

SOUTH ASIA TRENDS

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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

In a major breakthrough, Nepal promulgated its first democratic constitution amidst violent protests in the Eastern and Southern Nepal. While Kathmandu celebrated the promulgation of the constitution, Madhes and Tharu community of Nepal rejected the constitution as it does not address their grievances. Protest over the demarcation of the country into seven provinces caused 40 deaths. On top of that, India's undeclared blockade caused severe fuel crisis in the country. It is believed in Nepal that India is backing the Madhesis to continue the violent protest. Nepal's suspicion on India emerged due to its response on the new constitution. While the other countries have welcomed the new constitution, India expressed its concerns for not incorporating the 'disgruntled Madhesi based parties' in the constitution drafting process.

In an unfortunate development, Kunduz, a strategic city in Afghanistan, fell at the hands of the Taliban. Though President Ghani has vowed to retake the city from Taliban; the fall of Kunduz once again puts a question mark on the capability of the Afghan forces to manage countries security without foreign assistance.

In an unprecedented development, Sri Lanka co-sponsored a resolution at the 30th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Even though the hardline Tamils and the rebels of the United People's Freedom alliance (UPFA) opposed the resolution on Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan Government has been hailed at the United Nations by the international community.

All the South Asian heads of the state /government attended the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the plenaries. This issue of the South Asia Trends have covered the highlights of their speeches and activities in New York.

It is hoped that the readers will get an overview of the major developments in the region in the month of September.

Afghanistan

CEO Abdullah Abdullah addresses the 70th United Nations General Assembly¹

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah addressed the 70th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in New York on September 29. In his address, Abdullah said that the Afghans had reached the one year mark for the anniversary of the national unity government and he was delighted to report to the UN assembly that Afghanistan had achieved significant milestones in the past year. He said life expectancy in Afghanistan had increased by an average of 20 years since 2001, with Afghans living well beyond the mere 40 years of age that had once been their norm. He said through the focus on gender equality, equity, and equal opportunity adapted by the government, female political participation had also been strengthened. He said the Afghan government was strengthening laws and regulations dealing with torture and was taking necessary measures to prevent and prosecute individuals involved in any form of torture per the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. He said he and President Ghani had prioritised a comprehensive reform agenda to root out corruption from the Afghan society and institutions and to promote transparency and efficacy at all levels of government, the judiciary and at the national and sub-national levels. Abdullah said the recently escalating security issues had slowed down state building and overall progress. He said the presence of terrorist sanctuaries and support networks in Pakistan continued to cause trouble inside Afghanistan. Abdullah said the Haqqani network had been identified as a main culprit and needed to be dismantled as had been Afghanistan demand in the past. In addition to security challenges, he said, the menace of the illicit drug trade in Afghanistan was having an adverse impact on the economy and society. However, he said they had a new comprehensive action plan to combat the drug economy more effectively. Abdullah Abdullah also addressed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations in New York on September 26.

Fall of Kunduz: senators blame provincial officials²

Hundreds of Taliban militants attacked the strategic city Kunduz on September 27 from three directions, overrunning a number of government buildings, including the police headquarters and the central prison. The rebels set free hundreds of inmates from the jail and captured the main civil hospital on September 28 amid clashes with security forces. But on September 28, the Afghan security forces launched a clearing operation, retaking the newly-built police headquarters and the prison from the Taliban. NATO-led Resolute Support has confirmed that the U.S carried out an airstrike against a Taliban post on the outskirts of Kunduz city on September 28. President Ashraf Ghani, who marked his first anniversary in office on September 29, vowed to retake Kunduz City from Taliban. Some Meshrano Jirga or Senate members strongly condemned the fall of northern Kunduz City, calling for severe punishment to government and provincial security officials concerned.

ANSF plan anti-Daesh operation in Nangahar³

Daesh launched its first attack against government forces on September 27. The attack occurred in Achin district of eastern Nangarhar province. The attack ended with the killing of 85 Daesh terrorists. U.S forces provided air support to the Afghan

forces during the battle. As concerns deepen over the increasing number of militants associated with Daesh in some regions of Afghanistan, local security officials said on September 28 that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are planning a massive anti-Daesh campaign in Achin and Haska Mina districts of Nangarhar. As part of his anti-Daesh campaign, Nangarhar police chief Fazel Ahmad Sherzad called on the people to cooperate with the security forces in their bid to defeat Daesh in the province. Hundreds of security forces are expected to take part in the operation. Elaborating on the anti-Daesh operation, commanders of Afghan national army in the eastern region vow to continue the operation until Daesh is eradicated from the region. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has rejected the UN report which talks about the presence of Islamic State (IS) in 25 provinces out of country's 34 provinces.

Trilateral meeting on Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction and regional cooperation held in New York⁴

Addressing a sideline trilateral session between the U.S, Afghanistan and China at the UN's General Assembly in New York on September 26, US Secretary of State John Kerry warned the international community that it would be a tragedy if they forgot about Afghanistan. He called on the international community and China to help the country end the war. While reaffirming Pakistan's strong solidarity with Afghan people, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's advisor on foreign affairs and national security Sartaj Aziz stressed at the meeting that Pakistan's efforts to persuade Afghan Taliban to participate in peace talks should not be wrongly interpreted. The focus of the trilateral meeting was on continued financial and military support to Afghanistan and on the war against terrorism. The high-level event "Afghanistan's Peaceful Reconstruction and Regional Cooperation" co-hosted by Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and United States Secretary of State John Kerry. Participants of the event included, among others, Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Cevdet Yilmaz and the foreign ministers of Australia, Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, Norway, and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. A co-chair's statement issued after the event expressed long term support for political process, economic reconstruction, security and stability, regional cooperation as well as peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan remains a priority: NATO chief⁵

NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg has said Afghanistan remains among the alliance's priorities, reassuring continued support for Afghan security forces. Jens Stoltenberg, who met Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in New York, hailed the performance of Afghan security forces and called them an inspired army, a statement from the CEO office in Kabul said.

ISI picks Taliban leaders: Mansour Dadullah⁶

Mullah Mansour Dadullah, a senior Taliban commander in southern Afghanistan, said he returned to Afghanistan recently after refusing to work with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and said that the Taliban leaders are selected by

the ISI. Mullah Mansour Dadullah, who is opposed to Mullah Mansour, the current Taliban leader, said Taliban militants who are under the control of Pakistan are fighting his supporters in southern Zabul province. The former leader of Taliban's Jaish-ul-Muslimeen wing, Syed Akbar Agha played down the statements, saying any comments that originate from Taliban parties opposed to each other are questionable.

Hundreds of Afghans stage protest rally in UK against Pakistan's interference⁷

Hundreds of Afghans living in the United Kingdom (UK) staged a peaceful demonstration in front of Pakistan High Commission in London to protest Pakistan's involvement in Afghan affairs. Demonstrators ultimately submitted their resolution to Pakistan High Commission and demanded that terrorist sanctuaries must be eliminated in Pakistan.

Sartaj Aziz visits Kabul⁸

Sartaj Aziz, Foreign Affairs Adviser to Pakistan's prime minister, visited the Afghan capital Kabul on September 4 for a regional economic conference and also held meetings with Afghan president, foreign minister and national security adviser. President Ashraf Ghani, during a meeting with Pakistani National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz, reiterated Kabul's stance and asked Islamabad to move against terrorist groups inside its territory.

Islamabad to Taliban: shun terror, return to talks⁹

Islamabad on September 17 asked the Taliban's new leadership to shun the insurgency and return to reconciliation talks with the National Unity Government in Kabul. Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman told this in a weekly media briefing in Islamabad and reaffirmed Pakistan's willingness to facilitate the peace dialogue.

Outrage grows over Dand-E-Ghori deal¹⁰

A member of Baghlan provincial council claimed that local authorities in Dand-e-Ghori area of Pul-e-Khumri city, led by Gulab Mangal, the Minister of Borders and Tribal Affairs signed an agreement with Taliban giving them control of Dand-e-Ghori. Reacting to the allegations, local officials dismissed the reports and said that the agreement was inked with the tribal elders of Dand-e-Ghori, an accord that prevents the Taliban from operating in the area. Based on the agreement, the Afghan Security forces will not carry out further operations in Dand-e-Ghori or arrest militants. Dand-e-Ghori saw some of the fiercest fighting between Taliban and Afghan forces in recent months. Afghan political commentators warned that the handing over of Dand-e-Ghori area in Pul-e-Khumri city of northern Baghlan province by the government in a sense is an endorsement of the Taliban. They say that such a deal will only benefit the militant group to appear with more violence against Afghan troops. In the past similar agreements were signed in Musa Qala, district of southern Helmand province which was one of group's main strongholds in the south. However, the agreements later forged major challenges to Afghan forces.

Bangladesh

India-Bangladesh agree on need for exchange of stranded fishermen¹¹

Bangladesh and India agreed on expeditious repatriation of their fishermen who stray unwittingly into each other's territorial waters. The decision was made when visiting Bangladesh Chief of Army Staff Gen Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiul Huq met Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh on September 9. During the meeting, they discussed various issues, including fishermen of the two countries drifting into each other's territorial waters. Indian Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju, Secretary (Border Management) Anoop Kumar Srivastava, senior officers of the home ministry and Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi were also present at the meeting.

Bangladesh-US security dialogue held in Washington¹²

Senior government and military officials of Bangladesh and the United States held a dialogue on security issues on September 11 in Washington to enhance collaboration in countering extremism and terrorism, security assistance, UN peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster response. This was the fourth dialogue on security issues between the two countries. Bangladesh and the United States have stressed the importance of a deeper and stronger partnership to seek effective solutions to their security concerns during the meeting. At the meeting, Bangladesh reiterated its commitment to fighting terrorism and extremism. The US side lauded Bangladesh's contribution to promoting global peace under the aegis of the UN peacekeeping operations. Foreign Secretary (Bilateral) Mizanur Rahman led the Bangladesh delegation, which is comprised of senior officials from the ministries of foreign, home, defence, disaster management, Armed Forces Division and Bangladesh Embassy in Washington. The US side was headed by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM) Todd C. Chapman.

Bangladesh ensured all-out co-operation to the Thai law enforcement agencies¹³

"Bangladesh will uphold its zero-tolerance policy against any terrorism suspects at home and abroad under its stringent counter-terrorism laws, including the suspected mastermind of the Erawan Shrine bomb attacks who transited through Bangladesh in August", Bangladesh Ambassador to Thailand Saida Muna Tasneem told the Royal Thai Police. During a meeting with Spokesperson and Assistant Police Commissioner of the Royal Thai Police, Pol Lt. Gen. Dr. Prawut Thavornsiri, in Bangkok on September 12, the envoy assured the Thai law enforcement agencies of all-out cooperation from Bangladesh on the possible tracing down of activities of the Bangkok bomb blast suspect who as per Bangladesh police sources left Bangladesh on August 30 following a two week transit stay. Against the backdrop, Bangladesh has put its foreign missions on a high alert regarding issuance of tourist visas, especially to the third country nationals. The government has also reportedly, ordered strict profiling of visa seekers and an even stricter visa policy amid the growing incidents of terrorism.

Commonwealth Secretary-General visits Dhaka¹⁴

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharma made a three-day visit to Dhaka on September 11. During the visit Kamallesh Sharma met BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Iranian Foreign Minister visits Bangladesh¹⁵

Ending his day-long visit on September 16, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif outlined ways and means for mutual economic gains through wider collaboration in areas, including energy and trade between Iran and Bangladesh. Addressing a press conference in the Dhaka's Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Zarif explained the reason for his visit, saying Iran considered Bangladesh extremely important as the latter stood for it in international forums. Javad Zarif said the two countries were discussing inking deals, including for avoiding double taxation and customs cooperation, for easing visas for officials and for cooperation in the energy sector once the sanctions were lifted. He also had a bilateral meeting with Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali and sought Bangladesh's support in implementation of the agreement. Visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Mohammad Javad Zarif made a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Tejgaon office in Dhaka.

France and German foreign ministers visit Bangladesh¹⁶

France and German foreign ministers expressed empathy for the vulnerability of Bangladesh in the face of climate change and hoped the next climate conference, scheduled for November in Paris, would come up with some concrete measures to address the concern. Bangladesh was heavily threatened by the adverse effects of climate change and 'we share their concern,' French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said at a press conference in Dhaka. Fabius and his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier were on a one day joint official visit in Dhaka on September 21. During the visit, the French and German ministers jointly inaugurated a joint chancery building to be shared by their diplomats at Baridhara from summer next year. Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.H Mahmood Ali also spoke at the function. Both Minister Fabius and Minister Steinmeier called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office and had a lunch meeting with Mahmood Ali.

BSF returns Bangladeshis held for intrusion into India¹⁷

Seventeen Bangladeshi people who were arrested near Haridaspur border area in India on September 17 were returned on September 18. Indian Border Security Force (BSF) arrested them for illegally entering the Indian territory without any necessary documents. They were handed over to Benapole port police. In another development BSF has regretted its firing in which a Bangladeshi was killed and four others were injured on a border in Joypurhat Sadar Upazila on September 18. Following a series of flag meetings between the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the BSF, the Indian force agreed to carry out an investigation into the unprovoked firing by the BSF men who had entered Bangladesh, said Abdur Razzak Tarafdar, commander of Joypurhat 3 BGB Battalion. The BGB has demanded punishment to the BSF members involved in the incident of shooting the unarmed Bangladeshis.

Bangladesh Navy arrests Indian fishermen¹⁸

Members of Bangladesh Navy arrested 104 more Indian fishermen along with eight trawlers from Fairway Buoy area of the Bay of Bengal near the Sundarbans on September 30 for intruding into the Bangladesh water territory. With this, a

total of 165 Indian fishermen were arrested with 13 trawlers from the bay within two days, according to Bangladesh media. On September 29, members of Bangladesh Navy arrested 61 Indian fishermen along with five trawlers from the same area.

Sheikh Hasina co-chairs the summit on UN Peacekeeping¹⁹

Asserting that Bangladesh's commitment to UN peacekeeping is strong and steadfast and it stands ready to go further, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged all members of the peacekeeping community to work together to ensure peace and security around the world. The prime minister said this at a summit on peacekeeping operation at the UN headquarters on the sideline of the UN General Assembly on September 28. Sheikh Hasina co-chaired the summit with US president Barack Obama. She said Bangladesh is adopting a national peacekeeping strategy to better respond to the evolving needs of the UN peacekeeping missions on the ground and at policy level.

PM seeks more Japanese investment²⁰

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sought more Japanese investment in the special economic zone allocated for Japan in Bangladesh. The prime minister came up with the request during a bilateral meeting with her Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe at the UN headquarters on the sideline of the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 28.

Hasina receives 'Champions of the Earth' award²¹

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina received the highest environmental accolade of the United Nations Environmental Programme, 'the Champions of the Earth', award in recognition of Bangladesh's far-reaching initiatives in addressing problems induced by climate change. UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner at a gala reception on September 27 handed over the award to Sheikh Hasina appreciating her as an inspirational leader since she showed the necessity to work for environment protection and climate change.

Prime Minister pledges to do more for gender parity²²

Expressing her government's strong political will to move forward with gender equality and women's empowerment, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on September 27 said Bangladesh is pledge-bound to continue to work for the socio-economic and political empowerment of the women and higher education for girls. 'Bangladesh would create more opportunities for women and ensure their access to politics, business and government,' she told a high-level meeting of the global leaders on gender equality at the UN headquarters.

Bangladesh new chair of LDCs²³

Bangladesh has been elected the new chairman of the Global Coordination Bureau of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The new Chairman was ceremonially handed over the responsibility of leading the 49 LDCs at New York on October 1. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam formally took over the role from

the Minister of MDGs and SDGs of Benin, the immediate past Chairman of the Group.

PM dismisses claims that ISIS was behind shootings of foreigners²⁴

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina dismissed claims that the Islamic State was behind the fatal shootings of two foreign citizens in Dhaka, instead suggested that the killings may have been the work of home-grown militants aligned with her political opponents in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said irresponsible remarks from the government's top level over the murders of two foreigners will not only create obstacles to investigations but also turn it difficult to identify the assailants.

Bhutan

India-Bhutan border management meeting held in Thimphu²⁵

Reaffirming their commitments for a safe border, border management authorities from Bhutan and India met for the 10th time on September 3, in Thimphu. The delegations discussed strengthening security along the 700km border, threat perception from Indian insurgent groups, radical elements in the camps in eastern Nepal, and intelligence sharing between the two countries. The Indian home secretary for border management, Anoop Kumar Srivastava led the Indian delegation while home and cultural affairs secretary Dasho Sonam Tenzin led the Bhutanese delegation. Bhutan-India border management and security meeting was first held on March 2004 at New Delhi. The last meeting between the two countries was held in New Delhi on June 20, 2014.

Bhutan and India re-prioritise projects²⁶

A re-prioritised list of projects was agreed to in the fourth annual Bhutan-India development cooperation talks held in New Delhi on September 2. In foreign affairs terminology, an agreed re-prioritisation means that cost escalations for certain projects have been approved by the Indian government. However, the cost escalations are addressed with funds being reallocated from other projects under the 11th Plan for which there have been savings. The two delegations agreed to re-prioritise the construction of the 40-bed Tsirang hospital, the 40-bed Dewathang hospital, the new headquarters for the Election Commission of Bhutan, and the Rehabilitation Centre. The two delegations also re-prioritised certain projects in the irrigation sector that include construction and rehabilitation of irrigation schemes. India is contributing Nu 45 billion for the 11th Plan, of which Nu 28 billion is under Project Tied Assistance (PTA), Nu 8.5 billion for the Small Development Project (SDP) programme, and Nu 8.5 billion is provided as Programme grant or development subsidy. The two delegations also reviewed the overall progress of PTA projects. The two sides also noted with satisfaction the overall progress of SDPs. The Indian government recently approved a total of 182 projects worth Nu 2.4 billion during the third Bhutan-India Small Development Project Committee meeting. In the talk, the Bhutanese delegation was led by the foreign secretary, Tshering Dorji, while the external affairs secretary for economic relations and development partnership, Sujata Mehta, led the Indian side.

Kholongchu Project kicks off²⁷

The first joint venture between Bhutan and India started preconstruction works of the 600MW Kholongchu Hydroelectric Project (KHP) in Trashiyangtse on September 18. Works for approach roads and two bridges to the main components of the project are underway. Preconstructions are expected to complete in 18 months and KHP would also be tendering out works for the main components like the dam, surge shaft and powerhouse among others. Kholongchu Hydro Energy Limited (KHEL) has contracted works for the power supply during the construction period to Bhutan Power Corporation (BPC) for Nu 520 million after a MoU was signed on September 9. A 132KV line between Kelikhar and Kanglung would be constructed to tap the power down to Korlong where the electricity would be distributed at 33 volts wherever required. The project will commission in 77 months, including 18 months of pre-construction activities, at an estimated cost of Nu 38.689 billion at June 2013 price level. On completion, it's expected to generate 2,568 M units of electricity annually.

Prime Minister Tobgay visits Luxembourg²⁸

Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay, who was on a working visit to Luxembourg, met the Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel, on September 23. During the meeting, the two prime ministers had in-depth discussions on enhancing bilateral relations. Given that Bhutan and Luxembourg are small, landlocked countries, sharing a similar political system and values, the two prime ministers explored cooperation in areas such as communications, the scout movement, education, tourism, banking and finance. During the visit, Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay was granted an audience by His Royal Highness Grand Duke Henri at the Grand Ducal Palace in Luxembourg. Lyonchoen visited the National Federation of Scouts and Guides. From there Lyonchen left for New York on September 24 to attend the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit and the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Prime Minister Tobgay in New York²⁹

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay met UN Under Secretary General and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, at the UNDP Headquarters in New York on September 24. The two discussed sustainable development, climate change and other current challenges facing Bhutan including urbanisation and youth unemployment. The UNDP Administrator noted that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were consistent with Bhutan's developmental goals. They also discussed possible areas where UNDP could support the government's efforts in implementing the SDGs. Lyonchoen addressed the Plenary of the UN Summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda at the United Nations on September 25. Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay called for the UN to be reformed and supported India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council during his address to the UN Sustainable Development Summit. Lyonchoen pointed out that Bhutan has already started integrating the SDGs in development plans and looked forward to fulfilling the promises. Most of the SDGs are required to be achieved by 2030. However, Lyonchoen said the UN must be transformed for the SDGs to be met. "The United Nations has served us well for 70 years," he said. "To serve us for the next 70

years, it must stay relevant," he added. "And to stay relevant, it must reflect the geo-political realities of today. Countries like India and Japan, Brazil and Germany must be made to serve as permanent members in the Security Council. And Africa must be appropriately represented." Lyonchoen said that if the UN is not reformed it risked becoming irrelevant and ineffective. "That would harm all nations," he said. "But small countries, vulnerable countries, countries like mine and many others, would suffer the most." On the sidelines of the summit, he met with Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal, Prakash Man Singh. Lyonchoen and Foreign Minister Damcho Dorji also interacted with the Bhutanese community in New York. Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay and Aum Tashi Doma attended a reception that the President of the United States Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama hosted for Leaders of Delegations to the 70th UN General Assembly on September 28 in New York. In the morning, at a sidelines event of the UN General Assembly, Lyonchoen met with the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Dr. Miro Cerar. The two prime ministers agreed to work towards strengthening and enhancing bilateral relations. Lyonchoen also delivered his statement at the "High Level Forum of Landlocked Developing Countries at the Heads of State and Heads of Government Level."

Bhutan to harness 5,000MW electricity by 2021³⁰

Bhutan would harness only about 5,000MW of electricity by 2021, half the target the country had earlier pursued to achieve by 2020. The total installed capacity of hydropower today is about 1,600MW. The completion of Punatshangchu I & II and Mandgdechu hydropower projects would add about another 3000MW by 2021. "The progress rate of hydropower projects is very poor and has been moving at a snail's pace," said Economic Affairs Minister, Norbu Wangchuk, who is on a tour of Trashigang, said. The progress rate of 15 per cent today, Lyonpo said, has come after more than four decades of discussion on hydropower projects. "Therefore, we need to give more importance on hydropower and expedite works if we are to harness our full potential," Lyonpo said. Earlier Indian President Pranab Mukherjee had said that the 10 Indian-assisted projects in Bhutan, which include the three existing, three ongoing and four joint venture model hydroelectric projects would provide 6,476MW by around 2022. By then, it was confirmed that the 10,000MW target by 2020 was unachievable and that the target needed to be reviewed. However, Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuk said there has been significant progress after the 12th empowered joint meeting (EJP) when four joint venture (JV) projects comprising 600MW Kholongchu, 570MW Wangchu, 770 MW Chamkharchu and the 180MW Bunakha HPs were approved by the Government of India. Mutual discussions between Bhutan and Gol for other huge hydropower projects under the 10,000MW target like Kurigongri, Sunkosh and Amochu are happening as well but the detailed project reports (DPR) are yet to be finalised. India had earlier indicated that lack of fund might impede the progress of these JV projects.

More than Nu 8 million raised for Bhutan4Nepal relief effort³¹

Besides the Nu 63 million or US\$ 1 million the Royal Government contributed to Nepal following the April earthquake, the Bhutanese public also raised a total of Nu 8.39 million for the relief effort in Nepal, according to a cabinet press release.

Most of the donated money has been used by the government to cover the expenses it incurred for the relief operations. The government spent almost Nu 8 million for the relief effort, with around Nu 2.6 million being spent on medicine, Nu 3.3 million on chartering aircraft, and the rest on food, field kits, and communications facilities, among others. The remaining amount of around Nu 400,000 will be sent to Nepal at an appropriate time, it is pointed out in the press release. The chairman of the Bhutan4Nepal committee, Kinzang Wangdi, said that it is yet to be decided to whom the remaining money will be handed over to. He added that the priority is that it should reach people at the grassroots. The Bhutan4Nepal committee was set up to coordinate the relief effort.

Maldives

Team of Nasheed's international lawyer visits Maldives³²

Former President, Mohamed Nasheed's international team of lawyers Amaal Clooney came to Maldives on September 7. She met with former President Nasheed at Maafushi Prison on September 8. She met with Attorney General (AG) Mohamed Anil, who represented the government of Maldives on September 9. Amaal Clooney and Jared Genser, met with Nasheed in prison again on September 10. The team also met with foreign diplomats and media at Colombo. Speaking at a press conference at Kurumba Maldives, Genser said that President Nasheed has been neglected from numerous international rights and rights granted by the Maldivian Constitution. Amaal Clooney, said that his trial proceeded after neglecting a lot of his rights. She noted that President Nasheed was not given adequate time to respond. Due to these reason, Clooney said, that a lot of international community believes President Nasheed's trial was "a travesty of justice." The former President's lawyers said that they are almost certain that the case at U.N. working group of arbitrary detention would rule in President Nasheed's favour.

High Court rejects the appeal of former President Nasheed's prison sentence³³

High Court has rejected the appeal of the former President Mohamed Nasheed's 13-year prison sentence by the Criminal Court submitted by the Prosecutor General. The case report for appeal publicised by the High Court's website on September 10 said that while the state has appealed President Nasheed's case, the case is not based on the conditions within Article 43 of the Law of Courts. And the case cannot be accepted since it did not come from President Nasheed, it cannot be accepted as an appeal. The High Court's decision says that if the case wasn't appealed in the duration of ten days given to file for appeal due to a legitimate reason, it is not illegal to appeal the case after the duration expires. President Nasheed's legal team refused to file for appeal earlier claiming that the duration of ten days given to file for an appeal has been expired. The Prosecutor General's (PG) Office submitted the appeal case to the Supreme Court after it was rejected by the High Court.

Political and human rights situation of the Maldives should not be determined based on one individual: Ministry of Foreign Affairs³⁴

Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said that UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein did not take into consideration the seriousness of the situation, when he urged to release a prisoner. This follows a remark by Hussein in

his opening statement at the 30th session of the Human Rights Council on September 14, where he called on the Maldivian government to release former president Mohamed Nasheed. Foreign Ministry said in a press statement that the Maldivian delegation in their statement at the council clarified the political situation of the country, and said that to seek the release of an individual purely on the basis of his political standing is inappropriate, and clearly seeks to circumvent the rule of law. The ministry said that the political and human rights situation of the Maldives should not be determined based on one individual, and a holistic approach needs to be taken.

Protestors call to free ex-president Nasheed³⁵

A rally was held in the streets of Male' on September 11 with protestors calling for government authorities to free former president and opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed from prison. The rally marks the first time opposition party Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) took to the streets after a break of two months. The protest began and ended peacefully with no disputes between protestors and police. MDP's rallies stopped two months ago when Nasheed was transferred to house arrest, put promised to start up street protests once again after Nasheed was taken back to prison. Protestors also called for release of former Defense Minister Colonel (Retired) Mohamed Nazim – serving an 11-year prison sentence on weapons charges, and Adhaalath Party leader Imran Abdulla – ordered to put under arrest until end of his trial.

Maldives marks 50 years as a member of the United Nations³⁶

As the Maldives marks 50 years as a member of the United Nations, Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon has said that seeking U.N. membership was the important foreign policy decision by Maldives. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry celebrating 50 years since the country took membership with the United Nations, the Foreign Minister said that the Maldives has done numerous works at the international level. "Over the past 50 years, the Maldives has introduced several important initiatives at the United Nations, the security of small states, human rights and environment, and of course climate change, which has now become the most crucial issue facing humanity. The Maldives has also been a leading voice on the issue of human rights. As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, we have been a strong advocate for promoting the rule of law and creating the values of human rights." President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom also congratulated people of Maldives on the occasion. Issuing a statement for the occasion, MDP said that the current government has stepped out of the U.N. regulations, violate international laws, unlawfully brutal, openly violates human rights and disrupt equality.

Dunya Maumoon attends the UN Sustainable Development Summit³⁷

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon has said that sustainable development of small island developing states like the Maldives would never be realised unless meaningful progress is made in the fight against climate change. Dunya made this remark in her statement at the UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015 in New York, on 27 September 2015. She also assured Maldives' full commitment to the realisation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets.

Dunya Maumoon attends the summit on countering Islamic State³⁸

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon, on behalf of the Maldivian government, attended the summit on countering Islamic State (IS) and violent extremism, on the sidelines of the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Some 60 heads of states belonging to the international coalition in the fight against IS and countering violent extremism were present at the summit.

President Yameen calls on King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud³⁹

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom met with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on September 25. The meeting was held at the Royal Court in Mina Palace. Discussions at the meeting were held on the bilateral relations between the Maldives and Saudi Arabia. The President and the Saudi King also exchanged ideas on ways of enhancing the existing brotherly relations between the two countries, in a way that would be mutually beneficial to both countries. President Yameen also met with the Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Second Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense. President Yameen conveyed his profound sympathy to the Saudi officials, following the disastrous stampede in Mina, causing the catastrophic loss of lives and injury to many pilgrims.

The port and free zone development with Dubai World cancelled⁴⁰

The Government of Maldives has decided to cancel the Thilafushi port and free trade zone project with one of the biggest companies in the world in port development, Dubai Ports World (DP World). Member of the Board of Investment formed under the law of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and the Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, Dr. Mohamed Shainee told Media that when they discussed the proposal from DP World and found it not to be most beneficial for the country. Dr. Shainee said that although the project with DP World has come to a halt, they are now discussing with four other companies on different levels, including companies from India, China and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia extends \$80 million loan for the Hulhumalé Development Project⁴¹

The government of Maldives has signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia for an \$80 million loan for the second phase of the Hulhumalé Development Project. The agreement was signed at a ceremony at Ministry of Finance and Treasury on September 14, by Minister of Finance of Maldives Abdulla Jihad and Vice Chairman of Saudi Fund for Development Yousef Al-Bassam. Providing details on the loan terms, Jihad said that it has a repayment period of 25 years, grace period of five years, and 2 per cent interest. The loan would be used for four main projects, which are a 1,200-metre sheet piling project, a project to connect phases one and two by bridges, a project for establishing channels between the economic zone and phase two mainland, and two phase two harbour projects.

Explosion on board the Presidential launch⁴²

President and the First Lady were traveling from Hulhulé to the Capital, Malé after their Hajj Pilgrimage when the explosion that took place on board the

Presidential launch. A bodyguard of the President, a presidential aide and the First Lady, Fathimath Ibrahim was injured in the explosion. At the request of the Maldives Police Service, India has sent a forensic team to the Maldives to assist in the investigation of the explosion on the Presidential launch. The three-man forensic team would be working closely with the Maldivian Police providing all the technical assistance required in the investigation of the explosion. The Indian Government has provided similar assistance to the Maldives in the past establishing a forensic lab (FSL) in the Maldives under the India-Maldives Bilateral Assistance Program in 2010. India also supplied forensic equipment to the lab in 2011. Four Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the United States, nine Saudi officials have also joined the team investigating the explosion on board the Presidential launch.

President Yameen thanks India for assistance⁴³

President Abdulla Yameen has expressed his gratitude to the government of India for its long-lasting assistance to the Maldives. The President made this remark while speaking at a ceremony in Noonu Landhoo, held to inaugurate a new power station in the island. He said that the two countries have maintained an exceptional friendship and close bilateral relations, and this has been the case during all governments. "These relations have been maintained by all our governments. The best relations with India were established during President Maumoon's 30 years," he said. President Yameen said that Maldives would always welcome Indian investments.

Ambassador Shahare guarantees a numbers of investors from India⁴⁴

Indian High Commissioner to the Maldives, Rajeev Shahare has assured that a large number of Indian investors would visit the Maldives to invest in the country in the future. Speaking at the India-Maldives Friendship Confluence at Dharubaaruge on September 27, Rajeev Shahare said India and the Maldives have been maintaining their friendship for more than 50 years. He said that big projects such as SEZ (Special Economic Zone) are proof that the Maldives would develop and that Indian investors would visit the Maldives to invest in it. Vice President Ahmed Adheeb also spoke at the India-Maldives Friendship Confluence noting the support from India in the Maldivian economical projects and sent his gratitude. He said that the Maldives would always welcome Indian investors. Vice President Adheeb said that India has helped the Maldives with many challenges including economics. The Indian High Commissioner, Rajeev Shahare presented a shield to Vice President Adheeb. Noting that the Maldives is a prominent country in the Indian film industry, Rajeev Shahare said that a feature film is underway with the collaboration of an Indian film producer and a Maldivian film producer and it would be revealed to the people soon. The Indian High Commissioner also said that Maldivian artists are very talented and that India would assist the Maldivian film industry in any way they can.

Indian government confiscate boulder shipment en route to Maldives⁴⁵

Indian government has confiscated a large granite boulder shipment en route to Maldives onboard a barge at Baypore Port, India. The Times of India reported that

Mining and Geological Department said the shipment was illegal. The newspaper reported that Mining and Geological Department Additional Director had gone to inspect the shipment, and ordered that the shipment not be allowed out of the country. Environmentalists across India have been protesting export of granite boulders. The party behind the shipment is unclear.

Chinese vice minister of commerce calls on President Yameen⁴⁶

Vice Minister of Commerce of China, Gao Yan paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom at the President's Office on September 8. At the meeting, Gao Yan expressed her delight that the Maldivian people gave as much importance to the "China-Maldives friendship bridge", as the Maldivian government. She assured the President of China's continuous support and assistance to the Maldives, for the successful completion of the bridge. She also expressed hopes for future mega projects where both the countries could collaborate. Noting that the "China-Maldives friendship bridge" would be the first of its kind in the history of the Maldives, the Chinese Vice Minister of Commerce discussed the latest updates on the bridge project with President Yameen. Vice Minister of Commerce of China Gao Yan, also signed a document to launch Free Trade Agreement negotiations between Maldives and China at a ceremony at Kurumba Maldives during her visit in the country.

Maldives and China celebrate 43 years of diplomatic relations⁴⁷

Vice President, Ahmed Adheeb Abdul Gafoor has said that the Maldives and China will always trust and respect one another. Speaking at the ceremony held at Olympus theatre to celebrate 43 years of diplomatic relations between China and the Maldives, Vice President Adheeb said that the relationship between China and the Maldives will continue to be strengthened. Chinese Ambassador Wang Fukang in his speech at the event said that the friendship between the people of the two countries would be stronger and thanked Vice President Adheeb for attending the ceremony.

39% decline in the gross international reserves⁴⁸

Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) has said that at the end of July 2015, Gross International Reserves stood at \$692.5 million, which is the equivalent of 4.2 months of imports. According to the Monthly Economic Review for August 2015, this constitutes a decline of 39 per cent compared to the corresponding period last year. Gross International Reserves stood at \$703.7 million at the end of May 2015, and at \$712.2 million at the end of June 2015. At the end of July 2015, Usable Reserves amounted to \$213.5 million, which is an increase of 41 per cent in annual terms and a decline of 9 per cent in monthly terms. Gross international reserves also increased in annual terms despite the decline in monthly terms.

Nepal

Promulgation of new constitution⁴⁹

The Constituent Assembly of Nepal on September 16 made history as it passed the Constitution Bill with a two-thirds majority. A total of 507 votes were cast in favour of the constitution bill while only 25 votes were cast against the bill. Major three political parties—Nepali Congress (NC), CPN-UML, UCPN (Maoist)—and a majority of fringe parties have voted in support of the Bill in a meeting of the Constituent Assembly (CA) on September 16. However, the Madhes-based parties had already boycotted the constitution drafting process. According to the interim constitution of Nepal, a two-thirds majority is required to endorse the constitution. The constitution was endorsed through signatures of CA members. Kamal Thapa led Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N) voted against the Constitution Bill tabled by Constitution Drafting Committee Chairman Kirshna Prasad Sitaula. All the articles, preamble and name of the constitution have been endorsed. After endorsing all the articles of the constitution, Prime Minister and Nepali Congress President Sushil Koirala, CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli, senior leader Jhala Nath Khanal, leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, leader Baburam Bhattarai, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bam Dev Gauam exchanged good wishes among themselves. The endorsement of new constitution by the Constituent Assembly has elicited both happiness and disdain in mid and western Tarai districts. While some people have welcomed the new constitution, others are protesting. People in the latter group see the new constitution as an insult to the people of Tarai. In the midst of the protest, the new constitution was promulgated on September 20.

International responses on promulgation of new constitution⁵⁰

The United States, China and the European Union (EU) have congratulated the people of Nepal on the promulgation of the new constitution. A press statement released by the US Department of State's spokesperson, John Kirby, encourages Nepalis to continue to engage in dialogue through non-violent means and urges the government to accommodate the views of all Nepalis. The release also calls on security forces to exercise restraint as people express democratic rights. Talking to reporter in Beijing Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said that China hope that the country would take this opportunity to realise national unity, stability and development.' Responding to a question on dissatisfaction among minority groups on the constitution and concerned expressed by India and other countries, spokesperson Lei hoped that differences would be resolved through dialogue. The EU has said the promulgation of Nepal's new Constitution will be a historic event marking the culmination of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Norway and Japan welcomed the Nepal constitution. Issuing a press statement, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted the adoption of the new constitution following a lengthy process. "The approval of the fundamental law, which fully meets generally accepted standards, is the most important condition for stability and strengthening unity of Nepal as a sovereign democratic state," read the statement. It also expressed Russia's readiness to extend further cooperation and renew long standing ties between the two countries.

India's reaction to the promulgation of the Nepali Constitution⁵¹

In a meeting with ambassador of Nepal to India, Deep Kumar Upadhyay on September 23, India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval suggested the Nepali envoy to go to Kathmandu, if need be, to create a conducive environment for talks. According to sources, Doval telephoned Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae and urged him to convey all sides about India's expectation for political agreement, peace and stability in Nepal. Efforts are being made from the ambassadors of both the countries to maintain mutual understanding and dialogue after the Indian Prime Minister expressed his serious concerns over the straining ties between two neighbours in recent days. Two days ahead of the promulgation of new constitution, Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar, went to Kathmandu as a special envoy of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He met CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli at the latter's residence in Balkot, Bhaktapur. The duo held extensive discussions on Nepal's political affairs during the meeting that lasted for about nearly 3 hours. Jaishankar told Oli that it would have been better if the disgruntled Madhes-based parties were brought onboard the constitution drafting process before promulgating the new constitution. However, Modi's envoy said India was happy that Nepal is getting the new constitution through the Constituent Assembly (CA) after a long struggle. Oli and Jaishankar held a separate meeting for about an hour. In the first one and half hours, Indian officials were also present in the meeting. At the meeting, the Indian foreign secretary urged Oli to move ahead by incorporating the disgruntled parties even though the constitution is promulgated. Secretary Jaishankar organised a lunch for leaders of various political parties at the Lainchaur-based Indian Embassy. He met leaders of Madhes-based parties and discussed the current political situation. He also met President Ram Baran Yadav before meeting UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Ranjit Rae went to New Delhi to brief about the situation in Nepal following the promulgation of the new constitution. On his return to Nepal on September 23, Ambassador Rae went to the Prime Minister's official residence in Baluwatar straight away from the Tribhuvan International Airport.

India refutes giving specific list of constitutional amendments to Nepal⁵²

Indian Ministry of External Affairs (IMEA) has refuted the media reports that the Indian government has handed over any list of specific constitutional amendments or changes to Nepal government to resolve the ongoing unrest in Nepal's Tarai region. According to a classified document of Indian government published by Indian Express, the government of India has asked Nepal government to make seven amendments to the new constitution. In response to a query on the article in the Indian Express on September 23, the official spokesperson of the MEA clarified that the article is incorrect. "The government of India has not handed over any list of specific constitutional amendments or changes to Nepal government." "Without being prescriptive on specific clauses, and as already stated earlier, we continue to urge that issues on which there are differences should be resolved through dialogue in an atmosphere free from violence, and institutionalised in a manner that would enable broad-based ownership and acceptance."

Fuel crisis in Nepal⁵³

Various districts across the country are reeling under the crisis of cooking gas and petroleum products due to the 'undeclared blockade' imposed by India. The Indian Embassy said that the reported obstructions to the Nepal-bound cargo and freights were due to unrest, protests and demonstrations on the Nepali side. In a press statement issued on September 25, in response to a query from the media, the embassy stressed on the need for Nepali leadership to address the causes underlying the present state. The press release further states that the issues Nepal is facing are political in nature adding that issues of differences should be resolved and institutionalised with broad-based ownership and acceptance. Ambassador Ranjit Rae called on Minister for Health and Population Khaga Raj Adhikari and discussed the situation at the border checkpoints between Nepal and India. During the meeting held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Singha Durbar, Minister Adhikari, who is also in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sought cooperation from the Indian government for uninterrupted movement of vehicles carrying essential supplies to Nepal as before. He also assured that there would not be any security problem inside the Nepali territory for the transport vehicles since arrangements are already in place for their security. Minister Adhikari also reiterated full commitment to ensuring security of life and property of the Indian nationals in Nepal. In response, Ambassador Rae said that he would convey the issues raised by the Minister to the higher authorities of the Indian government.

Minister for Commerce and Supplies Sunil Bahadur Thapa visits India⁵⁴

Minister for Commerce and Supplies Sunil Bahadur Thapa went to India on September 28 to take part in Commerce Ministers' meeting in New Delhi. During the visit, minister Thapa met his Indian counterpart and notified about problems that surfaced in Nepal due to the halt in the export of petroleum products and other daily essentials from India. Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman has said that she would draw the attention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi about crisis. Minister Thapa also met Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and informed about the crisis in Nepal due to shortage of essential supplies following blockade from India.

Government initiates talks with agitating parties⁵⁵

Forty-five days after the Madhes-centric parties began their protests, the government finally initiated the dialogue process on September 28. The government formed a three-member talks team to hold dialogue with the parties and groups agitating against the new constitution. The talks panel comprises of Nepali Congress leader and Forest Minister Mahesh Acharya, UML Chief whip Agni Kharel and UCPN (Maoist) senior leader Narayan Kaji Shrestha. The team went to Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) office in Bijulibazar, Kathmandu, to meet the party Chairman, Mahanta Thakur. The leaders urged Thakur to seek solution through peaceful negotiations instead of resorting to violent protests that have pushed the country to a critical situation. In response, leader Thakur presented a 5-point precondition to normalise the situation in Tarai that has become tense with curfew orders and violence. The preconditions put forth by Thakur are to recall the Army back and deploy APF as back force, declare people deceased in Tarai protests as

martyrs and provide compensation to their families, make arrangement for free treatment of the injured, release those arrested during protests and drop all charges against them. Claiming that the government has already started addressing their demands as the army personnel have been recalled back to barracks on September 28, one million compensation to each family of deceased has been pledged, providing treatment to those injured, the government side urged the party to sit for formal talks, said TMLP General Secretary Sarvendra Nath Shukla. However, the Morcha contended the government claims saying that their demands have not been implemented yet. Likewise, the government team also met Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Loktantrik Chairman Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar. Gachhadar also presented the 5-point preconditions before the leaders. Also, Gachhadar presented three bottom lines for talks—reconsider the delimitations of state borders keeping in consideration the Tharu-majority area and demands of Madhesi people, representation based on proportional and inclusive system and demarcation of election constituencies based on population. According to the Madhesi leaders, the talks committee has assured them of coming up with a concrete proposal on their demands. The leaders seemed more positive and serious towards the demands of Madhesi, they added.

Chinese ambassador meets CPN-Maoist Chairman Mohan Baidya⁵⁶

A meeting has taken place between CPN-Maoist Chairman Mohan Baidya and Chinese ambassador to Nepal Wu Chuntai. During the meeting held at CPN-Maoist Central Office at Budhanagar on September 29, the two touched on contemporary politics, China-Nepal relations and relations between the two parties, said CPN-Maoist Secretary Dev Gurung. On the occasion, ambassador Chuntai expressed belief that the political parties in Nepal are capable of resolving the prevailing political misunderstanding. Ambassador Chuntai also showed concern towards the undeclared blockade imposed by Indian government and the efforts at unity between UCPN (Maoist) and CPN-Maoist.

Donor community urges government to finalise the reconstruction bill urgently⁵⁷

Worried by the delay in reconstruction, International community has called for finalisation of reconstruction bill immediately so that the work on reconstruction can begin. Issuing a press statement on September 23, the International Development Partners' Group (IDPG) called on the government and the parliament to take all necessary actions as a matter of urgency to finalise the establishment of the National Reconstruction Authority (NAR) to begin reconstruction work.

Pakistan

Sartaj Aziz visits Kabul⁵⁸

Adviser on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz made a day-long trip to the Kabul to participate at the sixth edition of Regional Economic Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VI). Mr Aziz led the Pakistani delegation to the regional conference, which in addition to foreign ministry officials, included Director General Military Operations Major General Aamer Riaz. Besides attending the conference and meeting President Ghani, the adviser met a number of Afghan leaders, including Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani, National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar, Second Deputy to Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Mohaqiq and Ustad Atta

Muhammad Noor. He also attended a reception hosted by Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. The focus of Aziz's discussions in Kabul was on finding a way to end the acrimony in the relationship that became more pronounced after attacks in Kabul. Significantly, there was no joint communiqué at the end of the visit. No statement was issued on the meetings Aziz had held with Afghan leaders in Kabul.

Aziz rejects US claims about Pakistan's inaction on Haqqani network⁵⁹

US National Security Adviser Susan Rice had in her meetings with Pakistani leaders on August 30, conveyed US concerns about the alleged terrorist and militant attacks, particularly those linked to the Haqqani network, emanating from Pakistani soil. She had further conveyed US demands regarding the steps that Washington wanted Pakistan to take against the group. Adviser on Foreign Affairs and National Security Sartaj Aziz rejected US claims that Pakistan had not adequately acted against the Haqqani network and said the terrorist group had been significantly damaged in the military operation in North Waziristan. Contrary to American and Afghan claims about the Haqqani network planning and launching attacks from Pakistani soil, Aziz said that the group was operating from within Afghanistan and the problem needed to be dealt with there.

Raheel Sharif discusses Afghan peace process with US officials⁶⁰

Army Chief General Raheel Sharif discussed the stalled Afghan reconciliation process with senior US officials on September 14. The issue was deliberated upon during General Sharif's meeting with top US and NATO commander in Afghanistan General John Campbell and the acting American Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Jarrett Blanc.

Attack on Pakistan Air Force camp near Peshawar⁶¹

In what appeared to be a precisely planned and executed attack, terrorists displayed their ability to breach the security of an Air Force camp near Peshawar on September 18 and carried out one of the deadliest assaults on a defence installation on the southern fringes of the provincial capital. Twenty-nine people, among them personnel of the Pakistan Air Force and military and some civilians, lost their lives and all 13 militants who had stormed the camp were also killed. The Darra Adamkhel chapter of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for the attack. Pakistani leaders however, claim that the Badaber Air Force camp attack originated in Afghanistan. The Afghan presidency through a statement rejected Pakistani military claims and asked Pakistan to fight all terrorist groups without discrimination to ensure peace and stability in the region. Later, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani called Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to condemn the attack. The call from the Afghan president came at a time when the Pakistani civil and military leadership gathered at the Prime Minister's House to analyse the attack and strategise their future course of action.

Indian diplomat summoned by Pakistan Foreign Office⁶²

The Foreign Office summoned a senior Indian diplomat on September 18 over the death of three Pakistani civilians caused by Indian military's shelling on villages along the Line of Control. This was the second time that the Indian diplomat had

been summoned to the Foreign Office in a week. "The Indian Deputy High Commissioner, Mr J.P. Singh was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Dr. Mohammad Faisal, DG South Asia and SAARC, to protest against the shahadat of three civilians in Nakyal sector due to the unprovoked ceasefire violations by the Indian security forces at the Line of Control," an FO statement said. Pakistan stressed upon India to stop forthwith these ceasefire violations and respect the 2003 ceasefire arrangement in order to restore peace and tranquillity at the LoC and the Working Boundary.

Pakistan takes up Indian firing at LoC, working boundary with UNSC⁶³

Pakistan has urged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to take notice of provocative Indian actions along the Line of Control and the Working Boundary, says a press statement by the Pakistan Mission to the UN. In a letter submitted to the president of the United Nations Vitaly Churkin of the Russian Federation, Pakistan's UN Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi asked the UNSC to urge India to exercise restraint. She said India should abide by the 2003 ceasefire arrangement. Ambassador Lodhi, Pakistan's Permanent Representative, gave details of breaches of the ceasefire, and pointed out that there had been a spike in violence over the last couple of months, resulting in several civilian casualties and injuries to many more. She urged the president to circulate the letter as an official document of the Security Council, the press release said.

US backs need for mechanism to monitor LoC violation⁶⁴

In a meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, US Secretary of State John Kerry has conveyed support for Pakistan's position that there should be a mechanism for curbing ceasefire violations along the Line of Control in Kashmir. The two leaders met on September 27 on the sidelines of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. A US State Department spokesman told reporters that Secretary Kerry had asked Sharif to take action against terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani network.

UN chief urges Pakistan, India to hold talks⁶⁵

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged India and Pakistan to "continue their peaceful dialogue". A statement issued by his office said that in a meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the secretary general also advised Pakistan to stay engaged with Afghanistan. A Pakistani official said the prime minister also raised the Kashmir issue during the meeting. Sharif calls for implementation of United Nations resolutions on Kashmir. The two also discussed the "fight against terrorism and violent extremism", the secretary general's office said.

Pakistan Foreign Office says talks with India only without pre-conditions⁶⁶

Pakistan said that it was ready for talks with India but would not accept any pre-conditions. "Pakistan's position regarding the talks is very clear. Pakistan is ready for talks without pre-conditions and there will be no talks if Kashmir is not included" in the agenda, Foreign Office spokesman Qazi Khalilullah told in the weekly news briefing. In reply to a question, he said Pakistan's position on the Kashmir dispute was very clear. "It is internationally recognised as disputed

territory. The dispute needs to be resolved in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions on the issue as well as aspirations of the people of Kashmir," he added.

Pakistan Rangers-BSF talks begin in Delhi⁶⁷

A 16-member delegation of Pakistan Rangers came to New Delhi on September 9 to hold meetings with their Indian counterparts in an attempt to defuse recent border tensions which had pushed the two nuclear countries "on the brink of war". Pakistan Rangers (Punjab) Director General Major General Umar Farooq Barki headed the delegation on a four-day (September 9-12) tour, while Border Security Force Director General Devendra Kumar Pathak represented India at the meeting. Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh received the high-level delegation of Pakistan Rangers on September 11 and assured them that India would not be the first to breach a future ceasefire between the two sides. Major General Burki said he would convey the message to the Pakistani leadership.

Pakistan offers more troops, drones for UN peacekeeping⁶⁸

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has pledged an additional infantry battalion and unarmed Pakistani drones to enhance UN peacekeeping missions. "We are pledging an infantry battalion ... we also commit to providing surveillance unmanned unarmed aerial vehicles," the prime minister told a UN peacekeeping summit conference in New York on September 28. Pakistan, which co-hosted the summit with the United States and others, began contributing troops to UN peacekeeping missions in 1960.

President Mamnoon Hussain visits China⁶⁹

President Mamnoon Hussain went to Beijing on September 1, on a four-day official visit where he met the country's leadership and attend an event related to China's victory in the World War II. The president was received at the Beijing International Airport by China's Ambassador to Pakistan Sun Weidong and high officials of the Chinese government. Pakistan's Ambassador to China Masood Khalid and senior officials of the embassy were also present. The president was accompanied by Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatemi and Begum Mehmooda Mamnoon Hussain. During his stay in Beijing, the president attended a military parade commemorating China's 70th anniversary of victory against Japanese forces in the World War II. He held meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping and discussed issues of mutual interest. The president also met China's Executive Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli, and addressed academicians and representatives of think-tanks at a luncheon hosted by Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC).

Attabad road link with China restored⁷⁰

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif inaugurated on September 14 a 24km re-aligned patch of the Karakoram Highway, with five tunnels, restoring a road link with China that had been cut after a massive landslide blocked the Hunza River and created the Attabad Lake in January 2010. Besides the 7km-long Pakistan-China Friendship Tunnels, the rebuilt highway includes two bridges and 78 culverts.

The \$275.06 million project was completed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation in three years and two months. Briefing the prime minister on the project, officials of the National Highway Authority said trade between Pakistan and China via the KKH and access of people of Gojal area of upper Hunza to the rest of the country had depended on a boat service in the lake during the five years and nine months. The prime minister was informed that the number of containers carrying Chinese imports and exports had dropped to about one-third after the natural disaster. Present on the occasion were Chinese Ambassador Sun Weidong and Gilgit-Baltistan Governor Barjees Tahir and Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman.

Pakistan, China to continue working against terror⁷¹

Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif said on September 15 that Pakistan and China would continue to work towards the total elimination of terrorism. According to an ISPR press release, the army chief visited the Bahadur Ranges in Attock, and witnessed the Pak-China joint field exercise, Warrior-III. He said the special relationship between the armies of the two countries had transformed over time and would continue to grow. Special Forces of the Pakistan army and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China completed seven-week exercise with focus on counter-terrorism operations on September 15. A senior level Chinese military delegation headed by Gen Li Fayi represented the PLA at the closing ceremony.

Over 2,000 acres of land to be given to China for EPZ⁷²

Federal Minister for Ports and Shipping Kamran Michael has said the government has acquired 2,281 acres of land in Gwadar to be handed over to China for establishing there an export processing zone (EPZ) and other facilities to make the port fully functional. According to him, the land, 650 acres of which had been acquired from the Pakistan Navy, would be handed over to China at a ceremony to be held in Oct in Gwadar.

Military asks government to choke terror financing⁷³

The military leadership asked the federal and provincial governments to share their burden under the ongoing National Action Plan (NAP) by activating special courts set up under the Protection of Pakistan Act (PPA), 2014, and putting in place measures necessary to stop money falling into the hands of terrorists. Held at the Prime Minister's Office, the five-hour, two-session apex committee huddle saw the military side pushing the chief ministers of the four provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan and the prime minister of AJK to take a hard line on errant madressahs, those guilty of hate speech and religious scholars known for fanning sectarianism.

Prime Minister Sharif meets Prime Minister Cameron in UK⁷⁴

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was received by British Prime Minister David Cameron at the 10 Downing Street on September 23. During a meeting held in a friendly and cordial atmosphere, both the leaders expressed satisfaction on the overall trajectory of ties between Pakistan and the UK and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in various areas of mutual interest. Prime Minister Sharif, who was in London on his way to New York to attend the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly, said that Pakistan and the United Kingdom

enjoyed close and cordial relations in diverse fields, including trade, commerce, education, security and defence. The two leaders exchanged views on issues of global and regional importance, including the situation in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Cameron was assisted by his National Security Adviser Sir Mark Lyall Grant, while Mr Sharif was accompanied by Special Assistant on Foreign Affairs Syed Tariq Fatemi.

Prime Minister proposes strategic dialogue with South Korea⁷⁵

Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif proposed initiation of a strategic dialogue and a Free Trade Agreement with South Korea, with an objective to translate the ties between the two countries into a meaningful relationship. The prime minister met the President of South Korea, Park Geun-hye, at the United Nations headquarters on the sidelines of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly. The two leaders affirmed the resolve to boost trade ties between their countries. Proposing an FTA with South Korea, Prime Minister Sharif said his country would welcome further investment by South Korea. He said power generation was a priority for Pakistan and sought greater participation by the Korean companies in this regard. The two leaders also discussed the current situation in Afghanistan.

UN agencies, Japanese envoy visit Jalozai camp⁷⁶

Japanese Ambassador Hiroshi Inomata led a mission of UN agencies to the Jalozai camp which was also visited by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Sardar Mehtab Ahmed Khan. Ambassador Inomata expressed the hope that the government's plan to facilitate the return of the temporarily displaced persons (TDPs) by the end of 2016 would go as scheduled. The head of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Pakistan, Lola Castro, and United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) country director Marc-André Franche accompanied the Japanese envoy along with Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Director-General Amir Afaq and officials from the Fata secretariat. The Japanese government has approved a grant of \$5 million for the rehabilitation of TDPs. With this money, the WFP has been distributing food and providing nutrition services to TDPs at the Jalozai camp.

Sri Lanka

Eight Parliament begins its session⁷⁷

The inaugural session of the eight Parliament was held on September 1. United National Party (UNP) Parliamentarian Karu Jayasuriya was unanimously elected as the new Speaker. The newly elected members of Parliament later took oaths before the new Speaker. United National Party (UNP) Parliamentarian Lakshman Kiriella was appointed as the Leader of the House and UNP MP Gayantha Karunathilake was appointed as the Chief Government Whip. Leader of the Tamil party, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) R. Sampanthan was appointed as the Opposition Leader and the leader of Sri Lanka's Marxist party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Anura Kumara Dissanayake was appointed as Chief Opposition Whip. 42 Cabinet Ministers including the Prime Minister as the Minister of Policy Planning and Economic Affairs took oaths at the Presidential Secretariat on September 4. Later, on September 9, President Maithripala Sirisena appointed three more cabinet ministers. UNP Chairman, MP Malik Samarawickrema was

appointed as the Cabinet Minister of Development Strategy and International Trade. United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) MP Vijith Wijayamuni de Soysa was appointed as the Minister of Irrigation and Water Resource Management and MP Faizer Mustapha took oath as the Minister of Local Government and Provincial Councils.

Sri Lanka's Constitutional Council holds its first meeting⁷⁸

The first meeting of Sri Lanka's Constitutional Council was held on September 10 under the patronage of the Speaker Karu Jayasuriya at the official Residence of the Speaker. Under the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, Constitutional Council is the responsible body to appoint members to the independent commissions such as bribery commission and election commission. The office of the Constitutional Council said the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Opposition Leader R. Sampanthan attended the meeting. In addition, members of the Constitutional Council Ministers Dr. Wijeyadasa Rajapaksa, Patali Champika Ranawaka and W.D.J. Seneviratne were also present.

NPC passes resolution on international probe on war crimes⁷⁹

The Northern Provincial Council (NPC) demanded an international probe into the alleged war crimes committed towards the end of civil war with the LTTE, while dismissing the domestic mechanism backed by the US and the international community. In a resolution passed on September 1, the NPC questioned the legal possibilities of conducting a credible domestic investigation in preference to an international mechanism.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe makes his maiden visit to India⁸⁰

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe made a three day visit to India on September 14. During his visit, he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Pranab Mukherjee, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Transport Minister. Following bilateral discussions, the two Prime Ministers gave joint statements. During the visit, the two countries signed four MoUs including: agreement for orbit frequency coordination for a SAARC satellite; supply of medical equipment from India to the district hospital at Vavuniya in Sri Lanka; renewal of a pact for New Delhi's grant assistance to small development projects in the island nation, and exchange of letters for India's support to start emergency ambulance services in Sri Lanka. Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan during his meeting with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe proposed for setting up a 6 million tonne per annum (MTPA) greenfield refinery in Sri Lanka and developing the Upper Tank Farm at China Bay in Trincomalee on mutually acceptable terms.

Sri Lanka Central Bank receives \$1.1 billion from India's RBI currency swap⁸¹

Sri Lanka's Central Bank received the \$1.1 billion from the \$1.5 billion swap agreement with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) signed earlier this year. The RBI and the Central Bank signed the Special Currency Swap Agreement on July 17. Under the arrangement, the Central Bank can draw up to US\$ 1.1 billion for a maximum period of six months. This is in addition to the US\$ 400 million received in April 2015 by the Central Bank under the currency swap facility availed by the RBI to central banks of SAARC member countries.

Sri Lanka and India held the 3rd defence dialogue⁸²

Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Karunasena Hettiarachchi and Indian Defence Secretary G Mohan Kumar held defence talks in New Delhi on the sidelines of the 3rd annual defence dialogue which began on September 21. Sri Lanka's delegation, comprises of Karunasena Hettiarachchi, Secretary to Ministry of Defence, Lieutenant General Crishanthe De Silva, Commander of the Army, Rear Admiral N.B.J Rosayro, Deputy Chief of Staff and Commander, Eastern Naval Area of Sri Lanka Navy, Air Vice Marshal C.R Gurusinghe, Representative, Sri Lanka Air Force, Rear Admiral G.D.A.S Wimalathunga, Director General, Sri Lanka Coast Guard Department, M.R.K Lenagala, Deputy High Commissioner, Sri Lanka High Commission, New Delhi and Sashikala Premawardhane, Senior Assistant Secretary, Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence. During the two-day event cordial discussions were held on several issues of bilateral importance. During their stay, the Sri Lankan delegation also called on several high ranking officials of the Indian defence establishment.

'Exercise Mitra Shakti' begins in Pune⁸³

'Exercise Mitra Shakti' a 14-day joint exercise between India and Sri Lanka Army began on September 29 in Pune. This is the third joint training exercise involving the two armies. The aim of the joint training is to share best practices and promote healthy military-to-military ties between the two armies and develop joint strategies by sharing expertise in the conduct of operations, the army said in a statement.

Sri Lanka armed forces annual joint field 'Exercise Cormorant Strike' kicks off⁸⁴

The three-week long joint military exercise involving thousands of Sri Lankan armed forces personnel and representatives from foreign countries commenced on September 3, in Kokilai in the East for the sixth consecutive year. The joint field exercise, known as the 'Exercise - Cormorant Strike VI - 2015', is organised by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) with the participation of over 2500 tri-service personnel of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Planned and executed by the Directorate of Training at the Army Headquarters, this year's exercise involve 2500 infantrymen, including largely the Commandos and Special Forces of the Army, 245 sailors and 140 airmen. In addition, 53 foreign military personnel from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and the US, joined the mega exercise. The Exercise, covering Pulmoddai to North of Arugam Bay in the East is to be coupled with simultaneous mock seaborne and airborne operations and is slated to further promote special operation capabilities and maintain combat readiness at all levels with a view to transmitting and sharing the sea of experiences the Sri Lanka Army had gathered.

Australia, Sri Lanka navy joint exercise⁸⁵

Sri Lanka Navy ships 'Sagara' and SLNS 'Samudura' engaged in a joint exercise with a visiting Australian naval ship 'HMAS Melbourne' on September 2 in the seas off Colombo. The Australian naval ship 'HMAS Melbourne' arrived at the Port of Colombo on August 29, on a five-day goodwill visit and left on September 2 for the next mission.

Mangala Samaraweera holds talks with UN rights chief⁸⁶

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Justice Minister Wijedasa Rajapaksa along with senior government officials met UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein at the Palais Wilson in Geneva on September 13.

Sri Lankan Government to establish truth commission⁸⁷

The Government of Sri Lanka informed the UN Human Rights Council that Sri Lanka will establish a truth commission and an office on missing persons. Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera told the Council during its 30th session on September 14 that the Sri Lankan Government will also ensure a political solution evolved through constitutional amendments.

OHCHR report on Sri Lanka has been released⁸⁸

Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka which was released at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called on the Sri Lankan government to establish a hybrid court which included international judges and lawyers to try all those involved in war crimes during the island nation's civil conflict between government troops and the LTTE. The London based Global Tamil Forum (GTF) and the Tamil National alliance (TNA) welcomed the OHCHR report that strongly indicated war crimes and crimes against humanity were most likely committed by both sides to the conflict. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also welcomed the report. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a response to the report, said that Sri Lanka took note of the Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the recommendations made by the High Commissioner. It also says that the government is open to continuing its engagement with the High Commissioner and his Office as well as the systems and procedures of the Human Rights Council, aimed at taking steps to safeguard and uphold the human rights of all her citizens.

Paraguay Parliament adopts resolution on Sri Lanka⁸⁹

The Paraguay Parliament has passed a resolution on Sri Lanka backing calls for an international process to ensure justice for the Tamils. The resolution was passed at a time when the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was meeting in Geneva with Sri Lanka on the agenda. The resolution in the Paraguay Parliament called for an international investigation by the UNHRC in support of justice and independence for the Tamil People. Recently, a delegation from the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) was in Paraguay where they met officials in the Paraguay government and discussed Sri Lanka.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka meets President Sirisena⁹⁰

The UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, Subinay Nandy, had talks with President Maithripala Sirisena on September 15. During the meeting Nandi said the UN Secretary General has assured to support the President and the Government

of Sri Lanka with the United Nations technical assistance and contributions to advance reconciliation and inclusive development through dialogue for a sustainable solution to the longstanding ethnic grievances.

Resolution on Sri Lanka submitted with amendments at the UNHRC⁹¹

The draft resolution on Sri Lanka titled “Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka”, was submitted to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on September 24 with several amendments to the original text proposed earlier after Sri Lanka objected the first resolution. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America have co-sponsored the resolution which was officially submitted to the 30th session of the UNHRC in Geneva. Sri Lanka is also one of the co-sponsors. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein called on the Government to criminalise hate speech, after he formally submitted his report on Sri Lanka to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva through a video message on September 30. The High Commissioner also maintained his calls for an ad-hoc hybrid court to deal with some of the allegations related to the war and those reported soon after that. Speaking at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on September 30, Sri Lanka’s Ambassador to Geneva Ravinatha P. Aryasinha said that the Government will ensure that the content of the report on Sri Lanka by the High Commissioner for human rights as well as the recommendations receive due attention of the relevant authorities including the new mechanisms that are envisaged to be set up. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) says it has no concerns with the draft resolution on Sri Lanka submitted to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva. SLFP said that the resolution only proposes that the Government accept foreign assistance for the local process and such assistance should have the consent of the government. United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) rebels however strongly opposed the resolution. The UPFA rebels demanded that the Government oppose the resolution saying it is still a threat to Sri Lanka’s sovereignty despite claims it has been watered down. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa said the resolution on Sri Lanka had “hostile provisions” which need to be removed. India’s DMK leader M Karunanidhi has opposed a statement made by Vikas Swaroop, the Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson, supporting a resolution accepted by Sri Lanka on the findings of the UN human rights probe panel on the atrocities on Tamils. Karunanidhi urged the Union government to support an international criminal investigation into the matter.

Mangala Samaraweera chairs the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting⁹²

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera chaired the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting held in New York on September 24. Foreign Ministers from across the Commonwealth attended the meeting. He also held talks with the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Kamallesh Sharma.

President Sirisena addresses 70th General Debate of the UNGA⁹³

President Maithripala Sirisena said the new vision for Sri Lanka by his government involves achieving the twin objectives of sustainable development and reconciliation.

He said that a fundamental requirement in this context is dealing with the past honestly and building a modern Sri Lankan Nation. The President said this while addressing the 70th General Debate of the UN General Assembly in New York on September 30.

Sirisena meets world leaders in New York⁹⁴

United States President Barack Obama has praised President Maithripala Sirisena's commitment and actions taken for strengthening of democracy and good governance in Sri Lanka. The President's media division said that Obama made these remarks at a meeting with President Sirisena while participating in the 70th session of the UNGA. In response, President Sirisena said his determination is to build the reconciliation in the country in future. When President Sirisena requested the assistance for the alleviation of poverty, the US President stated his government would fully help Sri Lanka on that regard. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, at his meeting with President Sirisena on September 26 stated that President Maithripala Sirisena has won the grace of world leaders today because he is leading the country towards a correct path. A meeting between President Sirisena and the President of South Korea Park Chung-hee was also held during the session. They discussed on the well-being of the Sri Lankan workers in South Korea. The South Korean President gave her highly positive response to the request made by President Sirisena for more employment opportunities to Sri Lankans. She also affirmed the assistance to seek solutions for the garbage problem in Sri Lanka. President Sirisena also met the President of New Zealand John Key. The New Zealand President said more investors will be encouraged to invest in Sri Lanka. They also discussed the ways to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has expressed his intention to make an official visit to Sri Lanka soon. He has said this when he met President Maithripala Sirisena in New York. During the meeting the two leaders discussed about the ways to strengthen the relationships between the two countries. The President also had talks with Prime Minister of Malta Joseph Muscat. During the discussion with President Sirisena he offered an official invitation to him for the Commonwealth Summit to be held in Malta. The discussion was based on how to strengthen the bilateral relations between Malta and Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Joseph Muscat stated that he would encourage investors from Malta to invest in Sri Lanka. After the bilateral meetings with the two Prime Ministers, the President also met Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma. President Sirisena, as the current President of the Commonwealth discussed about the actions to be taken to make next Commonwealth Summit successful.

Sri Lanka pledges to meet gaps in UN peacekeeping missions⁹⁵

Sri Lanka has given a pledge to meet some of the gaps in UN peacekeeping missions by providing two combat transport companies and two field engineering platoons as well as one infantry battalion, two special force companies, one combat engineering company, three infantry battalions, one explosive ordinance disposal company, one force protection company and two formed police units. Speaking at the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping at the United Nations, President Maithripala Sirisena said that Sri Lanka's current contributions to UN Peacekeeping stands at 529 including troops, military observers and civilian police.

Sumanthiran holds talks with Samantha Power⁹⁶

Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Member of Parliament M.A. Sumanthiran met the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and the United States Deputy Representative to the United Nations Michele Je Sison. Sources said that they discussed the UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka with the US being the main sponsor of the document which also has Sri Lanka as a cosponsor. The TNA MP had also urged the US to ensure the final text of the resolution is not diluted on a request from Sri Lanka.

German foreign minister visits Sri Lanka⁹⁷

Germany and Sri Lanka held talks on steps being taken by the Sri Lankan government to promote reconciliation and to strengthen the accountability processes as part of the government's overall objective of ensuring good governance, respect for human rights and strengthening Sri Lanka's domestic initiatives. Sri Lanka and Germany have also agreed to vigorously build on their multifaceted bilateral relationship following talks held between Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and visiting German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on September 22. Samaraweera said that the "fruitful and productive discussions" he had with the German foreign minister focused on identified areas of cooperation and on working towards forging closer and tangible links in the short and long term. German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier said that Germany would lead the European Union to revive the GSP+ relief to Sri Lanka. Steinmeier made these remarks when he called on President Maithripala Sirisena on September 21 at the Presidential Secretariat. Steinmeier conveyed the invitation of German Chancellor Angela Merkel for President Sirisena to visit Germany. The President accepted the invitation.

Sri Lanka, UAE explore ways to strengthen trade and investment ties⁹⁸

Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates explored ways to strengthen the bilateral ties between the two countries, especially in trade and investment. The discussions took place when the UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nayhan met with his Sri Lankan counterpart Minister Mangala Samaraweera on September 4 at the Ministry in Colombo. The UAE Foreign Minister visited Sri Lanka on the invitation of the Sri Lankan government. The UAE Foreign Minister also called on President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Sri Lanka welcomes Nepal's new Constitution⁹⁹

The Government of Sri Lanka has welcomed the promulgation of the new Constitution of Nepal, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The Foreign Ministry said that Sri Lanka join hands with the International Community to welcome the promulgation of the new Constitution of Nepal which is a key step in its journey towards national reconciliation, political stability and development.

Sri Lanka and Togo establish diplomatic relations¹⁰⁰

Sri Lanka has established diplomatic relations with the Togolese Republic, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The Foreign Ministry said that establishing diplomatic relations corresponds to the interests of both states, and will help to

consolidate international peace and security and uphold the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The agreement under the United Nations charter and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic relations was signed at the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York between Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Prof. Robert Dussey, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African Integration of the government of the Togolese Republic.

Northern fishermen protest in Jaffna against Indian fishermen¹⁰¹

Northern fishermen staged a protest in Jaffna on September 23 against Indian fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters and later handed over a petition to the Deputy Indian High Commission in Jaffna.

No evidence of ISIS operations in Sri Lanka: Defence Ministry¹⁰²

The Defence Ministry of Sri Lanka said that there was no evidence to back claims that the ISIS terrorist group was operating in Sri Lanka. Defence Secretary Karunasena Hettiarachchi said that while there were reports of a Sri Lankan man joining ISIS, there is no concrete evidence to suggest the group was operating in Sri Lanka.

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