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ABC Certified

Vol. # 10 Issue # 04 www.diplomaticstar.com.pk

April 2021

Monthly

Islamabad

DIPLOMATICSTAR

Pakistan's Leading Diplomatic Affairs Magazine



Pakistan and Azerbaijan decides to start Post-Covid direct flights

H.E. Ali Alizada

Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan



**Pakistan, Germany enjoying
Unity in Diversity**



**Denmark's interest in
Pakistan Green initiative**



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JUNE 9, 2021**

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Email: journalistbhatti@gmail.com**Price Rs:** 500**USA:** \$10**Euro zone:** €10**Biden to take off US forces from Afghanistan**

The Biden administration has now set a clearer timeline for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. While the US President said it would be "difficult" to meet the May 1 deadline between the previous US administration and the Afghan Taliban, US officials now say the evacuation will be completed by September 11. While some see it as the roundabouts change, it can also be seen as a more realistic, achievable history.

It is also important to note that the announcement comes ahead of the Afghan peace talks in Istanbul on April 24. However, the Afghan Taliban has said they will not take part in the program in Turkey until "all foreign forces have withdrawn from our country." But it is also true that much can change between now and April 24 and we can expect great diplomatic activity to make the Istanbul program a success and for the Taliban to accept the new date.

Foreign involvement in Afghanistan has been a major source of instability in the country, although the Afghan political class and militants have also played a significant role in the destruction of their homeland. However, the forever war cannot continue, and the sooner foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan and the Afghans accept responsibility for their own country, the better. Washington must stick to the new date and make sure there is no further delay. And when the Taliban are talking harshly about this latest development, they must show flexibility and continue negotiations with the government in Kabul.

The fact is that the Istanbul Summit offers a good opportunity for all Afghan factions, the Western-backed government, the Taliban, and other political and tribal stakeholders to move the peace process forward and set some worthwhile goals. And it would be a good idea for all factions, especially the Taliban, to refrain from all forms of violence as a major confidence-building measure to show that they have come to the Turkish city in good faith. If the Taliban continue to take a hard line and decide to boycott the meeting, it could have an impact on the withdrawal of foreign troops and leave Afghanistan in further uncertainty.

This is fact that Afghanistan has suffered for decades because powerful local players have refused to compromise and insisted on hogging power. As a result, the people of this country have suffered immensely. The United States and its Western allies appear to have largely won the Afghan war - although some Republicans want the US mission to continue indefinitely. It will be seen in the coming weeks whether the principal Afghan players are willing to lift the gauntlet.

Chief Editor

Raja Aamir Mahmood Bhatti

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The views of the writers do not necessarily reflect the view of the magazine



Pakistan and Azerbaijan decides to start Post-Covid direct flights

H.E. Ali Alizada

Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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DS: Would you please let us know about the important developments during the recent visit of the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan to Pakistan?

Ambassador: As a newly appointed FM of Azerbaijan, Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov was keen to pay one of his earliest official visits to the brotherly country of Pakistan to discuss the possibilities of strengthening and boosting relations with Pakistan. As you are aware the last bilateral visit of the FM of Azerbaijan to Pakistan took place 10 years ago and I think this visit itself was one of the important developments between the two

countries.

The Foreign Ministers of both countries agreed to further boost the cooperation in diverse fields of mutual interest including political, strategic, trade, economic, energy, defense, peace and security, humanitarian, science and technology, cultural and people-to-people ties, as well as continue to support each other on all issues involving our countries' national interests.

Another development during the visit was to hold the second trilateral meeting of FMs of Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Turkey. This meeting successfully concluded by the signing of Islamabad declaration by the three FMs. The declaration said

“the three countries desired of further deepening cooperation in all areas of mutual interest.” Both, the bilateral meetings and the trilateral meeting already lasted a positive impacts to our relations and will continue to further boost cooperation.

DS: During the meetings in Islamabad, the FMs also discussed the Karabakh and Kashmir issues. What is the stated policy of Azerbaijan on Kashmir?

Ambassador: As a country which enormously suffered from the Armenian aggression and occupation for almost three decades, we understand the consequences of the conflicts well. As a member of the

several international organizations and OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir, Azerbaijan constantly made all efforts for the resolution of Kashmir dispute.

The principal position of Azerbaijan on Kashmir issue is clear; Azerbaijan has always consistently supported the principle and legitimate position on Kashmir issue in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and has supported the peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir issue. Unfortunately, Kashmir issue lasts more than seven decades and we hope and believe that with support and efforts by the international community this conflict will be resolved amicably soon, through mutual dialogue and understanding.

DS: How do you see the overall relations between two countries? Where you think we should work more?

Ambassador: Azerbaijan and Pakistan enjoy excellent relations based on bonds of brotherhood, shared history, culture, mutual respect and trust. Both the countries have already reached strategic partnership at political level. But trade and economic relations don't match our political relations; therefore, we are now focused on promoting trade relations that would yield highly beneficial results for the economies of both the countries.

Covid-19 pandemic has caused some slowdown in trade activities between the two countries, but after the coronavirus pandemic will be settled down, I am sure that our bilateral trade will also get boosted. Azerbaijan is always interested in developing regional connectivity, transportation linkages and direct flights with Pakistan which will also give positive impacts to our economic and trade ties and soon after the slowdown of Covid-19 we are going to start direct flights



Ambassador's profile

Date of Birth: June 21, 1978, Nakhchivan city

Education:

1994-1998 -Bachelor, Faculty of Translation, Azerbaijan State University of Languages

2005-2008 -Master, the Faculty of State and Municipal Administration, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Work Experience:

2002-2003 -Leading consultant on protocol affairs, Consular Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

2003-2005 -Leading consultant on protocol affairs, acting chief consultant on consular and legal affairs, acting chief consultant on visa-passport affairs, Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

2005-2005 -Acting Head of Department, Head of Department, Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Auton-

omous Republic of Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

2005-2010 -Head of Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

2010-2016 -Consul General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the city of Tabriz of the Islamic Republic of Iran

2016- Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Awards:

2009 - "The 90th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Service Bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1919-2009)" Jubilee Medal of the Republic of Azerbaijan

2014 -Honorary Employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan

2019 -The Order "For Merit to the Homeland" of the 3rd degree of the Republic of Azerbaijan

2019 - "The 100th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Service Bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1919-2019)" Jubilee Medal of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Foreign Languages: English, Russian, Turkish, Persian

as well as some mutually beneficial projects between our two countries.

DS: Azerbaijan has liberated its internationally recognized territories from the Armenian occupation and this historical achievement was very warmly welcomed by official Islamabad and by Pakistani

regarding the restoration and renovation of infrastructure and development of the liberated regions. Under the direct leadership of the President, the Azerbaijani Government has started the decontamination, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration works at the liberated Azerbaijani ter-

the region will be carried out both through public investment and with the involvement of funds from the private sector. Attractive environment have been introduced for investors (both domestic and foreign). From the first day of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan the Pakistan



nation. How is the situation in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan and what kinds of works are conducted there?

Ambassador: The situation is stable and under control of Azerbaijani Armed Forces and Azeri authorities. As you are aware during the three decades of Armenian occupation, the Armenian invaders have committed genocide, massacres and war-crimes not only against the Azerbaijani nation but they also subjected the occupied territories to environmental, cultural terrorism. Over the decades, Azerbaijani cultural monuments, artifacts in the occupied territories have been systematically vandalized, misappropriated and destroyed. They occupiers cut and burned the trees and forests. The cities and villages were razed to the ground. The cemeteries, sacred sites, mosques were demolished.

Now the state programs and documents have been signed by the President of Azerbaijan

territories, which had suffered enormous destruction over the course of the Armenian occupation. "The liberated territories are now entering a new period marked by reconstruction and infrastructure works; that

Azerbaijan constantly efforts for the resolution of Kashmir dispute, as a member of various Int. organizations and OIC Contact Group on Jammu & Kashmir

will reshape the outlook of the region and will bring back the peace and stability.

DS: Will Pakistani companies also take part in reconstruction and rehabilitation process at the liberated territories of Azerbaijan?

Ambassador: Reconstruction of

has consistently extended the diplomatic, moral and political support to Azerbaijan and put its principal position on just cause of Azerbaijan. Pakistan has denounced the Armenian occupation of internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan, demanding immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from there.

Azerbaijani Government and nation has always appreciated and valued Pakistan's stance on the position of Azerbaijan. We will be pleased to see Pakistani companies stepping in to the reconstruction and rehabilitation process. Of course the priority will be given to the companies of friendly and brotherly countries. Many Pakistani companies have shown interest in construction and restoration works in liberated areas.

During the visit of FM of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, we have discussed prospects of cooperation with Pakistan's Frontier Works Organization (FWO) in restora-

tion and construction works at liberated Azerbaijani lands. Recently, FWO has also conducted the visit to Azerbaijan for this purpose. FWO is also considering participating and extending its support in de-mining process of the liberated Azerbaijani territories. During almost three decades of occupation Armenia deliberately laid land mines in these territories resulting in numerous casualties among the Azerbaijani military and civilians. Armenia, in a blatant violation of its international obligations, refused to release the map of minefields. This will have serious impedes on rehabilitation and reconstruction works. So lot of works is needed for de-mining of the liberated terri-



Frontier Works Organization is considering to participate and extending her support in de-mining process of the liberated Azerbaijani territories

tories and Pakistan has offered her willing to assist in this connection.

DS: How do you see the defense and military coopera-

tion. This field is also among top priorities for us. We have excellent bilateral cooperation with Pakistan in the military,



tion between Pakistan and Azerbaijan?

Ambassador: The military and defense cooperation is in the interest of both countries and is considered as one of the

military-technical and military-educational spheres, but it is important to intensify more our efforts in this area. Our Armed Forces are working closely on mutually sharing ex-

perience on annual basis. The servicemen and officers from both sides take part in different courses and trainings organized in our respective countries. Every year we organize several high level exchanges of military leadership and officials mutually. We have a very good understanding in trilateral format, when it comes to the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Turkey. Conducting joint bilateral military exercises between Azerbaijan and Pakistan, as well as the trilateral military exercises with the involvement of various types of troops, including Special Forces of the Azerbaijan's Armed Forces, Pakistani and the Turkish Armed Forces are under consideration and will take place this year. The de-

The Armenian invaders have committed genocide, massacres and war-crimes against the Azerbaijani people

defense and military cooperation between our countries at the high level of strategic partnership is there. I am sure it will be further strengthened in the years ahead.

March 31- Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis

Statement by the Sabina Aliyeva, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan.



One of the bloodiest pages of the policy of ethnic cleansing pursued by the Armenian nationalists against our people at different stages of history is the genocide committed against the Azerbai-

janis in March-April, 1918. The genocide against the Azerbaijani people committed by the armed groups of dashnak Armenians and their supporters had resulted in mass killing of tens of thousands of civilians due to their ethnicity and religion in Baku city and different regions of Baku governorate, and other cities, including Shamakhi, Guba, Khachmaz, Lankaran, Hajigabul, Salyan, Kurdamir and other districts. The residential areas, cultural monuments, mosques and cemeteries were brutally destroyed. Many ancient buildings, including "Ismailiyya" Building, one of the most beautiful architectural monuments in Baku, the offices of "Achig Soz", "Kaspi" and "Baku" Newspapers, and shrines were de-

stroyed by artillery fire, the minarets of the "Tazapir" Mosque were severely damaged, and the ancient "Juma" Mosque in Shamakhi was set on fire. The mass annihilation and pillaging started in Baku province later continued in Karabakh, Zangazur, Nakhchivan, Iravan, Goycha and other regions. Tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis became victims of mass atrocities committed by the Armenians. The dashnaks had destroyed, burned and plundered 110 villages in Shamakhi, 167 in Guba, over 150 in Karabakh, 115 in Zan-

years, and a mass grave was discovered in Guba city. Guba Genocide Memorial Complex, which has been established in this site, visually reflects the vandalism of Armenians against innocent Azerbaijanis.

The massacre of tens of thousands of civilians in 1918 on ethnic and religious grounds, the planned and gradual manner of these criminal acts, as well as commitment of such crimes in various parts of Azerbaijan must be interpreted as a crime of genocide.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 96 (I) of December 11, 1946 states that genocide is denial of the right to existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings. According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by UN General Assembly Resolution 260 (III) of December 9, 1948, genocide means any act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.

Unfortunately, the genocide committed against Azerbaijanis in 1918, has not yet received its political and legal assessment at the international level.

The indifference demonstrated by the international community to the crimes of genocide against one nation committed as a result of hatred speech policy pursued for centuries, as well as the failure to bring the perpetrators to justice may cause the development of impunity syndrome, provoking new crimes and widespread human rights violations.

We call on the world community and international organizations not to remain silent about the genocide committed against the Azerbaijanis in 1918, which is a crime against humanity, to recognize this heinous crime as an act of genocide at the international level, and to show determination and justice, without double standards, being guided by the norms and principles of international law.



janis in March-April, 1918. The genocide against the Azerbaijani people committed by the armed groups of dashnak Armenians and their supporters had resulted in mass killing of tens of thousands of civilians due to their ethnicity and religion in Baku city and different regions of Baku governorate, and other cities, including Shamakhi, Guba, Khachmaz, Lankaran, Hajigabul, Salyan, Kurdamir and other districts. The residential areas, cultural monuments, mosques and cemeteries were brutally destroyed. Many ancient buildings, including "Ismailiyya" Building, one of the most beautiful architectural monuments in Baku, the offices of "Achig Soz", "Kaspi" and "Baku" Newspapers, and shrines were de-

gazur Provinces, and 98 in Kars Oblast; innocent people, including women, children and the elderly, were brutally murdered. Furthermore, 199 villages in and around Iravan city, which was a historical territory of Azerbaijan, have been ruined and 132,000 Azerbaijanis have been mercilessly murdered. Based on the Presidential Decree of March 26, 1998, "On the Genocide of Azerbaijanis", the genocide of the Azerbaijanis perpetrated by the Armenians was made a political and legal assessment. So, March 31 is marked annually as "The Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis".

Within past years, many new facts and evidential documents have been collected as a result of investigations carried out in recent

Pakistan, Hungary launched a trade, economic window to boost commercial and economic linkages



By Raja Aamir Mahmood Bhatti

Islamabad, March 25 (DS): Pakistan and Hungary have launched a trade and economic window to boost their commercial and economic linkages. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Hungarian counterpart Péter Szijjártó virtually launched the online platform today.

Speaking on the occasion, the Foreign Minister expressed the confidence that the window will further enrich their bilateral relations. He said this will serve as the round the clock online platform to provide credible information and guidance for respective businesses and entrepreneurs.

The Foreign Minister said Pakistan deeply values its relations with Hungary both bilaterally and within the European Union. Shah Mahmood Qureshi said it is a matter of satisfaction that despite ongoing pandemic, the two sides have been working together to further cement their

economic partnership. Emphasizing the need for further consolidating partnership through high level and private sector exchanges, he said Pakistan looks forward to the second session of Pakistan-Hungary



Joint Commission on economic cooperation in Islamabad this year.

Alluding to the investment opportunities in Pakistan, the Foreign Minister said all the economic sectors are open for investment. He said the Hungar-

ian companies are welcomed to explore joint ventures with Pakistani counterparts.

He said the Hungarian companies can invest in special economic zones as well as the renewable energy, information technology, electric vehicles and tourism. He pointed out that there is also a great scope of cooperation in the agriculture sector.

The Foreign Minister said Pakistan has also eased visa requirements and the businessmen including those from Hungary can avail visa on arrival facility. The tourists are also being facilitated through online visa.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi said several European countries have revised their travel advisory for Pakistan after improvement in security situation and the economic and structural reforms undertaken by the present government. He hoped Hungary will also revise its travel advisory for Pakistan in order to improve the linkages.

Nowruz promotes peace, solidarity: Begum Samina Alvi



UNESCO's mandate.

"This day is the celebration of the intangible heritage of the world."

The Nowruz celebrations were organized by diplomatic community of nine countries in Islamabad including Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Azerbaijan in collaboration with Serena Hotels.

Begum Samina said it gave her immense pleasure to attend Nowruz celebrations. "I congratulate Serena Hotels and all the participating countries on this auspicious occasion. This is the beginning of the new year and a new hope to renew our

ISLAMABAD, Mar 27 (DS):

Begum Samina Arif Alvi on Saturday said Nowruz promoted values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families as well as fostered reconciliation and neighborliness. Speaking at an event here to mark the celebrations of Nowruz, she said as it contributed to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and different communities, Nowruz fitted closely with the



commitments towards peace and humanity.”

She said Nowruz was a festivity marking the first day of spring and renewal of nature. “It includes rituals, ceremonies and cultural events, as well as the enjoyment of a special meal with loved ones,” she said adding Nowruz was celebrated for over 3000 years in the Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and other regions.

She said the participating countries had given a message of peace and a bright future awaited those countries. “At this time, we also need to step up efforts to tackle the challenges of global warming. Climate change is already



Similarly, we also need to utilize alternate sources of energy for power generation from so-

be vigilant at this time of crisis because carelessness can lead to problems.”

“Therefore, we should observe SoPs, wash our hands, use a mask and keep physical distance,” she stressed. She wished everyone a prosperous and happy Nowruz by saying, “May its spirit of harmony, peace and respect towards humanity serves as inspiration to us all.”

Parliamentary Secretary for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aftab Jehangir, Dean of Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Turkmenistan Atadjan Movlamov and Chief Executive Officer of Serena Hotels Aziz Boolani also spoke on the occasion.

Begum Samina Alvi visited the stalls set up by embassies



happening; temperatures are rising; drought and wild fires are starting to occur more frequently; rainfall patterns are shifting; glaciers and snow are melting, and the global average sea-level is rising.

To mitigate climate change, we need to reduce or prevent the emissions linked to human activities. Climate change will affect both hemispheres of the Earth.”

She emphasized that it was the moral obligation of the whole world to keep our planet cool and minimize the use of fossil fuels.

She told, “In Pakistan, the government has taken initiative of planting billion trees which is indeed a good step and we need to play our role in this regard.

lar and wind.”

Begum Samina said our festivity and celebrations had been restricted due to emergence of Covid-19 pandemic during the



last year. “I hope that the process of vaccination will complete soon and we will overcome this disease. We need to

of different countries which was followed by stage performances depicting cultures of the region.

Prime Minister address Virtual Summit with President of Uzbekistan



Islamabad, 14 April (DS):

The first Virtual Summit between Prime Minister Imran Khan and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev was held. During the wide-ranging talks, views were exchanged on bilateral, regional and international issues.

The two sides highlighted the depth of Pakistan-Uzbekistan relations rooted in common faith, shared history and cultural affinities. They also reiterated their determination to maintain momentum of high-level exchanges and further enhance the upward trajectory of the relationship.

The two leaders reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations -- with particular focus on political, trade, security and defence, educational and cultural domains. They also agreed to encourage more people-to-people contacts including through spiritual (ziyarat) tourism.

Prime Minister Imran Khan underlined the importance of enhancing political and diplomatic linkages, fast tracking trade and economic cooperation, ensuring early finalization of the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and Transit Trade Agreement (TTA), increasing security and defence cooperation, and taking steps to deepen mutual collaboration in the fields of education, culture and tourism.

The Prime Minister also underscored the importance of rail, road and air connectivity and highlighted the enormous potential that exists in diverse fields to

build an expanded mutually-beneficial partnership.

The Prime Minister highlighted Pakistan's economic security paradigm and the shifting focus to geo-economics. He stressed that Central Asia was a region of particular focus in this vision.

The level of progress on the Trans-Afghan Railway Line Project, agreed between Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan earlier this year, was reviewed. The project would be a first step in linking the Central Asian transport network with Pakistani seaports of Gwadar, Karachi and Qasim. Prime Minister Imran Khan stated that, once completed, the initiative would transform the geo-economic dynamics of the entire regime.

The two leaders also discussed important global and regional matters of mutual interest, and reaffirmed the commitment to continue supporting each other at all international and regional fora, including the UN, OIC, SCO and ECO.

Prime Minister Imran Khan apprised on the latest situation in IIOJK, shared Pakistan's perspective on issues of peace and security in South Asia, and underlined the imperative of peaceful resolution of the Jammu & Kashmir dispute.

The Prime Minister also highlighted Pakistan's efforts to facilitate the Afghan peace process for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. He stressed that this historic opportunity must be

seized by the Afghan parties to achieve an inclusive, broad-based and comprehensive negotiated political settlement.

The Prime Minister also underscored the importance of counter-ing Islamophobia and promoting inter-faith harmony.

Following Agreements/MoUs were signed on the eve of the Virtual Summit:

- i. MoU for Developing Further Cooperation in the Field of Agriculture.
- ii. Agreement on Mutual Recognition in the Fields of Conformity Assessment of Products, Standardization, Metrology and Technical Assistance.
- iii. MoU on Defence Cooperation.

President Mirziyoyev reiterated his invitation to Prime Minister Imran Khan to attend the high-level International Conference on regional connectivity, to be held in Tashkent in July 2021. Prime Minister Imran Khan thanked President Mirziyoyev and reiterated his invitation to him to visit Pakistan at the earliest convenience.

The two leaders expressed confidence that the understandings reached during the Virtual Summit will further deepen bilateral cooperation and contribute towards forging a stronger, multi-dimensional relationship between the two countries. It was agreed to continue the Summit-level political dialogue in future.

COAS welcomes Biden's announcement of withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan

Rawalpindi, April 16 (DSt): Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa has welcomed President Biden's announcement of withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan by September this year. He was talking to the US Charged' Affairs Angela Ageler who called on him in Rawalpindi. The Army Chief reiterated that a prosperous, stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in the best interest of Pakistan in particular and region in general. He also hoped for greater Pak-US bilateral cooperation in all domains in future.



The US Charged' Affairs appreciated Pakistan's sincere efforts for bringing peace and stability in the region, especially the Afghan

Peace Process and also assured of US continued assistance for the common cause of peace in Afghanistan.

'Friendship Tree' Planted at Chinese Embassy Compound as part of 70th Anniversary of Pakistan-China Diplomatic Relations

By Raja Asif Mahmood Bhatti
Islamabad, 13 April (DS): Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood and Chinese Ambassador H.E. Nong Rong planted a Friendship Tree, at the Chinese Embassy Compound, as part of ongoing celebrations to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations. The 70th Anniversary celebrations were jointly initiated by Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi and State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in a virtual ceremony held on 2 March 2021. Both sides have planned a wide range of activities, spread



throughout the year, to mark this historic milestone and celebrate the evolution of Pakistan-

China friendship that has, over seven decades, transformed into a time-tested "All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership", despite vicissitudes of times and changes in the international and regional situation. Plantation of the evergreen Deodar tree - which is also the national tree of Pakistan - depicted the spirit of Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership. Both sides reiterated commitment to celebrate the 70th Anniversary in a befitting manner.



Sergey Lavrov recent visit widening Pakistan-Russia Relations

By Raja Asif Mahmood Bhatti

Islamabad, 7 April (DS): Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi received Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Foreign Office. The two Foreign Ministers had wide-ranging talks covering bilateral relations and regional and global issues.

Extending a warm welcome, Foreign Minister Qureshi recalled his earlier meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov on the sidelines of SCO Council of Ministers in Moscow in September 2020. The Foreign Minister underlined that strengthening of relations with the Russian Federation was an important foreign policy priority for Pakistan and that Pakistan-Russia relations, today, were marked by enhanced mutual trust and understanding. Noting the important progress achieved in bilateral relations, the Foreign Minister agreed on the need to intensify efforts to deepen cooperation in all areas, including economy and



stan's resolve to work with Russia for early commencement of the 'Pakistan Stream' Gas Pipeline project.

Foreign Minister Qureshi congratulated Russia on developing COVID-19 vaccine and highlighted Pakistan's plans to acquire more Sputnik-V as well as to have joint venture for production of the vaccine in Pakistan.

The Foreign Minister briefed his Russian counterpart on Pakistan's priorities relating to peace and sta-

peaceful resolution of the Jammu & Kashmir dispute.

The Foreign Minister noted with appreciation the close cooperation between Pakistan and Russia within the United Nations and at other multilateral fora including SCO. Matters relating to Security Council reform were also discussed.

There were detailed exchanges on matters relating to South Asia, West Asia, the Gulf region, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific. The two Ministers also dis-



trade, energy, counter-terrorism, security and defence, education, and people-to-people exchanges. The Foreign Minister added that the next meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) would cover a wide agenda encompassing economic, trade and energy cooperation between the two countries and must be result-oriented. Foreign Minister Qureshi also reiterated Paki-

bility in Afghanistan centered on an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. He appreciated Russia's role in the Afghan peace process including through convening of the meeting of Extended Troika in Moscow in March 2021.

The Foreign Minister dilated on the human rights situation in IIOJK and underlined Pakistan's approach to the issues of peace and security in South Asia and

cussed the potential of Euroasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The Foreign Minister stressed that Pakistan remained committed to forge a closer, multi-dimensional relationship with Russia — marked by trust and understanding. He added that Foreign Minister Lavrov's latest visit would help commence a new chapter in this direction.

Analyzing the Indian Strategy in Afghanistan

Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai

India since Nehru's time has been trying to put itself on the path of a major player in the region on one hand and attain a global position on the other. Besides China, Pakistan is a state which challenges India in many ways that irk the former to a large extent. As a rising power, India wants to enhance its role and ensure its presence in a fragile state Afghanistan in the post-9/11 era where Pakistan had a greater role earlier. For the said purpose, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent policies Washington adopted provided a favorable ground for Delhi to adopt a proactive policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan. India's major role in Afghanistan has always been suspicious for Islamabad for several reasons. Since Pakistan's inception, India was using tactics to destabilize Pakistan by supporting the elements who wanted to have a greater Afghanistan or Pashtunistan. Likewise, India is now supporting the unrest in Balochistan by using Pakistan's North-Western borders. This article deliberates upon how India by using its soft power in Afghanistan against Pakistan on one hand and making Pak-Afghan relations sour on the other. Following the overthrow of the Taliban regime and formulation of the new political setup in Afghanistan, India's engagement with Afghanistan became multi-dimensional as the new administration in Kabul had cordial relations with India. Soon after the installation of the interim authority in late 2001, the Indian Liaison Office was converted to a full-fledged embassy in Kabul. Since then, India has continued to pursue a policy of high-level engagement through humanitarian, financial, and project assistance to have clout in Kabul to counterbalance Islamabad's influence in Afghanistan. Likewise, back in the 1990s, India was supporting the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance as Pakistan was supporting the Taliban, a natural choice for India. Most of the core members of the Northern Alliance were holding key positions in the new setup.

Indian financial aid to post-Taliban Afghanistan is roughly \$3 billion in the form of developmental projects, scholarships, infrastructure projects, food packages, roads, medical, and institutional building. Thus, India has become one of the top six donors to post-Taliban Afghanistan. India has done a number of projects in Afghanistan: 1) Afghan parliament



in the capital having a library, 2) building educational institutions and provided them with aid 3) construction of energy projects like dams, 4) construction of dams and water supply channels, 5) electricity supply lines, 6) construction of health care facilities, 7) building an agriculture university, 8) energy power station in Kabul city, 9) Sports facilities, 10) cold storage in various cities, 11) telephone lines in various parts of the country, 12) television network system, 13) construction of wells and channels in many areas, 14) and rehabilitation of several water reservoirs.

Keeping in view the above-mentioned projects, it cannot be said the Indian aid is based on humanitarian grounds at all. India's major concern is to counter

Pakistan in Afghanistan and destabilize Pakistan by in-filtering rebels to Balochistan. A former strategic adviser to the U.S. commander in Afghanistan Mr. Zachary Constantino maintains that India and Pakistan pursue mutually exclusive objectives in Afghanistan and leverage sharply different tools to achieve their respective goals. Furthermore, the US officials also believe that Pakistan has utilized militant groups, including the Afghan Taliban, as strategic proxies, while India places considerable weight on its soft power influence among Afghans. However, such narratives seem to hold no more weightage especially in the contemporary regional environment, where India has been evidently involved in waging proxies against Pakistan by utilizing its operatives in Afghanistan.

The Indian influence has caused a huge hatred in the minds of the Afghans for Pakistan both on a governmental and non-governmental level. Even the Afghans cannot tolerate any Pakistani visiting any of Afghanistan's cities while they, on the other hand, do businesses in Pakistan, receive education on Pakistani scholarships in the country, and enjoy the best health care facilities in Peshawar and Islamabad.

Hence, the biggest threat India feels in Afghanistan is the Taliban over whom Pakistan, as many believe, still has leverage. The Indian strategies in Afghanistan are in disarray following the US-Taliban Doha deal. India considers if the Taliban become part of the Afghan government, it would definitely not enjoy the leverage they have had over the Afghan government following the US invasion. Any difference or trust-deficit between Pakistan and the Taliban might benefit India in the future which should be avoided. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the Taliban in the Kabul administration would likely bring peace to the war-torn country and ultimately make Afghanistan's policy balanced towards the neighboring countries.

The author is the Senior Research Associate at Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad.

Pakistan, Iran agree for early arrangements to facilitate legal trade in border region



ISLAMABAD, Mar 30 (DS):

Pakistan and Iran agreed on the need for expeditious finalization of arrangement to facilitate legal trade and improve livelihood in border region, in light of Prime Minister Imran Khan's initiative of joint border markets.

The matter was discussed in a meeting between Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Iranian counterpart Dr Javad Zarif, on the sidelines of the 9th Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, a Foreign Office press release said.

During the meeting, the two foreign ministers reviewed bilateral relations and ex-

changed views on regional issues, particularly the Afghan peace process. Qureshi emphasized the importance of enhanced bilateral economic cooperation.

The two foreign ministers also reviewed progress on the opening of new border crossing point. Foreign Minister Qureshi expressed the hope that the Afghan parties would seize the historic opportunity to work out an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political settlement. He underlined the need to consolidate progress achieved in Doha process and take the process forward. Expressing concern on high level of violence, he underscored the importance of reduction in violence lead-

ing to ceasefire.

Qureshi also underlined the need to be cognisant of "spoilers", who did not wish to see return of peace and stability in the region. He added that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan would help in improving connectivity and promote infrastructure development in the region.

The foreign minister expressed thanks for Iran's steadfast support on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute and Prime Minister Imran Khan's efforts to counter Islamophobia and promote inter-faith harmony. The two foreign ministers agreed to remain in close contact and maintain bilateral political exchanges.

US revisiting relations with Iran

Talat Masood

Of the many rash foreign policy decisions that former United States president Trump took the one that has caused immense harm to the credibility of the US and the sanctity of international treaties was the revocation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly referred as the Iranian nuclear deal. Over and above, it imposed severe sanctions to cripple Iran's economy hoping these measures would bring the downfall of the regime. This unilateral action in cohort with Israel reflected the deep animosity of the Trump administration toward the present Iranian government. Besides Israel, it was also meant to feed into the strong anti-Iran sentiment prevalent in Saudi Arabia and a few other Middle Eastern countries. These measures did cripple Iran's economy but were unable to weaken its resolve to stand up to US pressure and continue unabated with the enrichment and missile programmes. America's breaking away from the nuclear deal gave Iran's power elite to further tighten its grip and pursue the nuclear programme with less inhibitions. It has gone past the enrichment limits that were part of the original agreement.

Incidentally, the Iran nuclear deal was the outcome of years of serious deliberations and was worked out by highly seasoned professionals on both sides. These were painstaking negotiations, as Iran is a hard country especially when it comes to working out a detailed agreement on high security and strategic issues. The most redeeming aspect of the deal was that it allayed the fears of its adversaries and the world at large that Iran's ambitions, if any, to be the tenth nuclear power, have been stemmed at its roots.

As a member of the Pugwash Council, an eminent international organisation that focuses on nuclear proliferation and reduction of nuclear threat, I had visited Iran a few times and had the opportunity of seeing some of their nuclear installations including the enrichment facility. As our group consisted of members from several countries including China and the US, it was clear that Iran was demonstrating

that it was imposing self-restrictions to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) despite its undeniable technological and scientific prowess.

So, for Trump to revoke the nuclear deal without any sound basis apart from pleasing Israel and a few Arab countries and quelling his anti-Iran sentiment was certainly ill-advised. Subsequent developments did affirm these apprehensions.

After the US set aside the agreement the P-4 and Germany were left to fend for themselves. Of course, Trump was insisting that they take similar action. To an outsider it seemed they had frozen their options not wanting to displease the superpower and not totally aligned with its policy.

Once the US abandoned the agreement, Iran's power elite was unshackled to take a course that it saw fit for it. Another aspect generally overlooked is that when a country feels threatened it would hasten to build its defenses even more resolutely.

The answer lies in bringing Iran back in the international fold and the two sides should take appropriate measures to reduce mistrust and not be influenced by countries that have their axe to grind.

Pakistan's position on Iran's nuclear programme is unambiguous. It wants Tehran to remain in full compliance of the nuclear deal. Any departure from it raises undue tensions in the Middle East and widens the rift and apprehension among Muslim nations, particularly between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The extraordinary breakthrough in Saudi-Israel relations or UAE-Israel relations are largely a fallout of the growing hostility between Iran and the Arab states that was fully exploited by the US and Israel to mostly their advantage.

According to press reports, the US recently claimed to have floated very serious ideas on reviving the agreement but so far Tehran has not responded.

Although reports indicate talks between Iran and the European Union, with the US watching from the sidelines, have been encouraging. However, President Rouhani choosing to inaugurate a cascade of advanced centrifuges for producing enriched uranium at the Natanz

facility gave contradictory signals. Perhaps it was meant to indicate that despite the very harsh sanctions, through sheer determination Iran has made a major breakthrough in development of nuclear technologies and equipment. And hopes that this would lend weight while conducting the tough negotiations.

The latest cyberattack on the underground Natanz facility, apparently by Israel, so soon after its commissioning, could adversely impact the current negotiations. It is indeed unrealistic on the part of Israel to contend as though it has the right to be the sole nuclear power in the Middle East. In fact, its possession of nuclear power and aggressive policies are a major source of instability of the region.

The US must have realised that building pressure on nations does not necessarily work. In most cases it strengthens the nation's resolve to stand up to it. Pakistan is no stranger to these pressures. It was dealt with so severely and unfairly when it was building its nuclear capability, but through sheer determination it steered its way through. True, the people suffer as they have to bear the burden of sanctions and its long-term ill effects.

Another disturbing aspect is how the US and the West generally have happily reconciled and even helped Israel in acquiring its nuclear capability and deliberately overlooked India's nuclear build up. This was in sharp contrast to how Pakistan's nuclear programme was viewed.

As regards Iran, the attitude is equally harsh. There is however a big difference between Iran and Pakistan's nuclear policies. Iran is a signatory to the NPT whereas Pakistan is not and the logic of its nuclear build-up is to counter the Indian capability, lest it be unfairly disadvantaged. To point out these contradictions is to highlight the reality that major powers support or oppose proliferation not on principles but on sheer expediency. The monopoly of the big five as nuclear powers is by itself a contradiction and a paradox that is not going to change even in the distant future.

The writer is a retired Lieutenant General of the Pakistan Army.

FM Qureshi underlines huge potential for enhancing Pak-Tajik bilateral trade



ISLAMABAD, Mar 31 (DS): Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi said immense opportunities existed between Pakistan and Tajikistan to further enhance bilateral trade ties and cooperation in multi-dimensional fields. He called on Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon at the Presidential Palace in Dushanbe, a press release said.

The foreign minister expressed that top leadership of the two brotherly countries were determined to further solidify and expand these bilateral ties. He observed that the timely completion of Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) project would prove as beneficial energy

corridor for the entire central and South Asia.

Qureshi stressed upon optimally utilization of the bilateral institutional framework to further promote bilateral trade cooperation between the two countries through the Joint Working Groups (JWG) in relevant fields. The two sides also exchanged views on Afghan peace process, the regional situation and peace.

Foreign minister Qureshi apprised Tajik president of the contributions made by Pakistan towards peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan and the outcome. He reiterated that Pakistan considered peace and stability in Afghanistan as vital for the regional progress and

prosperity.

The foreign minister also reaffirmed Pakistan's sincere efforts for the regional peace and peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon expressed his resolve to further enhance the bilateral ties between the two countries and expressed satisfaction over the current level of relations. Qureshi also extended facilitation to the Tajik president on his re-election to the office of president after October 2020 elections. He said both countries enjoyed historic, religious, traditional and cultural relations and it was a welcoming sign that the top leadership of the two countries were committed



to enhance these ties further.

He also thanked the president for extending warm hospitality to his delegation during 9th Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process in Dushanbe and appreciated the successful hosting of the moot.

Later, on his twitter account, the foreign minister posted that he had an excellent meeting with the Tajik president. "Indeed, our bilateral ties with Tajikistan are of great importance with the shared vision and goals of Pakistan-Tajikistan leadership lending a strong foundation to build these further."

"With a vision to strengthening Economic Diplomacy, I shared Pakistan seaports offer shortest route for Tajikistan connectivity w/ S.E Asia, M. East, Africa & beyond. Reiterated our commitment to complete flagship CASA-1000, harbinger for building energy corridor between South and Central Asia."

The foreign minister also visited Tajikistan ministry

of Defence where he was welcomed by Defence Minister Colonel General Sherali Mirzo. During the meeting, both sides discussed bilateral ties, cooperation in the defence field and other issues of mutual interest.

Both sides shared the evolving bilateral defence ties and resolved to strengthen them further. They also agreed to work together through joint efforts to defeat extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking and cross border crime.



Pakistan, Germany enjoying Unity in Diversity’ a vintage political and cultural experience

By Raja Aamir Mahmood Bhatti

ISLAMABAD, (Diplomatic Star): German Ambassador to Pakistan Bernhard Schlagheck has said that Pakistan and Germany were enjoying ‘Unity in Diversity’ that is a vintage political and cultural experience.

He expressed these views while talking to a select group of scholars, authors, artists and dignitaries in an open air cultural night organized by Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF Pakistan) at Lok Virsa Islamabad. The event aimed to celebrate the rich cultural and intellectual diversity of Pakistan.

Bernhard Schlagheck said “Both Pakistan and Germany are federal republics. Pakistan is of course a multiethnic state, a fact which is not sufficiently realized in Europe. Yes, it is a Muslim state, but we all know how religion is practiced in different ways under the big tent of ‘ummah’.

Germany on the other hand is a homogenous nation, however, with a very strong history of regional and sub-regional identities. This diversity though perhaps different in types and nature, makes not only federal constitutions necessary- both in Pakistan and in Germany – but also cultural differentiation, federalism, even unity in diversity.”

Earlier, welcoming the participants of the event, Head of Country office FNF Pakistan Ms. Birgit Lamm, said: “We are all social beings; we cannot lock ourselves at home all the time and we need to socialize. For our personal well-being we also need culture, we need the beautiful things that art and creativity can give us.”

How can one talk about diversity and explain the concept of Federalism using arts? Ms. Birgit Lamm said FNF Pakistan in 2020 rose to the challenge when due to COVID a number of planned workshops were converted into digital panel discussion on zoom or facebook.

“As you know you cannot sit in a web workshop for a whole day. Those of us who have tried it, looking at the tiny little box, 2 by 2 inches, know it is really hard and draining” Ms. Lamm shared the story behind the Book “Cultural Federalism: Embracing Unity in Diversity in Pakistan” by Jami Chandio and how and why it included a number of hand drawn sketches alongside five academic research papers.

“If you talk about diversity, it calls for art, it calls for visualization. It was then that we decided to invite the cartoonist Akhtar Shah or Shahtoon to be part of this online program. Our key note speakers had only 07 minutes to make their point during the panel discussions, and these were exactly the seven minutes that Shahtoon sb had to draw a cartoon on the main message.” She said.

Sharing his experience as the moderator of the



“Unity in Diversity” web panel series , Touseeq Haider exclaimed “oh my gosh!”, this speaker is doing great but it is so difficult to sketch in seven minutes a cartoon or illustration out of whatever he or she is saying. So when the camera would cut to the room where Shahtoon was sitting, most of the times, let me be very honest, I thought maybe he has a blank page, but he never disappointed!” Forever humble, Shahtoon said “It was something I would pick up out of whatever everyone was saying and I did the best I could. I think our guests here should be able to tell whether I have done a good job or not.” But it was not about the sketches alone, they sketches told a story. A story told by more than 20 panelists over a series of 5 episodes titled “Unity in Diversity”. The papers presented by Jami Chandio , a scholar and champion of Federalism had many examples all pointing to the same conclusion “Diversity can work in both ways, it can divide society , it can be a source of conflict if it is denied, it can work as dynamic of unity if it is honored , secured and celebrated.” The highlight of the cultural night was the stellar performance by distinguished classic dancer and social activist Sheema Kermani. At the end of the performance Sheema Kermani highlighted the difficult situation faced by performing artists due to COVID-19. After a hiatus of almost two years since her last live performance in Islamabad, her words and classical kathak dance moves enchanted the audience.



‘Arzi Naweess’ appointed in Berlin to facilitate Pakistani Diasporas

By Tariq Mahmood Awan

Islamabad, 13 April (DS): Foreign Minister, Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi visited the Embassy of Pakistan on the second day of his official visit to Berlin on 13 April 2021. The Foreign Minister was received by the Ambassador and officers of the Embassy.

The Foreign Minister was given a tour of the Consular Section. He interacted with many applicants availing services. With a view to ease the difficulties faced by the Pakistani community and to further facilitate them, Foreign Minister Qureshi inaugurated the position of “Arzi Naweess”, who would offer free-of-cost facilitation for NADRA and IMPASS online-applications. He also announced that a similar post will soon be operationalized in the Consulate General in Frankfurt and in other places in Europe, where required.

The Foreign Minister also inau-

factured in Pakistan, make their way to Germany, every year, to be used especially in the prestigious Bundesliga matches, which

lin.

In order to acquaint European audience with Pakistan’s perspective on issues pertaining to



are viewed by millions of people across the world.

Foreign Minister Qureshi also interacted with members of the Pakistani community, who had

regional and international developments, including Pakistan-India relations, grave human rights violations in IIOJK, Afghan peace process, CPEC and opportu-



gured a “Football Corner” in the Consular Section, dedicating it to the hardworking Pakistanis stitching footballs, especially in Sialkot. He highlighted that this Football Corner would serve as a constant reminder about the contribution of Pakistan to the most loved sport of football, across Europe. Over 50 million footballs, designed and manu-

travelled from various parts of Germany to meet him. During the meeting, members of the community apprised the Foreign Minister of ways to further promote Pakistan’s image in Germany and offered many suggestions. The members of the community expressed their gratitude for the inauguration of the Arzi Naweess at the Embassy of Pakistan, Ber-



nities for investments in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), EU DisinfoLab, and FATF, the Foreign Minister held extensive media interactions with German and European media including Die Welt, DW and Diplomatic Magazine. The media representatives from local Pakistani community also interviewed the Foreign Minister.

Talks with India: a reality check

Zamir Akram

Since the agreement last month between the Directors General Military Operations (DGMO) of Pakistan and India to revive the 2003 cease-fire accord and address each other's "core issues", well-meaning people in Pakistan have expressed high hopes of an improvement in bilateral relations. Subsequent events have moved rapidly with resumption of stalled talks on the Indus Waters, a message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Pakistan Day and a forthcoming meeting of the foreign ministers in Dushanbe. However, despite the hype, there is a need for the optimists in Pakistan for a reality check. This should be based on Indian motives and intentions as well as experience of negotiating with India.

Past and present Pakistani leaders have consistently advocated a dialogue with India to resolve outstanding issues. The recent developments, therefore, are in line with this policy and Pakistan did not need any persuasion to engage with India. What is more important is why the Modi government has suddenly changed its "muscular" approach towards Pakistan and agreed to resuming talks without the earlier precondition of an end to Pakistan's alleged support for terrorism. Perhaps one reason is that the Biden administration has privately advised India to lower temperatures with Pakistan so that it can focus on collaborating with the United States against China in the Asia-Pacific. Another more important reason could be that after the Indian military's confrontation with China in Ladakh, the Modi government has realised the perils of a two-front confrontation with Pakistan and China.

However, this does not mean that India is ready to resolve its disputes with Pakistan. Based on past experiences, it is more likely that the Indian intention is to use the dialogue process as a tactical ploy to ward off external pressure from the US and perhaps also from China. In this case, Pakistan-India talks, if they actually take place, will again prove to be sterile. Such a divisionary dialogue, devoid of any substantive results, serves India's purpose to deflect external pressure.

Past experiences demonstrate that whenever India comes under international criticism for its repression in Kashmir and consequent tensions with Pakistan, it engages in talks with Pakistan, arguing that this is a bilateral issue and the international community should not interfere. But in the talks, India maintains that Kashmir is an "internal" issue and the only subject to be discussed is Pakistan's support to Kashmiri "terrorists". The dialogue thus becomes an endless circular argument. Even on other issues, such as Siachen, Sir Creek or the Wullar Barrage, the Indians adopt inflexible positions and refuse compromising solutions. On several past occasions, India has even reneged on agreed solutions, such as in the case of Siachen.

Another key objective for India has been to use the dialogue process to demoralise the Kashmiris by signalling that Pakistan has abandoned them and that their only hope is a union with India. Yet another diversionary tactic is to propose that the difficult issues like Kashmir be set aside while progress can be made on soft issues like trade and people-to-people contact. The purpose is to create a façade of normalisation behind which repression of the Kashmiris can continue.

In the light of such experience, Pakistani decision-makers need to be realistic about their expectations from the anticipated talks. Modi is not Vajpayee or Manmohan Singh and even their "soft borders" solution is not acceptable to him. After changing the status of occupied Kashmir and seeking to alter the Muslim majority demography of the region, Modi's henchmen are now talking about occupying Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Pakistani views about a new beginning with India have now become irrelevant. Modi's India perceives itself as a global power, with American backing. It, therefore, requires Pakistan's capitulation and subservience like other South Asian states. In this environment, Pakistan's relations with India cannot improve. On the contrary, Pakistan will be asked to not only abandon its position on Kashmir but also to accept Indian dictation on its foreign relations, such as with China. Consequently, any acquiescence with In-

dian demands now, even implicitly, would prove to be a slippery slope in the future.

Pakistan should not put its faith in the US either. Due to the Indo-US strategic convergence against China, Washington's geo-political interests will continue to override its principles about human rights or Pakistan's national interests. While the US calls upon Pakistan and India to bilaterally resolve their differences and is willing to facilitate such a dialogue, its preference is for Pakistan to accept the status quo in Kashmir and acknowledge Indian hegemony. As such, the US is an impartial interlocutor.

The foregoing is not to argue against resumption of a dialogue with India, at least to test the waters. But Pakistan should do so with the confidence of a nuclear-armed state with credible deterrence against India. While it does have its challenges, India too faces several problems. Externally, it has to contend with a two-front confrontation with China and Pakistan. In occupied Kashmir, it has failed for decades to overcome a popular uprising. Internally, several Indian states are beset with raging insurgencies. Modi's propagation of the fascist Hindutva agenda has divided the country and alienated 200 million Muslims, apart from tarnishing India's secular credentials. His economic policies combined with mishandling of the Covid pandemic has slowed down economic growth, increasing the number of Indians below the poverty line. India, then, is not the great power that it pretends to be and it is certainly not in a position to dictate to Pakistan.

Therefore, while engaging with India, Pakistan must not compromise on its principled position. Pakistan should also engage directly with the Kashmiris and take them into confidence so that they do not feel betrayed. It should also consult with China which has a major stake in Kashmir and the Pakistan-India dialogue. This would further strengthen Pakistan's negotiating position. Above all, the Pakistani people need to be taken fully into confidence since any outcome in the dialogue process must have national support.

Zartaj Gul lauds Denmark's interest in Pakistan's world-acclaimed green initiatives

By Shabbir Hussain

ISLAMABAD, Apr 08 (DS):

Minister of State for Climate Change Zartaj Gul lauded the Danish government for its interest in Pakistan's green initiatives and furthering it through enhanced collaboration in the shape of transfer of technology and capacity-building of the relevant sectors for effective implementation of the Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision.

Danish Ambassador Lis Rosenholm on Thursday called on Minister of State for Climate Change Zartaj Gul Wazir and conveyed her government's interest to join and support various green initiatives launched under the Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision for Clean Green Pakistan.

"Both sides agreed to boost bilateral co-operation and joint working for learning from each other's green initiatives related to forestry, renewable energy, energy efficiency, vertical gardening initiatives and water management," Climate Change Ministry media spokesperson Muhammad Saleem Shaikh said in a press statement while sharing various aspects of the bilateral meeting held at the climate change ministry.

"However, the Danish Ambassador and minister of state Zartaj Gul resolved to deepen further Pakistan-Denmark relations through enhanced cooperation and collaboration in, among others, forestry, renewable energy, water and disaster management through jointly working towards Prime Minister's world-acclaimed vision for clean, green and climate-resilient Pakistan," he added.

Danish ambassador told the state minister Zartaj Gul that Danish government, which is committed to global climate and environmental sustainability actions, is deeply appreciative of the stimulating vision of PM Khan for Clean Green and environmentally-sustainable and resilient Pakistan.

Ambassador was also impressed with Clean Green Pakistan programme and various green projects initiated under the vision, specially one of the world's largest ambitious 10 Billion Tree Tsunami Programme (TBTP) Ecosystem Restoration Initiative for promotion of nature-based solutions, Protected Areas Initiative for conservation and protection of the environmentally-sensitive and biodiversity-rich wildlife areas.

She also informed the minister that Denmark is a world leader in fighting climate change. We aim to reduce country's carbon emission to 70% by 2030 (below its 1990 levels), with carbon neutrality targeted already by 2050.

During the meeting, the Danish envoy Lis Rosenholm extended her government's offer to sign a Memorandum



of Understanding (MoU) with climate change ministry in Green Framework for enhanced bilateral collaboration in environmental, climate change, renewable energy, water management and forestry sectors for supporting Pakistan's green initiatives.

"We are very much honoured to receive the offer for signing agreement with the Danish government for boosting cooperation in the forestry, environment, ecosystem restoration, renewable energy, water conservation, vertical gardening, urban forestry and would sign the MoU after go-ahead from the Prime Minister Imran Khan," Zartaj Gul told media after the meeting.

While sharing details of Pakistan's green projects being implemented under the environmental leadership of PM Imran Khan, she told the Danish ambassador that the climate change ministry was implementing several globally-acclaimed flagship programmes and projects in technical support with the international UN organisations including United Nations Development Programme and UN Food and Agriculture organisation and the World Bank.

"The world's largest ambitious afforestation programme of 10 Billion Tree Tsunami Programme, Clean Green Pakistan Programme, National Apiculture Programme, National Olive Tree Tsunami Project, Ecosystem Restoration Initiative and Protected Areas Initiative are now being implemented successfully in consultation and coordination with the international organizations to attain climate resilience and environmental sustainability through the initiative, Zataj Gul added.

The minister also apprised the ambassador that another ambitious Protected Areas Initiative (PAI) launched last year under the over-arching programme 'Green Pakistan' aims at the conserva-

tion and promotion of nature-based solutions and creation of additional 5,000 green jobs for community members in the protected areas.

"The ambitious PAI primarily was being implemented at a full-throttled pace to boost the country's protected areas cover from 13 per cent to 15 per cent by 2023 and create 5,000 green jobs across the country," Malik Amin Aslam elaborated. She also informed the ambassador that the climate change ministry has also launched a unique post-Covid-19 green economic recovery initiative dubbed as Green Stimulus Initiative for creation of green employment opportunities for those rendered jobless after the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020.

Under the initiative, so far around 87,000 jobs have been generated all over the country in green sectors for unemployed daily-wagers, which is being replicated in other countries in line with Pakistani model.

Danish Ambassador Lis Rosenholm emphasised during the meeting that her government considers youth and children as key stakeholders when it comes to their role for health of our Planet. And its is equally heartening to note that Pakistan also assigns greater importance to the youth participation in green initiatives and climate action, she added.

"Pakistan and Denmark share ambitions on greening the Planet. We see eye-to-eye on the challenge of climate change. I am always delighted to discuss solutions, exchange knowledge and explore collaboration between our countries. Partnership is the only way to tackle climate changes," she highlighted.

The ambassador and the state minister agreed and said, "We all have an important role to play and to get the world on a zero-carbon path we need to learn from and inspire one another."

Troop withdrawal from Afghanistan

Rustam Shah Mohmand

The US review of its policy regarding the war in Afghanistan has been completed — for the time being. All American forces will be out of Afghanistan by September 11, this year. All Nato forces will also depart by the same deadline. The withdrawal will begin next month.

In making this announcement from the treaty room of the White House — the same room from where former president Bush made a declaration of a 'War on Terror' in the aftermath of terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 — President Joe Biden had to confront serious opposition from some leaders of the Republican Party as well as some senior military officers. In a historic speech, Biden told the American audience that "the United States had become mired in an endless and increasingly irrelevant conflict that more time and more troops would not resolve". The President also added that a perpetual presence in the country would not serve US interests. He added that America must focus on a "modern landscape of threats" that is far different from that of nearly two decades ago, when the war began.

Biden asserted that he will not pass this responsibility (of dealing with the war) to a fifth president — four US presidents including himself have presided over American troop presence in Afghanistan. Biden also said that the US had since long achieved the original goals of the war — an opinion that many would not agree with. The President declared, "I have concluded that it's time to end America's longest war."

Questioning the whole rationale for supporting continued military presence in Afghanistan, Biden added, "The main argument for staying longer is what each of my three predecessors have grappled with: No one wants to say that we should be in Afghanistan forever, but they insist now is not the right moment to leave."

That was putting it very succinctly. The problem was the goals were not defined. What did the US want to achieve? The Afghanistan Papers had laid bare the truth about the whole unwarranted military intervention. The papers illustrated how the American public was told lies about the war and how facts on the ground were concealed by the government and the generals. Together they were trying to market a strategy that had

no relevance to the objective realities. The US initiative could help in achieving a real breakthrough on ending the conflict. In the last week of this month there will be a UN-sponsored conference in Turkey to build a consensus on governance systems following an agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The conference would be attended by Qatar, the Taliban, the Afghan government, and of course Turkey. In view of the US pledge to pull out all its forces before September 11, the deliberations of the conference have assumed added significance. The Taliban's long cherished demand for the departure of all foreign forces has been met. Now is time for them to help in endeavours that would result in the establishment of an interim government. The interim government would be created by the traditional and time-honoured Afghan institution, the Loya Jirga, or People's Grand Assembly. The interim government that will include the Taliban as a vital component would be multi-ethnic and broad-based.

Opposition to the interim government could come only from the current rulers who would like to prolong the status quo. But prolongation of the status quo is fraught with grave dangers to the unity of the country. The only country that can play a crucial role in countering the machinations of the Kabul government is the US. The Kabul government is dependent on external financial assistance for the maintenance of its army, police and for the general administration. Washington has to use that lever in forcing the Ghani government to acquiesce in the idea of an interim government as a means for ending the war.

There are reports that the Taliban would not agree to attend the Istanbul meeting because the US has not met the May deadline for the withdrawal of forces. That will be a costly error. A delay of four months should not cause the whole scheme of reconciliation to be sabotaged or abandoned. After 20 years of fighting when the goal of an Afghanistan free of foreign forces is in sight, no decision should be taken that would unravel the whole peace process. The Taliban must realise that if they don't seize this opportunity not only would they lose support internationally, but also within the country. They would become more isolated.

The US had made its intention clear soon after the new administration

assumed responsibility. Biden was unambiguous when he said the May deadline for the exit of forces would be difficult to meet. And the new government needed time to complete its review of policy on Afghanistan. In less than three months, Washington has announced a new timetable for a complete withdrawal of all foreign forces. And this is a withdrawal plan that is not dependent or linked to any conditions. That is a clear departure from the narratives of the previous governments. The Taliban must reciprocate by being on board with the discussions in the Istanbul conference where the bottom line of complete and unconditional withdrawal of forces by September 11 will not be questioned or debated. Their willingness to participate in the Istanbul conference would not only raise their stature but also could help in the release of the nearly 7,000 remaining Taliban prisoners.

Regional countries have a role to play. China has stakes because of its heavy investment in Afghanistan which it would like to see protected besides its One Belt One Road project that would get a boost with normalcy returning to Afghanistan. Iran has an interest in a Taliban-inclusive government because only can such a government eliminate terrorist outfits like Daesh that pose a threat to its border areas. China has similar expectations. And of course, no country would gain as much from Afghanistan's peace and stability as Pakistan for a host of reasons. Islamabad must play its role by advising the Taliban leadership to not miss a historic opportunity for peace.

Biden has emphasised that the US would continue to lend support to Afghanistan in helping to create conditions for a complete return to normalcy. In other words, Washington would not wash its hands off Afghanistan even though there would be no military presence. Ashraf Ghani's acceptance of the idea of an interim government and the Taliban agreeing to come on board are critical elements in addition to continued international support for ending the conflict — all of which are indispensable components in a new peace formula. Biden's landmark announcement has opened the doors to resolving the long conflict. Missing the opportunity for peace would be a grave error.

The writer is a former chief secretary K-P and former ambassador.

President Biden invites 40 world leaders to climate summit

ISLAMABAD, Mar 27 (APP): President of the United States Joe Biden invited 40 world leaders to participate in the Virtual Leaders Summit on Climate on April 22-23 but surprisingly left out Pakistan, a country severely and frequently affected by climate change, global warming and rising temperatures.

Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry in a tweet said that the summit would reconvene the Major Economies Forum and would be a milestone. The leaders invited for Global Climate Summit included Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan and India. President Biden had also invited the leadership of countries like Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, China, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Indonesia and Italy.

While responding to a media query, the Spokesperson of the Foreign Office said Pakistan's commitment to addressing Climate Change and Prime Minister Imran Khan's leadership on this account was well accepted and appreciated around the world. The government's landmark initiatives like the Billion Tree Tsunami had won international acclaim, including from the World Eco-



nomic Forum.

Pakistan was also meaningfully contributing to shape the global Climate Change discourse, inter alia, as the Vice President of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Pakistan also co-chaired the multibillion-dollar Green Climate Fund, established to support climate actions in developing countries, last year.

The spokesperson said the Leaders' Summit on Climate Change hosted by President Biden reconvened the U.S.-led

Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, bringing together leaders from countries responsible for approximately 80 percent of global emissions and GDP. The summit also included representation from countries holding Chairs of geographic regions and groups including Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, and Climate Vulnerable Forum. Pakistan, despite being among the top ten countries affected by Climate Change, was one of the lowest emitters – with less than one percent of the global emissions.

Climate Change was one of the defining challenges of our times that could only be countered through inclusive, cooperative and forward-looking policies. Pakistan remained fully committed to play its due role in this fight, the Spokesperson added.

In the days ahead, the analysts will continue wondering whether omission of Pakistan was some kind of bias of the new US administration or even the issue of climate change had become a victim of political expediency.

Excluding Pakistan will raise questions about the larger designs of the United States in the South Asian region.

Italian Envoy Shows Interest to Support Pakistan in Education

RAWALPINDI, 27th Mar, (DS): Punjab Minister for Literacy and Informal Basic Education Raja Rashid Hafeez has said that the people of Pakistan and Italy were bound in deep relations of friendship. These relations are being further strengthened by the cooperation of the people of the two countries in various fields.

He said this while talking to Italian Ambassador to Pakistan Andreas Ferrarese. The Italian ambassador visited the provincial minister's residence in Satellite Town the other day and discussed issues of mutual cooperation in the social sector.

Expressing good wishes, the provincial minister said that we were grateful for Italy's support for the development of the social sector and our bilateral cooperation would continue in the future. On the oc-



casion, the Italian ambassador said that he had visited many cities in Pakistan and found a home-like atmosphere and he did not feel alienated in Pakistan.

He said that he wished to see the development and prosperity of the people of Pakistan and wanted to see Pakistan in the ranks of developed nations. Later on the Italian ambassador, along with the provin-

cial minister, distributed books and bags among deserving students at the International Community Support Foundation's office.

The event was attended by a large number of teachers and students, including the head of the foundation, Sultan Faiz. The students presented beautiful colorful programs. The Italian ambassador appreciated the performance of the children and said that Pakistani students had immense potential.

He also lauded the steps taken by the Punjab government to promote education and increase literacy rate. He especially paid homage to Raja Rashid Hafeez and said that considering the diligence with which the provincial minister was working.

Raja Rashid Hafeez thanked the Italian ambassador and said that we were grateful for the cooperation of the Italian Embassy in the field of education. He also mentioned that the practical steps taken by the Punjab government to increase the literacy rate.

Public Talk Future of Pakistan-Russia Relations

Islamabad, 14 April (DS):

“Pakistan-Russia relations are developing at a normal pace, but change cannot be expected overnight. As far as the future of bilateral ties is concerned, it is promising.” This was stated by Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Pakistan, H.E. Danila Ganich in a public talk on “Future of Pak-Russia Relations”. The event was organized and hosted by Center for Strategic Perspective (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) on April 14, 2021.

Following an introduction by Director CSP, Mr. Najam, DG ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry requested the Russian Ambassador to shed light on three major areas of interaction between Moscow and Islamabad: future of bilateral ties, particularly the most promising ones; areas of mutual interests; and, how think tank like ISSI can help strengthen the relations with a great country like Russia? Responding to these three im-



portant aspects of Moscow-Islamabad ties, Ambassador Danila Ganich stated that the most promising areas of bilateral cooperation lie in the political arena, international affairs, Afghanistan, and multilateral foras such as United Nations (UN), Shanghai Cooperation Or-

ganization (SCO), and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). He said Afghanistan is an identical long-term area of interest since both states want a peaceful settlement of the Afghan problem without any external interference. Touching upon economic dimension, he said that Pakistan seems to be more inclined towards western markets and that is a big hindrance in tapping the true potential of economic cooperation. Language, he said, is another barrier to fruitful cooperation.

The talk was followed by a lively interactive question-answer session.

The talk concluded with a vote of thanks by Chairman BoG, ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood who said that Moscow-Islamabad ties have enormous potential of cooperation and emphasized the need to expand the ambit of bilateral collaboration under the umbrella of Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Ambassador Danila agreed to a request by Mr. Najam to put CSP in touch with relevant think tanks in Russia.

Pakistan's commitment to address Climate Change appreciated globally: Zahid Hafeez Choudhari

Islamabad, March 27, (DS): Foreign Office has said that Pakistan's commitment to address Climate Change and Prime Minister Imran Khan's leadership on this account is well accepted and appreciated around the world.

In a statement Spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Choudhari said the Government's landmark initiatives like the Billion Tree Tsunami have won international acclaim, including from the World Economic Forum. He said that Pakistan is also meaningfully contributing to shape the global Climate Change discourse, inter alia, as the Vice President of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and member of



the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

He said that Pakistan also Co-chaired the multibillion-dollar Green Climate Fund, established to support climate actions in developing countries, last year.

The Leaders' Summit on Climate Change hosted by President Biden reconvenes the U.S.-led Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, which brings together leaders from countries responsible for approximately 80 percent of global emissions and GDP.

The Spokesperson said that Pakistan, despite being among the top ten countries affected by Climate Change, is one of the lowest emitters - with less than one percent of the global emissions.

Diplomacy Thru Pictures



Foreign Minister of Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov calls on Prime Minister Imran Khan in Islamabad on 7th April, 2021.



Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi Condoleed with Foreign Secretary, Suhail Mahmood over the demise of his brother in law Zaheer Akbar Khwaja (Late) in his office on April 06, 2021.



Advisor to the Prime Minister on Commerce & Investment Abdul Razak Dawood in a meeting with H.E. Bernhard Schlagheck, German Ambassador in Islamabad on April 8, 2021.



Italian Deputy National Armament Director, Admiral Guido Giacomini Called on Ms. Zobiaida Jalal, Minister for Defence Production in her office at Islamabad.



H.E. Andreas Papastavrou, Ambassador of Hellenic Republic Greece Called on Mr. Atif R. Bokhari, MOS/Chairman Board of investment at BOI Islamabad on March 19, 2021.



Advisor to the Prime Minister on commerce & investment Abdul Razak Dawood in meeting with H.E. Mr. Manuel Duran Spanish ambassador in Islamabad on April 13, 2021.



Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Nawaf Bin Saeed Al-Maliki Calling on Federal Minister for interior, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed in Islamabad on April 07, 2021.



British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Dr. Christian Turner Called on foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi at Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 19 2021.

The Islamabad Security Dialogue — an appraisal

Inam Ul Haque

Last week the linkage of the first-ever Islamabad Security Dialogue (ISD) was established with the United States thinking about the Indo-Pakistan region, in my Op-ed, “The Islamabad Security Dialogue: Perspective and Potential”. Before an appraisal of the ISD, let us encapsulate the essence of the prevailing global environment that is likely to impact the regional milieu. Whether the recent bonhomie between India and Pakistan, as evidenced by the positive steps taken by either side, is a spur of the moment re-orientation; a long-awaited outcome of the Track-II and other parleys; result of India-Pakistan’s own security calculus; or a subtle nudging by the Biden administration... the jury is still out. However, one hopes that the reflected positivity is genuine and irreversible. Serious-minded policy analysts in India have always recommended a détente in Indo-Pakistan relations. The argument — succinctly put across in a 2017 publication, “Dragon on Our Doorstep”, goes like this. India cannot militarily prevail against a China-Pakistan combine; and without normalising relations with Pakistan, India cannot realise its full potential, and concentrate its efforts towards a rising China. And that India has traditionally followed an appeasement policy towards China’s land incursions in Ladakh and elsewhere. And while Pakistan and China have remained focused on building a “military power”, India has been collecting merely “military war-withal”. These observers also point out that, whereas, the Pakistani military has a “strategic” outlook, not supplemented by its political class, having a “tactical” outlook; the Indian military has a tactical outlook, as opposed to the strategic outlook of its politicians/civilian leaders. And given the strategic importance of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative (with CPEC as its flagship project) — that has catapulted China under President Xi Jinping to world eminence — Sino-Pakistan ties have morphed into what the US-Israel relationship is. Pakistan is to China what Israel is to America. The ISD was prominent by China’s absence except Dr Hu Shisheng, an academic, and the agenda was ‘ostensibly’ set by Dr Moeed Yusuf, Pakistan’s national security adviser. An academic by training, Dr Yusuf’s deep involvement with US academia and think tanks, like the US Institute

of Peace in Washington (he was an associate vice-president for Asia); and some past iterations on social media, raise some concerns in the nationalistic circles. Phrases like General Bajwa’s “hand of peace in all directions” and “burying the past” — metaphorically at least — are significant strands of our future policy outlook. One hopes that the policy calibration stems from deep introspection and analysis, keeping our ‘selfish national interest’ uppermost. Dr Yusuf may or may not be our Jared Kushner.

Rapprochement on Kashmir, while bold and out of the box; has to vector in the aspirations of the Kashmiri people including the diaspora, and the trichotomy of the India-Pakistan-China relationship, given the border entanglement in the region. The recent statement by China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian encouraging bilateral amity between India and Pakistan notwithstanding, the binary of Indo-Pakistan rapprochement, leaving China out has implications.

Likewise, the option of keeping Kashmir on the back burner while moving forward on ‘other issues’, also is a slippery notion. Kashmir remains a ‘vital/core interest’ for Pakistan, given its emotional, religious, psychological and historic significance. The religious right without due confidence building parleys would rock the PTI boat like no PDM can.

Sometimes intractable and complex issues are resolved by time itself. Having said that, it is not intended to not defreeze the Kashmir issue, and find a solution acceptable to all sides. However, for the general public to be supportive, both the governments (India in particular) shall have to prepare grounds through confidence building measures (CBMs) in a sustained manner over time with all external agents working in harmony especially the deep states and political vigilantes (on the Indian side). And these measures should be started “from and within Kashmir” to have an impact. An immediate measure is the undoing of Article 370. Whether the RSS/Modi-led Hindutva-inspired Indian establishment can spring such a coup, remains to be seen... but seems tough at present. So, raising expectations from the very early and mostly cosmetic CBMs would be naive.

If the western analysts and their faithful local cabal are to be believed, the US is hell-bent upon propping up India as a bulwark against China. The truth is far from this truism. The US

wishes notwithstanding, India has steadfastly refused the US bait during the 2020 Ladakh stand-off with China; dithered on military cooperation (with the potential of antagonising China); and avoided military pacts with the US, in an effort to charter a course — as far as possible — closer to its non-alignment credentials. Yes, India has tried to maximise its economic and diplomatic potential from its ‘perceived’ closeness to the US.

There are indicators that India might balance against China without a closer partnership with America. It has avoided the repeat of its reckless ‘forward policy’ that led to the Sino-India war in 1962 over Aksai Chin/Arunachal Pradesh, that the Chinese call “South Tibet”.

Overall, India understands the transactional nature of the Indo-US relationship and the short span of US attention. India, under south wing bureaucracy and Chanakya Kautilya (375-283 BC) statecraft, is too clever and illusive for the mandarins of US State Department, sitting thousands of miles away.

The related argument floated around concerns China’s interest in Pakistan not having peace with India. China has always advised Pakistan to remain peacefully engaged with India concerning “all” issues. It understands the implications of a nuclear war in its backyard and the economic potential of the region, where it can sell its wares after the US/European markets are denied to it. Add to it China’s ability to harvest economic/mineral benefits of Afghanistan and Central Asia if the region is stable. In this game of thrones, the Indian military establishment seems unnecessarily gung-ho and myopic.

The world is effectively in a new cold war between China and the US. China’s reference to its past humiliation by European powers and its present self-confidence and national power potential, foretells new force alignments. By contrast, the US policy prescriptions towards South Asia are less developed and betray a confusion. With the global pivot shifting towards Asia in general and China in particular, more countries (Germany a first case in point) are hedging their bets.

Therefore, South Asia needs to embrace the “trichotomy of India-Pakistan-China” allowing time and sincere efforts to resolve issues, rather than playing proxies for the US, that remains embroiled in intractable problems domestically.

The writer is a retired Major General.

What does the state really want?

Muhammad Amir Rana

IN Pakistan, frenzied protests entailing roadblocks and violence have apparently emerged as a new way of communicating with the state. While multiple religiously inspired groups have contributed to the development of this particular protest feature, the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan has taken this chaotic tactic to new heights. The TLP threat had been growing at an alarming level, and eventually the government officially banned it under the anti-terrorism laws. The government also plans to file a reference in the Supreme Court for the group's dissolution as a political party.

The TLP has not only become an internal security threat but is also hurting Pakistan's international image and its relations with the world. The state has been tolerating the group for many years overlooking domestic and international concerns. Certainly, the state institutions have their own assessments and calculations.

The TLP's street saga this past week revealed the potential strength of the new leadership of the organisation and its cadre. For one, the street power of the group is still intact despite a relative decrease in its verbal ferocity or hate speech after the death of its founder Khadim Hussain Rizvi, whose memory will continue to inspire the TLP support base for a long time. But his demise may have offered the state institutions the opportunity to limit the bargaining power of the group. The assessment may have its pros and cons, but the future of such groups would depend on the state institutions' approach towards them. If the state continues seeing these groups through a political lens they will continue thriving in one way or another. And as in the past, they will resurface, and be allowed to operate, with different names, and will continue exploiting the religious-ideological and sociocultural sensitivities of the state and society. Therefore, it will be important to see how effectively the state enforces the ban on the TLP and its leaders. The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, and related laws are very clear and, if applied in letter and spirit, will not allow the group to survive as a coherent organisation. But history

has a different story to tell. Many organisations have continued to survive, thrive and operate in the country after being banned. The TLP might not be an exception, especially when it has a support and vote base that makes it attractive in the power corridors.

However, the TLP is merely an expression of the poor and retrogressive political and religious-ideological 'scholarship' in the country to which many actors and factors have contributed, ultimately nurturing a unique code of linking power to religion. The code in particular defines the relationship between state institutions and religious forces. The code only promotes a narrow worldview, discourages questioning, and insists on believing in a self-created utopia. But how to deal with a relationship if it becomes ugly or burdensome? Through negotiations or coercive means? Both ways are tricky.

Religion has become a delicate subject in the country. But if the state is willing to show resolve and enforce its authority, the situation can be turned around. It will have to make one significant change in its attitude, which is to keep religious scholarship and politics altogether separate. It is pity that the 30,000-plus religious seminaries, the Islamic studies departments in all universities and colleges, religious bodies such as the Council of Islamic Ideology as well as the teaching of Islamic studies up to graduation level have together not been able to produce religious scholarship as compared to other Muslim societies, which have fewer religious institutions. Google can provide a good view of the participants of any international forum on religion, state, and society, and we can assess the capabilities of Pakistani religious scholarship against that. Only a few noteworthy Pakistani names will appear on the screen — and most of these individuals have either already left the country after receiving threats or are not part of any state-sponsored religious institution and initiative.

The economy of religious institutions has badly damaged religious scholarship in the country, and only promotes the view which suits its financial and political interests. The state has empowered them through

various means, but mainly through legislation to please them or as a consequence of pressure from them. State institutions pick and choose religious groups when needed for their political purposes. They have developed a synergy at a level, where they don't go completely against each other's interests. State institutions are strong and whenever a group becomes strong enough and tries to fly high, state institutions trim its feathers through punitive measures as happened in the case of the TLP.

If the state wants to promote religious scholarship it can take some simple measures, starting with providing more space on media and public forums to genuine scholars. A list of a few dozen scholars from all religious sects — those, who are considered to have saner opinions and do not have political motives — can be prepared easily. They will help broaden the worldview of the public and create a challenge for the religious institutions to review their practices. The beneficiaries of the religious economy will react and will try to defame them, but if the state remains committed and protects scholarship, the insanity will certainly subside gradually.

The power corridors have been harping on the same argument of 'narratives' and 'counter-narratives' without offering a real-world solution to problems related to extremism. Narratives cannot be generated through bureaucratic policy procedures. If this were the case, plenty of policy initiatives and guidelines such as the National Action Plan and even state-sponsored fatwas like the Paigham-i-Pakistan would have already transformed society. Narratives cannot be prepared on orders. Scholarship nurtures new narratives and cultivates minds and prepares them to accept change.

However, the billion-dollar question remains: would state institutions want to promote religious scholarship and alter their comfortable relationship with religious groups? They may not want to as this would require minimising their role in politics, something that they may not be ready to do. Or will they come up with a few other tools for political manoeuvring?

The writer is a security analyst.

Germany ready to boost investment in Pakistan

By Tariq Mahmood Awan

BERLIN, March 12 (DS): Germany on Monday expressed the intent to increase investment in Pakistan's diverse sectors and boost trade relations. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi at a joint press conference in Berlin agreed to strengthen bilateral ties with a particular focus on increasing trade and investments.

The German foreign minister termed the visit of FM Qureshi a "good opportunity" for the launch



of new German initiatives and projects in Pakistan. FM Heiko Maas expressed satisfaction over the interest of 35 German companies ready to make an investment in Pakistan and said the encouraging trend would help "tap into immense potential". He mentioned a "constructive discussion" held with FM Qureshi on diverse matters and added that "Germany wanted to build up cooperation with Pakistan".

Foreign Minister Qureshi welcomed the plans of new German investment in Pakistan and highlighted that the country's shift in policy from geo-politics to geo-economics could turn out to be a "great opportunity for German companies". He said the incentives announced by the Pakistan government for foreign investors would make the country a hub of regional trade.

FM Qureshi said Pakistan wanted to "deepen, broaden and transform" its economic relations with Germany. He said Pakistan could benefit from Germany in technology transfer and the projects relating to the supply and production

of electric vehicles in line with the government's policy of a safe and green climate.

Qureshi expressed gratitude to Germany for supplying 15 million doses of COVID-19 by May and mentioned that Pakistan as a population of 220 million population would require more doses in future. He lauded Germany's supportive role in helping Pakistan achieve the GSP Plus status in the European Union and for not allowing the "politicizing of Financial Action Task Force (FATF)".

Acknowledging Pakistan's effort at the FATF forum by Germany is also commendable, he added. He said German Chancellor Angela Merkel did a great job in the development of Germany, adding that Prime Minister was keen to visit Germany. FM Qureshi mentioned that his meeting with his German counterpart took up ways to overcome delays in visa issuance. He said the positive role of the Pakistani diaspora in Germany also came under discussion with an agreement to legally sort out the issue of immigrants. On Afghanistan, he said Germany played an important role in bringing stabil-

ity in Afghanistan and vowed that Pakistan would remain in touch on the issue at every forum, may it be the Istanbul Peace Process or Doha forum.

On ties with India, he said Pakistan wanted to live in peace with all its neighbours including India. "Pakistan believes in holding a meaningful dialogue with India, but the first step must be taken by India," he stressed. "Pakistan will be receptive and forthcoming," he stressed.

German Foreign Minister Maas on the security situation in Afghanistan acknowledged Pakistan's contribution towards the restoration of peace in its neighbouring country and for hosting three million Afghan refugees. He lauded "Pakistan's active voice" for the peace process in Afghanistan at various platforms. On the relationship between Pakistan and India, he termed the ceasefire agreement at the borders a "step in the right direction".

The two foreign ministers earlier led delegation-level talks encompassing issues related to trade, energy, visa strategy and peace in Afghanistan.

Iraq's Under Secretary for Political Affairs calls on Foreign Minister Qureshi



Islamabad, 8 April (DS):

Dr. Saleh Hussein Ali Al-Tamimi, Under Secretary for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq called on Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

The Foreign Minister warmly welcomed the Under Secretary and reaffirmed Pakistan's strong and fraternal ties with Iraq. He said Pakistan accorded priority to its bilateral relations with Iraq, and was desirous of further enhancing and diversifying these ties in all fields. He hoped that close collaboration between the two countries in regional and multilateral fora will continue to strengthen in the years ahead. Recalling the recent Ministerial visits from both sides, Foreign Minister Qureshi underscored the importance of maintaining the positive momentum in high-level bilateral interactions.

Conveying warm wishes from the Iraqi leadership, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs thanked the Government of Pakistan for dispatching COVID-related assistance to Iraq in March 2021. He added that this brotherly gesture was well-received by the government and people of Iraq. Dr. Saleh Al-Tamimi welcomed Pakistan's intention to forge closer ties with Iraq, and assured the Foreign Minister of full cooperation and support.

During the meeting, the two sides agreed to enhance high-level interactions, work towards developing frameworks in various fields of cooperation, and hold the 9th Session of the Joint

Political Affairs and the Director General of the Foreign Service Academy of Pakistan. The MoU provides a framework of collaboration for capacity building and training of diplomats



Ministerial Commission at the earliest.

Following the meeting, the Foreign Minister witnessed the signing of an MoU on Co-operation between the Foreign Service Academies of the two countries, inked by the Iraqi Under Secretary for Po-

of both countries.

Pakistan and Iraq enjoy warm and friendly ties rooted in shared faith, values and culture. Both countries cooperate closely in regional and multilateral fora. Both countries remain committed to expanding and intensifying bilateral cooperation.

President calls for cementing Pak-Brunei trade relations



ISLAMABAD, Mar 24 (DS): President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday underlined the need for increasing and diversifying trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Brunei Darussalam for mutual benefit. He was talking to the outgoing High Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam, Brigadier General (R) Dato Mahmud Saidin, who called on him here at Aiwan-e-Sadr. The President said that Pakistan and Brunei Darussalam were enjoying excellent relations which were deeply rooted in shared values, religious commonalities as well as shared aspirations for global peace

and stability. He added that Pakistan had a strong agriculture sector and Brunei could benefit from Pakistan's expertise in this sector. The President expressed satisfaction over the fact that Pak-Brunei Investment Company, a joint venture between the government of Pakistan and Brunei Investment Agency, was playing a major role in the country's economic progress by providing an entire range of advisory services as well as financial support to viable business projects. He highlighted the role of Pakistani doctors who were contributing to the well-being of the people of Brunei

Darussalam. The President also appreciated the services of the outgoing High Commissioner for strengthening bilateral ties as well as promoting economic relations between the two brotherly countries. He emphasized the need for promoting people-to-people contacts as well as cultural exchanges that would greatly help in bringing the two countries further closer. Brigadier General (R) Dato Mahmud Saidin highly praised the services of Pakistani doctors who had been doing commendable job for the welfare of people in Brunei, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Egyptian Ambassador called on Ms. Zobaida Jalal, Minister for Defence Production

Islamabad: March 22 (DS): H.E. Mr. Tarek Dahrough, Egyptian Ambassador called on Ms. Zobaida Jalal, Minister for Defence Production. The Minister said that Pakistan considers Egypt as a friend and an important country. The Minister identified the need to further extend our cooperation beyond the economic domain to defence and industrial collaborations and joint ventures. The visiting dignitary acknowledged the importance of Pak-Egypt relations and said that Egypt enjoys good and brotherly relations with Pakistan and would like to continue with a same pace and momentum.



Army Chief, Polish Ambassador discuss issues of regional security

Islamabad, April 02 (DS): Ambassador of Poland to Pakistan Piotr A. Opalinski, called on the Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa in Rawalpindi.

During the meeting matters of mutual interest, regional security and enhanced bilateral and defence cooperation between both countries were discussed. The Army Chief said that Pakistan values its relations with Poland which are anchored by mutual trust and profound historic foundations.

He said that both countries have convergence of strategic interests on a range of security issues in-



cluding fight against terrorism. Visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's efforts for bring-

ing peace and stability in the region, especially the Afghan Peace Process.

Ukrainian Ambassador calls on COAS



RAWALPINDI, Mar 31 (APP): Ukrainian Ambassador Markian Chuchuk Wednesday called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa here at GHQ.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional security and enhanced bilateral and defence cooperation

came under discussion, said an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) media release. The COAS said that Pakistan attaches great importance to furthering bilateral relations with Ukraine in all domains. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's sincere efforts for bringing peace and stabili-

ty in the region, especially the Afghan Peace Process.

Both sides reiterated the commitment for expanding bilateral engagements through structured forums and regular exchanges, particularly with respect to defence cooperation.

The Taliban— arbiters of peace in Afghanistan



Gen (R) Mirza Aslam Beg

What an irony of social justice that powers such as Russia, the US, NATO and Pakistan, who tasted defeat at the hands of the Taliban at one time or the other, have made the declaration after the Moscow conference, supporting Biden's "moon-shot" Afghan Strategy. The Taliban are not to launch the spring offensive, but to negotiate and conclude the peace agreement leading to an all-inclusive democratic order. But the ground situation suggests that it is not possible to achieve the objective of "an inclusive democratic order".

The Taliban have maintained a respectable level of resistance, establishing their writ over 80 percent of Afghan territory. They are now expecting the occupation forces to leave by May 1, 2021, when the road will open for them to form the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, something they have stood for over the last four decades and have not wavered in their resolve. In 2003, Mullah Omar gave a strong affirmation of this resolve:

"We have decided to fight to the end to win our freedom. For us to follow the agenda of the occupation forces of a democratic order is not compatible with our traditions, our national ethos and purpose. We will fight and win our freedom, InshaAllah, to establish the Islamic

Emirate of Afghanistan, friendly to all neighbours and countries beyond. Pakistan does not stand by us at the moment, yet we stand by Pakistan, to safeguard our interests at all times."

This declaration has remained the guiding principle of the Taliban movement, and also determines the dialectics of the opposing will, establishing the power equation, which enables the Taliban to establish control over a large part of Afghan territory while the opposing forces' control is limited to cities and towns only. The Taliban can sweep them away and none of the supporters of the Ashraf Ghani regime would stand up to the Taliban surge.

Leaving Afghanistan is so tough for the US, because, despite decades of intervention, Afghanistan remains weak and poorly governed. The political distraction of a troop withdrawal could lead to the US getting bogged down in a war it cannot win and will suffer "a bigger loss of face" if it decides to stay on. This is the dilemma of the devil and deep sea. The turning point will thus come after May 1, 2021, when Taliban resistance will grow in intensity, gradually consolidating their writ over the areas, and laying siege to towns and cities, held by Ashraf Ghani's government.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan thus would be established, to form

the hardcore state of the Muslim world based on three bastions of power—the Revolutionary Iran, Jihadi Afghanistan and Islamic Pakistan. This is the emerging reality causing concern and fear in the minds of the secular world.

At this point in time, history appears to repeat itself. For example, thirty-three years ago in 1988 the turn of events heralded the dawn of a new order, beholden to the Taliban movement, the irresistible force which had defeated the mightiest of the mighty—the two superpowers and the regional powers of European Union and India, in a short period of four decades—an unparalleled feat of military achievement. Now it holds supreme over Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Taliban were cheated in 1990. They won't be cheated again. Rather, they are the ones who will lay down the conditions for peace in Afghanistan.

All eyes are now focused on May 1, 2021, when foreign troops are to leave, and if they do not, the Taliban will sweep across the country to establish their writ over territory which they already control, pushing the Afghanistan government to the besieged cities and towns, which will also fall to the Taliban as they consolidate the larger swathes of territory.

The writer is the former COAS.

Pak-Russia relations—the way forward



Ambassador (R) Tariq Osman Hyder

Looking back at the sweep of Pak-USSR then Russia, relations since the inception of diplomatic relations in 1948 one thing is clear; relations with Russia are of immense importance to Pakistan. There have been missteps and misperceptions on both sides with ups and downs, which have necessitated a steady and successful process of trust-building. To give one example, it is widely believed that Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan turned down the invitation to visit the USSR and instead went to the USA. In fact, he was keen for the visit to take place, and his team had been assembled including a young army officer Sahibzada Yaqub-Khan, later Ambassador in Moscow then Foreign Minister, as he had learnt Russian in a POW camp during WW-II. Negotiations for the visit had begun through the Ambassadors of both countries in Tehran but when they were switched to Delhi, they became stalled, (as Ambassador Sajjad Hyder has related in a chapter on The Visit that Never Was in his book the Foreign Policy of Pakistan); and that is why the Prime Minister first went to Washington. India has remained a factor in constraining military and

other cooperation with Pakistan. President Musharraf in his meeting with President Putin in 2006 in New York—on the sidelines of the UNGA which I attended—suggested that Russia be more forthcoming in arms sales to Pakistan now that after the US-India nuclear deal India was growing closer to the USA, or was India still that constraining a factor? President Putin frankly admitted that Russia's arms sales and economic cooperation with India precluded arms sales cooperation with Pakistan at that time.

During the Cold War, relations were difficult, as again during the 1971 War with India and again during the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. In the intervening period, Russian peacemaking at Tashkent to end the 1965 Indo-Pak war gave a political boost which unlocked both economic and military cooperation. This was also the case from 1972 onwards when Prime Minister Bhutto visited Moscow. The Soviet Union built the Karachi Steel Mills, major thermal power plants at Muzaffargarh, Multan, and Guddu; and assisted Pakistan in the establishment of the Oil and Gas Development Company (OGDC). After the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan ended, relations again slowly improved.

The Pakistan Steel Mills Corpora-

tion (PASMIC as it was also known in the USSR) with its 1.1-million-tonne capacity, became the largest industrial project in Pakistan. Thousands of young engineers and technicians were sent to Russia to master the various required disciplines, and many Russian experts lived in Pakistan to complete the project. The construction and other expertise gained in the process led to their deployment throughout Pakistan; but also in the wave of Pakistani labour and technicians assisting in infrastructure and other construction projects in the Gulf and the Middle East, whose foreign remittances, largesse to their families and the country benefit us to this day.

There has been a constant effort throughout on the part of all Pakistani leaders and political parties to try to improve relations with Russia. Russia, notwithstanding its traditionally priority relationship with India, has also recognised the importance of Pakistan as a middle power, its strategic location a trijunction between the Middle East, Central, and South Asia, and the role it can play in stabilising Afghanistan, which poses both an ongoing narcotics threat to Russia and a potential threat from terrorists.

The upward trajectory of our bilateral relations is encouraging. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisa-

tion (SCO)—which we joined owing to Russian and Chinese support—and the UNGA have in the past two years provided opportunities for talks between the two leaders and Foreign Ministers. One hopes that Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will avail the invitation to visit Islamabad at the earliest.

Trade has not reached its potential, hovering around \$500 million overall, with the balance in Pakistan's favour except when we preferred last year in 2020 to import wheat from a reliable source—\$300 hundred million worth for some 700,000 tons—from Russia, when overall trade went up to \$780.6 million. There are systemic hurdles, including a lack of direct flights, banking issues due to US sanctions which other countries have better managed, and slow two-month processing in issuances of business visas by the Russian side, that need to be overcome to enhance trade. The freezing of some \$117 million Russian funds by the Sindh High Court at the instance of commercial parties in dispute over funds they claimed remained unsettled in the counterpart trade used to repay Soviet Steel Mills and other project assistance through mainly Pakistani textiles and garments, on the breakup of the USSR became a major irritant discouraging investment in Pakistan. This issue was finally resolved in December 2019 and all the amount due to Russia, \$93.5 million was repaid and whatever else both countries agreed was due to the Pakistani business companies was also settled. A development long overdue but all the more welcome when arrived at.

Institutional mechanisms are working well. Four rounds of political consultations at Foreign Secretary level have been held. The Consultative Group on Strategic Stability has met 13 times since its first meeting in 2003 in which I had the privilege of leading our side. Of course, gestation of cooperation takes time. The Mi-35 helicopters discussed at that first meeting were delivered in 2018. On the economic side the Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation has held six meetings, and has a

number of joint working groups. Pursuant to the Pakistan-Russia Military Agreement of 2017, a joint Military Technical Commission was set up, military sales explored, five joint military exercises held, two joint naval exercises apart from Russian naval ships' participation in the multilateral AMAN exercises hosted by the Pak Navy, and six rounds of military staff talks, the latest earlier this month.

Amongst the other mechanisms, given limited space I will only draw particular attention to the Joint Coordination Committee on the North-South Gas Pipeline, now re-termed Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline, which is pivotal. Given that a political and institutional structure has been built up and convergences recognised, especially on Afghanistan; and given Pakistan's objective to try to reap the benefits of inter-connectivity from China's BRI of which CPEC is a key part, and also from Russia's Eurasian Economic Community, where do we go from here, how do we prioritise? That is the key question. What should Pakistan's key objectives be? On the political/diplomatic side, it is clear a closer relationship with Russia has obvious advantages in the region and beyond. What can we leverage in concrete terms from this improved relationship?

A key objective should be to get the North-South, Karachi to Lahore LPG pipeline, off the ground. The agreement was signed in 2015 and progress is slow. In negotiations since then, various hurdles have been cleared. Most recently due to the decision of the Supreme Court that the amount so far collected in the name of Gas Infrastructure Development Cess (GIDC) needs to be spent on Gas Infrastructure projects including TAPI, IP and North South Gas Pipeline project. The Ministry of Petroleum committed to the Supreme Court that GIDC funds would be spent on North South Gas Pipeline Projects. Hence the Russian side was re-engaged to acquiesce to the proposal of carrying out the project jointly on equity participation rather than entirely out of the Russian investment as originally envisaged.

This new shift necessitated the drafting of an additional Supple-

mental Agreement called addendum to the already agreed inter-governmental agreement. Both sides have agreed and approved this addendum. I will not go into other technical details—that the cost may go up from \$1.5 to around \$2.5 billion if the originally planned diameter is very sensibly increased to cater for projected higher demand now, obviating redoing the exercise in the future especially over right of way, other locational issues and financial cost benefits.

Once this mega-project flagship takes off it will begin a process of unlocking various constraints across the board and meeting future demand on which our progress depends. We must regard it as a strategic opportunity as we did with PASMIC. Looking further ahead on the economic side there is again the Steel Mill. In 2012, Russia offered a \$500 million loan for its refurbishing and upgradation. While negotiations to this end continued, Russia withdrew this offer in 2015 when its economy was hit by sanctions after the takeover of Crimea, and due to declining oil prices. One would hope that when PASMIC is tendered for again, Russia should be given the first chance to restart it. When the Steel Mill was set up by the USSR, it also set up four other equivalent-capacity steel mills in Iran, India, Turkey and Egypt. Each steel mill, apart from PASMIC, soon doubled its capacity and went beyond. What happened to the Karachi Steel Mill is well known. We should not squander any opportunity to put it back on its feet and to enhance its capacity.

In conclusion, we must accord and maintain strategic focus on the Pak Stream North-South Pipeline. As it progresses on the ground apart from contributing to our developmental goals, it will have a positive knock-on impact on our overall objectives of deepening bilateral and multilateral understanding; energy, economic, and business opportunities, connectivity; military ties, counter-terrorism, counter narcotics, peaceful nuclear cooperation including towards the NSG, and concrete regional cooperation, particularly on stabilising Afghanistan.

Sheikh Rashid for fostering ties with Maldives

ISLAMABAD, Mar 24 (DS): Minister for Interior Sheikh Rashid Ahmed Wednesday underlined the need for fostering Pakistan-Maldives ties through improved diplomacy and business cooperation.

There was a lot of scope for bilateral tourism and trade between both the countries that can be enhanced through better diplomatic coordination and business partnership. He shared these remarks in a meeting with High Commissioner of Maldives to Pakistan Farzana Zahir who called on him here.

Both the dignitaries discussed issues of mutual interest and vowed to strengthen bilateral ties, said a news release. Pakistan has historical ties with Maldives which were based on mutual brotherhood and love, said the minister. He expressed his government's desire to take advantage of the Maldives tourism experience.

Maldives was a key member of



South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), he said and stressed the need to activate the forum for development of the region. He said foreign tourists were attracting towards Pakistan due to online visa facility. The ambassador said visa-on-arrival facility between the two

countries has boosted tourism on both sides.

She said Pakistan government should provide more opportunities and facilities to businesses community for increasing bilateral trade. Home Secretary Yousuf Naseem Khokhar was also present on the occasion.

PIA flights resumption to Swat a milestone for promoting tourism

ISLAMABAD, Mar 27 (DS):

The resumption of PIA flights to important tourist destination of Swat after 17 years and landing of inaugural flight PK-640 at Saidu Sharif airport on 25 March was a peculiar achievement of government to promote tourism in the country.

The decision by the government was a longstanding desire of the local people and those associated with tourism industry. Chief Minister KPK Mahmood Khan, Federal Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan, Minister for Communications Murad Saeed, PIA's CEO Arshad Malik, MNA Saleemur Rehman, MPAs from Swat and large number of notables from the area attended the historical and graceful ceremony.

As per schedule, two flights from Lahore to Saidu Sharif via Islamabad would operate weekly on Friday and Monday with fare of

Rs 5888 for each passenger. The Chief Minister said the opening of the airport would boost tourism in the entire Malakand division and create unlimited opportunities of jobs, trade and investment for the people of the division.

"Promotion of tourism is one of the top priorities of the PTI government and vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan" he said and added that it was a historic day for the people of Malakand division, especially for Swat district which was badly affected by terrorism, floods and earthquake. It is another promise fulfilled by the PTI government," he said, adding that the government was opening new spots in Swat and other districts of Malakand division to promote tourism.

"An Austrian investor has selected Swat to establish a skiing village of hundreds of houses that will promote tourism and inter-

national skiing sports here", he also told.

The resumption of flights would facilitate large number of tourists, especially Buddhists from abroad, wanted to visit their sacred sites in Swat.

Besides scenic sites and tourist resorts, there are hundreds of archeological sites belonging to Buddhism where Buddhists and many of them wanted to come there. The mountainous region of Swat was famous for adventure tourism and many trekkers and hikers loved to visit the area for trekking in the mountains.

All stakeholders of tourism industry have termed the resumption of flight an encouraging move by the government and said that it would enhance employment opportunities through boosting tourism besides creating livelihood opportunities in the district.

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HOW IT WORKS

- 1 A tracking number and response will be generated and assigned to complainant requesting for the complaint's evidence.
- 2 IMC will inquire/investigate the complaint forwarding it to the respective RIC and place it before Probe Committee.
- 3 Complaint will be sent to Incharge IMC for an appropriate action.

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