

January 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD JANUARY 4TH TO JANUARY 10TH, 2016

SHARIF, SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT AGREE TO BOOST DEFENCE TIES

Dawn, January 6th, 2016

COLOMBO: Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena agreed on Tuesday on reinvigorating bilateral ties with focus on enhanced cooperation in trade, defence production, science and technology, and tourism.

In an interaction with media after delegation-level talks and signing of bilateral accords at the President's Secretariat, the two leaders stressed the need for fully exploiting their friendship for the development and prosperity of their peoples.

Mr Sharif mentioned the commonalities of views shared during the talks as the two sides agreed on pursuing multi-faceted interaction. He said Sri Lanka had been a strong and steadfast friend of Pakistan which had stood by it in difficult moments and added "we remain eternally grateful to the people and government of this beautiful island state".

He said Sri Lanka enjoyed exceptional position for being the first country with which Pakistan entered into a Free Trade Agreement.

The PM said the present volume of bilateral trade (\$325 million) did not reflect the true potential existing between the two countries and called for steps to achieve the target of \$1 billion by the end of 2016.

He reiterated Pakistan's offer to set up cement and sugar plants in Sri Lanka. He expressed satisfaction over the meeting of the Second Working Group and the sixth technical-level meeting of Pakistan-Sri Lanka Joint Economic Commission, being held in Colombo.

He appreciated the participation of Sri Lankan Navy in annual exercises with Pakistan Navy.

"I conveyed our desire for more frequent port calls, participation in military exercises and defence seminars and training of military personnel," Mr Sharif said.

He expressed confidence that the eight bilateral accords signed earlier in the day would go a long way in bringing prosperity to the country.

President Maithripala thanked the government of Pakistan for helping Sri Lanka root out terrorism from its soil and appreciated Pakistan's cooperation in carrying out several development projects in his country. He said he would visit Islamabad to attend the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit.

Earlier, the two leaders at a meeting reviewed the whole gamut of bilateral relations. Mr Maithripala called Mr Sharif a true leader and a real pride of the nation.

Mr Sharif said Pakistan was happy that its assistance for ending militancy in Sri Lanka had borne fruit, adding that the help was in fact for the cause of peace.

He said Pakistan attached great importance to its relations with Sri Lanka which, he added, had grown stronger over the past six decades.

He stressed the need for resolution of tariff issues by Sri Lankan authorities, noting the same would facilitate the Pakistani businessmen in maintaining export of their products to Sri Lanka.

The prime minister apprised the president of the improved security situation in Pakistan in the wake of Operation Zarb-i-Azb against terrorists.

He said that Pakistan being home to the Buddhist civilisation and heritage offered great potential for promoting religious tourism, particularly to Sri Lanka.

The two sides also discussed the potential of cooperation in defence production.

Mr Sharif and Mr Maithripala led their delegations at talks on issues of bilateral interest. Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also joined the delegation-level talks.

The Pakistan side was represented by Commerce Minister Engineer Khurram Dastagir Khan, Minister for Defence Production Rana Tanveer Hussain, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi and National Security Adviser Nasser Janjua.

Earlier, bilateral instruments were signed between the two countries in diverse fields, including cooperation in trade, financial intelligence, science and technology and healthcare.

Mr Sharif, Mr Sirisena and Mr Wickremesinghe witnessed the signing of agreements.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the exchange of intelligence related to money laundering and terrorism financing was signed between the Financial Intelligence Unit of Sri Lanka and Financial Monitoring Unit of Pakistan.

The MoU on sharing statistical and census data was signed between the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka.

Earlier, President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe received Prime Minister Sharif on his arrival at the presidency. The Sri Lankan First Lady greeted Begum Kalsoom Nawaz.

National anthems of the two countries were played followed by a 19-gun salute.

PM Sharif reviewed a guard of honour presented by a contingent of the Sri Lankan forces.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1231126>

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February 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 22nd TO FEBRUARY 28th 2016

PUNJAB MAIN BENEFICIARY OF YOUTH BUSINESS LOAN SCHEME

Dawn, February 22nd, 2016

ISLAMABAD: The Prime Minister's Youth Business Loan scheme appears to be losing steam, mainly because of hitches at the National Bank of Pakistan — the lead institution assigned to implement the subsidised programme.

The programme, launched in 2013, seems to have an overwhelming focus on Punjab despite the original plan to extend loan broadly on the basis of provincial population.

According to the official record, there has been duplication of loan approvals and disbursements for individuals on the same national identification card numbers or without completion of formalities.

Sources said the NBP itself was least interested in extending fresh loans following the removal of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's daughter Maryam from the programme's top position.

In a written response, the NBP said that loan disbursements were being made on the basis of provincial share in the National Finance Commission and denied slowing down the scheme or duplication in approval of loans.

The prime minister and the finance minister had repeatedly stated that loans would be extended on the basis of provincial population and the government would pick up the difference of mark-up rates over 8 per cent in the beginning. The interest rate for borrowers was subsequently reduced to 6pc. This was also notified by the PM Office saying the "SBP will ensure that loans are broadly in conformity with provincial populations".

According to the official record, the first ballot was held in Islamabad on Feb 28, 2014, and 5,350 loans worth Rs5.2 billion were approved. Of this, 76.36pc (4,085) loans were given in Punjab, 12.5pc in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 6.4pc in Sindh, and less than 2pc each in AJK, Balochistan and Islamabad.

In the second ballot held on June 4, 2014, 5,099 loans worth Rs5.33bn were approved. Punjab got 77.64pc (3,959) loans of Rs4.1bn, KP 8.7pc, Sindh 7.04pc, AJK 2.41pc, Islamabad 1.67pc, Balochistan 1.18pc and Baltistan 1.18pc.

Interestingly, the NBP said the number of loan disbursements stood at 7,240 and amount of loans disbursed was Rs6.789bn with recovery rate of 96.5pc as of January 2016. However, in reply to another question, the bank claimed that it had approved more than 5,000 loans after the two ballots.

The NBP's record, however, revealed about 9.24pc of loan amounts to be in default or classified and number of such loans is 8.96pc. This meant that a number of borrowers did not come back for the second or third tranche and were found 'delinquent'.

The NBP said that strong controls were provided in the system to detect and stop any inter-role or intra-role duplication of both guarantors and applicants.

It said it did not have access to other bank's database to screen its applications for controlling duplication in real time, but such duplication could be detected through ECIB (electronic credit information bureau) of the SBP which is mandatorily updated by all member banks by the month-end. "At this point in time, all borrowers in NBP portfolio are distinct individuals without any duplication," it claimed.

Prima facie, this was not the case. For example, a customer from Mardan obtained Rs1.575 million from the NBP and Rs0.75m from the First Women Bank on the same CNIC number, address and profession.

The sources said one of the major reasons behind the non-processing of fresh applications was non-payment of dues to a software vendor (a software house) that provided the programme for loan processing. The NBP decided to develop in-house software and assigned the job to a team, but this could not become fully functional despite being put in place in November last year.

The NBP, however, denied it saying it honoured all its commitments on time and as per terms of the agreement.

The sources said that most of fresh applicants were being discouraged through delaying tactics and those with influential background were accepted and approved. The bank is required to process an application within 15 days, but it was taking 5-6 months in case of independent applicants.

The NBP said the central bank had done away with the requirement of ballots in September last year and applications were now approved without ballot subject to completion of pre-disbursement formalities.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1241075>

FUNDS FOR BISP DOUBLED, SAYS MARVI

Dawn, February 22nd, 2016

GWADAR: Federal Minister of State and Chairperson of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Marvi Memon has said that the government has doubled funds for the BISP to eliminate poverty from the country.

Speaking at a gathering of women beneficiaries in Gwadar on Sunday, she said the number of BISP beneficiaries in the Makran division had reached 26,545.

“The federal government wants to empower women by financially helping them through the BISP to help them become part of the mainstream,” Ms Memon said.

She said that the process of availing of the BISP facility was being simplified so that maximum number of women could benefit from the facility.

The minister said that the BISP had been running several projects to empower women across the country, especially in Balochistan, including patronising the Balochi embroidery and developing cottage industry.

She said that women beneficiaries whose BISP cards had become deactivated, could get them reactivated by presenting their ID cards to the BISP offices in their respective areas.

Balochistan Health Minister Mir Rehmat Saleh Baloch said that BISP had been proving helpful in eliminating poverty from the province.

He said that number of BISP beneficiaries in Balochistan should be increased, keeping in view backwardness and poverty in the area.

Gwadar District Council chairman Babo Gulab also spoke on the occasion and welcomed BISP efforts in the area.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1241054>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM FEBRUARY 15th TO FEBRUARY 21st 2016

PAKISTAN AMONG 20 STATES JOIN MAJOR MILITARY MANOEUVRE

Business Recorder, February 15, 2016

Armed forces from around 20 countries were gathering in northern Saudi Arabia Sunday for “the most important” military manoeuvre ever staged in the region, the official news agency SPA reported.

The “Thunder of the North” exercise involving ground, air, and naval forces sends a “clear message” that Riyadh and its allies “stand united in confronting all challenges and preserving peace and stability in the region”, SPA said.

Saudi Arabia is currently leading a military campaign against Iran-backed rebels in its southern neighbour Yemen. Last December, it also formed a new 35-member coalition to fight “terrorism” in Islamic countries.

Sunday’s announcement also comes as the kingdom, a member of the US-led coalition targeting the jihadist Islamic State group, said it has deployed warplanes to a Turkish air base in order to “intensify” its operations against IS in Syria.

SPA did not specify when the military exercise will begin or how long it will last. However, the agency called it the “most important and largest in the region’s history” in terms of the number of nations taking part and the weaponry being used.

Twenty countries will be taking take part, SPA said.

Among them are Saudi Arabia's five partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as Chad, Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Senegal and Tunisia, it added. A Saudi source said on Thursday that members of the new "anti-terrorism" coalition will gather in Saudi Arabia next month for its first publicly announced meeting.

Riyadh has said the alliance would share intelligence, combat violent ideology and deploy troops if necessary.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-stories/0:/16576:pakistan-among-20-states-join-major-military-manoevre/?date=2016-02-15>

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March 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MARCH 21st TO MARCH 27th 2016

US USES KARACHI PORT FOR IMPORT OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT

Dawn, March 23rd, 2016

Parvaiz Ishfaq Rana

KARACHI: A large number of US military vehicles were discharged by a vessel at Karachi Port in the first week of this month. The consignee (importer) of the vehicles was the US army, officials disclosed on Tuesday.

According to official documents and sources, vessel M.V. Liberty Promise carrying about 401 military vehicles, each weighing 2.5 ton, along with four other consignments belonging to private companies, berthed at the port's East Wharf on March 1. The vessel left the port on March 6.

The Import General Manifest (IGM) of Pakistan Customs did not specify the brand of the military vehicles, but sources at the port told Dawn that most of them were Humvees which had been widely used by the US army in Iraq and Afghanistan up to 2011.

The vessel loaded (port of shipment) the military vehicles from Wilmington, US. However, it could not be ascertained if the final destination of these vehicles is Afghanistan, where the US military has decided to prolong its stay.

But the shipment does suggest that the Karachi Port is being used as a transit facility for shipment of logistical, non-lethal equipment of the US military.

The Karachi Port took special measures to keep the vehicles under wraps by erecting containers around them at East Wharf.

The US military also imported one unit of screen machine, impact crusher, etc, and the port of shipment was Jacksonville. The US Embassy in Islamabad imported four boats, TC craft and tow unit and the port of shipment was Beaumont.

China Gezhouba Group Company Ltd imported 10 trucks from Jeddah and Airblue Ltd air-conditioned passenger buses.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1247392>

US LOOKS FORWARD TO MEANINGFUL NUCLEAR DIALOGUE WITH PAKISTAN

Dawn, March 24th, 2016

WASHINGTON: The US State Department has said it is looking forward to a “meaningful dialogue” with Pakistan at a nuclear summit next week.

As world leaders, including those from India and Pakistan, gather in Washington this week to discuss nuclear security issues, the prestigious Harvard Kennedy School released a report reviewing global security measures.

The report concluded that Pakistan’s nuclear security arrangements were stronger than India’s, although the country still faced significant threats from terrorist groups.

At the State Department, spokesman John Kirby told a news briefing that the United States “routinely discusses” issues of nuclear security with Pakistan.

“We look forward to having Pakistan represented at the Nuclear Security Summit coming up and to being able to continue to have meaningful dialogue about issues of nuclear security,” he added.

The two-day, fourth Nuclear Security Summit begins in Washington on March 31 and prime ministers of both India and Pakistan have pledged to attend it.

Their presence in the US capital, and subsequent comments by both Pakistani and Indian officials, have also raised hopes for a bilateral meeting between the two South Asian leaders.

While US officials have not confirmed or denied reports that they are encouraging the two prime ministers to meet, Mr Kirby said that the US had always welcomed moves aimed at reducing tensions between India and Pakistan.

“We welcome efforts that have been taken and efforts that may be taken in the future to work out those issues bilaterally between the two countries,” he said.

Last week, US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Rose Gottemoeller also told a congressional panel that Pakistan had “really done an excellent job” of establishing a programme for nuclear security. This programme was “not only serving Pakistan’s interests, but is also serving on a regional basis to provide training with the help of the IAEA,” she said.

Ms Gottemoeller noted that India was still “at an early stage” of establishing its own Centre of Excellence for nuclear security”.

Meanwhile, a report examining nuclear security worldwide suggests India’s “nuclear security measures may be weaker than those of Pakistan”, but says the risk “appears to be moderate”, while claiming risk of nuclear theft in Pakistan “appears to be high”.

“US officials have reportedly ranked Indian nuclear security measures as weaker than those of Pakistan and Russia,” the Harvard Kennedy School reported.

“US experts visiting the sensitive Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in 2008 described the security arrangements there as extraordinarily low key,” the report added.

In a review of global measures for nuclear security, the report noted that while India’s security arrangements were weaker than Pakistan’s, adversary threats in India were also “less extreme” than those in Pakistan.

“Overall, the risk of nuclear theft in Pakistan appears to be high,” said the report, adding that the possibility of a government or an “extremist takeover in Pakistan cannot be entirely ruled out”.

Nuclear risks in Pakistan, the report noted, was also linked to an expansion in the country’s nuclear arsenal. A shift in Pakistan’s strategic doctrine towards tactical nuclear weapons also increased the risk, the report added.

Despite these risks, “Pakistan has substantially strengthened its nuclear security in the past two decades,” the report said. It also highlighted the measures Pakistan had taken to enhance security: Deployment of 25,000 troops to guard

nuclear stocks and facilities; equipping sites with extensive barriers and detection systems, separating storage of nuclear weapons components, providing weapons with locks to prevent unauthorised use and extensive cooperation with the United States to improve nuclear security.

But Pakistan “must protect against almost overwhelming adversary threats” which include terrorist groups that have demonstrated “that they are willing and able to launch complex, well-coordinated attacks on heavily defended military targets within Pakistan”, the report warned.

It referred to the 2014 attempted hijacking of a naval frigate by Al Qaeda’s South Asian affiliate to highlight the threat, noting that the terrorists had planned to use “its anti-ship missiles to attack US naval vessels”.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1247603>

TACTICAL N-WEAPONS ARE HERE TO STAY, SAYS ADVISER

Dawn, March 26th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to the National Command Authority (NCA) retired Lt Gen Khalid Ahmed Kidwai said on Friday that Pakistan would continue its tactical nuclear weapons programme despite concerns in the West.

“We are not apologetic about the development of tactical nuclear weapons. They are here to stay and provide the third (tactical) element of our full-spectrum deterrence,” Gen Kidwai said during a lecture at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.

He dwelt at length on the reasons why Pakistan had been compelled to build tactical nuclear weapons and regretted that while the world criticised Pakistan for developing battlefield weapons, it ignored the causes that had pushed it in that direction.

Pakistan first tested the short-range Nasr missile in 2011 to counter India’s Cold Start Doctrine. Since then the US and other Western countries have been expressing concerns about the security and proliferation of the battlefield nuclear weapons.

The issue of tactical nuclear weapons is also being discussed in the Pakistan-US strategic dialogue and American officials say it is one of their top concerns. It was apparently due to Western pressure that Nasr missile was not included in the missiles that were displayed in the Pakistan Day parade this year.

The US has been asking Pakistan to curtail the tactical weapons programme. According to a diplomatic source, Pakistan is being urged to make a commitment in this regard at the upcoming Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, to be held on March 31 and April 1.

Gen Kidwai further said that “Pakistan will not cap or curb its nuclear weapons programme or accept any restrictions. All attempts in this regard, as recently made clear by NCA, are bound to end up nowhere”. His comments came days after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told US Ambassador David Hale that Pakistan was ready to make commitments about security of nuclear assets, but not the ones that could affect its military capability, according to a source.

This, Mr Sharif told Mr Hale, would be seen as a compromise on national security.

At the lecture, Gen Kidwai said nuclear weapons, particularly the tactical arms, by limiting the space for war, had provided an opportunity to the political leadership and diplomats to find a solution to the disputes threatening peace in the region.

“The ball is back in the court of politicians and diplomats. They must reassert from this position where there is a situation of military stalemate, with neither side expecting military results, to achieve political objectives,” Gen Kidwai said, adding that dialogue provided the only way forward.

Referring to the concerns about tactical weapons, he said a proper strategy would be developed in this regard. “The Strategic Plans Division and strategic forces, which plan their storage... their numbers... their operational deployment, they make sure that they (tactical weapons) are so balanced... that they are ready to react when they must

react and aren't either sucked into battle too early and remain safe. So that kind of operational philosophy would be applied to tactical weapons," he said.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1248033/tactical-n-weapons-are-here-to-stay-says-adviser>

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April 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM APRIL 11th TO APRIL 17th 2016

OUR GOAL IS TERROR-FREE KARACHI, SAYS GEN RAHEEL

The Express Tribune, April 14th, 2016.

Faraz Khan

KARACHI: Army chief General Raheel Sharif has said that Pakistan's economic progress hinges on peace in Karachi and that the ultimate aim of the ongoing Rangers-led surgical operation is to make the city terror-free.

"Economic progress and economic activity is directly linked with peace in Karachi; hence a terror-free and peaceful Karachi is the ultimate aim of this operation and all efforts must be directed with a focused approach to achieve this objective," he said on Wednesday

He was presiding over a security meeting during his visit to the Corps Headquarters in Karachi. He was given a detailed briefing on the ongoing Karachi operation, including the intelligence-based operations (IBOs), said a press statement issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

Attendees included the corps commander and the director-generals of the Inter-Services Intelligence, Military Operations, Military Intelligence and Pakistan Rangers, Sindh.

Expressing his satisfaction over the pace and success of the operation, the army chief lauded the Rangers as well as intelligence and law enforcement agencies for their 'phenomenal achievements and sacrifices' in improving the security environment in Karachi. He also appreciated the people of Karachi for their unflinching support for the security forces.

Earlier in the morning, the army chief addressed the faculty, participants and allied officers of the Air War Course. He dilated on the current global issues, regional security environment, and Pakistan's fight against the menace of terrorism.

He resolved to take the fight against terror to its logical end and help create an environment to embark the country on the road to development. He lauded the Pakistan Air Force's role in supporting the army in Operation Zarb-e-Azb. Synergy achieved between air and land forces has been highly appreciable.

There is a marked decrease in every kind of terrorism and crime, particularly targeted killings, in Karachi since the beginning of the operation, which started on September 5, 2013 to purge the city of criminal elements and terrorists.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1084149/surgical-operation-our-goal-is-terror-free-karachi-says-gen-raheel/>

ARMY TO JOIN OPERATION AGAINST RAJANPUR OUTLAWS

Dawn, April 15th, 2016

Tariq Saeed Birmani , Asif Chaudhry

Lahore / Dera Ghazi Khan: The army has been called in to join the anti-criminal Zarb-i-Aahan operation in the riverine area of Rajanpur after Punjab police's failure to capture members of the dreaded Chotoo gang.

The latest development came after the federal interior ministry accorded approval for launching a military operation against the hardened criminals of Rajanpur's Rojhan tehsil on Thursday, according to a police official.

He told Dawn that an army battalion from Okara and two platoons of the Special Services Group (SSG), an independent commando regiment/corps of the army, had been called in to launch a large-scale operation.

A strike force with paratroops from Rangers would also take part in the joint operation along with regular policemen and commandos of the force, the official said.

He said that the initiative had been taken in the wake of reports that 24 policemen, including SSG commandos of Elite Police, had been taken hostage by the gangsters and six others were killed during fierce battles with the outlaws.

The tug of war intensified on Thursday when the criminals killed another four policemen and handed over the bodies to the authorities with a threat to kill 24 others still in their custody.

The gangsters also handed over four injured policemen to representatives of police.

Sources said that army units had started converging on the riverine area of Rojhan Mazari to initiate a final assault against the Chotoo gang in Kacha Jamal and Kacha Moro areas.

They claimed that the operation would start any time after Thursday midnight and go on until the last criminal was eliminated.

The police official said that a meeting was convened on Thursday between the corps commander of Multan and the Inspector General of Punjab, Mushtaq Sukhera. Officials of other security agencies also attended the meeting. He said that the huddle discussed updates on the situation and a new standard operating procedure to launch a military operation against the gangsters hiding in an island which has become the battleground.

“It will be a massive joint operation led by army.”

The official said that a strategy for the release of the ‘captive policemen’ and to eliminate notorious criminals was discussed, besides an option of airstrike through military helicopter gunships.

Punjab police spokesperson Nabila Ghazanfar said that during fresh clashes, police had achieved a major success by killing seven notorious members of the gang.

She claimed that the slain criminals included Ali Gul Bazgir, the ringleader of the Chotoo gang, Faqir Mohammad and Majeed Bakhrani.

She confirmed that six policemen had been killed and seven others suffered injuries while fighting the gangsters. Twenty-four police personnel, including elite commandos, are in the custody of the criminals.

A source in the police department said that the Chotoo gang’s ringleader was demanding safe passage for himself, his family and some loyal accomplices to proceed to Dubai in return of safe release of the captive policemen.

A video footage aired by some TV channels showed police authorities requesting the ringleader to treat their captives as guests. In return the gangsters asked them to avoid any further ‘adventure’ and threatened that otherwise they would kill the hostages.

Talking to reporters, the IG said that the operation had been launched after consultation with the military authorities and Rangers.

He rejected reports that the police force was ill-equipped and said those fighting on the frontline were wearing 10kg bulletproof jackets, protected helmets and safety shoes.

He said that the police had killed top members of the notorious gang.

Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, in a meeting, reportedly expressed annoyance over police failure to carry out an operation against the gang.

Annoyed at a “false” report on the operation, he asked why the operation was launched if police force was short of manpower and weaponry.

He expressed sorrow on the loss of lives of policemen and admonished the high-ups of the force for not providing backup support to the law-enforcers fighting on the frontline.

Four injured policemen freed by the Chotoo gang were shifted to Sheikh Zayed Medical College Hospital in Rahim Yar Khan on Thursday. The policemen were identified as Aftab Ahmed, Mohammad Saifullah, Mohammad Ishaq and Tanveer Ahmed of Rajanpur Elite Force.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1252176/army-to-join-operation-against-rajanpur-outlaws>

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May 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 16TH TO MAY 22 ND 2016

CHINA MAY SEEK BASE IN PAKISTAN, OTHER COUNTRIES, SAYS PENTAGON

Dawn, Business & Finance weekly, May 16th, 2016

WASHINGTON: China is likely to consider establishing additional naval logistics hubs in countries with which it has a long-standing friendly relationship and similar strategic interests, “such as Pakistan”, according to a Pentagon report.

In its annual report to Congress on “Military and Security Developments in China”, the US Department of Defence claimed that China is looking for countries that have “a precedent for hosting foreign militaries.”

But the report also noted that “China’s overseas naval logistics aspiration may be constrained by the willingness of countries to support a (Chinese military) presence in one of their ports.”

The report pointed out that Pakistan remains China’s “primary customer” for conventional weapons and China engages in both arms sales and defence industrial cooperation with Pakistan.

This includes joint production of LY-80 surface-to-air missile systems, F-22P frigates with helicopters, main battle tanks, air-to-air missiles, and anti-ship cruise missiles. In June 2014, Pakistan started co-producing the first two of 50 Block 2 JF-17s, which is an upgraded version of the Block I JF-17, the report adds.

“We have noticed an increase in capability and force posture by the Chinese military in areas close to the border with India,” Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for East Asia Abraham M Denmark told reporters after submitting the report to Congress.

“It is difficult to say how much of this is driven by internal considerations to maintain internal stability, and how much of it is an external consideration,” he added.

The Pentagon report also highlights tensions between China and India as a cause of concern. “Tensions remain along disputed portions of the Sino-Indian border, where both sides patrol with armed forces,” it warns.

In October 2013, Chinese and Indian officials signed the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement, which supplements existing procedures managing the interaction of forces along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1258570/china-may-seek-base-in-pakistan-other-countries-says-pentagon>

PAKISTAN MAY CONSIDER UPGRADING ITS DEFENCE CAPABILITIES: AZIZ

Dawn, May 17th, 2016

Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: Expressing concern over India's test of supersonic interceptor missile, Adviser to the PM on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said on Monday that Pakistan would consider options for augmenting its defence capability. "Pakistan is not oblivious to its defence and will think seriously to upgrade its defensive capabilities...by acquiring advanced technology," Sartaj Aziz said in comments given to state-run Radio Pakistan.

India, which is working to develop a multi-layered ballistic missile defence system, on Sunday tested an Advanced Air Defence (AAD) interceptor missile.

Mr Aziz said Pakistan was concerned over the development that is upsetting the balance of power in the region. He said the government would raise its voice at the international fora over India's conventional and nuclear build-up.

The adviser said India was enjoying the backing and cooperation of the US, which was supporting India with the objective to contain China.

The development of anti-ballistic missile systems, it is feared, may give Indian strategists a false sense of security, besides increasing their pre-emption tendencies. "In India-Pakistan context, where flight time of missiles is very less, it is virtually impossible to intercept incoming missiles, but India is developing anti-ballistic missile systems as power projection tools," an expert said.

He said these anti-ballistic missile systems could then give Indian planners a false sense of security, while contemplating military action against Pakistan because of the belief that they could take care of any incoming missile.

The anti-ballistic missile systems together with the second strike capability, which India has almost acquired with the test of nuclear-capable K-4 Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles last month, in particular provide sort of assurance to the strategists that the first strike could be absorbed and later retaliated.

Pakistan is pursuing Full Spectrum Deterrence, which essentially offers options to deal with different contingencies. Indian anti-ballistic missile systems could theoretically push Pakistan to reassess its fissile material requirement to meet the need for more missiles.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1258814/pakistan-may-consider-upgrading-its-defence-capabilities-aziz>

NUCLEAR, MISSILE DEVELOPMENTS IN S. ASIA WORRY US, PAKISTAN

Dawn, May 18th, 2016

Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United States expressed on Tuesday concerns over the 'nuclear and missile developments' in South Asia and called for resolution of outstanding disputes between India and Pakistan for lasting peace in the region.

"Both sides recognised their interest in strategic stability and discussed their respective concerns over nuclear and missile developments in South Asia," a joint statement issued at the end of the eighth round of the Pakistan-US Security, Strategic Stability, and Nonproliferation Working Group said.

The meeting of the Working Group, which is a component of bilateral Strategic Dialogue, was co-chaired by Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhry and Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Rose Gottemoeller.

Induction of four regiments of BrahMos cruise missiles, and testing of nuclear-capable K-4 Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles and supersonic interceptor missile by India had led to concerns that strategic balance in the region would be disturbed and could set off an arms race. Indian moves to upgrade its military hardware and procure newer systems are further believed to be disturbing the conventional balance.

Pakistan has been expressing concern over the Indo-US nuclear deal that has freed its indigenous fissile material stocks for its weapons programme as manifested by its expanding programme.

The statement noted that Pakistan, in this regard, “expressed concerns on the growing conventional imbalance and reiterated its longstanding proposal for Strategic Restraint Regime (SRR) in South Asia and its readiness to pursue measures in the region aimed at building confidence and avoidance of arms race”.

The Pakistani proposal for Strategic Restraint Regime has been on the table since Oct 1998, but the Indians, who are deeply opposed to a regional mechanism, have always avoided discussions on it.

Experts believe that regional stability, in the absence of such overarching strategic stability architecture, has been tenuous.

In this context, the two sides stressed on peaceful resolution of disputes between India and Pakistan through a meaningful dialogue.

“Both sides emphasised the importance of meaningful dialogue and progress in this area and expressed the hope for lasting peace in South Asia and the resolution of outstanding disputes through peaceful means,” the statement said.

This was implied as US endorsement for Pakistani position that India would have to resolve Kashmir dispute through negotiations.

The US, at the talks, asked Pakistan to lift its hold on Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), but there was no breakthrough, with the Pakistani delegation firmly sticking to its position on the matter.

Pakistan fears that concluding FMCT in the current form would freeze its existing asymmetries with India and has instead been calling for a more comprehensive Fissile Material Treaty.

“The United States underscored the need to commence negotiations on a treaty dealing with fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons. Pakistan underlined its preference for a broader Fissile Material Treaty (FMT) that addresses the asymmetries in existing stocks and highlighted that its position will be determined by its national security interests and the objectives of strategic stability in South Asia,” the statement said.

Pakistan at the same time assured that it would not be the first to resume nuclear testing and would support the objectives of CTBT, but stayed short of commitment to sign it.

The Pakistani side stressed that it had enough credentials, because of the steps it had taken in the realm of export controls, to gain membership of cartels including the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

<http://www.dawn.com/news/125904>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 9TH TO MAY 15TH 2016
RANGERS POLICING POWERS IN KARACHI EXTENDED FOR 77 DAYS
Dawn, May 10th, 2016

Iftikhar A.Khan

ISLAMABAD: The federal government extended on Monday Rangers’ policing powers in Karachi for another 77 days.

“Pursuant to the request made by the Home Department, Government of Sindh, dated May 3, 2016, and in continuation of this Ministry’s Notification No 9/1/95-R (Sindh) dated Feb 3, 2016, the powers conferred upon Pakistan Rangers (Sindh) in Karachi Division, under clause (1) of sub-section-3 of section-4 of Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 (XXVII of 1997), are extended for another period of 77 days with effect from May 4, 2016,” reads a notification issued by the interior ministry.

The controversy over the extension of Rangers' policing powers had cropped up last year when the PPP-led Sindh government got a resolution passed in the provincial assembly to curtail their powers and moved a summary for conditionally extending their tenure in December last year.

The summary had been rejected by the centre which asked the Sindh government to move a new summary. The special policing powers of Rangers had been without a legal cover for weeks after the expiry of their term in the first week of December until a unilateral notification was issued by the federal government extending the powers till February.

In February, things moved smoothly and a summary was received by the centre from Sindh.

This time as well, the Sindh government has sent a summary to the federal government for the extension of Rangers' policing powers.

The deployment of Rangers in Karachi is requisitioned under Article 147 of the Constitution and under Clause 1 of Sub-section 3 of Section 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, authorising the paramilitary force to prevent the commission of terrorist acts, or scheduled offences, in the notified area for the punishment of terrorists in accordance with the provision of the Anti-Terrorism Act.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1257438/rangers-policing-powers-in-karachi-extended-for-77-day>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 2nd TO MAY 8th 2016

COUNTRY NEEDS A CIVIL-MILITARY 'COE'

Business Recorder, May 04, 2016

M Ziauddin

The Ministry of Defence has sought Rs 920 billion – an 18 percent increase over the current year's budgeted Rs 781 – for the fiscal year 2016-17. In the outgoing year the defence budget was increased by 11.6 percent against the allocation for the previous year of Rs 780 billion from Rs 700 billion in 2014-15. However, due to resource constraints the allocation under the defence ministry head for the next year is not expected to be more than Rs 860 billion. The increase in the demand for the next year is dictated by the enhanced threat perception which is said to have increased due to the current geo-political situation and Pakistan's strategic location in the region as well as by the additional role being undertaken by the armed forces for providing security to the on- going projects of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The ministry is also said to have requested that sales tax and customs duties on defence imports should be waived off and that powers to waive off austerity measures of defence organisations should be given to secretary defence and not the secretary finance. The ministry has also sought preferential treatment in pensions suggesting that there should be one rank-one pension formula for the defence services.

Expenditures on defence in Pakistan have always been dictated and determined by our foreign policy which has remained a closely guarded preserve of our defence institution. And this policy has, in turn, remained hostage to the Kashmir question which, in turn, has remained the centre- point of our security. Of course, no one would grudge the price, no matter how high, to pay for his country's security. And since this price is being fixed solely by the defence institution, the emphasis has always been on ever more sophisticated weapon systems capable of neutralising offensive capability of our Eastern neighbour.

This strategy has from day one made the national economy subservient to security rather than security becoming subservient to the economy. It was always our security needs that had dictated our annual budgets irrespective of our ability to meet these security-related demands from our own resources.

During the Cold War the US military assistance had filled this expanding gap between our security needs and our ability to generate resources on our own. As soon as the Soviet Union vanished from the scene, the US also walked away from the region. As a result the country suffered enormous economic setbacks during the 1990s while its defence needs were being met by China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The second Afghan war once again saw the US rushing back to the region with its dollar dole. And now having seemingly lost interest in the region or perhaps having come very close to our arch enemy, India, Washington seems

reluctant to even help finance a deal for eight F-16s. With the oil price plummeting we can hardly expect Saudi Arabia and the UAE to be as forthcoming as they were in the 1990s. And it is a moot point if China would be able to fill the gap that is being created due to drying up of our traditional sources of dole.

So, one would like to believe that it is now time for the civilians and the armed forces to sign a charter of economy (CoE) to make our security subservient to our national economy, of course without giving up our stated position on Kashmir or letting India out-flank Pakistan in the region using Kabul and Tehran.

How does one do this? Well, libraries of our staff colleges should be full of analytical reports on how our foreign and defence policies have fared over the last 69 years. These reports would show what we have gained by the single-minded pursuit of these policies and what we have lost.

And as can be clearly seen these policies worked to an extent only because of massive external help-both military and economic. China alone would not be able to shoulder this massive external burden. In fact we should not in our own self interest burden China with such a responsibility.

Many bitter enemies of yesteryears have become close economic allies with vested self interests in each other's economic well-being using what is called geo-economics to determine their relations rather than geo-strategy or for that matter geo-politics.

The CoE that one wishes the civilians and the military to sign one hopes would be based on a strategy inspired by geo-economics with a view to trying to solve the country's security problems rather than continue to waste our energies and resources in trying to achieve the unachievable.

Indeed what is needed urgently is a CoE to be signed between the civilian government and the military institution and not one between the ruling party and the opposition as is being suggested by finance minister Ishaq Dar. There already exists an unspoken CoE among all civilian politicians. Even the Jamaat-e-Islami or for that matter the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam seems to have found the system of market economy that is practiced in the country nearer to their beliefs than the so-called socialist economic system against which they had waged a jihad with the guns and gold doled out by the capitalist world.

The PPP had already adopted what the late Benazir Bhutto used to call the New Labour ideology which again was not very much different from Mrs Thatcher's market mantra. And every time Imran opens his mouth to talk about the economy he sounds more like a champion of the cruel capitalistic system that is prevalent in the UK.

And that leaves the ruling PMLN whose very leadership is the product of the market economy sans any regulations. So, no matter which of the above mentioned parties is in the saddle in Islamabad, there would not be much of a difference in the official economic policies with, of course, a slightly differing emphasis on priorities.

All have embraced the trickle-down theory and all use the GNP per capita as a measure of economic growth which is based on statistics calculated by dividing the total national income produced equally among all the people in the country. But these averages camouflage the crass reality of an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor with a handful of rich owning almost the entire wealth of the nation while the teeming millions are seen running from pillar to post for two square meals a day.

<http://www.brecorder.com/articles-a-letters/187:articles/42743:country-needs-a-civil-military-coe/?date=2016-05-04>

RANGERS TO HELP ACQUIRE LAND FOR DIAMER-BHASHA DAM

Dawn, May 8th, 2016

Jamil Nagri

GILGIT: The federal government has decided to deploy Rangers in Diamer district as a security measure to acquire land for the Diamer-Bhasha Dam project as local residents are reportedly reluctant to leave the area.

The decision was taken by the ministerial committee on the project at its meeting held in Islamabad on Friday.

The meeting decided to deploy a wing of Rangers.

Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Birjees Tahir presided over the meeting attended by Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Inter-provincial Coordination Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Minister for Overseas Pakistanis Pir Sadaruddin Shah Rashdi, Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman, Wapda chairman Zafar Mehmood and GB Chief Secretary Tahir Hussain.

The committee reviewed the progress made so far on the project. It was informed that 90 per cent land has been acquired for the purpose.

The meeting was informed that residents of Thak area and other adjoining areas are not ready to vacate their land despite being paid compensation. "The local police are unable to deal with the situation," the meeting was told.

The government has paid about Rs45bn as compensation, while Rs8bn would be distributed soon.

The minister for Kashmir affairs ordered the GB government to settle issues with people affected by the land acquisition through introduction of projects under confidence-building measures. He also directed the GB government to speed up the land acquisition process to ensure early ground-breaking of the much delayed project.

GB Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman claimed that his government has saved Rs10 billion by introducing transparency and fair practices in the land acquisition process.

The federal government has decided to construct half of the power projects in GB region. According to official sources, the issue of royalty to be paid to KP and GB had been resolved.

Now Diamer Bhasha Dam power plants will be installed in KP and GB.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1257044>

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June 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 27TH TO JULY 2 ND 2016

TERRORISTS GOING FOR SOFTER TARGETS TO SURVIVE, SAYS COAS

The Express Tribune, June 27th, 2016.

Faraz Khan

'Badly bruised and isolated' terrorists will go for softer targets for their survival, warned army chief General Raheel Sharif on Sunday as he directed senior security officials to hunt the terrorists and "pre-empt their moves to frustrate their designs."

The army chief travelled to Karachi after the recent targeted killing of qawwali maestro Amjad Sabri and kidnapping of the son of Sindh's top judge within two days. Sabri was shot dead by two motorcycle-riding gunmen in the Liaquatabad neighbourhood of Karachi Wednesday afternoon. A day earlier Advocate Ovais Ali Shah was seized by masked gunmen from outside Agha's Supermarket in the posh Clifton area.

The two high-profile incidents led some politicians and analysts to question the effectiveness of the ongoing Rangers-led targeted operation in the provincial metropolis.

The army chief said the Karachi operation has brought about a noticeable improvement in the law and order situation of the city. "However as we progress to target the crime and terror syndicate network, we need to keep our focus on

actionable human and technical intelligence and totally dismantle their support structure,” he said while speaking during a meeting at the Corps Headquarters in Karachi Sunday evening.

According to the ISPR, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, National Security Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Nasser Janjua, Sindh’s governor and chief minister, Home Minister Sohail Anwar Sial, ISI chief and the corps commander attended the meeting. Participants were briefed about the security situation and various aspects of the ongoing operation against terrorists, criminals and their linkages in Karachi.

“The operation has now entered a phase where terrorists and their abettors are badly bruised, isolated and hence will go for softer targets so as to find their survival and undermine the society psychologically,” Gen Raheel said while asking all concerned to hunt terrorists and pre-empt their moves to frustrate their designs.

“We must continue our mission unabated to consolidate and not let anyone reverse our gains,” he said. Expressing his assurance to the people of Karachi, the army chief emphasised that the nexus of terrorists, their abettors, sympathisers and financiers will be broken at all cost and the ongoing operation will be taken to its logical conclusion.

He urged upon all stakeholders for earnest endeavours in their respective spheres within the overall ‘Whole of the Nation Approach’ for overcoming the menace of terrorism.

The army chief exhorted all commanders, including those of security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies, to continue working hand in glove and leave no stone unturned for restoration of peace in the city. Measures to build capacity of other law enforcers were also discussed for lasting peace in the economic hub of the country.

Earlier in the day, Gen Raheel travelled to the Headquarters of the Pakistan Rangers (Sindh), where he was briefed by Rangers’ Director General Maj Gen Bilal Akbar about the ongoing operations and the way forward, particularly on progress in investigations into Sabri’s killing and Advocate Ovais’ kidnapping. Karachi Corps Commander Lt Gen Naveed Mukhtar and ISI chief Lt Gen Rizwan Akhtar also attended the meeting which decided to speed up the Karachi operation.

Gen Raheel commended the sacrifices and achievements of the Rangers which have brought about significant improvement in the law and order situation in the city, according to the ISPR. He said the determination, courage and resolve of the Rangers to rid the city of terrorists and criminals have earned them widest respect from the people of Karachi.

“Across-the-board operation focuses on the entire network of terrorists, their abettors and financiers, and will continue till we achieve our objective of peace and restoration of normalcy in all parts of Karachi,” the army chief reiterated. “Every assistance, including intelligence and material combat support, will be provided to the Rangers to accomplish their mission,” he said. Referring to the recent incidents, the army chief directed all commanders, including those of intelligence agencies, to continue working hand in glove and leave no stone unturned in finding the perpetrators.

Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar, who also travelled to Karachi for the meeting at the corps headquarters, directed the officials concerned to expedite the ongoing targeted operation in Karachi. He had had a one-on-one meeting with Sindh Governor Dr Ishratul Ebad Khan at the Governor House where he also telephoned the provincial police chief to discuss the security situation in Karachi.

Later, Nisar visited the residence of slain qawwali maestro Amjad Sabri along with the governor to offer his condolences to the family. “We will bring the killers to court of law irrespective of how powerful they are,” he said and held out an assurance that the law enforcers would soon arrest the killers. “Once again I assure you that we will not let the assassins flee,” he told Sabri’s family. “Amjad Sabri was an international celebrity who disseminated the message of peace, love and tolerance.”

The interior minister also visited Sindh High Court Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah whose son, Advocate Ovais Ali Shah, was kidnapped from outside a supermarket in Clifton a few days ago. He briefed the chief justice on the law

enforcers' efforts to locate his son. Official sources said the interior minister also conveyed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's message to the two families.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1130587/army-chief-interior-minister-visit-karachi-recent-wave-unrest/>

ARMY TO HAVE KEY ROLE IN KARACHI POLICE RECRUITMENT: NISAR

Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: The Army is all set to have a dominant role in the recruitment of 20,000 police personnel who will help make Karachi more secure.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar talked about decisions taken at a meeting held in Karachi to review the law and order situation of the port city.

Saying that 20,000 fresh recruits would be inducted into the Karachi police, he explained that "the army will assist in [ensuring] merit-based recruitment and training, besides playing a role in equipping them with light arms". He added that around 2,000 ex-servicemen would also be recruited.

He said the army was already playing a role in building the capacity of police and other law enforcement agencies across the country.

Conceding that there had been no significant progress in blocking terrorists' financial support, the minister said that the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (Nacta) would convene a meeting of all stakeholders early next week, or soon after Eid, to explore out-of-the-box solutions.

The other point raised in the meeting was regarding the documentation of Karachi's population, modelled along the lines of the procedure adopted in the federal capital, with the assistance of the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra).

Another proposal was the preparation of a digitised federal crime record, that would greatly help security and intelligence agencies in effectively managing operations against terrorists, he said, adding that work on this would start soon after Eid.

Highlighting the importance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for Pakistan, he said the possibility of enacting a special law to deal with those who had their own ulterior motives against the project was also discussed.

Referring to joint investigation teams formed to investigate terrorism-related cases, he said a proposal to give them legal cover was also considered, which would be further discussed in the next meeting after seeking legal opinions.

Another proposal that came under discussion was the establishment of a national authority to handle vehicle registration and issue uniform number plates across the country. The revenue from this exercise could be shared with the provinces.

Another decision involved the installation of security cameras at various points in Karachi, in a phased manner, along the pattern of the Safe City Project, initiated in Islamabad.

Nisar observed that while Pakistan was winning the war against terrorism, the country had to win on the psychological front in order to take it to its logical conclusion.

"The fight against terrorism is a success story, but the war continues. The rules of the game are tilted against the government and the security agencies as the enemy is not visible. They are hiding among our population, many of them are educated and it is difficult to identify them," he remarked. He said the division of powers between the federation and the provinces also sometimes became a hurdle to effective law enforcement.

Claiming that terrorists were fast losing space, he said the killing of Amjad Sabri and the kidnapping of the son of the Sindh High Court (SHC) chief justice (CJ) were a challenge for the security and intelligence agencies.

He said after Orlando shooting, the entire American nation was united in mourning to counter terrorism. The Pakistani nation has to unite in the face of incidents such as the kidnapping of the SHC CJ's son. He also vowed to trace and punish Sabri's killers as well as safely recover the chief justice's son.

Criticising the social media for playing a negative role, he said that each rumour churned out by a section of the online medium somehow became a news story. He implicitly rejected rumours that a former president was involved in the kidnapping of the SHC CJ's son, saying that one never knows who is spreading rumours on social media, the person behind it could even be a RAW agent or a terrorist.

He also announced that police officials were no longer barred from performing duties with United Nations peacekeeping forces.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1267738>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JUNE 13TH TO JUNE 19TH 2016

ARMY WON'T GO BACK TILL JOB IS DONE: COAS

The Express Tribune, June 15th, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: Army chief General Raheel Sharif has said that terrorists will not be allowed to stage a comeback in the tribal regions as he reassured tribesmen that the "army will not go back until the job is fully done".

Thousands of tribesmen displaced by Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan have started returning to the areas purged of terrorists. The repatriation and resettlement of these tribesmen, who have officially been designated as temporarily displaced persons (TDPs), will be completed by the end of this year.

"Our focus within Fata (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) will now be on more efficient border management to prevent cross-border movement. For enduring stability, IBOs [intelligence-based operations] and combing operations will continue with same vigor across the country," Gen Raheel said during a visit to forward locations in North and South Waziristan agencies on Tuesday.

The army chief spent the whole day with tribesmen and troops busy in the consolidation phase of Operation Zarb-e-Azb which was launched in mid-June 2014 to indiscriminately flush out local terrorists and their foreign cohorts.

The army chief was given a detailed briefing on ongoing operations and rehabilitation work and its effects on the social landscape of the area, according to a statement issued by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR). While acknowledging the exceptional achievements, courage, determination and sacrifices of the troops in achieving operational gains, Gen Raheel said Zarb-e-Azb was launched against terrorists of all hues and colours, and their sanctuaries had been dismantled without discrimination.

"Operation Zarb-e-Azb is in its final stage in the fewer left-out pockets," he said, adding that the army with the support of the entire nation had achieved unparalleled successes in the fight against terrorism.

He also inaugurated multiple projects as a part of the post-operation comprehensive rehabilitation plan for Fata. These projects include the 72-kilometre-long Miramshah-Razmak-Makeen dual carriage road as part of the 705-kilometre central trade corridor. The newly constructed road by the Frontier Works Organisation will considerably reduce travel time between North and South Waziristan agencies.

The army chief also commissioned the state-of-the-art 100-bed Sheikhha Fatima Binte Mubarak Hospital at Sholam, in South Waziristan. He said Fata's development was a priority task being undertaken by the army as a comprehensive plan.

"These projects will improve the quality of life in the tribal areas, usher a new era of economic prosperity, and address the problem of militancy on a long-term basis," he said.

According to the ISPR, Pakistan Army has so far undertaken 567 projects in the social, communication, infrastructure and power sectors in Waziristan.

General Raheel appreciated the support of the tribal brethren in combating terrorism and acknowledged their sacrifices. He assured them that terrorists would never be allowed to return to the region and the army would not go back till the job was fully done.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1123167/army-wont-go-back-till-job-done-coas/>

US SENATE PASSES \$800 M PAKISTAN FUND

Dawn, June 16th, 2016

WASHINGTON: The US Senate has passed its draft of the National Defence Authorisation Bill, including a provision to set up a new fund to reimburse Pakistan for its efforts in the war against terrorism.

The Senate version authorises \$800 million under a provision called the 'Pakistan Security Enhancement Authorisation'.

It also fences \$300m behind a similar Haqqani network provision that has existed in the annual defence authorisation acts since the fiscal year 2015.

The proposal for Pakistan was passed as originally initiated.

None of the over 400 amendments considered by the Senate targeted this outlay for Pakistan.

The proposed reimbursement mechanism for Pakistan replaces the Coalition Support Fund (CSF), which was used to reimburse both Afghanistan and Pakistan for their efforts to combat terrorism.

Pakistan has received a total of \$3.1 billion since 2013 under the CSF. But this fund expires in the current financial year, ending in October.

The US administration is allowing the CSF to expire because it was linked with a specific US mission in Afghanistan, which has formally ended.

While adopting the new provision, the Senate Armed Services Committee used the CSF model to restructure security support for Pakistan. But it focuses specifically on Pakistan's own security needs instead of tying it to a broader coalition.

In doing so, the new provision delinks Pakistan from Afghanistan, by recognising it as a country with its own strategic value for US interests.

In a report filed with the draft Defence Bill, the US Senate Armed Services Committee called Pakistan "a long-standing strategic partner" and stressed the need to continue a strong relationship with the country.

The committee also noted that since 9/11 Pakistan has been a vital partner of the US in efforts to combat terrorism in South Asia.

Both houses of the Congress have passed their versions of the Defence Bill. A conference committee of both houses will now be formed to develop a consensus draft.

The consensus draft will be passed from both houses of the Congress again before it is sent to the president for signature.

The procedure can be completed by July, although past bills have been passed as late as November.

Senator John McCain, who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, had introduced the bill late last month. The committee sent it to the Senate with its approval.

Besides, the Haqqani restriction, the bill requires Pakistan to keep open ground communication lines to Afghanistan for receiving reimbursements from this fund.

Another bill, passed by the House of Representatives last week, linked \$450m from a total of \$900m proposed for Pakistan to take action against the Haqqani network.

The committee expressed the concern that “continued reliance on Coalition Support Fund for the provision of security assistance to Pakistan could negatively impact US support of Pakistani operations to combat terrorism”.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1265197>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM MAY 30TH TO JUNE 5TH 2016

F-16 DEAL NO LONGER A VIABLE OFFER, SAYS US

Dawn, June 3rd, 2016

WASHINGTON: The F-16 deal was no longer a viable offer, a US State Department official told a Capitol Hill meeting on Thursday, as other speakers urged the United States to help improve Afghanistan-Pakistan ties.

“The drone strike that killed Mullah Mansour was an ice-breaker. There could be more strikes in Balochistan now. This is a very dangerous situation for Pakistan,” warned Marvin Weinbaum, a US scholar from the Middle East Institute, Washington.

A spokesman for the Pakistan Embassy, Ubaidur Rehman Nizami, however, urged members of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to get together to consider the consequences of the May 21 drone strike that killed Mullah Mansour. The group includes the United States, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, formed last year to seek a negotiated settlement to the Afghan dispute.

The Capitol Hill meeting was organised by the Pakistani American Congress, which holds this annual event to present Pakistan’s case before US lawmakers.

“Forever is a long time but the term of the offer has expired. So for now it is not a viable offer,” said State Department official David Ranz, when asked if the US offer to sell eight F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan was dead.

Mr Ranz pointed out that Congress did not approve the Obama administration’s request to use US funds for subsidising the deal and that was why it expired, on May 24.

Besides preventing the sale, Congress made “a significant portion” of the military assistance to Pakistan “conditional to taking action against the Haqqani network”, he added.

Pakistan has been receiving about a billion dollars from the US Coalition Support Fund as reimbursement for its efforts to combat terrorism.

“We are committed to this important relationship with Pakistan. We are committed to getting through the challenges, and to building a stronger relationship,” Mr Ranz said.

The official pointed out that Pakistan was the biggest beneficiary of the US education assistance and the United States was also working closely with Pakistan to help the country overcome its energy crisis.

But sometimes, “the cooperation is subsumed by the challenges, which get the lion’s share in the media”, he said.

Mr Ranz, however, acknowledged that the United States had concerns about Pakistan’s nuclear programme and about terrorist groups like the Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Besides these two long-standing issues, recent short-term issues like imprisoning Dr Shakil Afridi, who allegedly helped the US trace Osama bin Laden, also strained bilateral relations, Mr Ranz said.

Steve Cohen, a scholar from the Brookings Institution, said that “roller-coaster” was an apt description for Pakistan-US relationship and warned that if this “roller-coaster” went on for too long, it could also break.

Mr Cohen said that the US Congress was “deeply concerned” about the possibility of a war between two nuclear-armed countries, India and Pakistan.

The renowned American scholar also urged Pakistanis not to blame outside powers like the US and India for their internal problems, like the insurgency in Balochistan but also to look at the mistakes they had made in that province. Mr Weinbaum urged the United States to shift its focus from seeking reconciliation with the Taliban to “promoting reconciliation between Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

He argued that unless relations between the two neighbouring countries improved, there could be no peace in the region.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1262432>

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July 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 25TH TO JULY 31ST 2016

RANGERS BELIEVED TO BE GIVEN PM’S GREEN LIGHT

The Express Tribune, July 30th, 2016.

Sardar Sikander

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has authorised the Sindh Rangers to continue its surgical operation in Karachi with special policing powers even if the Sindh government does not grant extension to its powers, The Express Tribune has learnt.

The special policing powers of the paramilitary force, which has been engaged in a surgical operation in Karachi since September 2013, expired on July 19. Sindh government, which apparently has reservations on the operation, has not extended the special powers so far.

However, credible sources in the PM Secretariat have told The Express Tribune that the premier has authorised full powers to the Rangers while his exercising authority under Section 4 (1) of The Anti-Terrorism Act 1997.

It Section 4(1) reads, “It shall be lawful for the federal government to order the presence of armed forces and civil armed forces in any area for the prevention and punishment of terrorist acts and scheduled offences in accordance with the provisions of this Act.”

The development implies that the security forces' operations in the violence-plagued city will not be affected even if the powers of Sindh Rangers are not extended by the provincial government.

Meanwhile, the prime minister's expected visit to Karachi to resolve the lingering issue of Rangers powers has not yet taken place due to the political developments involving the election of a new chief minister in Sindh and his cabinet, sources further shared.

"Once the new cabinet is in place and it starts functioning, the premier will visit Karachi and take relevant input from security apparatus on the targeted operation in Karachi and to sort out the issue of powers' extension," the officials said.

The PML-N stalwart and Leader of the House in Senate Raja Zafarul Haq did not confirm or deny the reported development. "This is a sensitive matter that cannot be summed up in a 'yes' or 'no'. Having said that, let me add that the federal government is extremely concerned over the attitude of authorities in Sindh regarding the extension issue," he said.

Haq said the Rangers are at the forefront in restoring peace in Karachi, which was worst affected by senseless killings of innocents for years. "I think the credit mainly goes to PM Nawaz, his team and the security brass. The gains acquired in Karachi operation cannot be allowed to go wasted," he said.

The PML-N stalwart said the premier is in contact with administrative and security authorities in Sindh and is 'closely' monitoring Karachi situation. "We will never allow violence to rear its ugly head again in Karachi, Fata [Federally Administered Tribal Areas], Balochistan or anywhere else."

According to sources, the PM authorised the paramilitary force to keep performing its duties in the National Security Committee (NSC) meeting held at the PM House on July 22. However, the Rangers properly resumed their former role after July 26 killing of two army troops in the city's business centre.

In the said meet-up, the PM lauded the role of the military and civil intelligence agencies in bringing peace in Karachi and elsewhere "against the nefarious designs of the international agencies and hostile countries."

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1152218/rangers-believed-given-pms-green-light/>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 18TH TO JULY 24TH 2016

PEOPLE TO WELCOME ARMY TAKEOVER, CLAIMS IMRAN

Dawn, July 18th, 2016

Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf chairman Imran Khan said on Sunday that democracy faced no threat from the army but from what he called the dictatorship of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and added that people would welcome a military takeover.

"In Turkey an attempt was made to overthrow a democratically-elected government, but the people of Turkey poured onto streets to save democracy, whereas in Pakistan there is loot and plunder and monarchy is being established in the name of democracy and (therefore) if the army took over (power in Pakistan), the people will celebrate and distribute sweets," Mr Khan said at an election rally in Islamabad, Mirpur district.

"When a government serves the people, they stand by it exactly like what the world witnessed in Turkey," Mr Khan said, adding that Turkish leader President Recep Tayyip Erdogan strengthened Turkish currency lira and cleared all debts ultimately benefitting the Turkish people who in turn thwarted the conspiracy to topple the democratic

government. On the contrary in Pakistan, he said, Mr Sharif had crushed the people under debts and raised his personal fortunes instead of making the country economically stable.

The PTI chief alleged that both the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and National Accountability Bureau (NAB) were under the influence of the PML-N government and did not possess guts or authority to perform their duties independently.

He said that 13 corruption cases were pending against Mr Sharif in NAB but its chairman was the prime minister's pawn.

He said that Mr Sharif could not hold anyone accountable because he himself was involved in the transfer of ill-gotten wealth out of Pakistan. "Since in democracy a prime minister is answerable to the people, Mr Sharif should tell the nation from where his children had got so much money to establish offshore companies and buy expensive apartments," he demanded.

"But whenever he (the PM) is asked these questions he responds with his sad stories instead of giving specific replies," he said.

The PTI leader observed that if Mr Sharif believed in democracy, he would have presented himself before parliament.

"The British prime minister is also answerable to the people while Moammar Qadhafi, Hosni Mubarak and Saddam Hussein were not," he said.

Condemning Indian atrocities in occupied Kashmir, he said that Pakistan could not put pressure on India unless it became strong.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1271480>

CORPS COMMANDER ASKS CM TO EXTEND RANGERS' POLICING POWERS

Dawn, July 23rd, 2016

Hasan Mansoor

KARACHI: A meeting between the Karachi corps commander and Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah over the issue of Rangers' special powers and an extension of their mandate to the whole of the province ended without a breakthrough on Friday.

However, government officials saw Mr Shah's meeting with Lieutenant General Naveed Mukhtar, the corps commander, as a step in positive direction against the backdrop of sour relationship between the Sindh government and paramilitary Rangers over the extension of their powers.

The special powers given to Rangers by the provincial government for Karachi division expired on July 19. This time, the paramilitary force as well as Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan wanted the Sindh government to extend the tenure of its special powers not only for Karachi but for the whole province.

"The chief minister and the Karachi corps commander met to discuss certain issues such as the targeted operation in Karachi, over law and order situation, implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) and extension of powers to the Rangers in Sindh," said a statement issued by the CM House.

A government spokesman said that the CM and the corps commander also discussed the delay in the issuance of extension of powers to the Rangers in Sindh.

The chief minister assured the corps commander that he was in consultation with his party leadership and the matter would be solved shortly.

Shortly after the meeting ended, CM Shah reached Bilawal House to brief Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari.

Sources said the PPP chairman left the city for Dubai after having a detailed discussion with Mr Shah.

The sources said Mr Shah too would leave Karachi for the United Arab Emirates on Saturday (today) to be part of a series of meetings with the party leadership that includes former president Asif Ali Zardari.

They said that any decision regarding the extension in the Rangers' powers either only for Karachi or for whole Sindh would be announced after these meetings, which would also decide the future course of action of the ruling PPP and an imminent reshuffle in the provincial cabinet and top bureaucracy.

Earlier, the meeting between the corps commander and the CM was held in 'a good atmosphere'. It continued for more than one-and-a-half-hours and later Finance Minister Murad Ali Shah, Home Minister Sohail Anwar Siyal and CM's Law Adviser Murtaza Wahab also joined it.

The CM said his government was committed to eradicating terrorism and other criminal acts such as targeted killing, extortion and kidnapping for ransom from the province.

"I appreciate the law enforcement agencies, particularly police and Rangers, for restoring peace to the city," he said and thanked the corps commander for taking a personal interest in implementation of the NAP.

Meanwhile, Advisor to the CM on Information Maula Bux Chandio on Friday said that the Sindh government was fully committed to maintaining peace and ensuring the rule of law in Sindh as per the Constitution.

In a statement, he said: "No interference in the [way of the] Karachi operation is being made as all the process in this regard is as per law."

He said anti-democratic forces backed by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government "are out to harm PPP's Sindh government, but we are determined to foil such nefarious designs."

"We want the federal government not to interfere in Sindh government affairs as it is wise enough to resolve the issues amicably."

Also on Friday, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) urged the CM to extend the Rangers' stay in the province till complete restoration of law and order.

FPCCI's senior vice president Sheikh Khalid Tawab demanded that the CM approach the federal government to give a legal cover to the Rangers' stay in the province.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1272620>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 11TH TO JULY 17TH 2016

MYSTERIOUS BANNERS URGING COAS TO TAKE OVER PUT UP ACROSS COUNTRY

Dawn, July 12th, 2016

Saher Baloch | Ikram Junaidi | Waseem Ahmad Shah

Islamabad/Karachi/Peshawar: A little-known political party of Punjab put up banners in 13 cities across the country on Monday with its leaders urging Chief of Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif to impose martial law and form a government of technocrats.

The banners have been put up in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Hyderabad, etc, by the Move on Pakistan party and unlike its earlier campaign requesting the army chief to reconsider his retirement plan due in November the message is quite ominous this time around.

A banner hanging at a traffic intersection on the thoroughfare between Chief Minister House and the Rangers headquarters in Karachi reads: Janay ki baatain hui puraani, Khuda k liye ab ajao (Talks of leaving are now old; for God's sake now come).

Ali Hashmi, the central chief organiser of the party, told Dawn that the goal of their campaign was to suggest to the army chief that after imposing martial law a government of technocrats should be made in Pakistan and Gen Raheel should himself supervise it.

While the official mouthpiece of the army — the Inter-Services Public Relations — remained silent, analyst Amir Rana believed that the latest move strengthened the view that something was cooking up.

Interestingly, the banners sprang up overnight on all major thoroughfares in the 13 cities, even in cantonment areas, despite the presence of several checkpoints and extra security.

Mr Hashmi claimed that his party's banners were removed in Lahore and Faisalabad in the morning.

The Move on Pakistan party — which has little grass-root support — has been registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan for the past three years and a Faisalabad-based businessman, Mohammad Kamran, is its chairman. He runs a number of schools and 'businesses' in Faisalabad, Sargodha and Lahore.

The party came into the spotlight in February when it put up posters and banners across the country asking the army chief not to retire and "help in eradicating terrorism and corruption".

Though five months back the party maintained that it was not inviting the army to take over, this time it said that "there is no choice but to enforce martial law and form a government of technocrats".

Mr Hashmi said that the absence of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from the country for more than 40 days proved that there was no need of a political government. "Those who have been running the country will keep running it."

Regarding his future plans, he said: "We have been considering holding rallies from Faisalabad to Lahore and Karachi to Sukkur in the second phase to convince the army chief that he should intervene for the betterment of the country and nation."

Analyst Rana said that there could be some forces behind the persons responsible for the latest campaign.

"Some elements always remain ready to find ways to come close to the armed forces and make an alliance with the establishment," he said, adding: "Although a change cannot be brought with such moves, it strengthens the doubt that something is going on."

The issue was widely discussed on TV talk shows and on the social media.

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, however, was cautious in making any comment.

At a private TV programme, Minister of State for Privatisation Mohammad Zubair said that the army chief had already expressed his intention that he would not seek an extension in his tenure. “He [Gen Raheel] is the head of a great institution. I’m sure the person who will replace him will be equally professional and competent.”

He said that only legal experts could say what action be taken against those putting up such banners and posters.

Pakistan People’s Party leader and Adviser to the Sindh Chief Minister on Information Maula Bux Chandio said in a press talk that Gen Raheel would take a decision in the best national interest.

He, however, asked the army chief not to pay any heed towards the advice or suggestions of sycophants.

Meanwhile, when asked whether the inscription on the banners amounted to sedition, a Peshawar police official said in a lighter vein that the message on the banners was vague and the organiser of the party might be asking the army chief to come to Peshawar.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1270214>

ARMY TO MONITOR SCHOOLS, HEALTH CENTRES IN FATA

Dawn, July 14th, 2016

Zulfiqar Ali

PESHAWAR: As active combat operations are reaching their ultimate end, the Army has assumed the monitoring role in education and health sectors in Fata, insist multiple sources.

A relevant official confided to Dawn that political agents had received letters from the Corps Headquarters Peshawar informing them that monitoring teams of the army would visit schools, colleges and health centres to compile data of teachers, students, doctors, supporting staff and missing facilities.

He said the letters were issued in May and that teams had been constituted for every tribal agency.

The official also insisted the Frontier Corps, a paramilitary force in the region, had been given that task in some areas.

Thousands of troops, both regular and paramilitary, were deployed across Fata in 2002 and thereafter to fight the Taliban militants.

Besides tactical operations, the Army was also engaged in the reconstruction and rehabilitation activities in areas cleared of militants.

It hasn’t been ascertained whether the initiative was taken by the army or the KP governor has requested the relevant military authorities to intervene in Fata’s social sector. The media wing of the Governor’s House did not offer comment, while Fata additional chief secretary and social sector secretary were not available despite repeated calls.

However, a security official confirmed the involvement of the army units in monitoring of schools and health facilities, saying employees were getting salaries but didn’t perform duty.

“These are local arrangements to assist civil administrations in tribal agencies,” he said, adding that the process was initiated from North and South Waziristan agencies, where troops were already engaged in rehabilitation work.

The social sector, especially healthcare and education, in the area are in dwindling position and has nothing to do with militancy.

Recently, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Iqbal Zafar Jhagra hinted at giving monitoring role to the army after receiving complaints about poor quality of work and corruption in development schemes in the region, which is largely believed to be a 'black hole.'

"The Army and FC teams have been visiting schools and colleges independently after the notification and will carry on their job for indefinite period," said the official.

"This is a continuous process, which is part of efforts to mainstream tribal areas," he said.

The official said sometimes, the Army also sought cooperation from the relevant agency education officers.

He said the monitors would submit their respective reports to the relevant commandants or brigade commanders.

A teacher at a school near Parachinar, Kurram Agency, said an army captain along with soldiers recently visited his school, collected data of staff and students, and asked about shortage of basic facilities.

Apart from hundreds of health centres, Fata has 5,572 schools with 574,512 boys and girls enrolled there.

Around 500 schools for boys and girls were closed down recently under the rationalisation plan being executed in health and livestock sectors, too.

Fata has separate directorates for education and health working under the umbrella of social sector department at the Civil Secretariat Fata in Peshawar.

Every tribal agency has an education officer and surgeon dealing with day-to-day affairs in these two sectors under the supervision of political agents.

In addition, a governor's team also exists to carry out inspection of facilities of all sectors in Fata.

Another official said a plan was under consideration to appoint monitors to check attendance of teachers, students and other activities in educational institutions across tribal region.

Despite the presence of huge network of directorates and other relevant organisations, the government has given additional task to the army to start monitoring in education and health sectors.

Interestingly, the relevant directorates and departments maintain data of attendance, dropouts, shortage of trained staffs and missing facilities every year and now the army as well FC would do the same exercise.

The official said before starting monitoring process, the army had distributed proformas asking the relevant offices to provide details about missing facilities in schools and health centers.

He admitted absenteeism in educational institutions and health centers and shortage of essential facilities.

"The intervention of the army may put positive impact on education and health sectors because it has plenty of resources compared to the civil administrations in the area," he said.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1270732/army-to-monitor-schools-health-centres-in-fata>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM JULY 3RD TO JULY 10TH 2016

CONCERN OVER BORDER ISSUES CONVEYED TO US

Dawn, July 3rd, 2016

Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: Despite lingering mutual mistrust, Pakistan and the United States on Saturday agreed to carry forward their bilateral engagement and cooperation for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

The agreement was reached during a meeting between US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard Olson with Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhry — a second meeting in three weeks and since the bilateral relationship took a dip following a drone attack in Nushki in May that took out Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour and amid growing concerns in the US Congress that Pakistan is soft on the Haqqani network and the Taliban during its counterterrorism operations.

Meanwhile, Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif, while countering the reservations in Congress during a meeting with a senior US bi-partisan Congressional delegation led by Senator John McCain, Chairman Senate Armed Services Committee, at the General Headquarters, counted the successes of military's counterterrorism Operation Zarb-i-Azb in North Waziristan. Also, the army chief listed unregulated border and rocky ties with Afghanistan as major challenges for sustaining those achievements.

“[The] COAS dilated upon security challenges faced by Pakistan and Pakistan's contribution to regional stability and global peace. Pakistan's successes in war on terror, [and] need for an effective border management across [the] long porous Pak-Afghan border to check illegal movement on either side of the border were also discussed,” a statement from ISPR said about the meeting.

The delegation, which included Senators Lindsey Graham and Joe Donnelly, is visiting Pakistan on an invitation by Gen Sharif.

During its stay in the country, the delegation would study the actions Pakistan has taken against terrorism and their impact on regional peace and security.

The delegation would also visit the operational area.

Concerns in the US Congress that Pakistan did not fully act against the Haqqani network and the Taliban during Operation Zarb-i-Azb had earlier prompted Senate Foreign Relations Committee to stop the use of Foreign Military Financing programme for partially funding the sale of 8 F-16s, which ultimately led to the cancellation of the deal.

The US defence secretary has, meanwhile, also been withholding a certification to the Congress that Pakistan has adequately acted against the Haqqani network and the Taliban. Deductions have, therefore, been made from the Coalition Support Fund reimbursements for Pakistan.

Ambassador Olson had at the Atlantic Council on June 21 repeated those concerns when he noted: “It doesn't seem to us that Pakistan will have a bright future...unless and until it goes after the Afghan Taliban.”

The US opinion is that a strong action by Pakistan against the Taliban sanctuaries and supply lines on its territory would push the insurgent group to join the peace process.

Pakistan had been claiming that its security forces acted against all terrorist groups indiscriminately. But lately they have become more forthcoming by admitting that they cannot start a war on their own soil for Afghanistan by taking on the Haqqanis and the Afghan Taliban.

Adviser to the PM on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said in an interview with Reuters the previous day: “There are risks involved of how far we can go and in what sequence we should go and in what scale we should go.”

Gen Sharif very candidly explained the situation as he described normal relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan as key for regional peace and security.

The Pak-Afghan relations, except for short periods of calm, have remained tense. Pakistan sees Indian involvement in Afghanistan as a major security threat for itself.

Gen Sharif had in one of the meetings with a US delegation last month also asked for Afghanistan to dismantle the sanctuaries of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan on its soil.

Pakistani officials have been hoping that the Congressional delegation's visit would help address the misperceptions in the Congress about the operations.

Sartaj Aziz has said that he will in his meeting with the Congressional delegation counter the allegations that not enough has been done.

Although there was no word from Senator McCain's office on the GHQ meeting as yet, Pakistani officials said the delegation was appreciative of Pakistani achievements and understood their constraints.

Mr Olson also separately met Gen Sharif.

The Foreign Office in a statement on Mr Olson's meeting with Aizaz Chaudhry said: "Both sides agreed on continued constructive engagement between Pakistan and the United States in the areas of trade, investment, education, health and energy."

Mr Chaudhry reiterated Pakistan's commitment to the Quadrilateral Coordination Group as an effective forum to facilitate an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process, the statement said.

Mr Olson, the FO said, expressed appreciation for continued close cooperation between Pakistan and the United States on issues of mutual interest.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1268794>

QAIM ORDERS RANGERS, POLICE TO ENSURE SECURITY IN KARACHI

Business recorder, July 06, 2016

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah on Tuesday directed Rangers and police to ensure security of all the important places such as markets, mosques, eidgahs and other important centres. "You have to be very vigilant because our enemies are working to destabilize Pakistan and try to mar CPEC projects but we won't allow this come what may," he said while presiding over an informal meeting on law and order and other issues here at the CM House, according to a press release.

The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Siddique Memon and IG Police AD Khwaja. Later the meeting was joined by Advocate General Zameer Ghumro. The chief minister said the law enforcement agencies had restored peace in the city. He said the enemies of Pakistan were against CPEC projects which were bound to open new vista of prosperity and development in the country in general and in the province in particular.

"We have to be more vigilant, alert and have to further strengthen national unity to face the nefarious designs of our enemies," he added. The Inspector General of Police (IGP) briefed the Chief Minister on the law and order and security arrangements during the Eidul Fitr. He also briefed the Chief Minister about the progress so far into the cases of kidnapping of Awais Shah and killing of Amjad Sabri.

He said that he was closely working with all the agencies for safe and sound recovery of Barrister Awais Shah. "All the agencies are working day and night to resolve this case and like the Sindh government other agencies are also deeply concerned," he said. As far as Amjad Sabri case was concerned, he said, there were some solid clues and the police were working on them.

The Chief Minister telephoned DG Rangers Major General Bilal Akbar and discussed overall law and order, target operation and special operation for recovery of Barrister Awais Shah and gave him necessary instructions. The DG Rangers assured the Chief Minister that the security plan for Eid days was very much enforced and work on the cases of Awais Shah and Amjad Sabri was in progress.

<http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172:pakistan/63309:qaim-orders-rangers-police-to-ensure-security-in-karachi/?date=2016-07-06>

MILITARY MYTHS

Dawn, July 9th, 2016

Irfan Husain

Pakistan cricket team has just begun its tour of England, and I wonder if their fitness level has benefited from their recent training camp.

This is especially relevant on this summer outing as army trainers helped to raise our players' physical condition in Abbottabad. While we will soon find out if it actually improved performance, we can reflect on yet another civilian function handed over to the military.

Don't get me wrong: I have no problem with professional fitness instructors — in or out of uniform — getting our players into shape. But this use of military expertise must be unique to our cricket team. So why have our coaches abdicated their responsibility for instilling fitness in our team?

Could it be that our players — never a very disciplined bunch — don't take them seriously? Another issue is that as Shahryar Khan, the cricket board chief, has informed us, very few of our cricket stars are educated, and cannot therefore understand the instructions from the foreign coaches appointed to drill them.

But the broader point here is the use of the army to perform tasks civilians should be doing. Time and time again, it has been called in for internal security duties when the police ought to be solely responsible for law and order. But at least this is understandable, given how poorly our police force is trained, led and equipped.

What is less comprehensible is the use of highly trained troops to read electricity meters as happened in the late 1990s under Nawaz Sharif. Not trusting Wapda's meter readers who often were not permitted to enter the factories, farms and homes of the rich and powerful, the government launched a campaign to collect electricity dues by using soldiers to check meters.

And election duties often see large numbers of army units deployed across the country to prevent rigging as opposition parties do not trust the police to be fair. Even worse, at times of political crises — and the Lord knows we have our fair share of those — the cry goes up from opposition politicians for the 'third umpire' to step in.

We often complain of the army's numerous interventions and our repeated bouts of military rule. But we conveniently forget that all too often, generals have been invited to step in by self-serving politicians who hope that these coups will benefit them, and crush their opponents. And generally speaking, they get a few crumbs thrown at them from the ruling junta's high table.

So when we talk about civilian-military relations — or civ-mil in current jargon — we should remember the role unprincipled politicians and inefficient leaders play in providing space to the military. This is not to suggest that ambitious generals do not manipulate venal politicians into being their puppets, or that the ISI does not exploit their weaknesses — no shortage of those, either — to further its murky agenda.

For their part, soldiers are convinced that it is their superior organisational skills that make them so much more effective than their civilian counterparts. Thus, they run housing schemes, factories and farms across the country. They forget the huge advantage they enjoy in receiving licences, permissions and financing.

When my batch mates and I started our civil service career nearly 50 years ago, we were attached to various army units for two months. In his wisdom, some general had decided that a dose of military discipline would make us better bureaucrats. So I duly went off on exercises with the 28th Punjab Battalion that was then based in Quetta.

In the evenings at the army mess where I had a room, I would read books I had borrowed from the base library; often, young officers would ask me if I was preparing for an exam. While my shooting skills improved on the rifle range, I don't think I learned anything of value. But I did get an insight into the insularity of military life. For one, our commanding officer, a reasonably bright lieutenant-colonel, was convinced that one Muslim soldier was equal to 10 of his Hindu foes.

The prevailing sentiment in military messes across the country appears to be that all politicians are corrupt, and that all civil servants are both crooked and inefficient. I am told that a play is regularly performed at the Kakul military academy depicting a dashing young army officer deputed to civilian duties in a crisis displacing the bumbling bureaucrat, and quickly sorting out the mess.

But look deeper, and you see the reality beneath these self-serving myths. In all the bouts of military rule we have lived through, nothing has improved. Our dictators could not even make the trains run on time, or our taxis to charge by their meters. And for all the talk of one Muslim soldier being equal to 10 Hindus, we have lost each of the wars we have fought with India.

At the end of the day, soldiers and civilians alike are the products of the same rotten system.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1269591>

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August 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 29TH TO SEPTEMBER 4TH 2016

MILITARY CONVICTIONS: SC DISMISSES CIVILIAN APPEALS

Business Recorder, 30 August, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Supreme Court on Monday upheld verdicts and death sentences in the cases of 16 civilians convicted of terrorism-related offences by military courts, the first time the highest court has ruled on the legality of cases tried by the military.

A five-member bench led by Chief Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali ruled that the appellants had not proved the military violated their constitutional rights or failed to follow procedure, in a blow to some activists who contend the courts routinely violate people's rights.

The military has so far convicted 104 civilians in the secret tribunals. Of those, 100 have been sentenced to death, and four to life imprisonment. All but six are said by the military to have confessed. Those whose appeals were dismissed on Monday included nine members of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and two al-Qaeda members, according to military. Two convicts are said to have been involved in the Peshawar school killings.

Lawyers for all 16 convicts contended their clients had been tried in secret, without access to legal counsel of their choice, and that their confessions had been recorded illegally. They also claimed they were denied access to military court records when preparing their appeals.

The complaints echoed those made by lawyers and families of those convicted by the courts to Reuters. Two families and one lawyer said they had been threatened after filing appeals. Several told Reuters that confessions were “coerced” by the military.

Sajid Ilyas Bhatti, the deputy attorney general representing the government, denied the appellants’ claims, saying they had been accorded their rights. He argued that military court proceedings were “immune from challenge on the ground of any alleged violation of the fundamental rights”.—Reuters

<http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/08/30/1-page/789682-news.html>

RANGERS’ CLAIM ABOUT KARACHI OPERATION CHALLENGED

Dawn, September 1st, 2016

Jamal Shahid

ISLAMABAD: A privilege motion notice was submitted with the Senate chairman on Wednesday against the Pakistan Rangers for misleading the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights by claiming that an international organisation had endorsed the Karachi operation being carried out by the paramilitary force.

PPP Senator Farhatullah Babar informed the committee that the privilege motion notice had been submitted by him. The lawmaker said he had searched for the international human rights organisation and called people in Pakistan, India and Nepal who said the body “Human Rights Commission South Asia” did not exist.

“All individuals [had] disassociated themselves from the fake organisation,” Mr Babar said.

“The Human Rights Commission South Asia seems to be a bogus organisation created primarily by the vested interests for propaganda purpose,” he said, adding that “the submission of the report of a bogus organisation to defend the human rights record of a law enforcement agency has only undermined its own credibility”.

During a meeting of the committee in July, Col Qaiser Khattaq, who is said to be overseeing the Karachi operation, said that an international human rights organisation had endorsed the operation.

Mr Babar had challenged the Rangers’ claim and asked Col Khattaq to submit a copy of the report in the committee’s next meeting.

However, when the committee met on Wednesday, representatives from Pakistan Rangers were absent.

In a letter to the committee, the Rangers said its representatives would not be available until November “due to prevailing law and order situation of the Metropolitan city”.

The committee rejected the Rangers’ explanation.

“We want the law enforcement agency to answer for misleading parliament by quoting the report of a non-existing fictional international human rights body,” said Mr Babar, adding that the credibility of Pakistan Rangers had been stained because of this move.

The committee was unanimous in expressing concern over the continued absence of Rangers representatives from the meetings and demanded their presence at the next meeting.

“There is no justification whatsoever for the Rangers’ absence,” said Mohsin Leghari, adding that it only gave a bad name to the institution.

However, PML-N Senator Nisar Muhammad defended the operation. “Karachi is a changed city only because of Rangers,” he said.

The committee took several decisions pertaining to the killing of people and dumping of bodies in Balochistan over the past two years.

It recommended DNA tests of all such bodies and reiterated its call for adoption of draft legislation to “rein in state agencies”.

The debate was triggered when Quetta’s DIG Crimes Shakeel Ahmed Durrani informed the meeting that 52 bodies had been found dumped in ‘A areas’ of Balochistan over the past two years.

The meeting learnt that cases were not being investigated as no-one had come forward to lodge a report with the police. While local police were in charge of ‘A areas’, their jurisdiction ended in ‘B areas’ which came under the jurisdiction of Frontier Corps, the committee was informed.

Mr Babar said the admission that no-one had lodged a report with the police was stinging indictment of state institutions.

“This is a vote of no-confidence in the state machinery and the system of justice,” said Mr Babar while warning against consequences of state apathy towards the plight of the people of Balochistan.

He said the report of dumping of mutilated bodies was highly alarming as figures pertained only to ‘A areas’ where police were deployed.

“God alone knows how many bodies of unfortunate victims were found dumped in ‘B areas’ of Balochistan,” the senator said and demanded a complete report on the “killing and dumping cases” in all areas of the province year-wise at the next meeting.

On the advice of the chairman of the National Commission of Human Rights, retired Justice Ali Nawaz Chowhan, the committee decided to seek copies of the FIRs lodged by the state in cases of those whose bodies had been found dumped.

It also called for a report on whether there was a nexus between the people reported missing and dumped bodies in the province.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1281303>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 15TH TO AUGUST 21ST 2016

PM OFFERED COAS EXTENSION BECAUSE HE FEARS ARMY: IMRAN

Dawn, August 15th, 2016

Khawar Ghumman

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan has accused Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of offering an extension and a promotion to Chief of Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif because “he is afraid of the army”.

In his post-midnight address to a rally in the capital on Sunday, Mr Khan said, in so many words: “The prime minister is repeatedly asking the army chief to take an extension and become a field marshal because he fears him; [PM Sharif] has all other institutions under his control.”

His claim came as the capital was rife with rumours that the army chief might be promoted to the rank of field marshal, in recognition of his success in leading Operation Zarb-i-Azb.

According to some quarters, the offer was made, but Gen Sharif refused to accept it and decided to stick to his earlier decision of retiring as per schedule, on Nov 29 this year.

In January, when social media was abuzz with talk about a possible extension for the army chief, Gen Sharif had come out with an unequivocal statement, saying: “I do not believe in extension(s) and will retire on the due date.”

Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid said: “The PTI chief is known for making such irresponsible statements,” adding that until Mr Khan revealed the source of his information about the prime minister’s purported offer, “How can I respond to this assertion that is based on rumours?”

A security official told Dawn that the army chief had already announced his decision to retire on time and only the government could explain the rumours that had been doing the rounds over the past few weeks.

“As far as a decision regarding an extension or promotion for the army chief is concerned, it can only be made by the prime minister,” the official said.

In his speech, the PTI chairman predicted that the next Aug 14 would be the “real independence day”, when the country would be free from the clutches of the current ruling elite who had deprived the masses of education, health and other basic facilities over the years.

“They win elections through fraud and then make money in connivance with corrupt government officials as there is no one to check them,” he alleged.

He also came down hard on the National Accountability Bureau, saying that it only acted against minor criminals. “Those who loot the country appoint a Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) chairman and bring in people of their own choice to the Election Commission to manage elections.”

Overseas Pakistanis were willing to come back and invest in the country, but because of rampant corruption they preferred destinations like Dubai and Malaysia, he said.

In contrast, Mr Khan said, a minister had been arrested in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while the father of a member of the KP Assembly had been sent behind bars by the provincial accountability department. “One must ask the FBR why it doesn’t act against those named in the Panama Papers.”

Imran Khan also accused two FBR officials — Dr Irshad and Amjad Tiwana — of ‘fixing’ the tax records of the Sharif family.

Challenging the democratic credentials of the Sharif brothers, the PTI chairman said those who were “spoon-fed politics by military dictators, took money from the ISI and even attacked the Supreme Court” were now giving him sermons on democracy.

He supported the military establishment’s assertion that the National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism couldn’t achieve the desired results because the government had failed to fulfil its commitments about NAP.

Mr Khan said the federal government had failed to bring reforms to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or streamline seminaries.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1277655>

CHANCES OF SUDDEN CHANGE IN PAKISTAN REMOTE: EXPERTS

Dawn, August 17th, 2016

WASHINGTON: The chances of a sudden change of government in Pakistan are remote as the military is not prepared to bring down the civilian set-up, says Ambassador Robin Raphel.

The former US assistant secretary of state for South Asia was among half a dozen American scholars — and a Pakistani journalist — who analysed the current political situation in Pakistan at a recent seminar in Washington.

The speakers highlighted different weaknesses and strengths in the current political set-up and its relations with the country's powerful military establishment. All agreed that the military would retain its 'dominating influence' over the civilian set-up but would not bring it down.

"The military does not want snap elections," said Ms Raphel, a respected Pakistan sympathiser in Washington who recently faced an FBI investigation for her alleged friendly relations with Pakistani diplomats. In June, she was cleared of charges and allowed to resume her work as an expert on South Asian affairs.

Ms Raphel thinks that if elections are held now, "likely beneficiary will be Imran Khan" but the elections will take place as scheduled, in 2018. She and other speakers argued that the military was reluctant to trust Imran Khan because of his "loose cannon" image, which might or might not be true.

While ruling out the possibility of a military takeover, Ms Raphel warned that the "military may move in if there is a major public disorder in the country".

The chances of a takeover, however, were remote, she added. "Like the military, the public too has changed and may resist any abrupt move."

But she underlined "some erosion in public support for democracy", which she said was worrying and might lead to a situation where the people might be forced to welcome an abrupt change, as they did in 1999.

"If it happens, the United States will weigh its options and will take a decision that is compatible with US interests in the region," she said.

Marvin Weinbaum of the Middle East Institute, a senior Pakistan expert in Washington, said that the transfer of power in 2013 from the PPP to the PML-N was a game-changer, which greatly reduced the chances of an abrupt government change in Pakistan.

"The transfer happened because the two parties did not make the mistake of derailing democracy as Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto did in the 1990s," he said. "The transfer also happened because Nawaz Sharif was willing to wait for the next election, which he did not in the 90s."

Agreeing with the two scholars, Pakistani journalist Raza Rumi said that in the past eight years, democracy had been strengthened in Pakistan and it would be difficult to alter the course.

It was the launching of Mr Rumi's book — *The Fractious Path: Pakistan's Democratic Transition* — that brought these and other scholars to the National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, for a discussion on the current political situation in Pakistan.

The experts agreed that despite some serious institutional problems, Pakistan would continue (its journey) on the road to democracy.

"Pakistan's internal struggle for democratic rights and gradual advance of civilian assertion is overlooked by the western media and commentators, who view Pakistan only through the security prism most notably what the military wants in Afghanistan," said Mr Rumi while explaining why some experts in the West continue to predict the demise of democracy in Pakistan.

Ms Raphael noted that democracy survived the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's dharna, which caused echoes of coup, but ultimately, "those echoes subsided and the government emerged stronger than before."

Other speakers noted that recent amendments to the Pakistani Constitution gave more power to provinces and created a system that was far from perfect, but better than before.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1278099>

TOR SIGNED WITH MALAYSIA FOR MILITARY COOPERATION

Dawn, August 18th, 2016

RAWALPINDI: Terms of reference (ToR) were signed by the militaries of Pakistan and Malaysia on Wednesday to institutionalise a long-term framework for military cooperation.

The development came after Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif reached Malaysia on a two-day official visit and held meetings with the military leadership of the host country to formalise military-to-military cooperation.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations, a smartly turned out contingent of the Malaysian army presented a guard of honour to Gen Sharif on arrival at the army headquarters.

He held separate meetings with Gen Tan Sri Dato Sri Haji Zulkifeli bin Mohd Zin, Chief of Defence Forces, and Gen Tan Sri Raja Mohamed Affandi bin Raja Mohamed Noor, Chief of Malaysian Army.

Gen Sharif was introduced to senior army commanders and given a briefing on operational and training aspects of the Malaysian army.

During his meetings with the Malaysian military leadership, military-to-military relations, joint military training and defence collaboration were discussed.

The chief of defence forces and the army chief of Malaysia praised Pakistan army's achievements in the fight against terrorism and efforts for regional peace and stability.

Gen Sharif said that Malaysia and Pakistan had convergence of interests in different domains of regional security and the need to go after terrorism indiscriminately.

In the evening, Gen Sharif met Defence Minister Dato Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein in Putrajaya.

During the meeting, the Malaysian minister expressed his desire to expand the range of defence collaboration to enable the two militaries to benefit from each other's experience and professional skills.

He said that the spirit of cooperation would help in strengthening the existing relations between the two armies and evolve the ties into a long-term strategic partnership.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1278321>

THE GENERAL AND HIS MEN

Dawn, August 18th, 2016

Khurram Husain

BY now the name of Gen Ziaul Haq has practically become a metaphor for the darkest decade in Pakistan's history. The patronage of militant groups may have a longer history, preceding the era of the general whose death anniversary just passed a few days ago, but the proportions that it assumed in Ziaul Haq's time was truly monstrous.

He is remembered for many things: the sinister laws that were passed to solidify his rule, his experiment with 'managed democracy' (which too has a longer pedigree but took concrete form in his time), his foreign policy, and the first steps towards economic liberalisation that were undertaken during his time. And of course his death in a plane crash, the biggest mystery of which is the cloak of silence that was dropped on it.

The biggest legacy of the general is the contradictions he left Pakistan mired in. The country was in a close and deep alliance with America, while at home the general's regime stood on the shoulders of extremist elements for its own legitimacy.

Economically, he tried to reverse the legacy of both his predecessors, by opening up the economy to encourage competition and roll back the nationalisations and halt the growing role of the state in every area of economic life. But his economic policies left the country trapped between a rentier business elite demanding more protections and foreign creditors demanding more openness.

The general was caught between his dreams and reality, eventually losing touch with both. Much the same fate befell Musharraf, although in his case when the time came to choose, he opted to cling to his dreams and jettison his contact with reality. The results are clear to see.

Today Zia is dead and nobody in the country, including in the army that he led, is interested in asking who did the dirty deed. Musharraf, on the other hand, has lived to dream of electoral victory on the promise of confronting the Taliban when he cannot even muster the courage to face the court trying him for treason, or even win the Sind Club election let alone a parliamentary one.

The general who wanted to rule forever, and was laying down the architecture of eternal dictatorship in the days following the dissolution of the Junejo government, was scared stiff of a 35-year-old woman whose father he had executed and whose popularity he could do nothing to extinguish. Those who met him in the twilight of his life describe a man who was obsessed with Benazir Bhutto and couldn't complete a train of thought without mentioning her at least once.

He came to power promising elections, he left promising elections. By May 1988 it was clear that any election would only be won by the PPP since it was the only party capable of fielding a candidate on every seat in the country, and the general's men took to giving private assurances to all they met that the general's regime was here for a lot longer than being conveyed in public statements. That is when his plane exploded, precisely at the time when his dream of being in power indefinitely must have seemed closer to him than ever before.

His infamous Eighth Amendment, used by him to dismiss a government elected under his own rules, was subsequently employed to dissolve the PPP government, and also the government of his own protégé, Nawaz Sharif. All components of the general's rule and his legacy were at loggerheads with each other.

One very interesting dimension of the general's rule was its impact on the civil service. The rise of Ghulam Ishaq Khan was an emblematic achievement of his rule, drawn by a marriage of convenience. Mr Khan was a man of many shades, skilful at building a network of support for himself within the services, keenly aware of where talent lay, supremely loyal to his own people, but clumsy at his attempts to engineer a political outcome in the great civil contests that began following the general's death and completely beholden to GHQ for his position.

Who remembers the network of civil servants he pulled into a tight network around him? There was A.G.N. Kazi, the master administrator who held almost every important economic post in the country, V.A. Jaffery, the quiet and temperate technocrat of sorts and so many others.

And circling in their midst was the ever present Mahbubul Haq, the thorn in Khan's side, whom the general had taken a liking to despite Khan's best efforts. Mahbubul Haq served as finance minister twice, once in 1985 and then in 1988, replacing Wattoo once the Junejo government had been dismissed. But that is another story.

The point is this: this entire network, which continued wielding considerable power so long as their benefactor enjoyed a good rapport with GHQ, was swept away once Khan was gone from the scene following his fatal clash with Nawaz Sharif in 1993.

In politics too, the general opened the door to so many of the same politicians who are today vilified as emblematic of everything that is wrong with civilian rule. Nawaz Sharif first used the power of money and mass advertising campaigns to win in the 1985 election. Who subordinated civil institutions to play the role of dividing up the political space between loyalists and opportunists? Who wanted to create Mehran Bank and for what purpose? Was Jam Sadiq Ali really such a big improvement on Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi in Sindh? Who gave us the IJI and how was it created?

So many questions, all with a direct relevance to our times, all the legacy of the general and his men, who toyed with the country with the wiles of a schoolboy. So many memories to rake up every time this infernal anniversary passes us by. And so many anniversaries in every year.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1278170/the-general-and-his-men>

GOVT IN PROCESS OF REDUCING SCOPE OF RANGERS-LED OPERATION, SAYS CM

Dawn, August 18th, 2016

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said that fruits of Karachi targeted operation will be sustainable when Sindh's civil institutions and police are strengthened and 'we are now in a process of strengthening institutions, so, we are in fact trying to reduce scope of operation instead of expanding it'.

He told journalists at the press club on Wednesday evening that Sindh would mount pressure on the federal government to impel it to implement the 18th constitutional amendment in letter and spirit. Sindh would also take up the issue of National Finance Commission (NFC) which completed its term in June 2015, he said.

He said the centre did not accept his point of view on the NFC. Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had completed their work with regard to the NFC but the centre had not yet done it, causing a delay in the announcement of the new award.

Mr Shah vowed to take up the issue again before the prime minister and said that there were issues that were to be taken up by the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and some pertained to NFC.

He clarified in answer to a question the federal government did make deductions from withholding tax at source under certain powers of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). Such cuts which were partly right and partly unjustified. "But since it involves a legal process Sindh is going to pursue it to get its revenue back," he said.

To a question about expanding scope of Rangers operation to other parts of Sindh, Mr Shah said that Karachi targeted operation would be sustainable when Sindh's civil institutions and police were strengthened.

He said: "I have discussed it with Rangers that this operation will be really successful when Sindh police and civil institutions take care of it. We are now in a process of strengthening institutions like police. So, we are trying to reduce [scope of operation] instead of expanding it," he said.

He termed the 18th amendment a great achievement of PPP government. "We will mount pressure on the federal government for its implementation for which I will need your [media] help," he said. He said that Karachi was given Rs10 billion package with 19 schemes and 14 of them were given administrative approval. They would be completed in 4-6 months, he said.

He said that he had asked every department to come up with the schemes that were executed on time.

No one should think that he would resolve all issues in one and a half years but he would try to do his best.

Earlier, addressing High Court Bar Association after offering fateha for Quetta explosion martyrs, Mr Shah said the PPP government would ensure rule of law in Sindh and governance would be improved in accordance with constitution.

He sought lawyers' cooperation in this regard and said that he would discuss report of Hyderabad DIG Khadim Rind regarding security measures in high court as mentioned by HCBA president Ayaz Tunio. The CM did express his displeasure over lawyers' indiscipline.

CM's adviser on information Maula Bux Chandio, provincial ministers Mohammad Ali Malkani, Imdad Pitafi and Jam Khan Shoro also accompanied the chief minister.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1278220>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 8TH TO AUGUST 14TH 2016

IMPACT OF MILITARIZATION ON SOCIETY DISCUSSED

Dawn, August 14th, 2016

Tooba Masood

KARACHI: Militarisation plus islamisation equals deterioration, said Karachi University student and activist Laila Raza at a talk on militarism and oppression organised at the Irtiq Institute of Social Sciences on Saturday.

The session — 'Women's fight against militarising and wars of aggression' — was organised by Irtiq in collaboration with Roots for Equity and International Women's Alliance (IWA).

Ms Raza started her talk by taking a look at history and past dictatorships. She said that she failed to understand why people kept thanking Chief of Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif when many of them did not even understand why they were celebrating Independence Day on Aug 14.

"Why are people thanking Raheel Sharif?" she said, adding that she didn't know why personally but "I hope the people who say this, use their words sensibly".

According to Ms Raza, the youth is being brought up on ideals and by idolising/glorifying the military.

She discussed how militarisation had harmed students and student movements in the country. She said that it had affected a whole generation of Pakistan's youth.

Militarism, she said, isn't just about weaponisation but about how one institution has hegemony over our thoughts, ideas and our way of life, specifically over this generation.

Other speakers included Dr Azra Talat, director of Roots for Equity, Dr Huma Ghaffar (moderator) and Wali Haider who also works with Roots for Equity.

Dr Ghaffar, in her opening comments talked about how the IWA had declared 2016-17 as the year for women's fight against militarisation, fascism and wars of aggression.

"They made this announcement on Aug 8, the same day as the bomb fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — which is one of the biggest examples of militarisation," she said.

She discussed the impact of militarisation and how it impacted society — focusing on the women and youth.

She touched upon how militarisation led to occupation of land, environmental issues, human casualties and constant insecurities. The issues faced by women, she said, also include rape, harassment and displacement.

Wali Haider discussed hegemonic control along with the nation state and people's narrative using examples from the United States and Middle East.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1277366/impact-of-militarisation-on-society-discussed>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 1ST TO AUGUST 7TH 2016

SINDH-CENTRE ROW ENDS: RANGERS GET POLICING POWERS FOR ANOTHER 90 DAYS

The Express Tribune, August 2nd, 2016.

Mudaser Kazi

KARACHI: The Sindh government has given the paramilitary Rangers policing powers for another 90 days and extended the force's stay in the province for a year. Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah signed a summary on Monday putting an end to a controversy between Sindh and the Centre.

The Rangers-led targeted operations have been ongoing in Karachi since September 2013, which have led to a marked decline in violence in the teeming metropolis.

CM Murad said the Rangers and police have done a wonderful job by restoring peace in the city. "We must appreciate their sacrifices for restoring law and order in the province," he added while presiding over a meeting on law and order at the CM House.

He specifically credited the law enforcement agencies for the sharp decline in incidents of terrorism, targeted killings, kidnapping for ransom and extortion.

The summary was moved by the home department seeking a year's extension in the stay of the Rangers in Sindh with a grant of special policing powers for 90 days. The chief minister signed the summary forthwith and directed Chief Secretary Siddique Memon to coordinate with the federal government for issuance of a notification at the earliest.

Apart from the chief secretary, attendees at the meeting included IGP Sindh AD Khwaja and Home Secretary Riaz Hussain Soomro. After the meeting, Chief Minister's Adviser Moula Bux Chandio said in a statement that the issue of the Rangers special powers has been resolved amicably which would help maintain law and order in the province.

"Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has granted special powers to the Rangers soon after assuming his charge," Chandio added. "The Sindh government is committed to maintaining law and order in the province for development and prosperity of the people of the province."

Now the federal government needs to adopt a positive attitude towards Sindh and desist from putting pressures on the provincial government, Chandio said. "The Sindh government is running all its affairs as per the Constitution and according to the law. The business community and civil society are also fully satisfied with the Sindh government's steps for peace. Hence, there is no need to put any hurdles in the democratic process in Sindh."

Hours earlier, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said the Rangers' policing powers extended under Article 147 of the Constitution would not be limited to Karachi but would apply to entire Sindh province.

Speaking at a news conference, the security czar said the paramilitary force has thus far conducted 154 raids in rural Sindh which have yielded the arrest of 533 suspected criminals. Of these, 34 suspects belonged to banned outfits, 24 were involved in illegal drugs trade, 10 were high-profile smugglers, 16 were separatists and 127 were foreigners illegally staying in the province.

Referring to the Sindh government's earlier dilly-dallying on extending the Rangers' powers, Nisar said that the matter should not be politicised because the paramilitary force has given huge sacrifices for restoring peace in Karachi. The operation was initiated by the federal government in consultation with the provincial authorities in Sindh, he added. The operation also enjoys public support.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1153969/sindh-centre-row-ends-rangers-get-policing-powers-another-90-days/>

SINDH, CENTRE AT ODDS OVER RANGERS POWERS

The Express Tribune, August 3rd, 2016.

ISLAMABAD: The Centre and Sindh are again at loggerheads over policing powers for the Rangers which has been conducting targeted operations against criminals, particularly terrorists, target killers, kidnappers and extortionists, in the province since September 2013. The federal government on Tuesday voiced serious reservations over a Sindh government move to limit the special powers of the paramilitary force to Karachi.

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah signed two summaries on Monday seeking a yearlong extension in the Rangers' stay in the province with policing powers in Karachi only for 90 days. The legal wing of the federal interior ministry, however, rejected one of the summaries, resurrecting a row that had apparently been averted a day earlier.

The legal wing pored over the summaries sent by the Sindh chief minister and concluded that one of them relating to the Rangers special powers doesn't conform to Article 147 of the Constitution, sources in the ministry told The Express Tribune. Nonetheless, sources said Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan might review the summary.

"The government of a province may, with the consent of the federal government, entrust, either conditionally or unconditionally, to the federal government, or to its officers, functions in relation to any matter to which the executive authority of the province extends," reads Article 147.

Chaudhry Nisar believes the Rangers' special powers cannot be restricted to Karachi only – and constitutionally, the policing powers, if granted, would apply to the whole of Sindh. "The paramilitary force has thus far conducted 154 raids in rural Sindh which have yielded 533 arrests," he told a news conference on Monday.

Incensed by the interior minister's hard line, a vocal PPP senator, Saeed Ghani, advised him not to become a 'viceroy', a regal official who runs a country or a colony in the name of a monarch. "The Sindh government has granted special powers to the paramilitary force in a manner which had been decided by the Sindh Assembly and an all-party conference," said Ghani who is expected to get a portfolio in the new cabinet of Sindh.

This is a Sindh government prerogative to decide where to deploy the Rangers in the province. "Chaudhry Nisar considers himself a viceroy and he wants to sabotage the understanding which was reached with harmony to fight the war against terrorism. It has become abundantly clear that Chaudhry Nisar is working on some hidden agenda," Ghani added.

Sindh Law Adviser Murtaza Wahab, meanwhile, said the provincial government has sought the same powers for the Rangers that the paramilitary force has been enjoying since 2013, the year when targeted operations were launched in Karachi. "

"We have not curtailed the Rangers powers. I don't know why the federal government has rejected the summaries," he said, adding that before the Karachi operation, all political parties and stakeholders had evolved a consensus to give the Rangers special powers only in Karachi.

He claimed that security situation in other districts of Sindh was under control, and the police were diligently handling the situation.

Reacting to PPP's criticism, Parliamentary Secretary for Information Broadcasting and National Heritage Mohsin Shahnawaz Ranjha said the PPP should put its own house in order and improve its governance in Sindh. He added that peaceful Karachi was necessary to boost economic activities in the metropolitan city.

Speaking in a PTV show, he said peace in Karachi has been restored due to the operations conducted by the Rangers against the criminals. "The credit goes to all national institutions for restoring peace in the city.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1154880/row-deepens-sindh-centre-odds-rangers-powers/>

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September 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 26TH TO OCTOBER 2ND 2016

SINDH PA PASSES SINDH ARMS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016

Business Recorder, 29 Sept, 2016

Anwar Khan

KARACHI: The Sindh Assembly on Monday adopted 'the Sindh Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2016 into law with a unanimous vote, making weapons and ammunition sales and purchase documentation and attestation mandatory in the entire province.

In line with the legislation, no dealers can sell firearms or ammunition without verification of the purchaser's CINC and thumb impressions from the Nadra. The law is aimed at registering each and every weapon in the province with a forensic test and will come into force at once for entire Sindh.

The law that Sindh Senior Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Nisar Khuhro introduced in the house making the arms and ammunition trading documented with an official attestation with an aim to scale back the terrorism and target killings. Buyers will have to submit all credentials that the law has made mandatory with vendors before acquiring arms and ammunitions.

A vendor will now be required to carry out a test fire of the gun with two shots and submit the used bullet cartridges to the forensic laboratories. The law is expected to streamline the arms sells in the province.

Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah conceded the education boards in the province were plagued with financial corruption but vowed to cleanse the menace. "There are still some good people working," he told the house in a response of a call attention notice by PTI's lawmaker, Khurram Sherzaman Khan.

He assured the legislature that the government would continue its action in a bid to streamline the academic regulators. He said that the Anti-Corruption Department had raided the Board of Intermediate Karachi and arrested two officials. However, assistant controller has attained a bail, he said, adding that the Anti-Corruption had also seized 95 answer sheets.

New officials will be appointed at the board to replace those whose contracts have lapsed, he said, adding that the vacant post had been filled. "There is a problem of corruption in boards," he acknowledged, saying that "therefore the anti-corruption has raided. A fair action is going on. Those involved in corruption will be punished".

"The education boards will be cleansed from corruption to ensure fair marking. Those involved in malpractices will not be spared," the CM Sindh said and lauded the honest officials for their jobs. A girl student holding the first position in the intermediate exams belonged to a poor family, he said.

Earlier, Khurrum Sher Zaman highlighted that the degrees and certificates were being sold. He urged the government to remove shortcomings in the education system. The house also adopted a resolution with a unanimous vote to pay tribute to those killed during ARD movement between 1983 and 1986. The house was later adjourned to meet today at 10:00 am.

<http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/29/9-page/798165-news.html>

ESCALATION NOT IN ANYONE'S INTEREST, SAYS ARMY

Dawn October 2nd, 2016

Baqir Sajjad Syed

LINE OF CONTROL: The Pakistan Army said on Saturday that escalation and provocation was not in anyone's interest as it launched a media blitzkrieg to challenge Indian claim of having conducted surgical strikes in Azad Kashmir to neutralise alleged "terrorism launch pads".

"Escalation and war mongering do not suit anyone. We neither escalated nor want to increase tensions; all the war rhetoric has been from the Indian side," Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations Lt Gen Asim Bajwa told journalists at a forward command post on the Line of Control (LoC).

A group of 40 journalists, both local and foreign representing about 20 media organisations, were taken to two of the seven places Indians claim to have targeted with surgical strikes: Bagsar in Bhimber sector and Mandol in Hot Spring sector. They were also the places where Pakistan had lost two of its soldiers early on Thursday morning due to Indian shelling.

Apart from receiving briefings by regional commanders and the military spokesman, the journalists also interacted with the locals, who denied having any knowledge of surgical strikes or any other suspicious activity on the night between Wednesday and Thursday.

Gen Bajwa told reporters that no "signature of any surgical strike" could be found which meant that there was no reality in the Indian claims.

He challenged India to be transparent and open about its claim. Pakistan Army, he recalled, was cooperating with a United Nations probe into ceasefire violations that occurred on Sept 28-29 along the 250km LoC, and had brought media there for investigating the Indian claims. "Why are they not allowing their own people to scrutinise the claims?" he wondered.

India had earlier restricted journalists from publishing stories on military issues without approval of relevant corps headquarters after the Indian media exposed as untrue Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lt Gen Ranbir Singh's claim of finding Pakistani markings on weapons recovered from Uri military camp attackers.

Gen Bajwa posed several questions to Indian military about its "surgical strikes" claim and advised the Indian DGMO to be "sure-footed" while making statements on sensitive matters.

Some of the questions he asked were: Where are bodies of people killed in the claimed surgical strikes? Where did the Indians cause damage? How come the troops came and went back unchallenged all in a span of five hours in this difficult terrain?

India had claimed that "surgical strikes" by its troops had caused "significant damage to terrorists and those who were trying to support them".

The military spokesman insisted that there was no “physical violation” of the LoC and there was only an exchange of fire on that day.

Pakistan, he said, did not allow infiltration across the LoC and export of terrorism as a matter of policy. He regretted that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was misleading his people by misinterpreting the ceasefire violation as a surgical strike to cover up problems in held Kashmir.

Gen Bajwa worried that escalation on its eastern border with India could affect Pakistan’s commitment to the fight against terror, in which 208,000 troops were engaged and operations were in concluding phase. Losing focus on the counterterrorism operations, he cautioned, would not serve the cause of peace and security in the region.

Touching upon the controversy about the missing Indian soldier Chandu Babulal Chohan, believed to be in Pakistani custody, the spokesman said India had asked for a DGMOs-level contact on the issue.

India says Chohan had inadvertently crossed the LoC and was detained by Pakistan Army.

Pakistani military’s position has over the past few days evolved from outright denial about his arrest to searching for his whereabouts. And now Gen Bajwa says the procedures for verification and authentication are being carried out — a process normally undertaken after an inadvertent crosser is found.

The military spokesman still stopped short of categorically accepting that Chohan was being held here.

Maj Gen Chiragh Haider, general officer commanding of Jhelum-based 23rd Division that is responsible for most of the LoC, said Indian claim of surgical strikes was incomprehensible and not expected from any reasonable and responsible military officer.

He said physical violation of the heavily militarised LoC was impossible as even the slightest movement was noticed there. “Therefore, it is unlikely that Indian soldiers came into Azad Kashmir and went back,” he contended.

Mirza Abdul Waheed, a local bodies’ councillor, told Dawn in Bagsar that nothing happened on that night except for an exchange of fire by both sides.

Rafi Shahzad, another Bagsar resident, said the Indian claim was a pack of lies. Mohammad Liaquat had similar view of events of the Sept 28/29 night.

In Mandol, some 2km from an Indian post on the LoC, Nauman Kabir, who works at a local bank, said he was surprised at the manner in which Indian leaders were trying to befool their people.

Shahid Mehmood, who works in Saudi Arabia and is at home for vacations, said the normal pace at which life was continuing here itself spoke about the Indian claim. “Indian threats cannot scare us,” he added.

Akseer Ahmad remembers intense artillery exchange that woke up everyone.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1287481>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 19 TO SEPTEMBER 25TH 2016

‘POLITICIANS, JUDICIARY SUPPORT MILITARY INTERVENTION IN CIVIL MATTERS’

Dawn, September 20th, 2016

IkramJunaidi

ISLAMABAD: Claims that the military does not want to interfere in the government's matters are false and in fact, politicians and the judiciary have always supported the military in intervening in matters of governance, said PPP Senator Farhatullah Babar.

Speaking at a seminar titled 'Civil Military Relations: Challenges and Way Forward' on Monday, which was hosted by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), the senator said claims of the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) and the PM Office being on the same page are also untrue. He said there is a deficit of trust between the two and that the military is making constant invasions in civilian matters.

"When the government decided to lodge a case of treason against retired General Pervez Musharraf and the judiciary was hearing the case, who moved the general to a government hospital and gave him shelter," he asked,

To support his argument, Senator Babar said that just in June this year when the prime minister was in the UK, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar was acting as prime minister and that Mr Dar had gone to the General Headquarters (GHQ) along with a delegation of civil leadership.

Pakistan is a security state and the security is also defined by the security establishment, he said.

Talking about the way forward, Mr Babar said that public discourse should be broadened and their opinions heard.

"A parliamentary committee on national security, in both the National Assembly and the Senate, should be established. Politicians should ensure their performance is good so that allegations of corruption do not surface. The security establishment should also look into these affairs," he said.

Also speaking at the event was PML-N Senator retired Lieutenant general Abdul Qayyum, who said Pakistan has suffered from the ups and downs in the civil-military relationship and that military interventions cannot be justified.

"Some believe that the military is responsible for all the bad things and others think the military should run the country and I don't agree with either of these opinions," he said.

"When a general decides to take over, various politicians begin paying his visits and offer him their services. The courts also grant the general powers, even the ones he does not ask for," he added.

He was referring to when the Supreme Court gave former President Musharraf the power to amend the constitution, though he had not asked for that power.

Senator Qayyum said that those who want the military to take over should understand that there is no guarantee that the country will end up with generals like Churchill, McCarthy and Jamal Abdul Nasir.

Defence analyst Imtiaz Gul said that when they come to power, politicians run the government via a kitchen cabinet. They should understand that democracy requires responsibility, he said.

Senior journalist Zahid Hussein said there was no clear policy regarding some of the major decisions in the country because no one knew which Sharif was in power. He added that the PTI/PAT rally of 2014 had provided the military the opportunity to gain space.

He asked how politicians can expect anyone to take parliament seriously when they themselves hardly attend sessions.

Analyst Dr Ayesha Siddiqi said the problem is in the structure of Pakistan, which she said is a colonial state where everything is dealt with the way it was before 1947.

SDPI Head Abid Qayyum Suleri said that the dictators of Pakistan act like they are democratic leaders while democratic leaders behave like dictators, which he said was the reason why there has never been neither the perfect democracy nor the perfect dictatorship in the country.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1284878>

PAKISTAN, TURKEY AGREE TO EXPAND DEFENCE TIES

Business Recorder, September 21th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Commander of the Turkish Land Forces General Salih Zeki Colak called on Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif in his office on Tuesday and discussed matters of mutual interest.

The minister appreciated the exemplary and historic brotherly relations between Pakistan and Turkey.

He expressed Pakistan's strong desire to deepen, broaden and strengthen Pakistan-Turkey relations in the field of defence, a press release said.

Both the leaders discussed issues of mutual interest including extremism, terrorism and flow of refugees across the borders.

They also shared the resolve to cooperate with each other in order to effectively face challenges.

The Defence Minister also apprised the Turkish General on Pakistan's success in operation Zarb-e-Azb and National Action Plan.

The minister said Pakistan valued the cooperation from the Turkish side in the provision of Trainer-37 aircraft to Pakistan on gratis basis.

Moreover, the minister offered sale of Super Mushak aircraft with Turkish specifications.

In the meeting, the minister expressed satisfaction over the successful holding of the 11th round of high level Military Dialogue Group meeting in Ankara in October 2015.

He thanked the Turkish Navy for their participation in the exercise AMAN-13. Turkish Navy was also invited to participate in AMAN-17 exercise scheduled in February 2017.

The minister appreciated the democratic initiatives of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish role for crushing uprising on its borders, its role in Syria and the Turkish participation in trilateral process on Afghanistan as Pakistan desired for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

He pointed out that both the countries cooperated closely at the regional and multinational fora through the platforms of United Nations, OIC and ECO.

The minister invited the Turkish delegation for IDEAS-2016 to be held at Karachi from 22-25 November 2016.

He extended thanks for the generous support of Turkey to Pakistan during national calamities.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/pakistan/318724-pakistan-turkey-agree-to-expand-defence-ties.html>

SENATE BODY QUESTIONS RANGERS OVER 6,000 ARRESTS

Business Recorder, September 21, 2016

KARACHI: The Senate's Functional Committee on Human Rights on Friday asked Sindh Rangers to clarify the reason behind arrest of 6,000 persons in Karachi.

Meeting of the Senate's Functional Committee on Human Rights was chaired by Senator Nasreen Jalil.

During the meeting, Senator Farhatullah Babar questioned that why 6,000 persons were arrested and then some of those in detention were released.

Col Qiaser Khattak responded that arrests and raids were conducted as per the due process of law and innocent individuals were released later.

Meanwhile, Minister of Human Rights Kamran Michael stated that Karachi jail had the capacity to keep 2,400 prisoners but the current number of inmates exceeds 6,000.

Additional IG Karachi Mushtar Mehar also briefed the meeting, stating that police detained 100 and Rangers captured around 150 suspects outside the Karachi Press Club on August 22.

He said only 13 of them were formally arrested while others were released.

Senator Nasreen Jalil remarked that all the institutions must work in their ambits.—NNI

<http://epaper.brecorder.com/2016/09/24/9-page/796605-news.html>

INDIA INITIALS DEAL TO BUY 36 FRENCH FIGHTER JETS

Dawn, September 24th, 2016

NEW DELHI: India signed a deal on Friday to buy 36 Rafale fighter jets for \$8.8 billion, France's biggest such sale, as it seeks to bolster its military against China and Pakistan.

Defence experts say the aircraft, manufactured by France's Dassault, will bring much needed boost to India's air force as it struggles to renew its Soviet-era military hardware.

India, the world's top defence importer, is conducting a \$100-billion upgrade of its military hardware, facing border disputes with its northern and western neighbours, China and Pakistan.

"Rafale will significantly improve India's strike & defence capabilities," tweeted Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar shortly after signing the deal with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian.

Friday's agreement follows years of tortuous negotiations and represents a substantial reduction from the 126 planes originally mooted.

But it is still France's biggest aviation defence deal in financial terms and was hailed as a vote of confidence by French President Francois Hollande, whose administration has lobbied heavily for the Rafale.

"The agreement... is a mark of the recognition by a major military power of the operational performance, the technical quality and the competitiveness of the French aviation industry," he said in a statement.

It is the biggest order for the Rafale after Egypt agreed to buy 24 of the jets in 2015 and Qatar purchased the same amount later that year.

The highly versatile aircraft is currently being used for bombing missions over Syria and Iraq as part of an international campaign against the militant Islamic State group.

It has also been deployed in the past for air strikes in Libya and Afghanistan.

The first planes will be delivered in 2019 and the 36 jets will form two new squadrons of the Indian air force, which is trying to renew its dwindling fleet of Russian MiG-21s — dubbed “Flying Coffins” because of their poor safety record.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1285752>

RUSSIAN TROOPS ARRIVE FOR LANDMARK WAR GAMES

Dawn, September 24th, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Loaded with symbolism, Pakistan and Russia — the erstwhile cold war-era rivals — on Saturday begin their two-week-long military exercises.

The drills being held for the first time by the two countries reflect their deepening military-to-military relations.

A 70-member contingent of commandos from Russia’s Southern MD mountain motorised rifle brigade arrived here on Friday to participate in the special operations war games that would continue until October 10.

The exercises codenamed ‘Druzhbha-2016’ — a Russian word meaning “friendship” — would feature counterterrorism and conventional special operation training sessions.

“The troops will perform assigned tasks in mountains, including the ones aimed at eliminating illegally armed groups,” a Russian defence ministry statement said.

The exercises will be held at Cherat — where the Special Services Group, the commando division of the Pakistan Army, is headquartered and where the Special Operations School is also located — and at the Army High Altitude School in Rattu, Astore district.

“The first joint exercises being held by Pakistan and Russia is a testimony to our improving relations,” military spokesman Lt Gen Asim Bajwa said.

He said the drills would help the two militaries share useful experiences and improve coordination.

“The military command of the country’s armed forces and political leadership of the Russian Federation attach great importance to the exercises carried out by the armed forces,” the Russian defence ministry said.

Besides the exercises the two countries have a number of joint events coming up.

Earlier, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov had in a meeting with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Rashad Mahmood said the two countries were planning “an intensive programme” of joint events for 2016, including talks between the two countries’ general staffs and an exchange of military delegations.

The exercises have been made possible by the defence cooperation agreement signed by Pakistan and Russia in November 2014 during the visit of Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu. Defence ties have gradually expanded and now form the bedrock of the Moscow-Islamabad rapprochement.

The war games gained added significance after India advised Russia against holding drills with Pakistan. Importantly, these are being held at a time when tensions between India and Pakistan have climaxed in the aftermath of the Uri terrorist attack. Indian media had been claiming that Moscow had agreed to call off the exercises.

Russia is simultaneously hosting Indian military units for its exercises with India, codenamed 'Indra-2016'. The India-Russia exercises that began on Thursday would end on Oct 2.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1285756/russian-troops-arrive-for-landmark-war-games>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 11TH TO SEPTEMBER 18TH 2016

ARMY PLEDGES JUSTICE OVER POLICE-SOLDIERS 'SCUFFLE'

Dawn September 13th, 2016

Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: The army pledged on Monday to dispense justice as it launched an investigation into a reported scuffle between its officials and police patrolling staff on a motorway and ensuing events.

"Law will take its course in disposing the case and justice will be done," a military spokesman said in a statement on the Saturday incident.

The Inter-Services Public Relations described the incident as "sad" and said that an inquiry was being conducted into the matter.

According to police, Captain Qasim and Captain Danial were signalled to stop on Peshawar-Islamabad motorway near Attock on Saturday by a motorway patrol for alleged "reckless driving". The two officials driving their private vehicles did not pay heed to the signal and sped away. The patrol team chased them and brought them to a halt.

The drama started as Capt Qasim alighted from his car pointing his pistol at the patrol party while Capt Danial made a phone call and sought help from a nearby army unit. Four vehicles carrying some 25 soldiers led by Maj Zafran arrived at the place and assaulted the policemen.

Later the army men took the policemen to Attock Fort where they were kept in "wrongful confinement" till intervention by higher police officials, police said.

"On the written complaint of Sub-Inspector Atif Khattak, an FIR has been registered under Sections 279, 186, 353, 506, 365, 342, 148 and 149 of the Pakistan Penal Code at Akora Khattak police station in Nowshera district," an incident report by police said.

The charges relate to rash driving, obstructing a public servant in discharge of his duty, assault on a public servant, criminal intimidation and threatening to cause death or grievous hurt, kidnapping and rioting while armed with a deadly weapon. Most of the charges are non-bailable offences.

The military has not come up with its account of the incident.

The incident sparked a massive public outrage soon after it became public on Sunday afternoon, with social media getting flooded with thousands of postings asking for strong disciplinary action against the officers and soldiers involved in it.

The row has tarnished the military's public image which it is desperately trying to improve.

A military official said that an investigation had just started and it would look into different aspects of the incident, including provocative factors. "There has been a history of harassment by motorway police at the section of the motorway where the incident took place," he added.

Investigations into incidents involving military officers are seldom made public.

Last December, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Senator Nauman Wazir was humiliated by military personnel at a check-post near Nowshera.

On Senate Chairman Raza Rabbani's intervention, Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif had promised to order an inquiry into the incident and share the findings with him. But nothing was heard about it afterwards.

Meanwhile, police are conducting an investigation into the latest incident.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1283735>

UNDER PRESSURE, PUNJAB UNDECIDED ABOUT RANGERS POWERS

Dawn, September 17th, 2016

Intikhab Hanif

LAHORE: The Punjab government, which has agreed to seek assistance of Rangers in combating terrorists, is under tremendous pressure to also engage the paramilitary force in netting ordinary criminals, highly placed official sources said on Friday.

The provincial government had expressed its willingness to seek deployment of Rangers for a period of two months to assist police and the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) in hunting down terrorists and their facilitators and combating banned organisations across the province.

A notification for the purpose was prepared last week. It was to be sent to the federal interior ministry by the Punjab chief minister for approval for deployment of Rangers.

Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah Khan had told Dawn that the notification would be issued by the governor and Rangers would only assist police and the CTD in conducting intelligence-based operations and providing security during Eidul Azha and Muharram. "This is not going to be the Karachi-like deployment of Rangers who have been given policing powers by the Sindh Assembly," he said.

But no notification about Rangers' deployment has been issued so far.

The only development was a Sept 11 directive by Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif to police for launching a crackdown on criminal elements throughout the province and breaking their rackets within 60 days.

There has been an increase in intelligence-based combing operations in various parts of the province being jointly conducted by the CTD of Punjab police and intelligence agencies.

Sources in the Punjab government said the notification could not be issued because of objections by the army which wanted Rangers to also deal with ordinary criminals.

But the provincial government insisted that its police were enough to deal with ordinary crimes.

The sources said that as per the draft notification, Rangers (if engaged in Punjab under Section 7, read with 10 of the Pakistan Rangers Ordinance, 1959) will assist police and the CTD in fighting outlawed organisations, terrorists and their facilitators.

The quantum of the force will be determined by the provincial apex committee, headed by the Punjab chief minister, after due assessment of credible information justifying the intelligence-based operations.

According to the sources, the military authorities are not agreeing to such a condition. They also want Rangers to net criminals like police do. The Punjab government had been opposing it altogether, the sources said.

The provincial government had been opposing the deployment of Rangers in the past, fearing this would affect its administrative independence. But this time it is hard to resist the pressure in the aftermath of the recent act of terrorism in Quetta.

The Punjab government is still trying to keep the engagement of Rangers limited to catching terrorists.

“There is pressure on the Punjab government on this issue which is being handled at the highest level,” said an official when asked whether Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif or the Punjab chief minister was holding negotiations on the matter.

Law Minister Rana Sanaullah, who also heads the provincial committee on law and order that deals with such matters, could not be contacted for his comments on the issue despite repeated attempts.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1284305/under-pressure-punjab-undecided-about-rangers-powers>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER 5TH TO SEPTEMBER 10TH 2016

‘MIRACLES’ OF MILITARY JUSTICE

Dawn, September 5th, 2016

Faisal Siddiqi

THE legal debate about whether specified heinous crimes committed by civilian militants in the name of religion or sect can be tried by court martial or military tribunals was decided by the Supreme Court in favour of court martial in the ‘District Bar Association case’ (2015). So, this debate about the constitutionality of court martial of civilian militants is over until the 21st Amendment expires in January 2017.

Recently, while deciding 16 appeals regarding the death sentences awarded to 16 civilian militants by the field general court martial (‘court martial’), the Supreme Court in the ‘Said Zaman Khan & Others’ case has now also examined and decided the equally critical issue of whether the actual trials conducted by the court martial of these civilian militants were in accordance with law and justice and especially with the requirements of fair trial. In short, these findings show as discussed below that we live in interesting but dangerous legal times.

Silver lining: Although the District Bar Association case upholding the constitutionality of the court martial of civilian militants was disappointing for a section of the public, the silver lining in the verdict was the powerful majority judgement authored by Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed who laid down two powerful principles. Firstly, “trials of civilians by court martial are an exception and can never be the rule”. Secondly, the Supreme Court and high court had the judicial power to review any judgement or sentence of court martial. In short, it is the superior courts, and not the chief of army staff or court martial who will have the last and final judicial say.

In both, the District Bar Association case and in the recent Said Zaman Khan & Others case, Justice Saeed went further and laid down the following five precise and clear grounds to challenge any judgement or sentence of court martial.

Firstly, the court martial was set up or constituted in violation of the law, and/or the person being tried, and/or the offence for which he is being tried, doesn’t come within the legal jurisdiction or power of court martial. In short, the proceedings are without jurisdiction.

Secondly, persons/members forming part of the court martial have delivered the judgement or sentence out of bias or bad faith or ulterior motive. In short, the proceedings are factually mala fide.

Thirdly, the judgement or sentence is a wilful act of wrongfulness without reasonable or probable justification and blatantly illegal. In short, the judgement can be challenged on grounds of gross violation of the law without the need to prove actual mala fide intention ie mala fide in law.

Fourthly, the judgement or sentence is based on perverse evidence or no evidence or insufficient evidence, or the conclusions drawn are wholly unreasonable and improbable.

Fifthly, the decision to select a particular civilian militant to be tried by court martial (as opposed to other similar civilian militants) could also be challenged on the grounds of being unfair and unreasonable.

With these five grounds of challenges against court martial judgements, it appeared, at least in theory, that there were powerful legal and judicial safeguards against court martial of civilians. Sadly, in practice this theory has not lived up to expectations.

Perfect convictions: An examination of the record of the trial proceedings of the court martial of these 16 persons, all of whom have been given the death sentence, is revealing, perhaps unique in the annals of criminal jurisprudence. Uniquely, the trial record of the 16 in its key aspects is remarkably identical — perhaps cyclostyle is the right word.

Firstly, all 16 persons voluntarily pleaded guilty not once but twice.

Secondly, all made judicial confessions before a judicial magistrate and none of them, retracted their confessions later.

Thirdly, none of the 16 persons wanted a civil defence lawyer of their choice and preferred to be defended by a defending officer of the armed forces. This is especially surprising considering that they hired lawyers to file petitions before the high court and appeals before the Supreme Court challenging the court martial judgement.

Fourthly, the 16 persons did not object to the jurisdiction or members of the court martial. Fifthly, all declined to produce any evidence in their defence.

Either this is an example of the ‘miracles’ of military justice or there is a more earthly reason for such perfect convictions. Presuming the trial record is correct, the main reason for such harmonious military trials, with the accused persons agreeing to everything and anything, is the atmosphere of coercion ie during the trials, the accused persons are in the custody of the military or intelligence and their trials are basically secret. This is obvious from the fact that the relatives of the 16 persons (without exception) found out about the court martial proceedings only after the death sentence was awarded and mainly through newspapers; one family received the news via an anonymous caller.

Can such trials be considered fair especially when the accused can’t even engage a civilian lawyer of his choice? I mention this with sadness but with a sense of responsibility that these aspects should have been considered by the Supreme Court especially since all these persons were under death sentences. Even in the darkest days of the Zia era, it was our superior courts that saved numerous people from the unfairness of court martial sentences.

Two dangerous legal phenomena are emerging. Firstly, our brave officers and soldiers who have seen their fellow officers and soldiers being killed, often brutally, are as an institution in no position to do dispassionate justice. In such situations, revenge takes precedence over justice.

Secondly, the Said Zaman Khan & Others judgement mentions the “extraordinary circumstances necessitating the enactment of the 21st Constitutional Amendment Act” 16 times in the judgement which clearly shows the tremendous responsibility and pressure the courts feel to provide justice against militant violence. But paradoxically, upholding these unfair court martial proceedings leads to the further militarisation of anti-terror law in Pakistan which contains within it the implied acceptance of the failure of the civilian criminal justice system.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1282106>

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October 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 24TH TO OCTOBER 30TH 2016

WE HAVE OVERCOME HEARTLESS ENEMY, SAYS ARMY CHIEF

The Express Tribune, October 24th, 2016.

LAHORE: “Having overcome the heartless enemy, we are set to march forward on the road to progress,” Army Chief General Raheel Sharif said at the closing ceremony of the 1st International Paces Competition 2016 on Sunday.

He described Operation Zarb-e-Azb as an example of ‘war for peace’ and said the offensive was bringing stability and prosperity to Pakistan and the region.

“Today, our brave men can tell the world with pride that by eliminating terrorist networks from the far reaches of Pakistan-Afghanistan border, an environment of peace and prosperity is flourishing,” he said.

He said Pakistan Army’s Physical Agility and Combat Efficiency System (Paces) proved its effectiveness during the fight against terrorism. “Our troops confronted insurmountable challenges that called for extreme endurance and constant vigilance.”

“Our success against terrorism owes immensely to the physical strength and mental robustness of our officers and men. This, coupled with sincerity of purpose and clear direction, contributed heavily towards fortifying their will and morale during intense and demanding operations,” he added.

Appreciating personnel of Pakistan Army, he said they were trained to constantly uphold the soldierly attributes of courage, character and competence to fulfill the trust reposed by the nation.

Among those who attended the ceremony, included general officers and delegated from friendly countries and other dignitaries. The landmark event brought together participants from 18 leading armies of the world.

The army chief called Paces a unique competition, saying that the occasion was an opportunity for promoting mutual cooperation and brotherhood. “Today, Pakistan stands more integrated with the rest of the world than ever before.”

Paces, he said, was designed to demand a high-level of combat efficiency crucial for the challenges of modern warfare. Lauding all competitors, he said they displayed a very high standard of sportsmanship, physical fitness, and determination.

Highlighting the evolving nature of warfare, the army chief congratulated all participants, especially those who excelled in various events, saying that this experience would enhance their passion for battle worthiness. “I hope you have relished the environment and the excitement of competing under challenging conditions,” Gen Raheel said.

Terming the presence of the participants a mark of everlasting friendship, he said: “The first International Paces Competition has been a great success. We look forward to holding such events in future as well and I am sure that we will see even larger and more diverse participation.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1207813/anti-terror-fight-overcome-heartless-enemy-says-army-chief/>

TWO KILLED IN ALL-NIGHT INDIAN SHELLING

Dawn October 25th, 2016

Abid Mehdi

SIALKOT: An infant and an elderly man were killed and seven people were injured in heavy mortar shelling by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in villages along the Sialkot Working Boundary on Monday.

The attack came in the dead of night when residents of villages in Bajwat, Chaprar, Harpal, Sucheetgarh, Merajkey and Charwah sectors were asleep, senior officials of the Punjab Rangers said.

Haniya, one-and-a-half years old, daughter of Boota Ahmed of Chaprar village, and Mohammad Latif, 63, of Janglora village, were killed. The injured included Haniya's mother, Yasmeen Bibi, 26, and Razia Bibi, 45, of Resmaan-Chaprar; two brothers Babar Hussain, 32, and Mohammad Kaleem, 30, of Jhumiyaan village; Shakeela Bibi, 28, and Allah Ditta, 35, of Bajwat village; and Mohammad Bashir, 80, of Merajkey village.

Rescue 1122 officials in Sialkot took the injured to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH), where doctors said the condition of Yasmeen Bibi and Babar Hussain was critical.

Several heavy mortar shells fired by the BSF exploded inside homes and schools. The officials said the shelling had continued for almost the entire night, damaging rooms, rooftops, walls and balconies of several houses in the villages. Some of the shells landed in fields, but did not explode.

Local residents described the attacks as "jolts of thunder". They spent a sleepless night as heavy and small mortar shells rained down in the streets, thoroughfares, on rooftops and buildings.

Two shells landed in the playground of the Government Boys High School in Chaprar, but did not explode. Two shells each fell in the grounds of the Government Girls High School and the Government Boys High School in Merajkey, but did not explode. A shell exploded near a mosque in Merajkey. Mohammad Bashir, who was leaving the mosque after Fajr prayers, was hit.

Locals described a scene of devastation as dozens of cattle heads including cows, goats, donkeys and buffaloes were found killed and injured in the shelling.

Sialkot District Coordination Officer Dr Asif Tufail told Dawn that the district administration had set up three emergency medical and relief camps in Kundanpur village (Sucheetgarh sector), Phookaliyaan village (Bajwat sector) and in Chaprar village (Chaprar sector).

Rescue 1122 in Sialkot also sent three ambulances to Chaprar and Kahliyaan-Bajwat villages to take the injured to the CMH.

Almost all public and private schools in the villages that came under the attack were closed on Monday.

The Inter Services Public Relations said that the Punjab Rangers had responded to the unprovoked firing and shelling in a "befitting" manner.

A BSF spokesperson told Reuters that one of their soldiers was killed in cross-border firing in the Jammu region, and a boy, one of the five Indian civilians injured, later succumbed to his wounds.

The firing occurred in the Pura, Pargwal and Kanachak sectors on India's side of the border.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1292145/two-killed-in-all-night-indian-shelling?fromNewsdog=1>

CHILD AMONG THREE KILLED AS INDIA CONTINUES TO SHELL VILLAGES

Dawn October 29th, 2016

Tariq Naqash | Abid Hussain Mehd

MUZAFFARABAD/SIALKOT: Three people, including a child, were killed and six others were injured in heavy shelling by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) along the Line of Control in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and the Sialkot Working Boundary late on Thursday and Friday.

Saima, 25, Amna, 7, and Abdul Latif, 50, residents of villages in Kotli district, died and Alizah, 10, Siddique, 55, Naila Ilyas, 14, Shazia Akhtar, 25, and Shaheen Akhtar, 36, and Nazar Hussain, 65, were injured.

They were taken to two health facilities for treatment.

Senior officials of the Pakistan Rangers told Dawn that the Nakyal and Tatta Pani sectors were the hardest hit and some villages in the Samahni sector, Bhimber district, along the LoC came under fire. There was intermittent shelling in villages in the Bajwat, Chaprar, Harpal, Bajrah Garhi, Charwah and Shakargarh sectors along the Working Boundary on Thursday night and early Friday morning.

Several mortar shells landed in public schools in Charwah-Merajkey but did not explode.

Sialkot District Coordination Officer Dr Asif Tufail said all schools in Sialkot's border villages remained closed for the sixth consecutive day. "Most residents of these villages have left. The schools will reopen once the tension eases."

Since Oct 19, seven residents of villages in Kotli district and one in Bhimber district have been killed in Indian firing.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations dismissed claims that the BSF had killed a Pakistani soldier at the Working Boundary. "This is absolutely baseless...it is a part of their propaganda to underplay their losses at the Working Boundary."

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1292994>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 17TH TO OCTOBER 23RD 2016

CENTRE EXTENDS RANGERS' POLICING POWERS FOR 90 DAYS

Dawn October 18th, 2016

Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has extended special policing powers of the Rangers in Karachi for 90 days from Tuesday.

"Pursuant to the request made by the home department, the government of Sindh, dated 15th October, 2016 and in continuation of this ministry's notification No. 9/1/95 –R Sindh dated 3rd August, 2016, the powers conferred upon Pakistan Rangers (Sindh) in Karachi Division under clause (1) of sub-section 4 of Anti-Terrorism 1997 are extended for another period of 90 days with effect from 18th October, 2016," stated a notification issued by the interior ministry on Monday.

It is for the first time in recent months that the matter has been amicably resolved without any war of words between the centre and the provincial government. In August, a controversy had cropped up when the federal government hinted that the Rangers would be given special policing powers for the entire Sindh – a move that had been strongly resisted by the provincial government that accused the centre of invading the province.

In the past, too, there had been deadlocks in the issuance of notification, with the Sindh government accusing the Rangers of overstepping their mandate. The interior minister had earlier warned that the centre had other options available under the law, if Sindh continued to delay a requisition.

The deployment of Pakistan Rangers in Karachi is requisitioned under Article 147 of the constitution, and under clause 1 of sub-section 3 of section 4 of Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997. The paramilitary force is authorised to prevent the

commission of terrorist acts, or scheduled offences in notified area for the punishment of terrorist in accordance with the provision of the ATA, 1997.

The Rangers have been assisting the Karachi police since 1989 when the then PPP government in the centre had called them and the Frontier Constabulary to curb rising political violence in the metropolis. The paramilitary force were later given special policing powers amid increasing number of killings on sectarian, political and ethnic grounds in the city.

Since 2013, they have been spearheading an 'operation' against criminal elements after the federal cabinet empowered the force to lead a targeted advance with the support of police against criminals already identified by federal military and civilian agencies for their alleged involvement in targeted killings, kidnappings for ransom, extortion and terrorism.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1290609/centre-extends-rangers-policing-powers-for-90-days>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM OCTOBER 3RD TO OCTOBER 9TH 2016

COAS REVIEWS ARMED FORCES' OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

Dawn, October 4th, 2016

Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif reviewed the operational preparedness of the country's armed forces on Monday, even as the military claimed three instances of ceasefire violations by Indian forces across the Line of Control (LoC).

According to a brief statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Gen Sharif visited the headquarters of the Strike Corps, the name given to the famed 1 Corps based in Mangla.

A brief video released by the ISPR shows Strike Corps Commander Lt Gen Umar Farooq Durrani briefing the army chief. Lahore Corps Commander Lt Gen Sadiq Ali, Peshawar Corps Commander Lt Gen Hidayatur Rehman, Gujranwala Corps Commander Lt Gen Ikramul Haq and Director General Military Operations Maj Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza were also present at the occasion.

The army chief's visit to the 1 Corps is seen as a clear message to the enemy that the armed forces are ready to meet any eventuality.

Retired Lt Gen Ghulam Mustafa, who used to command the Strike Corps, termed the army chief's visit to Mangla "highly significant".

"Normally, such meetings take place at the General Headquarters and are not announced. This was a clear message to India, and the presence of other corps commanders during the preparedness-level review is also noteworthy," he said.

Meanwhile on the LoC, tensions between the two South Asian nuclear-armed nations ran high as Pakistan's military accused India of violating the ceasefire thrice in one day.

According to the ISPR, the first violation took place between Sunday night and Monday morning in the Iftikharabad sector, near Mirpur. Shelling began just after midnight and continued for nearly four hours.

The second violation was reported in the Nezapir sector near Sialkot, where firing from across the border started at 11:30am.

Hours later, the Kailer sector near Bagh in AJK also saw unprovoked firing from across the LoC around 2:30pm.

Pakistani forces retaliated in a befitting manner, but there were no reports of any casualties or losses, the ISPR said.

Ties between Pakistan and India worsened after an attack on a military camp in Uri, inside India-held Kashmir on Sept 18, where around 20 Indian soldiers were killed.

India alleged that Pakistan-backed terrorists were involved in the attack and initially claimed that weapons recovered from them bore Pakistani markings. However, this assertion was debunked by the Indian media itself, forcing the Indian DGMO to retract the claim.

Since then, India violates the ceasefire along the LoC on an almost daily basis. The escalation continued when India claimed to have carried out surgical strikes across the LoC on Sept 29, claims Pakistan rejected as being baseless.

Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports surfaced on Monday regarding contact between the national security advisers of the two countries. However, these could not be independently verified.

The ANI news agency reported that Naseer Janjua and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval had spoken on the phone following the recent escalation in tensions between the two sides.

ANI quoted Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz as confirming that the two men had spoken, but Mr Aziz could not be reached for comment despite repeated attempts.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1287855/coas-reviews-armed-forces-operational-preparedness>

AGGRESSION WILL NOT GO UNPUNISHED, WARNS COAS

Dawn, October 7th, 2016

Suhail Kakakhel

RISALPUR: Chief of the Army Staff General Raheel Sharif said on Thursday that the armed forces were fully prepared to give the “most befitting response” to any internal or external threats to the country.

Addressing the passing-out parade of combined courses of the College of Flying Training and Aeronautical Engineering at the PAF Academy in Risalpur, the army chief reiterated Pakistan’s commitment to pursuing the policy of friendship with all countries on the basis of mutual respect and equality.

However, he warned that any aggression borne out of “deliberate intent or even a strategic miscalculation will not be allowed to go unpunished” and would be met with the most befitting response.

Referring to the atrocities in India-held Kashmir, he said: “We have recently witnessed an unfortunate display of utter desperation playing out inside occupied Kashmir and along the Line of Control through a litany of falsehoods and distortion of facts by India.”

He urged the international community to condemn Indian insinuations and fabrications about Pakistan, which he said made unparalleled contributions to the global fight against terrorism.

Gen Raheel said that Pakistan wanted good relations with all its neighbours, but no one should make any mistakes about the nation’s collective resolve to defend the motherland.

About the domestic front, he said that the armed forces had achieved “phenomenal success” in uprooting the terrorist infrastructure from Pakistani soil.

However, he added, the enemies of peace and prosperity had been distressed by the sight of the country's success and they would now attempt to accelerate their efforts "to reverse our gains and derail the country's progress" through their direct and indirect strategies.

"Their nefarious designs will not be allowed to succeed at any cost," he declared.

Praising the role of the Pakistan Air Force in the fight against terrorism, the army chief said that Zarb-i-Azb, with the support of the PAF, had successfully turned the tide against terrorism. "Its role has been crucial in achieving our objectives to root out the menace of terrorism."

"The exemplary cooperation between the services leading us to stability in a short time is unique in this type of warfare. It is a value which we must all cherish and carry forward with even deeper commitment in the future," he said, adding: "For sustainable peace, the forces are now engaged in eliminating the residual threat in the form of facilitators and their sympathisers through intelligence-based and combing operations across the country."

He said that it was a great honour for him to review the passing-out parade.

He also felicitated the graduating cadets and said: "The PAF rightly takes pride in its unmatched mix of high-end technology with quality human resource and continuous force upgrade for ensuring its fighting potential. It is indeed satisfying that PAF is vigorously pursuing the force goals to retain its cutting edge."

The COAS visited the field area on Thursday and witnessed the ongoing Pakistan-Russia joint exercise — DRUZBAH — which commenced on Sept 27, our correspondent in Attock adds.

The army chief met participating troops and appreciated their professionalism, skills and dedication.

Paying tribute to both armies, he said that the Pakistani troops were most battle hardened and experienced and reckoned as one of the best in the world as were the Russian troops rated best amongst the contemporary armies.

He said that such joint military exercises would provide an excellent opportunity to participating troops to learn from each others' experience in counterterrorism domain.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1288518/aggression-will-not-go-unpunished-warns-coas>

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November 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 28 TH TO DECEMBER 4TH 2016

AZERBAIJAN SUGGESTS JOINT PRODUCTION OF DEFENCE GOODS

The Express Tribune, December 2nd, 2016.

Islamabad: Azerbaijan Ambassador Ali Alizada has suggested that Pakistan should engage in joint production of defence products in a bid to give a boost to bilateral relations.

He stated this while speaking at a ceremony held to mark the 25th anniversary of restoration of state independence of Azerbaijan.

"Azerbaijan has also been developing its defence industry and Pakistan is a very developed country from this point of view. So, we can work together to start joint production and further develop cooperation in the military area," he said.

The envoy pointed out that the two countries had good relations in all fields and these would successfully continue.

“Our political relations are at a very high level and we are strategic partners. Now we are working more on the economic track, on the track of investments and creation of mutually advantageous joint ventures to increase the level of mutual trade,” he said.

The two sides are also planning to establish joint ventures in Azerbaijan, particularly in the areas of pharmaceutical, textile, agriculture and tourism.

“We believe and experience shows that cooperation among countries can eliminate some of the problems. Our efforts are aimed at establishing cooperation in the area of transportation,” he added.

The North-South Corridor, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, is being built and Azerbaijan has taken important measures in this regard.

“New transportation projects which Azerbaijan is implementing together with its neighbours will create new opportunities and open fresh routes of transportation from Asia to Europe, from North to South and Pakistan can benefit from these projects too,” he said.

“Today, we work on a global energy project called the Southern Gas Corridor. The cost of this project is around \$45 billion and Azerbaijan plays a leading role in implementation of this project,” he said, adding that about 70% of the economy now comprised the non-oil sector. “We are seriously dealing with diversification of exports.” The ambassador said Azerbaijan had minimised its dependence on oil and gas and the country enjoyed a high ranking in international organisations.

“The Davos World Economic Forum ranks Azerbaijan 37th with respect to competitiveness of the economy. It shows our economy is competitive, diversified and not based on one source, which is energy,” he added.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1250812/azerbaijan-suggests-joint-production-defence-goods/>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 21ST TO NOVEMBER 27TH 2016

NAVAL CHIEF WITNESSES PAK-CHINA EXERCISE

The Express Tribune, November 21st, 2016.

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah visited the Chinese Navy Ship Handan on Sunday at the sea during the on-going PN-PLA (N) bilateral exercise.

A Pakistan Navy statement said the exercise was being held in the Arabian Sea between the navies of the two countries from November 19 to 21.

The exercise covers wide-spectrum of maritime and naval operations by ships, helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft, joint boarding operations by special forces, air defence exercises, communication drills and joint manoeuvres by ships from both navies.

Commander Pakistan Fleet, Vice Admiral Syed Arifullah Hussaini also accompanied the CNS during the visit.

During his visit onboard, the naval chief interacted with the the PLA (N) ship's crew and appreciated their operational competence.

The admiral expressed his satisfaction over the regular visits of the PLA (N) ships and conduct of bilateral exercises between the two navies.

The naval chief said: “The Pak-China friendship was highly valued and the continued cooperation between them had proven to be a source of strength for both the countries.”

He said regular conduct of PN-PLA (N) bilateral exercises would further enhance the level of “cooperation” and “inter-operability” between the two navies that would contribute towards regional peace and stability.

Thereafter, Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah visited PN Fleet Units and showed satisfaction over their readiness in keeping vigil over the PN area of responsibility.

During interaction with officers and men onboard, the admiral commended their morale, preparedness and resolve to defend the maritime frontiers of the motherland.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1237898/maritime-order-naval-chief-witnesses-pak-china-exercise/>

INDIAN SHELLING CLAIMS FOUR MORE LIVES IN AJK

Dawn, November 22nd, 2016

Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: Four more people lost their lives to indiscriminate Indian shelling in different areas of Azad Jammu and Kashmir on Monday as the restive Line of Control (LoC) continued to witness exchange of heavy fire between the two sides.

According to officials, 19 people, mostly women and children, were injured in the Indian shelling.

“The entire dividing line (LoC) has been going through hell since morning... Heavy Indian shelling has caused deaths and injuries to men, women and children alike, even though they were forced to stay indoors,” chief secretary Sultan Sikandar Raja told Dawn.

He said a man identified as Altaf, 40, and a woman, Nazia, 30, were killed and at least 10 others injured in Chota Nar Dabsi, Mathrani, Pir Kalanjar, Mohra, Tarkundi and Oli Panjni villages of the Nakyal sector in Kotli district.

Eight of the injured were identified as Aniq Ahmed, 15; Burhan Salim, 11; his sister Nighat Salim, 16; Yasmin Bibi, 40; Farzana, 25; Mohammad Tazeem, 48; Alfaz Begum, 34; and Ms Maqsood Jan.

In the Samahni sector in Bhimber district, Attique, 14; and Tafoor, 11, were killed and Adnan, 13; Sabiha, 9; and her sister Sabahat, 11, were injured when mortar shells hit their houses in Baroh village. One Said Mohammad was injured in Bata Khetar village.

The Indian shelling in Mandhol and Battal villages of the Battal and Madarpur sectors in Poonch district injured Riaz, Khajoor Begum, Attia Younas, Kafayat Begum and Jannat Hussain.

Villages in Kotli, Charhoi and Khuiratta sub-divisions of Kotli district were also shelled, but “fortunately no casualties were reported from there”, the chief secretary said.

The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said Pakistani troops had been responding to Indian shelling befittingly. “There are reports of heavy casualties of Indian soldiers due to effective retaliatory fire by Pakistani troops. Six Indian soldiers have been confirmed killed till now,” the ISPR claimed.

According to the chief secretary, 27 people have lost their lives and 99 suffered injuries in the Indian shelling since early last month. About 11,000 families have left their houses in vulnerable villages along the LoC and moved to safe areas.

AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider told Dawn on Monday that his administration was bracing for more evacuations as the situation along the LoC became extremely critical.

“If the xenophobic Indian rulers are not reined in, I am afraid around 500,000 people living all along the LoC in Azad Kashmir may be forced to move to the safe areas,” he said.

He called upon the international community to take notice of the flagrant ceasefire violations by Indian troops and protect civilian populations from their aggression.

“All peace-loving nations should play their effective role in resolving longstanding Kashmir dispute which is at the root of all tensions between India and Pakistan,” he said.

Indian Deputy High Commissioner J.P. Singh was summoned to the Foreign Office on Monday and conveyed the Pakistan government’s strong condemnation of the unprovoked ceasefire violations by Indian forces on the LoC, according to APP.

The Indian diplomat was told that the deliberate targeting of civilian-populated areas was highly deplorable, said a press release issued by the Foreign Office.

India was urged to respect the 2003 ceasefire understanding in letter and spirit, investigate the continued incidents of ceasefire violations, stop targeting villages and civilians and maintain peace at the LoC.

“The government of Pakistan also expressed concern over the incident of Indian refusal of diplomatic flight clearance to Pakistani aircraft. This action by India constituted a violation of the 1991 bilateral agreement between Pakistan and India,” the FO added.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1297857/indian-shelling-claims-four-more-lives-in-ajk>

10 CIVILIANS, THREE SOLDIERS KILLED IN INDIAN SHELLING

Dawn, November 24th, 2016

Tariq Naqash

Muzaffarabad: Indian troops on Wednesday shelled civilian populations almost all along the Line of Control in Azad Jammu and Kashmir after a daylong lull and hit a passenger bus, leaving 10 civilians dead and 21 others injured. Three army personnel also lost their lives in an exchange of fire across the LoC, officials said.

These are the heaviest civilian killings in a single day over the past 13 years since India and Pakistan signed a ceasefire agreement in November 2003.

The major incident took place in the Neelum valley, where shelling started at 3am, but intensified after sunrise, according to Jamil Ahmed Mir, Superintendent of Police in Neelum.

At around 8.30am, the Muzaffarabad-bound passenger bus was hit near Lawat Kanari, about 97km northeast of here, leaving eight passengers dead and eight others wounded. Witnesses told Dawn that two men on a motorcycle were passing through the area when the bus was hit. As a result, one was killed and the other wounded.

The victims were taken to the district headquarters hospital in Athmuqam. The deceased were identified as Mukhtar Shah, Mohammad Younas Ahmed, Mohammad Zubair, Mohammad Ashraf, Mohammad Rafique, Iqbal Malick, Zahoor Shah and Khawaja Manzoor — all residents of the Neelum valley. The injured included Mohammad Bashir, Khawaja Imran, Khawaja Jawad, Bashir Shah, Sharafat Shah, Fazal Hussain, Raja Gulfam, Khawaja Sultan and Mohammad Shafi. Three of them were brought to Muzaffarabad in a critical condition.

“When we reached two kilometres ahead of Lawat, firing began... And shortly afterwards a shell landed on the bus, killing four persons on the spot, but I took the vehicle ahead to a comparatively safe portion of road,” said the wounded driver at a hospital in Muzaffarabad.

A minor girl and a man were also injured in the shelling near Athmuqam, a police officer said.

For the first time since the outbreak of hostilities, the Neelum valley, which had become a tourist hub in the past decade, was also hit indiscriminately. Since the main artery of the 200km-long valley is exposed to Indian gun positions, life there was virtually crippled by the cross-border shelling.

AJK Legislative Assembly Speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir, who was elected from the Neelum valley, said the situation was critical all along the LoC.

“I call upon the government of Pakistan to take up the issue of unprovoked shelling of civilian populations in the UN Security Council to build pressure on India,” he said at a press conference in Muzaffarabad.

Since the valley was highly vulnerable to Indian guns, “a great trial has begun for its nearly 250,000 residents”, he said, adding that Indian troops were not even allowing transportation of the injured to Muzaffarabad as they had also hit an ambulance.

One person was killed and seven were injured in the shelling in Kotli district. Three people were wounded in Poonch district.

Mohammad Ramzan, an official at the deputy commissioner office in Kotli, said that a man, identified as Adnan Khalid, was killed and six people were injured in the Nakyal sector. One woman was wounded in the Tatta Pani sector.

Two men and a woman were injured in the Battal sector in Poonch district, according to SP Mir Abid.

Bhimber district was also hit by the shelling, but no casualties were reported from there.

According to the officials, 38 civilians have been killed and over 115 wounded in the Indian shelling since early August.

AJK President Sardar Masood Khan, Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider and leaders of almost all political parties vehemently condemned the “unprovoked and unrelenting” Indian shelling, particularly the firing on the passenger bus, terming it a “dastardly act of the enemy”.

In a statement, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) confirmed that Pakistani and Indian troops had exchanged fire across the LoC, which had caused death of three army personnel on Wednesday, apart from the civilian casualties.

“Three Pakistani soldiers valiantly embraced Shahadat at the LoC while responding to Indian unprovoked firing,” it said.

They were identified as Capt Taimoor Ali Khan, Hawaldar Mushtaq Hussain and Lance Naik Ghulam Hussain.

The ISPR said the bodies had been sent to their native areas, where burials would take place with full military honours on Thursday.

It claimed that seven Indian soldiers were confirmed dead in retaliatory fire by the Pakistan Army. The exchange of fire was continuing, it added.

The ISPR said Indian troops were now targeting civilian populations across the LoC in order to “distract attention from real issue of their atrocities in India-held Kashmir”.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1298279/10-civilians-three-soldiers-killed-in-indian-shelling>

WORLD HELP SOUGHT TO EASE LOC TENSION

Dawn, November 25th, 2016

Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has urged the international community to help defuse tensions with India, adding that targeting of civilians living along the Line of Control (LoC) could not be further tolerated.

This was stated by the Prime Minister’s Office after a meeting was held to review the situation at the LoC following Wednesday’s attack on a passenger bus that had left 10 people dead. Separately, three soldiers, including a captain, were killed in the Hot Spring Sector.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chaired the meeting and Adviser to the PM on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, ISI DG Lt Gen Rizwan Akhtar, Special Assistant to the PM on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi and National Security Adviser retired Lt Gen Nasser Khan Janjua were present.

The meeting was followed in the evening by a farewell dinner that PM Sharif hosted for the outgoing Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif to honour his four decades of military service, including the last three years as top commander.

All three star generals in military service and a two star general, who serves as Gen Sharif’s staff officer, were invited.

PM Sharif paid tribute to the retiring army chief saying that Pakistan was “safer and stronger” today than in 2013 when Gen Sharif had assumed command of the army.

“General Raheel Sharif always led from the front. ... It was under his leadership that Pakistan’s armed forces had confronted not only external threats but also the menace of terrorism. We successfully established the writ of the state and reclaimed every inch of the territory under our sovereign control,” the prime minister said.

According to a participant, PM Sharif looked comfortable and relaxed as he saw off the outgoing general. Although he has worked with seven army chiefs in his three tenures, this is the first time PM Sharif will see off an army chief who has completed his tenure.

Among others, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and States and Frontier Regions Minister retired Lt Gen Abdul Qadir Baloch joined the reception.

Senate Defence Committee Chairman Mushahid Hussain also attended the dinner.

The participants at the dinner kept looking for hints as to who Gen Sharif’s successor could be, but could not find any substantive indication. The government is expected to announce the new army chief any time — probably over the weekend after the prime minister returns from his two-day visit to Turkmenistan.

There were, however, two observations; first, the order of departure of guests after the dinner. The next general to leave after Gen Sharif was Lt Gen Ishfaq Nadeem, who is said to be the favourite for the job. He was followed by Lt Gen Zubair Hayat, who is expected to become chairman joint chiefs of staff committee.

But the selection of pictures tweeted by the prime minister’s daughter Maryam Nawaz gave a different hint. She tweeted pictures of Lt Gen Hayat and Lt Gen Javed Iqbal Ramday shaking hands with the prime minister.

At the musical event that followed the dinner, Gen Sharif was probably reminded of the yearlong rumours about his extension as the selection played on that occasion included ‘Aaj jane ki zid na karo’.

The meeting that reviewed the situation after Wednesday’s attack on a bus by Indian forces noted that Pakistan had repeatedly protested the targeting of civilians, but India had ignored all protestations as its forces continued to target civilian populations. The statement issued by the PM’s Office says that the international community has largely been silent on the matter despite warnings from Pakistan that India may be headed towards a “strategic miscalculation”.

“The meeting urged the international community to take note of the intentional targeting of civilians and increasing number of civilian casualties. The meeting further called upon the international community to play an active role in defusing the deteriorating security situation along the LoC which has been deliberately escalated by the Indian side,” the statement says.

So far, 52 people — 40 civilians and 12 soldiers — have been killed due to Indian shelling along the LoC in the last few months. This is the highest number of casualties along the LoC since the two countries agreed to observe a ceasefire in 2003. Not only did the Indian forces use artillery along the LoC for the first time in 13 years, but even targeted an ambulance that was evacuating victims of shelling.

“The meeting deplored the belligerent targeting of the ambulance which was rescuing the affectees of the attack on the bus, as a blatant violation of international humanitarian law,” the statement said.

Speaking at the meeting PM Sharif said though Pakistan had exercised maximum restraint, it could no longer tolerate the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians, particularly children and women, ambulances and civilian transport.

“The Kashmir issue is an unfinished agenda of the Partition; we will never abandon our Kashmiri brethren in their freedom struggle,” the prime minister said.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1298489/world-help-sought-to-ease-loc-tension>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM NOVEMBER 7TH TO NOVEMBER 13TH 2016

WOMAN AMONG FIVE INJURED IN INDIAN SHELLING

Dawn, November 7th, 2016

Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: At least five people, including a woman, were injured when Indian troops resorted to indiscriminate shelling from across the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district of Azad Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, officials said.

“Indian troops resorted to unprovoked firing in the Battal sector at the LoC in the morning. Pakistani troops responded befittingly to the Indian fire,” the Inter Services Public Relations said in a statement.

A police officer identified the injured as Sajida Kosar, Sain Majeed, Sain Nasir, Master Naseer and Abdul Qadeer.

AFP adds: The Indian army said two of its soldiers were killed in an exchange of fire along the LoC. “One soldier was killed in a firefight as Indian troops pushed back Pakistani infiltrators while another died in a separate incident,” the army said.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1294815/woman-among-five-injured-in-indian-shelling>

COAS WITNESSES ARMY FIELD EXERCISES IN KHARIAN

Dawn November 9th, 2016

RAWALPINDI: Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif on Tuesday spent a night in the field near Kharian and witnessed troops from Central Command carry out operations as part of the Army Field Exercises.

The exercises were aimed at validating the operational plans involving infantry and mechanised troops and their support elements from the Central Command, said an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release.

Apart from first-ever use of a virtual Command and Control Room, the exercises saw the first formal employment of indigenously developed Mine Dispensing System. The Special Service Group's free-fall paratroopers performed a high-altitude drop.

Speaking to officers on the occasion, the COAS said the Army Field Exercises achieved its objectives integrated with the latest communication concepts and cyber technology to reduce reaction time for quick response. "Successful culmination of the exercise has boosted our confidence in our combat readiness," he said.

"Induction of numerous indigenously prepared systems manifests our growing technical prowess and self-reliance. While we have been occupied in a determined fight against terrorism across the country especially the western border, we have kept ourselves prepared to take on any misadventure or strategic miscalculation by our adversary," he added.

Commending combat efficiency of the troops, he said: "The resilience, resolve and heroic deeds of our men against odds have earned international acclaim for our audacity as a nation."

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1295213/coas-witnesses-army-field-exercises-in-kharian>

COAS ORDERS JOINT EFFORTS FOR 'COMPLETE' RESTORATION OF PEACE

Dawn, November 10th, 2016

Imran Ayub

KARACHI: Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif on Wednesday hinted that the Rangers-led operation across the city was not going to end any time soon when he asked the Karachi corps commander and heads of the intelligence and paramilitary agencies to continue to collaborate with the law enforcement institutions "for complete restoration of peace" to the metropolis.

The army chief, who was on a brief visit to the city, chaired a "security conference", which was attended by the corps commander, DG ISI, DG MI, DG MO and DG Rangers, at the corps headquarters.

He appreciated the role and performance of the intelligence agencies and security forces that led to the restoration of peace to the city but at the same time he highlighted the need to continue the exercise for lasting peace.

"Appreciating the accomplishments of security forces and intelligence agencies for improved law and order situation in the city, the army chief directed to continue focused operations in conjunction with other LEAs and provincial government for complete restoration of peace for common citizen of Karachi," said a brief statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations.

The security conference was held a few days after the results of the "Karachi operation", which has been under way for the past three years, had been challenged by targeted attacks on sectarian grounds.

Over the past five weeks, nine people were killed and over a dozen others were wounded in targeted attacks on the various venues of Muharram majalis, while only last week two members of the Tableeghi Jamaat, three workers of the banned group, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, and a prayer leader were killed in what police suspected as targeted killings on sectarian grounds.

The renewed wave of sectarian killings pushed the provincial government to do more despite the success against heinous crimes of kidnapping for ransom, terrorism and targeted killings. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah had recently ordered the IG Police to ask DIGs to explain their position about their 'failure' in stopping targeted killings.

Nearly a week after the provincial apex committee meeting on law and order, the military leadership at the security conference asked his force commander and chief of intelligence agencies to continue their efforts in collaboration with the local law-enforcement institutions.

Earlier before presiding over the security conference, the ISPR statement said General Sharif attended the ongoing exercise "Resilient Response" where he was briefed in detail about the conduct and conclusions of the exercise encompassing both defensive and offensive operations.

The army chief expressed his complete satisfaction over the enhanced battle worthiness and operational preparedness of formations, added the statement.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1295329/coas-orders-joint-efforts-for-complete-restoration-of-peace>

THREE MORE DIE IN INDIAN SHELLING FROM ACROSS LOC

Dawn, November 9th, 2016

Baqir Sajjad Syed

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Tuesday lodged protests with India as well as with the United Nations military observers over targeting of civilian populations as three more civilians were killed due to shelling by Indian troops from across the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Kashmir.

With the latest casualties the civilian death toll from Indian shelling has risen to 25 in the past few weeks. Another 103 have been injured.

Indian Deputy High Commissioner J.P. Singh was summoned to the Foreign Office to receive a protest over the deaths that occurred on Monday in the Nakial and Jandrot sectors.

"Director General (South Asia and Saarc) Dr Muhammad Faisal urged the Indian side to respect the 2003 Ceasefire Understanding; investigate the continued incidents of ceasefire violations; instruct the Indian forces to respect the ceasefire in letter and spirit, stop targeting the villages and civilians and maintain peace on the LoC," an FO statement said.

The FO has protested five times during the past five weeks over targeting of civilian populations, but all the protests have been ignored.

Another three civilians were killed on Tuesday due to Indian shelling as the Indian deputy high commissioner received the demarche over deaths occurring the day before.

"Two ladies identified as Kalsoom and Amna (mother and daughter) died due to Indian fire in Mandole village in Battal sector, while another civilian was killed in Khoiratta sector," the ISPR said.

Unprovoked firing from across the LoC targeted civilian populations living in the Sabzkot, Khoiratta, Nekrun and Sharda, Tander, Battal and Baroh sectors, it added.

"Heavy exchange of fire is continuing in the Battal Sector," an ISPR official said.

A protest was also lodged with the UN Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) over the continued attacks on civilians living in villages along the LoC.

The UNMOGIP observers visited LoC last week to collect information about the ceasefire violations by Indian forces.

Tariq Naqash adds from Muzaffarabad: The senior superintendent of Poonch police, Mir Abid, told Dawn by telephone that in the Battal Sector the shelling began at about 1.35pm, with Indian troops using both small and heavy weapons and targeting “as usual” the civilian populations of the area.

The shelling had largely stopped by the evening, but sporadic firing with small arms was continuing, he said.

A mortar hit the house of one Zakir Hussain Shah in Mandole village shortly after the shelling began, killing his 45-year-old wife Kalsoom Fatima and six-year-old daughter Amna on the spot.

Mr Shah’s 30-year-old brother, Nazakat, was critically injured.

Mohammad Ashfaq, 26, was killed in Thair village near Mehndri Bridge, the SSP said.

Rafique Awan and Rabia Bibi were injured in Mandole and Battal villages, respectively, he added.

There were unconfirmed reports that two more persons had been injured.

The Battal, Madarpur and Dara Sher Khan sectors had faced heavy shelling on Sunday, in which six persons, including two women, were injured and at least 25 houses and three vehicles were completely or partially damaged.

On Tuesday, the Nakial sector of Kotli district remained calm, but the adjacent Khoiratta sector of the same district witnessed heavy shelling since 8am.

An official in the Khoiratta police station said that though the shelling was intense it did not kill or injure anyone directly.

However, a man in his late twenties, identified as Ghazi Naeem, died of cardiac arrest after a shell landed yards away from where he was hiding, in his Tain village of Khoiratta sector, he said.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1295224/three-more-die-in-indian-shelling-from-across-loc>

COAS REAFFIRMS ARMY’S COMMITMENT TO PEACE, SECURITY IN SWAT

Dawn November 12th, 2016

Fazal Khaliq

MINGORA: The people, security forces and police of Swat have rendered great sacrifices in fight against militancy and for restoration of peace, said Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif, adding that the establishment of a cantonment in the scenic valley would play a vital role in ensuring a durable peace.

The COAS said this while addressing elders of the area during the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Swat cantonment at Kanju, Kabal tehsil, on Friday. The army chief also inaugurated the newly-constructed emergency unit at Saidu Teaching Hospital and Army Public School in Swat.

UAE Ambassador Essa Abdulla Albasha al Noaimi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Chief Minister Pervez Khattak, KP Governor Iqbal Zafar Jhagra, Peshawar Corps Commander Lt Gen Hidayatur Rehman, UAE Pakistan Assistance Programme (UPAP) Director Abdullah Al Ghefeli, high-ranking military officers, elected representatives and elders of the area were also present on the occasion.

According to an Inter Services Public Relations statement, Gen Raheel Sharif visited Mingora, Kanju and Khwazakhela. The cantonment was approved on September 8, 2015, on popular demand by the people of Swat in view of the much-needed long-term security for the region, the statement added.

Speaking on the occasion, the COAS expressed his gratitude to the people of Swat for their valiant stand against the reign of terror and standing alongside security forces to throw militants out of the valley.

Congratulating the people of Swat on this historic day, Gen Raheel reaffirmed the army's commitment to continuing playing a solid role in bringing about an enduring peace and security to the region.

"Establishment of the cantonment in Swat will act as a deterrent for terrorists, boost confidence of all law enforcement agencies and help bring a permanent sense of security with readily available force to counter any threat to peace in the area," he said, adding the cantonment would also contribute to socio-economic development of the area.

The COAS said that development of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) and Malakand was a priority task being executed as a well-considered strategy.

"The Pakistan Army has undertaken over 700 mega and minor projects so far in the social sector in areas where operations were carried out," he said.

"These projects are aimed to improve the quality of life of locals and address the problem of militancy on a long-term basis. The whole world acknowledges the Pakistan Army for uniquely completing an entire cycle of fighting terrorism from operations to reconstruction and resettling the displaced persons back in the area," he added.

He said the Army Public School, Combined Military Hospital (CMH) and other developmental projects would be initiated with the cantonment for public services and benefits.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1295898>

NAKYAL & BATTAL SECTORS: HUNDREDS OF HOUSES, SCHOOLS HIT BY INDIAN SHELLING
The Express Tribune, November 12th, 2016.

Muzaffarabad: The unprovoked Indian shelling in civilian-populated areas along the Line of Control (LoC) has damaged hundreds of houses and schools in the Nakyal and Battal sectors.

In the Nakyal sector, Indian army has been shelling residential areas for the past three weeks. In addition to small arms, Indian troops are using 120mm mortar shells to hit structures, including schools and guest houses.

"Indian forces are deliberately targeting residential areas. Heavy mortar shelling has damaged a large number of houses, shops, besides wreaking havoc on trees and crops," said Shakeel Ahmad, who is now forced to live in a makeshift camp set up at the Govt Primary School Khandar Kotayra in Nakyal.

Residents in the affected areas contended that Indian troops opened fire whenever they detected movement in fields.

People in Khimb, Morah, Lanjot and Bahidara areas are living in makeshift camps set up in Kotayra where the government of Azad Kashmir and Pakistan Army are providing them free meals, shelter and medical aid.

"More than 60 families (were forced to) flee from various villages to Nakyal where they have been temporarily accommodated. They are being served food twice a day and spend nights in homes of people in Nakyal," said Assistant Commissioner Nakyal Sardar Zeeshan Nisar.

Schools and colleges are closed because of the indiscriminate shelling of Indian forces in the Nakyal sector

Wondering what Indian forces gained by targeting schools and other civilian targets in the area, Saima, a tenth grader, said: “We urge the world community, especially members of the United Nations Military Observers Group for India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to visit the LoC and see how Indian military is targeting civilians in the Nakyal sector.”

Saima and her family are currently lodged at a camp in Kotayra.

Firing by Indian troops forced the local administration to shut down at least 24 girls and 34 boys’ schools in the Nakyal sector.

“Living under recurrent gunfire is traumatic. Our education suffers a lot. Indian shelling may destroy our schools but it will not defeat us ... I request Malala Yousafzai to press India to stop shelling schools and civilian areas along the LoC. Indian guns is interfering with our educations,” said an undergraduate student, Sahiba. She and her family members are now forced to live in a makeshift camp in Kotayra.

Over the past couple of days, Indian troops have killed more than nine civilians and injured dozens more in various sectors along the LoC.

The Foreign Secretary briefed the heads of missions of the permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russian Federation, the UK and US) Friday morning about the continuing unprovoked firing and ceasefire violations by the Indian troops on the LoC and the Working Boundary areas over the past two months.

Expressing grave concern over the increased frequency of indiscriminate firing and shelling from the Indian side, he said that Indian troops were deliberately targeting civilian populated areas, killing at least 26 and injuring 107 in complete disregard of the 2003 Ceasefire Understanding and of international law.

Condemning the use of artillery in Shalkot and Jura sectors on November 9, the Foreign Secretary stated that heavy weaponry was being used by Indian troops after 13 years, compelling Pakistan to respond with maximum restraint.

Terming Indian actions a threat to peace and regional security, he said: “The Armed Forces of Pakistan gave a befitting response.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1228547/nakyal-battal-sectors-hundreds-houses-schools-hit-indian-shelling/>

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December 2016

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 26 TH TO JANUARY 1ST 2016

SEVERE COLD HAMPERING IDPS’ RETURN TO TRIBAL AREAS

Dawn December 26th, 2016

PESHAWAR: The government is set to miss the deadline to take the internally displaced persons (IDPs) back to their homes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas by the end of December due to severe cold weather in some parts of the conflict-affected region.

In addition, the fate of thousands of families who took refuge in Afghanistan still hangs in the balance and the government has yet to announce mechanism for their repatriation. Over 100,000 people had taken refuge in Afghanistan when the Pakistan Army launched the operation ‘Zarb-i-Azb’ in North Waziristan Agency in June 2014.

The offensive against local and foreign militants had forced over one million civilians to flee their homes and take shelter in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other areas of the country.

Fata Disaster Management Authority director general Mohammad Khalid said that some of the IDPs might not go back to their homes till March 2017 because of the tough weather conditions in their native lands.

“Return of IDPs is likely to be delayed to some areas like Shawal and Datakhel in the South and North Waziristan agencies, respectively, till March due to harsh weather conditions,” he told Dawn.

He said that 85 per cent of the IDPs had been repatriated and the return to various tribal agencies was still in progress. He said that repatriation of displaced population to Orakzai and Kurram would be completed next month.

The government had earlier announced to complete repatriation of IDPs to Fata by the end of December 2016. FDMA said that caseload of the IDPs from five tribal agencies of Fata was 336,042 families of which 274,044 had been sent back to their homes so far.

Statistics show that 30,626 displaced families are waiting for return to North Waziristan, 22,245 families to South Waziristan, 2,517 families to Khyber Agency, 2,894 families to Orakzai Agency and 3,716 families to Kurram Agency.

The returnees are provided tents, food ration for six months and kit of non-food items in addition to Rs25,000 cash grant and Rs10,000 transportation cost. The government has also announced to pay Rs400,000 cash for fully damaged and Rs160,000 for partially damaged house.

The compensation process has been very slow due to delay in releases from the centre and the damage assessment survey. Military campaign and weather severity had rendered the houses unfit for living.

Concerned officials said that the tribal people who had taken refuge in Afghanistan were a source of concern for the government. After launch of the military operation in North Waziristan the people living in areas adjacent to the Afghan border had fled to Afghanistan.

Unofficial sources said that around 200,000 tribal people had been provided refuge in Afghanistan. They said that the government had yet to work out a plan for the return of refugees from Afghanistan.

The local administration had sent registration forms to the tribal people in Afghanistan a few months ago and asked them to fill these forms before their return to North Waziristan. One source said that the government was likely to make decision about refugees in Afghanistan next week.

Mr Khalid said that roughly 5,000 to 10,000 families had migrated to Afghanistan. He said that people who migrated to Afghanistan would be treated like other IDPs.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1304534>

PROCESS FOR NSG MEMBERSHIP POLITICISED: PAKISTAN

Dawn December 31st, 2016

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is open to separating its civilian and military nuclear facilities and signing the additional protocol to International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) safeguards agreement, but worries that the process for membership of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) has become too politicised.

“We have told the international community that if this is an objective criteria, we can do it because we don't have any intent to mix civilian and military fuel cycle service. Those cycles are already separate,” Director Strategic Plans

Division (SPD) Dr Adil Sultan said while speaking at a round table conference at the Strategic Vision Institute (SVI) on the criteria proposed by Ambassador Rafael Grossi, the facilitator of the discussion in NSG on membership for non-NPT countries.

“We can also agree to additional protocol if it is only about civilian programme,” he added.

Separation of civilian and military nuclear facilities and signing of the additional protocol are two main issues among the four points that are considered to be designed to block Pakistan’s candidature. Mr Grossi’s proposed criteria have a total of nine conditions.

Mr Sultan explained that technically Pakistan’s civilian and military programmes were already separate and only procedural process was required to notify that to the IAEA.

The SPD official believes that the intent behind the proposed criteria is “not to have a separation plan, but to throw up a road block against Pakistan’s candidature. ... it’s politically motivated”.

Recalling the Pakistani proposal to India for a bilateral ban on nuclear testing made earlier this year, Dr Sultan said “whatever Pakistan does or offer gets little resonance”.

He suggested that Pakistan should further strengthen its credentials by doing things that do not affect its national security so that when eventually a formula is agreed, Pakistan does not get knocked out.

Dr Sultan, however, cautioned against perpetually complaining against discrimination. “That’s not how the system works, we would have to do out-of-box thinking to ensure that we are not left out when the formula is developed and applied to the non-NPT states aspiring for NSG membership”.

SVI President Dr Zafar Iqbal Cheema, speaking on the occasion, said the criteria proposed by Mr Grossi suited India, but at the same time it tries to give a false sense of security to Pakistan that in case of India’s entry Delhi would not veto a Pakistani application in future.

SVI recommended to the government to consider separating the civilian and nuclear facilities and signing and ratifying the additional protocol to the safeguards agreement so that Pakistan could bolster its credentials for NSG membership.

Agni Test: The SVI expressed concern over testing of nuclear capable intercontinental ballistic missile Agni-V by India.

Dr Cheema said Agni-V symbolised India’s quest for great power status. “Pakistan should not ignore its future employment,” he said.

Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal said Agni-V had intensified Pakistan’s security dilemma and would spur arms race in the region. The test, he said, further signified that India was ready to assert itself in the Pacific region.

He wondered about world’s muted reaction to the Indian test.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1305484>

THREE INJURED IN INDIAN SHELLING

Dawn December 31st, 2016

Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: After a lull of nearly two weeks, guns roared across the Line of Control (LoC) on Friday, leaving three civilians wounded in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

A police official, Mohammad Ilyas, told Dawn from Abbaspur in the Poonch district that Indian troops resorted to shelling from across the LoC, injuring three people in Taroti village. He identified the injured as Mohammad Mushtaq, Shahbaz Mushtaq and Zeeshan Amin. However, the condition of the injured was said to be stable, he said.

In a tweet, the newly-appointed Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) chief Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor said that Indian troops resorted to “unprovoked mortar shelling” in Chirikot Sector from 4.40pm to 5.40pm. Pakistani troops “effectively responded” to the shelling, he said.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1305481>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 19 TH TO DECEMBER 25TH 2016

US APPROVES SALE OF NIGHT VISION EQUIPMENT TO PAKISTAN

Dawn December 24th, 2016

Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Defence has awarded a \$284.6 million contract to Lockheed Martin to produce infrared target sight systems for the US Navy and Pakistan, the Pentagon announced on Friday.

The system will be used for the AH-1Z Cobra attack helicopters, which have proved very effective in combats against militants, particularly in difficult terrains. In the US, the AH-1Z Cobra attack helicopter is used by US Marine Corps expeditionary forces.

The TSS incorporates a third-generation forward-looking infrared sensor that provides target sighting in day, night, or adverse weather conditions.

A Pentagon press release describes the TSS system as a large-aperture mid-wave forward-looking infrared sensor with a laser designator/rangefinder turret. It provides the capability to identify and laser-designate targets at maximum weapon range, significantly enhancing platform survivability and lethality.

The company’s Orlando-based missile and fire control unit will produce the sight system in Orlando and Ocala, Florida, through January 2022 for the US Navy and Pakistan under the foreign military sales portion of the award, the Pentagon said.

The contract has a base value of \$150.96m but its accumulative cost would go up to \$284.6m. The government of Pakistan will pay about 12 per cent of the total cost through an arrangement with the United States under the Foreign Military Sales programme.

In January, Lockheed Martin received a smaller contract of \$14m to provide the same target system for Pakistan.

The contracts include software development and testing, system modification, and installation requirements to integrate the TSS into the Cobra helicopters. The TSS provides target information and tracking data for the helicopter, in addition to passive targeting for integrated weapons.

Work on the first contract, performed in Florida, would be completed by December 2017.

Although the United States and Pakistan were once close allies, relations between the two countries strained in 2011, when the United States discovered and eliminated Osama bin Laden at his compound in Abbottabad.

Earlier this year, US lawmakers stalled a deal for providing eight F-16 aircraft to Pakistan after accusing Islamabad of continuing to support the Afghan Taliban.

The US State Department had approved the sale in February but in May it informed Pakistan that it could not provide financial support for buying the aircraft because of congressional restrictions. The lawmakers had stopped the administration from using the so-called Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for assisting Pakistan.

The State Department, however, advised Pakistan to use its national funds if it still wanted to buy the planes. This would have required Islamabad to pay \$700m instead of the original \$270m, increasing the cost two-and-a-half times.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1304179/us-approves-sale-of-night-vision-equipment-to-pakistan>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 12 TH TO DECEMBER 18TH 2016

NO GOING BACK ON KARACHI OPERATION, SAYS COAS

Dawn, December 15th, 2016

Imran Ayub

KARACHI: Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa assured the people of Karachi on Wednesday that the change of military command would not affect the Karachi operation as more “efforts will be made to consolidate the gains achieved so far” for peace in the metropolis.

It was Gen Bajwa’s first visit to Karachi after taking over the army command last month. He arrived in the morning and went straight to the mausoleum of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah to pay homage to the father of the nation.

He reached the headquarters of the V Corps and later visited the headquarters of Pakistan Rangers, Sindh, on Dr Ziauddin Ahmed Road. A detailed briefing was given to him on operational preparedness of the formation and security situation in Sindh focusing on peace efforts in Karachi.

Gen Bajwa was full of praise for the people of Karachi for extending full support to the armed forces.

According to a statement issued by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the COAS said: “Karachi is the economic hub of the country and security in the metropolitan has a direct bearing on overall business climate and economic activities of the entire country.”

The ISPR statement reflected the army chief’s resolve that the Karachi operation, which has been going on for more than three years, is not going to end any time soon as efforts for a “sustainable peace” will continue despite the change in the top military command.

The army chief emphasised that all-out efforts would be made to consolidate gains made so far during the operation and indiscriminately eliminate remnants of terrorists with their sleeper cells, the statement said, adding that he particularly lauded the support and sacrifices of the people of Karachi in the journey towards peace.

Gen Bajwa said that the “gains of the operation will not be allowed to be reversed and it will continue till attainment of sustainable peace”, it added.

The new army chief’s remarks will help address the concerns of the people of Karachi who have been concerned over the fate of the Rangers-led targeted operation, which was launched in September 2013. The operation was instrumental in restoring peace and improving the city’s security situation after years of bloodshed on sectarian, ethnic and political grounds.

Gen Bajwa not only praised the army and Rangers, but he also lauded the role of other law enforcement and intelligence agencies for bringing about considerable improvement in law and order and issued directives for a focussed and synergised effort of all military and civilian intelligence agencies for optimum effects to pre-empt potential threats to the peace of Karachi.

“The army chief said that the Pakistan Army would render all necessary assistance to the provincial government for capacity-building and training of law enforcement agencies for long-term effectiveness against organised crime and enduring peace for the city,” added the statement.

Outgoing Karachi Corps Commander Lt Gen Naveed Mukhtar, who has been designated as the new director general of the Inter-Services Intelligence, and new Corps Commander Lt Gen Shahid Baig Mirza were also present.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1302425/no-going-back-on-karachi-operation-says-coas>

INDIAN SHELLING LEAVES MAN DEAD, EIGHT STUDENTS HURT

Dawn, December 17th, 2016

Tariq Naqash

The latest incident of ceasefire violation took place in Nakyal sector of Kotli district after a gap of almost three weeks. The previous such incident, which caused 10 deaths, occurred on Nov 23 in the upper belt of the Neelum valley, when a bus was targeted with small arms and mortars.

According to Nakyal Assistant Commissioner Sardar Zeeshan Nisar, Indian troops started shelling in the area in the morning “without any provocation” and the shelling continued till noon at intervals.

As Pakistani troops responded to the shelling, the Indians “as usual” fired shells on civilian populations, he added.

Mr Nisar said that one of the shells exploded near a school bus in Mohra village, killing 25-year driver Mohammad Asad on the spot and injuring eight students, aged between 5 and 15 years.

They were identified as Talia Rubi, 13, Farrukh Zulqarnain, 11, Ehsan Arshad, 15, Rukhsana Yousuf, 15, and her sister Shabnam Yousuf, 10, Sadaf Riaz, 8, Samiur Rehman, 5, and Mehrab Babu, 15.

Seven of them were admitted to the Nakyal tehsil headquarters hospital and were said to be out of danger.

The Pakistan army’s media affairs wing, ISPR, confirmed the incident, saying, “Indian troops violated the sanctity of ceasefire and targeted a school van” in Nakyal sector.

“Pakistani troops effectively responded and targeted Indian posts from where fire was coming,” the ISPR said.

In a statement, AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider condemned the Nakyal incident and said Indian troops were hell-bent upon multiplying tensions in the region.

“Unrelenting shelling by the trigger-happy Indian troops on unarmed civilians along the LoC should not go unnoticed,” he said, calling upon the United Nations to take immediate stock of “war crimes” by Indian troops in Kashmir before “it’s too late”.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1302849/indian-shelling-leaves-man-dead-eight-students-hurt>

NEWS COVERAGE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 5 TH TO DECEMBER 11TH 2016

FORESTS ALONG LOC FACE DESTRUCTION FROM INDIAN SHELLING

Dawn, December 7th, 2016

Jamal Shahid

ISLAMABAD: Unprovoked Indian shelling has caused widespread destructions to the already degenerating woodlands along the Line of Control (LoC), the forest department told a parliamentary committee here Tuesday.

“Indian shelling has triggered both ground and canopy forest fires that have been difficult to put out. Difficult terrains and landmines make access and firefighting efforts almost impossible for conservators,” AJK Forest Secretary Syed Zahoorul Hassan Gilani told the National Assembly Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan. The committee met for a briefing on the continuous unprovoked firing by the Indian army at Neelum Valley and the losses of lives and destruction to the jungle and natural habitat.

Officials from the AJK forest department informed the committee that over 5,000 acres of forestland had been impacted by the Indian shelling along the border which started earlier in September. Already stressed for water because of the ongoing drought conditions, forest fires, caused by the shelling, have also dried up the watertable. The officials added that AJK was home to six of the nine types of forests found in Pakista

The meeting was informed that the forest department was struggling to conserve the natural habitat. The existing staff was protecting woodlands, which were three times as vast as that in Murree. They said the forest department was short of funding too and had to make do in a limited budget of Rs762 million against a demand for Rs2 billion.

According to another official, reforestation efforts started 20 years late in AJK where the indigenous population had caused significant harm to the woodlands by cutting down trees for fuel.

The meeting was informed that socio-economic conditions of the people were still poor and they depended heavily on forest resources despite the availability of petrol and kerosene to burn kitchen fires and for heating in winters.

The members were surprised to learn that at the current rate of reforestation efforts – 5,000 acres a year – it would take the department 180 years to repopulate 0.9 million acres of total empty area with trees.

“We can increase the rate of planting trees to 30,000 acres per year and lessen the time from 180 years to 30 years. But for that we need massive investments,” said the official, recommending an increase in the annual development plan from Rs345 million to Rs1.5 billion per year for the forest conservation efforts.

The officials also sought special allocations for the development of areas along the LoC.

The meeting was also briefed on the losses of lives and properties in the recent exchanges of cross-border firing.

Additional Secretary AJK Farhat Ali Mir told the meeting that 29 men and 10 women had been killed since the cross-border shelling started in Neelum, Chamb Jolian and Nathyal in September.

“As many as 128 men and women have been injured besides damages to the property where four houses have been completely destroyed and another 77 partially damaged,” he said.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1300962>

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