was imported to Maldives, while electronic items and food and beverage worth MVR 472.4 million and MVR 458.1 million respectively were imported to Maldives.

Maldives imposes travel restrictions for three countries affected by Ebola⁴⁵

The Foreign Ministry of Maldives said in a statement dated October 12, 2014, that the government had decided not to issue on-arrival visas to travellers arriving from countries heavily affected by Ebola virus disease as part of the ongoing preparedness and precautions against this disease. The ministry said that the

countries listed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as those heavily affected by Ebola Virus Disease are Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, in West Africa.

“It is Government’s responsibility to ensure secure working environment for HRCM”: UN⁴⁶

A statement from Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has said that it is a responsibility of the government of the Maldives to ensure a secure and safe working environment for the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM). The statement which was issued on October 17, expressed “concern” about the suo moto action taken by the Supreme Court of the Maldives against HRCM. The statement also says that HRCM and the Civil Society should be given opportunity to work with the UN Human Rights machinery without intimidation from anybody. The statement urges the Maldivian government to act in consonance with its earlier cooperation with the UN in preparing the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The statement also stated that Zaid Raad al Hussein had sent a letter to the Maldivian government following the commencement of hearings in the Supreme Court’s suo moto action against HRCM. Supreme Court of the Maldives began suo moto legal proceedings against the HRCM, after the Commission accused the Supreme Court of inappropriately influencing and controlling lower courts.

Oil exploration assessments have given positive signals⁴⁷

Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture Dr. Mohamed Shainee has said that the initial assessments in the search for oil in the Maldivian territory, had given positive signals. He said that the detail report of the assessments will be received in the first quarter of 2015. He added that exploring the full region covered by water would be a high cost for the government, and efforts are ongoing to focus on ‘important areas’. Shainee said that during a recent visit to Europe, companies from two countries expressed interest in undertaking oil exploration projects in the Maldives.

Discussions held to expand US investment in Maldives⁴⁸

Discussions were held between officials of the Maldives and the US, regarding expanding US trade and investment in the Maldives. The first meeting of the Joint Council of the Maldives-US Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) held on October 20 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was launched by Michael Delaney, Assistant US Trade Representative for South Asia, and Mohamed Saeed, Minister of Economic Development of Maldives. The Embassy of the US for Sri Lanka and Maldives said in a press release that the two countries originally signed the TIFA in October 2009, establishing the forum as the premier venue to promote bilateral trade and investment and resolve issues. This first meeting discussed procedures for more robust engagement, as well as touched on topics such as labor, intellectual property, and the investment climate.

Tourist arrivals increase by 10 percent⁴⁹

Tourist arrivals to the Maldives has increased by 10 percent over the first nine months of the 2014. Tourist Arrivals and Growth Rate January – September 2014, published by the Ministry of Tourism, states that a total of 901,004 tourists visited

the country by the end of September 2014. As tourist arrivals in the first nine months of 2013 was 818,275, this is an increase of 10.1 percent. The Ministry said that during this period, the highest tourist arrivals from one region, at 450,296, was from Asia and the Pacific. This is also a 17.3 percent increase in tourist arrivals from this region when compared with the same period last year. The second largest market generating region to the Maldives, Europe, saw a decline in arrivals during the month of September 2014. However, total arrivals growth from the region stayed positive at 1.6 percent with a total of 386,914 tourists at the end of the period from January to September 2014, compared with the same period of 2013. Tourist arrivals from China was 286,838 in the first nine months of 2014, and 34,425 in September 2014. The Chinese market registered a negative growth of 1.7 percent for the first time in September 2014, since becoming the number one market in 2010. Tourist arrivals for September 2014 was 95,114 – a 3.1 percent increase compared with 92,298 in September 2013.

Dosti 12 held⁵⁰

Defence Minister Nazim, in the ceremony held on October 29, 2014 to inaugurate “Dosti 12”, the trilateral exercise of three nations, Maldives, India and Sri Lanka, said that it would be unreasonable to assume that a single nation, however powerful, could guarantee the security across the maritime domain in the Indian ocean region on its own. He further said that the waters of Indian Ocean region are crisscrossed with the sea lines of communication that accounts for a substantial amount of global energy and commercial trade, and that it is the collective responsibility of the countries in this region, to ensure the security and safety of these routes. Ambassador of India to the Maldives Rajeev Shahare, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Maldives, and senior officials of coastguard of Maldives, India and Sri Lanka participated in the inauguration of Dosti 12 exercise. The joint training exercise between Indian and Maldivian coastguard started in 1991 and Sri Lanka has participated in this exercise from 2012 onwards.

Inflation rises by 1.4 percent⁵¹

The Department of National Planning of Maldives has said that the annual inflation, from September 2013 to September 2014, had increased by 1.4 percent. The department said that the most significant rise in prices over the twelve months until September 2014, were seen in Tobacco and areca nuts, with 6.60 percent; Education, with 5.16 percent; Restaurants and Hotels, with 4.90 percent; and Health, with 4.27 percent. Meanwhile, Food and non-alcoholic beverages fell by 2.37 percent over the twelve months until September 2014. Inflation rose by 0.06 percent in September 2014.

Nepal

Nepal, India enact power trade⁵²

In a major boost to power trade between Nepal and India, the two neighbours signed a power trade agreement (PTA) on October 21. Energy Secretary of Nepal Rajendra Kishore Kshatri and Indian Power Secretary PK Sinha signed the ‘Agreement on Electric Power Trade, Cross-border Transmission Interconnection and Grid Connectivity’ at Prime Minister’s Office in Singha Durbar. The two secretaries termed the deal as “historic”. Officials of the two nations fast-tracked

the PTA process as directed by the joint communiqué issued during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal in August. The two countries had promised to finalise the PTA within 45 days of issuing the joint communiqué. Subsequently, the PTA was initiated in New Delhi on September 4 and was endorsed by the cabinets of Nepal and India. The agreement allows licenced electricity producers, buyers or traders of each country to engage in cross-border electricity trading, including that through power exchanges, and to seek cross-border transmission access as per the laws of the respective country.

PM Koirala meets EC President Barroso⁵³

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and European Commission (EC) President Jose Manuel Barroso held a meeting on October 1. During the meeting that took place at the EC headquarters in Brussels, matters relating to Nepal's ongoing peace process, constitution-drafting, Nepal-European Union (EU) relations and sectors of priorities for assistance were discussed. On the occasion, PM Koirala thanked EU for its continuous support and cooperation to Nepal in the ongoing peace and constitution drafting processes, and in the endeavours for attaining economic and social development, and institutionalising democracy.

Nepal, Japan to strengthen bilateral ties⁵⁴

Foreign Affairs Minister Mahendra Bahadur Pandey held a meeting with his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida in Tokyo on October 8. According to a press statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the two leaders discussed various issues such as strengthening dialogue between the two governments by creating a foreign ministry-level mechanism and cooperation in the priority areas of Nepal's development. According to the ministry, Pandey also invited a high level delegation from Japan to take part in 18th SAARC Summit. Japan is an observer in the regional organisation. Pandey also held discussions with Toshihiro Nikai, chairman of the Japan-Nepal Parliamentary Friendship League at Japanese Parliament House.

EU triples support to Nepal⁵⁵

The European Commission has tripled its support to Nepal in the 2014-2020 period in comparison with the allocation from the previous years. The development support has increased from the 120 million Euros for 2007-2013 to 260 million Euros for the next seven years. In the presence of Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat and European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs, Finance Secretary Suman Prasad Sharma and the Head of the EU delegation in Nepal Rensje Teerink signed a seven-year agreement at a function held at the Finance Ministry on October 19.

Education Minister Yadav leaves for Japan⁵⁶

Minister for Education Chitra Lekha Yadav has left for Japan on October 16 on a five-day visit at the invitation of the Asian Friendship Network, Japan. The network has been supporting for physical infrastructure development of community schools in Nepal.

China proposes BIPPA, extradition treaty to Nepal⁵⁷

Amid growing trade ties between the two countries, China has proposed Nepal to sign a Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) and Extradition Treaty during Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam's visit to China. China had forwarded the text of Extradition Treaty to Nepal for consideration in 2009 and that of BIPPA ahead of former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Nepal in January 2012. Nepal is yet respond to China on either of the two documents.

Nepal in pact to form Asian bank⁵⁸

Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) along with 20 other Asian nations to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), in Beijing, China, on October 24. The bank is expected to come into operation by 2015.

Tibet announces additional 20 million yuan annual aid to Nepal⁵⁹

Luosang Jiangcun, the chairman of the Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, has announced an additional 20 million yuan annual aid to Nepal. Luosang made the announcement during his meeting with Prime Minister Sushil Koirala in Kathmandu on October 28. The aid, which is meant for Nepal's development endeavours, will continue for another five years, said Dinesh Bhattarai, foreign advisor to the PM. The visiting chief of Tibet Autonomous Region of China called on President Ram Baran Yadav, UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, CPN-UML Chairman K.P. Sharma Oli and Nepali Congress Vice-president Ram Chandra Poudel, among others. The visiting chairman of the government of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, Luo Sang Jiang Cun, urged the government to put in place measures to curb "anti-China activities" in Nepal. Luo leads a six-member delegation to Kathmandu. He held talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Bam Dev Gautam and Minister for Foreign Affairs Mahendra Bahadur Pandey in their respected offices. Bilateral issues including Tibetan assistance to bordering Nepali districts figured on the agenda.

Govt proposes China for GPK Respiratory Center⁶⁰

The government has officially forwarded a proposal to China to establish GP Koirala National Centre for Respiratory Disease in Dulegauda, Tanahun. In April 2010, the Ministry of Health and Population had proposed to set up 100-bed hospital which received a Cabinet approval in May. The project plan has since been revised to a 300-bed hospital and the Chinese help has been sought to build the state-of-art health care facility equipped with modern technology including post graduate medical college, residences for doctors and medical staff, said Sujata Koirala, daughter of late Girija Prasad, who has been initiating the project. The Ministry of Finance on Monday forwarded the proposal to the Chinese side, seeking Rs7 billion in grant assistance for the hospital construction.

Nepal, Korea sign FAG⁶¹

Government of Nepal and the government of the Republic of Korea have signed a Framework Agreement for Grant at the Ministry of Finance on October 30. The

objective of the agreement is to specify terms and procedures of grant aid programmes of Korea to Nepal. The framework agreement for grant aid was signed and exchanged by Mr. Suman Prasad Sharma, secretary at the Ministry of Finance and Mr. Choe Yong-Jin, ambassador of Korea to Nepal, on behalf of respective governments. The Republic of Korea has been supporting in three priority sectors - health, vocational education and rural development - under the grant aid project for Nepal.

China agrees to build Rasuwagadhi ICD⁶²

One more Inland Container Depot (ICD) will be built on the Nepal-China border point with the Chinese assistance, with China agreeing to construct a depot in Rasuwagadhi, Rasuwa, the Ministry of Commerce and Supply (MoCS) said on October 14. The ICD in Larcha, Sindhupalchowk is also being constructed with Chinese assistance. According to the ministry, Nepal and China have prepared the final draft of the overall ICD structure in Rasuwagadi. During the bilateral talks held in Kathmandu on October 13 and 14, the Chinese side agreed to construct the infrastructure including a quarantine facility, warehouse, customs office, inspection and security, bank, restaurant and medical treatment. Six-member Chinese team led by Zhang Hua, executive director of Foreign Aid Cooperation, China held talks with the MoCS officials on the findings of the pre-feasibility study conducted earlier by the Chinese side. Currently, the Tatopani border is the main land route to trade with China. The construction of the ICD in Rasuwagadhi is expected to facilitate the trade with China by providing an alternative trade route.

PDCC settles land reform dispute⁶³

The Political and Dialogue and Consensus Committee (PDCC) of the Constituent Assembly (CA) settled the dispute related to scientific land reform in the constitution writing process. The issue was a major component of Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2006. The parties have agreed in principle for scientific land reform, but the differences persist on the provision of providing compensation confiscating the land from the people who own land above the ceiling defined by law. The parties agreed to settle this issue through an enactment of law after the promulgation of a new constitution.

Cabinet nominates four CA members⁶⁴

Nepal government has nominated four more Constituent Assembly (CA) members. A Cabinet meeting on October 16 nominated Rammaya Bogati of Nuwakot, Janak Raj Joshi of Tanahu, Shyam Kumar Shrestha of Kavrepalanchowk and Janak Bahadur Budha of Bajhang to the vacant posts of the 601-member CA, according to government spokesperson and Minister for Information and Communications Minendra Rijal. With the appointment, the number of nominated CA members has reached 21 out of 26. Earlier on August 29, the government had nominated 17 out of 26 lawmakers at the recommendation of political parties.

Pakistan

Cross firing at the working boundary⁶⁵

Cross firing took place along a stretch of the working boundary between India and Pakistan. Pakistan Foreign Ministry had lodged a protest with Indian diplomats over the killings of Pakistani civilians, saying the firing was “in complete disregard” of the Eidul Azha festival being celebrated. Pakistan also voices ‘deep concern’ at UN over ceasefire violations by Indian troops. Ambassador Masood Khan, Pakistan’s permanent representative to the United Nations, told that the UN Military Observer Group (UNMOGIP), the world body’s observer force in the disputed region, must be enabled to play its role in monitoring the ceasefire. Indian officials meanwhile debunked the notion saying that India does not recognise the UNMOGIP as having the mandate to monitor ceasefire between the two sides. Meanwhile Pakistan’s Defence Minister Khwaja Asif said that Pakistan is capable of responding “befittingly” to Indian actions on the border after several days of clashes in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir. “We do not want the situation on the borders of two nuclear neighbours to escalate into confrontation,” Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said in a statement. “India must demonstrate caution and behave with responsibility.” Defence minister’s reaction came against the backdrop of an earlier statement by his Indian counterpart Arun Jaitley where he ‘warned’ Pakistan to stop shelling in the disputed region. Pakistan also conveyed its concerns over ceasefire violations across the Line of Control (LoC) to a visiting two-member US congressional delegation.

Govt, opposition agree on Kashmir diplomatic offensive⁶⁶

Pakistan government and opposition agreed in the National Assembly on October 23 to launch a diplomatic offensive against India over recent border clashes. The house unanimously adopted a government-moved resolution strongly condemning what it called “unprovoked and indiscriminate ceasefire violations” by Indian forces after Adviser to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs and National Security Sartaj Aziz informed it that the government would send out delegations of parliament members and former ambassadors to draw world attention to the violations by India.

Pakistani, Indian armies establish contact through hotline⁶⁷

Senior Pakistani and Indian military officials spoke to each other on the hotline October 14 and discussed ways and means to reduce tension along the Line of Control (LoC) and the working boundary.

UNMOGIP team visits Pakistani villages⁶⁸

A team of United Nations Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) visited on October 13 and 14 the villages which were hit by Indian firing in Charwah, Chaprar and Pukhlian sectors on the working boundary near Sialkot. The observer’s team also visited the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) Sialkot and met with injured civilians. Pakistan on October 9, lodged a strong protest with the UN over shelling on the working boundary and the LoC and offered the UNMOGIP team to visit the areas to have a first-hand account of hostilities.

Nawaz Sharif visits North Waziristan⁶⁹

In an unprecedented development, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on October 9 became the first elected prime minister to ever visit the war-torn North Waziristan agency as he reached its headquarters in Miramshah to boost the morale of security forces fighting against terrorists in the ongoing military operation. Army Chief General Raheel Sharif accompanied the prime minister during his visit to the tribal region. The prime minister expressed satisfaction over the progress of the operation and lauded the sacrifices rendered by military personnel in their fight against terrorism and assured full support for the complete success of the ongoing operation. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that the armed forces' efforts in the war against militancy and extremism was evident and commendable.

Finance Minister visits USA⁷⁰

Federal Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar went to Washington to discuss a range of strategic and economic issues with US lawmakers as well as members of international financial institutions.

'US terror sanctions list not binding on Pakistan'⁷¹

The US Treasury Department slapped sanctions on two Pakistan-based terrorist organisations — LeT and Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HuM) — and froze the assets of their leaders. The announcement claimed that the assets were used for providing financial support to LeT, which is accused of carrying out the Mumbai terror attacks. The Treasury notification described HuM as "a terrorist group that operates throughout India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and maintains terrorist training camps in eastern Afghanistan." The Foreign Office of Pakistan termed the United States' decision to designate Pakistan-based organisations as terror groups a 'unilateral move' that does not apply to Pakistan. "There is a procedure at the United Nations to declare any person or organisation a terrorist; however, the US' decision to declare three Pakistani-based organisations [as terror groups] does not apply to Pakistan," Foreign Office spokesperson Tasneem Aslam told reporters at the weekly media briefing in Islamabad. Meanwhile, The United States designated Khan Said Sajna, the deputy leader of outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a global terrorist. The designation list also includes Ramzi Mawafi, a former physician of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Both have been designated under an executive order targeting terrorists and those providing support to terrorists or acts of terrorism.

NATO helicopters violate Pakistani airspace near Pak-Afghan border⁷²

Reportedly, NATO gunship helicopters violated Pakistani airspace and entered Pakistani territory where they stayed for 10 minutes before returning, official sources told Dawn. At least five helicopters were seen flying near the Pak-Afghan border and two of them entered Pakistani territory in Torkham and Pasidkhel. Sources said the helicopters crossed over through Shamshad mountains situated between Pakistan and Afghanistan. A few days back, NATO had carried out a massive assault on Taliban positions in the Shamshad mountains and had killed scores of Afghan Taliban members. Pakistan is yet to respond to the violation and it hasn't yet been ascertained whether the incursion was deliberate or a slipping

over of the helicopters into Pakistani airspace during routine patrolling on account of the rugged mountainous terrain.

US special envoy in Pakistan for consultations with civil, military leaders⁷³

The United States Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Mr. Dan Feldman October 28 arrived in Islamabad on a two-day visit. The envoy held a meeting with Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and the two discussed bilateral ties and issues relating to the region and Afghanistan. Both sides shared their resolve to improve and strengthen relations between Pakistan and the US.

Pakistan lodges protest with Iran over killing of soldier at border⁷⁴

The Foreign Office of Pakistan lodged a strong protest with Iran on October 18 after its border guards stormed into Pakistani territory and killed a security official. Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Ali Raza Haghhighian was summoned to the Foreign Office in Islamabad lodged a strong protest with him over the recent incident. During the meeting, the Foreign Office demanded the Iranian ambassador to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident, which also resulted in injuries to four other Pakistanis. Meanwhile, an Iranian military official said that authorities have proof that militants were entering the country from Pakistan to carry out attacks and will be pursuing the matter through "diplomatic channels." Iran has also summoned the Pakistani ambassador and demanded immediate steps to stop attacks by "terrorists and rebels" that sparked deadly clashes on the countries' border. Pakistani and Iranian officials met in Tehran on October 22 where the two sides agreed on intelligence cooperation at the porous border between the neighbouring countries. The meeting was between Inspector General FC Balochistan Major General Ejaz Shahid and Iranian border force's chief General Qasim Razai.

Germany, UNDP pledge one million euros for IDPs⁷⁵

Germany and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have pledged one million euros for return and rehabilitation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) of North Waziristan. German Ambassador to Pakistan Cyrill Nunn and UNDP's Country Director Marc-Andre Franche signed an agreement to this effect at the German Embassy on October 17. The director general of Provincial Disaster Management Authority, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tariq Orakzai, also attended the agreement signing ceremony.

India, US planning attacks on Islamists here: JuD⁷⁶

India with the connivance of the US is aspiring to carry out surgical strikes against Islamists in Pakistan, Jamaatud Dawa Emir Hafiz Saeed alleged on October 19. "A plan regarding surgical strikes against Islamists in Pakistan was finalised in the recent meeting between US President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi after which India started violating Pakistan's territorial integrity," a press release quoted Saeed as telling his party's central, zonal and district leadership. He urged the government to stop promoting trade ties with New Delhi arguing that better relations with India were impossible until resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Pakistan hands over 29 detained Afghans⁷⁷

Pakistan handed over 29 Afghan nationals, apprehended during Operation Zarb-i-Azb from different areas of North Waziristan Agency, to Afghanistan as 'goodwill gesture'. The Afghan nationals were in custody of Pakistani security forces and were handed over to Afghan authorities at Ghulamkhan on Pak-Afghan border on October 31, said a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). It said that Afghans were apprehended during Operation Zarb-i-Azb from different areas of North Waziristan Agency. After detailed investigation it was established that these individuals did not have links with terrorists, but were illegal immigrants, living without valid documents, said the statement.

Pakistan protests fresh drone strike in South Waziristan⁷⁸

Pakistan has strongly condemned a US drone strike in South Waziristan that killed at least seven suspected militants, including a key commander of Haqqani network, on October 30 and termed it unnecessary, said a Foreign Office spokesperson. "These drone strikes are a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and should be stopped," FO spokesperson Tasneem Aslam said at a news briefing. The attack happened in Nargas village of Birmil area, some 30 kilometres west of Wana, the main town of South Waziristan tribal region near the Afghan border which is considered a stronghold of Taliban militants. Officials and a militant source said four foreigners and a Haqqani network commander, who is blamed for numerous bloody attacks in Afghanistan, were among those killed.

Ease of doing business in Pakistan slips⁷⁹

Pakistan is ranked 128th out of the 189 countries surveyed for the latest World Bank's 'Doing Business' annual report, a drop of 18 places from last year.

Dar unveils 14-point economic roadmap⁸⁰

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced on October 28 a 14-point 'future roadmap' aimed at achieving over seven per cent growth by 2018 and making Pakistan a globally competitive and prosperous country with particular emphasis on macroeconomic stability through inclusive growth. Speaking on the final day of an international investment conference in Islamabad, the finance minister said that to achieve the growth rate it was necessary to address poverty incidence and unemployment while improving socio-economic indicators, including health and education. Other main features of the roadmap are: containing inflation to single digit; bringing down fiscal deficit to 4 percent; increasing foreign exchange reserves to \$22 billion, investment-to-GDP ratio to 20percent and industrial sector growth by 8percent; bringing down public debt to 55percent of GDP; increasing tax-to-GDP ratio to 15percent and exports to \$32 billion; spending 4percent of GDP on education and health sectors; alleviating poverty and supporting vulnerable sections of society; reducing power outages and meeting the shortage of natural gas with enhanced supplies through increased exploration and production as well as through imports.

Sri Lanka

Admiral Zakaullah new chief of Pakistan navy⁸¹

President Mamnoon Hussain had promoted Vice Admiral Zakaullah to the rank of Admiral and appointed him the Chief of Pakistan Navy on the advice of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on October 2. Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah assumed command of the Pakistan Navy at Naval Headquarters in Islamabad. Admiral Zakaullah's predecessor Admiral Asif Sandila handed over the command of the Pakistan Navy to him.

Australia grants Sri Lanka Rs 10 million for sanitation facilities in resettled villages in Mannar⁸²

The Australian High Commission in Colombo recently handed over 44 newly built toilets to beneficiaries in resettled villages in Manthai West, Mannar. The High Commission has to-date built 160 toilets in Manthai West for resettled villages in both Tamil and Muslim areas at a total value of Rs 10 million. The project was part of the Direct Aid Program, the Australian Government's small grants scheme, which provides fast, high-impact development needs to grass roots communities.

Sri Lanka, Australia foreign ministers discuss bilateral issues⁸³

Sri Lanka's Minister of External Affairs Prof. G.L. Peiris, who was in Perth, Australia, held bilateral discussions with Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ms. Julie Bishop, the External Affairs Ministry said on October 9. The two foreign ministers met at the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Ministerial Meeting in Perth and discussed a wide range of issues that are of mutual interest to both countries. The discussions covered all aspects of the bilateral relationship, in particular the revamped Colombo Plan, the Joint Working Group between Sri Lanka and Australia, trade and investment, and security cooperation.

"Sri Lanka's short-term macroeconomic outlook remains positive": World Bank⁸⁴

In a report released on October 6 on the economic outlook in South Asian countries, the World Bank says the outlook for Sri Lanka remains positive with an expected 7.8 percent GDP growth in 2014, subdued inflationary pressures, an improving external position and further fiscal consolidation and debt reduction. The report "South Asia Economic Focus" forecasts 8.2 percent GDP growth for Sri Lanka while on average the South Asian countries, which include India, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives, will see a growth of 6.0 percent.

President inaugurates third language lab assisted by India⁸⁵

President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Minister of Education Bandula Gunawardana, and the High Commissioner of India Y.K. Sinha, jointly inaugurated a Language Lab at the Wayamba National College of Education, Bingiriya on October 11. Speaking on the occasion, the Education Minister thanked India for its assistance in the field of education. The High Commissioner welcomed the inauguration of the third Language Lab, and reiterated India's continuing commitment to assist in Sri Lanka's development. The Language Lab in Bingiriya is one of the nine Language Labs that the Government of India has set up in each of the nine provinces of Sri

Lanka. Two Language Labs in Gampaha (Western Province) and Kandy (Central Province) have already been inaugurated. Other locations where Language Labs have been set up include Ampara (Eastern Province), Badulla (Uva Province), Jaffna (Northern Province), Matara (Southern Province), Polonnaruwa (North Central Province), and Ratnapura (Sabaragamuwa Province). The Language Lab project is being implemented as part of an MoU signed between India and Sri Lanka in 2011 for "Setting up of a Three-Tier English Language Training System in Sri Lanka". The total cost of the project is SLR 84 million, which is being implemented by the Government of India under full grant assistance through M/s Metropolitan Office (Pvt) Limited, Colombo. As part of the project, Government of India has provided 30 computer units and other related equipment, software and latest sophisticated teaching aids to each Centre, and has also trained five master trainers for each Centre.

Yal Devi resumes operations to Jaffna⁸⁶

Yal Devi, which was operating between Colombo and Palai, resumed operations to Jaffna on October 13 after a 24 year gap, under the patronage of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. The President also opened the reconstructed Jaffna Railway Station. The 38 km long Pallai-Jaffna railway line has been reconstructed as part of reconstruction of the Northern Railway line in Sri Lanka under a concessional credit line amounting to about US\$ 800 million provided by the Government of India to the Government of Sri Lanka. The project was implemented by IRCON International Limited, a Public Sector Enterprise under the Government of India. IRCON is working towards timely completion of the Northern Railway line and work is going on simultaneously on the Madhu Road-Talaimannar section and Jaffna-Kankesanthurai section, together with signaling and communications work.

Indonesia, Lanka to combat smuggling⁸⁷

Indonesian and Sri Lankan foreign ministers met in Jakarta, discussing ways to step up efforts in addressing human smuggling issue and boosting bilateral trade, which is targeted to reach one billion U.S. dollars next year. Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Marty Natalegawa met with his Sri Lankan counterpart Gamini Lakshman Peiris at Marty's office. Besides discussing ways to address the human smuggling issue, the two ministers also discussed ways to improve further cooperation in economy, trade, investment, farming, fishing and tourism. Indonesia's President-elect Joko Widodo looks on after a ceremony inaugurating a new parliament in Jakarta. Indonesia's President-elect Joko Widodo and External Affairs Minister, Professor G L Peiris, had talks in Indonesia on October 12, the Indonesian media reported.

India-Sri Lanka⁸⁸

Indian Defence Secretary Shri R.K. Mathur called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the President's House in Kandy October 10. President's Media Spokesman Mohan Samaranayake said they discussed bilateral defence ties and related issues. Radha Krishna Mathur arrived in Sri Lanka on October 9 to pursue the 2nd round of the Sri Lanka-India Annual Defence Dialogue (ADD). He also accompanied a four-member delegation which comprises of Joint Secretary, Shri Ram Suhag Singhe,

Joint Secretary, Smt Suchitra Durai, Rear Admiral, R.B Pandit, Indian Navy and Major General Rustam Patnaik, Indian Army. Major General Prasad Samarasinghe, Chief of Staff of the Army, welcomed the delegation on arrival at the Katunayake airport. The itinerary of the first day began with the courtesy call on his Sri Lanka's counterpart, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary Defence and Urban Development at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Urban Development who also has been the host. Mutual exchange of views and matters of bilateral importance touched the brief and formal meeting before both of them, exchanged mementos, symbolizing sound relations that prevail between two nations in a spirit of brotherhood, goodwill and understanding. The 2nd Sri Lanka-India Annual Defence Dialogue afterwards, commenced at the MoD main conference hall with both Mr. Mathur and Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, representing Sri Lanka's interests, presiding at the head table. The regional security situation and issues of maritime security were also discussed at the meeting. The inaugural Annual Defence Dialogue was held at New Delhi on 31 January 2012.

Court reserves order on Lankan Tamils⁸⁹

The Australian High Court has reserved its decision in a challenge over the detention at sea of 157 Tamil asylum seekers and the plan to take them to India, ABC news Australia reported today. Lawyers for the Federal Government told the High Court in Canberra the detention at sea and planned removal of the asylum seekers was done lawfully and did not breach its international obligations. Government lawyers told the court the decision was made under the Maritime Powers Act by the National Security Committee of the Cabinet. The group, which includes 50 children, were intercepted at sea and taken aboard the Australian Customs ship the Oceanic Protector. The group had set out from Pondicherry in India after fleeing Sri Lanka. A failed attempt to return the group to India saw them transferred to Nauru via the Cocos Islands and the Curtin Immigration Detention Centre in Western Australia. Government lawyers told the court the authorities that detained the group were upholding migration laws. The Government also defended the Maritime Powers Act. But lawyers for the asylum seekers told the court there should have been an agreement with India before the decision to take the group there was made. Lawyers for the Tamils have also raised concerns that India is not a signatory to the International Treaty on Refugees. But lawyers for the Government told the court that would not necessarily mean the group would not get effective protection in India.

Sri Lanka, India navies discuss maritime issues at IMBL meeting⁹⁰

Sri Lanka and India had held the 24th International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) meeting in the mid seas on October 16 to discuss maritime issues common to both countries. The IMBL meeting between the Sri Lanka Navy and the Indian Navy/Coast Guard was held onboard SLNS Sagara at the Indo- Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Line off Kankasanthurai on 16th October 2014. During the 24th IMBL session, the Navy officials of the two neighboring countries have discussed several issues of mutual interests related to prevention of smuggling narcotics and other illegal items and illegal fishing activities in the Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar sea areas. Commander Northern Naval Area Rear Admiral Sarath Dissanayake headed the Sri Lanka Navy delegation. The Indian delegation was headed by Naval

Officer in Command (Tamil Nadu & Puducherry) Commodore AK Mahadevan. The Indo-Sri Lanka IMBL meeting is held once a year to strengthen the naval relationship between the two neighboring countries. The Sri Lankan and Indian delegations meet alternatively onboard an Indian naval ship and a Sri Lankan naval ship.

Japan hands over self-propelled grab hopper dredger to Sri Lanka⁹¹

Japan handed over a self-propelled grab hopper dredger constructed at a cost of Rs. 1.2 billion to Sri Lanka on October 18 to develop country's fishery industry. The handing over ceremony of a self-propelled grab hopper dredger named "Sayuru" took place October 18 at the Dikkowita Fishery Harbor with the participation of Minister for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Dr. Rajitha Senarathne and Japan's Ambassador to Colombo Mr. Nobuhito Hobo. The total construction cost of the dredger at Japanese Yen 988 million was borne by the Government of Japan under its Grant Aid scheme. A study conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on a request by the Sri Lankan government has found that Sri Lanka's existing maintenance dredging capacity is insufficient at the country's fishery harbors. The Japanese government last year granted Rs 1.38 billion to Sri Lanka for the procurement of the self-propelled grab hopper dredger to meet the dredging needs. According to the Fisheries Ministry, the 49.9 meter long and 11.5 meter wide dredger with a gross tonnage of 624 tons has a depth of 3.4 meters. It is powered by twin 625 kw engines. Japan has previously provided a similar dredger to Sri Lanka during 1988/89 period.

EU to ban fish imported from Sri Lanka⁹²

The European Union (EU) has decided to ban the import of fisheries products caught by vessels flagged in Sri Lanka from entering the EU market after three months' time from now. The European Commission said that in November 2012, the EU sent a warning to Sri Lanka saying they were not complying with international rules on illegal fishing and their control systems were inadequate. European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Maria Damanaki said that two years later, not much has changed and the same problems are still there and are even getting worse. She says Sri Lanka is now authorising huge vessels to fish in the Indian Ocean without marine GPS (VMS). This renders control totally impossible. Damanaki said that Sri Lanka is the second biggest exporter of fresh and chilled swordfish and tuna to the EU (74 million € of imports in 2013) and in those circumstances the EU cannot tolerate not to know whether the fish they import into the EU was caught sustainably or not. Following the European Commission decision to impose a ban on Sri Lanka's fish exports to the European Union bloc, Sri Lanka said the country would comply with the international standards of fishing. The ban will come into force in mid-January 2015 if Sri Lanka does not comply with the international standards of fishing. The Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Rajitha Senarathne said that he would take steps to settle the issues with the European Union. National Organizer of Common Fisheries Union Rathna Gamage said ban is due to Sri Lanka government's inactivity regarding European Union stipulations. He said the EU has expressed its concern regarding Chinese ships fishing in international seas bearing Sri Lankan flag.

U.S. trade delegation backs enhanced U.S.-Sri Lankan business cooperation⁹³

Further expanding trade ties between the two countries, Sri Lanka and the United States inked a joint trade and investment agreement on October 15 in Colombo. The agreement was signed during the Eleventh Joint Council Meeting under the US-Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) taking place in Colombo from October 14 -16. Sri Lanka's Industry and Commerce Minister Rishad Bathiudeen signed the agreement on behalf of Sri Lanka while the US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Michael Delaney signed for the United States. The goal of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council meeting is to expand trade and investment between the United States and Sri Lanka. The newly signed agreement is expected to make a direct contribution to expand trade as well as investment opportunities between the two countries. The US representative noted that the new agreement will be an impetus for Sri Lanka to become a key stakeholder within the export market. The United States is also seeking ways to increase private sector engagement. The American and Ceylon Chambers of Commerce joined the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to co-host U.S.-Sri Lanka Business Forum on October 16 to coincide with the 11th Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Joint Council Meeting. One of the key objectives for the TIFA Joint Council is to reduce non-tariff trade barriers and improve the regulatory regimes for foreign investors and potential international partners to find success in Sri Lanka. The U.S. business delegation represented a wide range of sectors ranging from infrastructure and energy to transportation and consumer goods, and included leading U.S. companies such as GE, Lockheed Martin, and Johnson & Johnson. The participation of such prestigious U.S. companies highlights the enormous potential Sri Lanka's private sector holds for international partners.

EU General Court says ruling to lift sanctions on LTTE is a legal ruling not a political decision⁹⁴

The General Court of the European Union (EU) said today that the decision to lift sanctions on the LTTE was a legal ruling of a court and not a political decision taken by the EU governments. Issuing a statement, the EU General Court noted that the legal ruling is clearly based on procedural grounds and it does not imply any assessment by the Court of the substantive issues of designating the LTTE or of freezing LTTE funds. The Court statement said the EU institutions are studying the Ruling carefully in detail and they will reflect on the options open to them and, in due course, decide on appropriate remedial action to take.

Sri Lanka Defense Secretary and Indian Defense Minister discuss enhancing military ties⁹⁵

Sri Lanka's Defence and Urban Development Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa on Monday, October 20 called on India's Union Minister for Finance, Corporate Affairs and Defence, Arun Jaitley, in New Delhi and discussed a number of issues. Although, the officials have not released any official statement on what transpired during the meeting, a Times of India report said that India plans to further step-up defence cooperation with Sri Lanka and Maldives. The military cooperation will

include assistance in “capacity-building” of their armed forces through both training and supply of equipment, as part of the overall policy to steadily boost military ties with countries in Indian Ocean to counter China’s strategic inroads in the region. Indian Defense Secretary R K Mathur was also present at the meeting. Earlier this month a delegation led by Mr. Mathur held discussions with Mr. Rajapaksa and high-ranking Sri Lankan defense officials on the sidelines of the 2nd Annual Defense Dialogue held in Colombo. During that meeting, an array of ongoing defense cooperation initiatives was taken up for review and new avenues were identified with a view of strengthening bilateral defense ties between the two countries. Affairs concerning regional security and maritime security issues were also extensively discussed. India has reportedly, decided to supply two naval offshore patrol vessels and other military equipment to Sri Lanka.

Charge sheet filed against Lankan spy⁹⁶

A preliminary charge sheet has been filed by the Indian National Investigation Agency in a court in Tamil Nadu against a Sri Lankan national in a case of alleged attempts to spy for Pakistan’s intelligence agency, ISI, and carry out sabotage activities in South India. The charge sheet was filed against Zahir Hussain, a Lankan national who was arrested by the Tamil Nadu police on April 29 this year Siva Balan and Mohammed Saleem before a designated NIA court. The charges against them include offences under the IPC and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. Over 40 persons have been cited as witnesses and out of them, the identity of 20 have not been disclosed. Totally, there are nine accused in the case including an official of the Pakistan High Commission in Colombo.

Pranab hails India’s ties with Sri Lanka⁹⁷

Indian President Pranab Mukherjee said relations between India and Sri Lanka have withstood the test of time and socio-cultural exchanges for centuries have fostered further close cooperation in various fields. He said both the countries have much to learn and imbibe from each other in order to resolve various issues which are the legacies of a protracted period of colonial rule. The Indian President said this at a function in India to release a Commemorative Postage Stamp to pay tribute Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist and writer Anagarika Dharmapala.

Lanka assures India over China ties⁹⁸

Sri Lanka’s Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Jayantha Perera, made a five-day official visit to India at the invitation of his Indian counterpart Admiral R.K. Dhowan. Tamil Nadu Tamil political parties have expressed opposition to Vice Admiral Jayantha Perera’s visit to India. Sri Lanka’s Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Jayantha Perera categorically stated that his nation will never compromise on India’s national security or for that matter of any other country. “We have very good co-operation with India. We will never compromise on national security of India. India’s security is our security. Not only Chinese, even the Russians and other countries also we have very good relationship, we are non-aligned country,” Sri Lanka’s Navy Chief told ANI in New Delhi.

Commonwealth Secretary-General meets President⁹⁹

Commonwealth Secretary General Kamallesh Sharma was briefed on the post war developments in the North when he toured Jaffna today as part of his five days official visit to Sri Lanka. In Jaffna, the Commonwealth Chief had talks with the Northern Province Governor Major General (retired) G.A. Chandrasiri on the resettlement of war displaced people and other issues. Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma offered to continue assisting in the implementation of the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), as required. Sharma made the offer when he called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa at Temple Trees on October 27 to brief the current Commonwealth Chair-in-Office on the ongoing work and progress of objectives agreed upon at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2013 that took place in Colombo last November. Calling it a routine "health check" of work resulting from a CHOGM, Sharma reported to President Rajapaksa that the check "is successful." Regarding initiatives taking place in Sri Lanka, Sharma informed the President that the collaborations between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka have been very productive.

UN Counter-Terrorism team visits Sri Lanka¹⁰⁰

A group of Counter-Terrorism experts from the United Nations (UN) visited Jaffna on October 29 and assessed the security situation in the north and also discussed the development work undertaken by the Government. The UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), began a three-day focused country visit to Sri Lanka on October 28 in order to stress on the importance of a comprehensive approach to countering terrorism in accordance with the principles of the rule of law including human rights, as requested by the Security Council. Head of the delegation is Assistant Secretary-General Jean-Paul Laborde, Executive Director of CTED. Members of the delegation include counter-terrorism experts from CTED focusing on legislation, law enforcement, and countering violent extremism, as well as representatives of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and INTERPOL. As requested by the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), the visit has three main objectives: To assess Sri Lanka's implementation of the provisions of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), including the ratification and implementation of international instruments against terrorism as well as international cooperation in these matters, and to make relevant recommendations concerning steps that Sri Lanka should take in this regard; to recommend areas in which Sri Lanka would eventually benefit from receiving technical assistance; and to address measures put in place by Sri Lanka to implement Security Council resolution 1624 (2005).

Indians among eight sentenced to death¹⁰¹

The Colombo High Court issued the death sentence on eight people on October 30, including five Indians after they were found guilty for heroin smuggling. The three Sri Lankans and five Indians had posed as fishermen when they were arrested in 2011 by Sri Lankan navy near the Delft islands. During investigations, the GPS technology had been used to verify if the convicts were actually fishermen. Investigations had revealed that the convicts had smuggled heroin between India and Sri Lanka.

UN Committee raises several concerns¹⁰²

The UN Human Rights Committee, while taking note of some positive developments in Sri Lanka, also raised several concerns and proposed recommendations in its concluding observations made on October 30 on the fifth periodic report of Sri Lanka. The Committee considered the fifth periodic report submitted by Sri Lanka at its meetings held on October 7 and 8 and made available on its concluding observations. Among the positive aspects noted by the Committee are the legislative and institutional steps taken by the State party on corporal punishment, penal code, protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and adoption of the National Plan of Action for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The Committee however raised concerns over the 18th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution which, inter alia, discontinues the Constitutional Council and empowers the President to dismiss or appoint members of the judiciary and other independent bodies. Furthermore, it is concerned at the impeachment of the former Chief Justice in January 2013 under circumstances that raised serious doubts about its consistency with basic principles of due process and judicial independence. The UN Human Rights Committee also raised concerns that notwithstanding the lifting of the emergency regulations, provisions similar to that of the emergency regulations continue to be applied within the framework of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, including restrictions on freedom of expression and association, arbitrary searches and arrests, prolonged detention without charge or trial, and the reversal of the burden of proof when detainees allege that they have made confessions as a result of torture or ill-treatment. It also raised concerns at the criminalisation of abortion, including in cases of rape or incest, which compels pregnant women to seek clandestine abortion services that put their lives and health at risk.

Washington is to rush aid to Koslanda¹⁰³

US Embassy in Colombo said that to meet the urgent needs of victims of the landslides in Koslanda, the United States Government has provided \$50,000 for emergency humanitarian assistance. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) worked closely with Sri Lanka's National Disaster Relief Services Center and international aid partners to coordinate the donation of most urgently-needed items. The U.S. assistance was provided through World Vision to supply emergency non-food items such as blankets, mattresses, clothing, hygiene kits, and footwear, as well as education material for children, child counseling services and psycho-social first aid to help those affected recover from the disaster.

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