

South Asia Centre
Minutes of the Meeting
February 25, 2014

Members Present

Dr. Ashok K. Behuria, Ms. Sumita Kumar, Mr. Vishal Chandra, Dr. Nihar Nayak, Dr. Anand Kumar, Dr. Priyanka Singh, Dr. Yaqoob ul Hassan, Mr. Shreyas Deshmukh, Ms. Gulbin Sultana and Mr. Vivek Kaushik

Topic of Discussion

- Dr. Nihar Nayak Presented the concept note of his forthcoming fellow paper on “Rebooting Democracy: An Analysis of Nepal’s Second Constituent Assembly Election.”

Afghanistan

- Twenty Afghan soldiers were killed and four others were missing in a Taliban ambush on an army outpost located on a mountain in Ghazi Abad district of eastern Kunar province on February 23. One soldier was seriously injured in the attack. Nearly 100 Taliban insurgents attacked the army outpost at 03:30am local time. Eight Taliban insurgents were also killed after Afghan forces launched a military operation to clear the area.
- Initially the officials had announced that eight soldiers were missing, but later four returned to the outpost. Reportedly, these soldiers escaped from the outpost when the Taliban insurgents launched the attack. Therefore, involvement of insiders in this attack was suspected. Ghazi Abad district shares a border with Pakistan and has been the site of insurgent activity targeting Afghan forces' outposts. Therefore, involvement of the Pakistani Taliban has also been suspected.
- According to the discussions in the cluster the attack had the signature of old-style Taliban in it and it was designed well to hit the ANA’s morale and confidence. A series of attack like this, , would have an adverse effect on the psyche of the ANA forces. The ANA did not seem to have any advanced information about the attack. There was element of surprise in it.
- The video shown in the centre from *Tolonews.com* about the effect the attack had on the soldiers was quite telling. In one of the shots, as the coffins were being carried in front of the soldiers lined up for the occasion, to pay homage to the lost souls, it was observed that the subaltern forces did not have any semblance of discipline and order, expected from men in uniform, and appeared quite intimidated as they were nervously looking at each other, as if apprehending another surprise attack by Taliban. It demonstrated the state of ANA to some extent— as to how poorly trained they were even at the very basic levels.

Bangladesh

- Bangladesh National Party (BNP) performed better than the Awami League (AL) in the first phase of local body polls since the parliamentary elections. According to unofficial results, the BNP candidates won in the 43 while the ruling Awami League won in 34 sub-districts out of 97 seats in the polls for upazilla councils.
- Khaleda Zia criticised her own students' wing leaders for not making enough noise against the Government. Khaleda wanted more vigorous anti- government movement to be launched by the student wing of her party.
- According to an agreement signed between India and Bangladesh, Bangladeshi businessmen will be given a five-year, multiple-entry visa. Those travelling on medical grounds will get a two-year, multiple-entry visa, which can be extended for one more year. Three attendants of a patient will also be entitled to visa. Until now, India has been granting Bangladeshi tourists visas for up to six months and has allowed one person to accompany a patient.
- Bangladesh raised its objection on the Bollywood movie "Gunday" for portraying Liberation movement as war between India and Pakistan.
- Malaysia initiated crackdown on illegal migrant workers including Bangladeshi workers.
- Three detained Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) workers were freed by JMB cadres from a prison van in Trishal of Mymensingh on the Dhaka-Tangail Highway on February 23. Later police was able to re-arrest them. JMB seemed to be reactivating itself after a long while.

Nepal

- CPN-UML finally agreed to join government after the Nepali Congress (NC) agreed to allocate 10 ministries to UML, and Prime Minister's Koirala's assurance that the Home Ministry would go to the UML.
- Nepal received foreign direct investment (FDI) worth Rs 113.18 billion from 78 countries till date. India, China, South Korea and the US are among the the top FDI contributors. The energy sector has emerged as the largest recipient of FDI. In the first seven months, the energy sector has received FDI commitments worth Rs 10.94 billion.
- Subas Chandra Nembang of UML was appointed as the Constituent Assembly Chairman

Pakistan

- Former interim chief of the Pakistani Taliban Asmatullah Shaheen Bhattani was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in North Waziristan. The discussions in the cluster indicated that Bhattani could have been taken out by the ISI, despite the rumours that

he had links with it. It was because, according to some reports, he had claimed publicly about his role in the killing of the FC soldiers by TTP forces in Mohmand. It was held that Bhattani was not quite happy with Fazlullah's elevation and would not have liked Fazlullah's reconciliation with Pakistani forces at any cost. Therefore, he quietly pushed for execution of FC-men by Mohmand TTP forces. However, this hypothesis needed further scrutiny.

- Peace talks between the Pakistani government and Taliban insurgents which began on February 6 got derailed after insurgents said they executed 23 men from Frontier Corps reportedly avenging the killing of Taliban fighters captured by the armed forces.
- Nawaz Sharif is trying to centralise power as far as foreign affairs is concerned. He has not appointed Foreign minister yet. It appears that he is a bit unsure about having somebody as full-time FM because in the past, most of the foreign ministers were influenced by the military in their policy decisions. To keep the military out of the policy decision making as far as foreign affairs is concerned, Mr Sharif has kept the ministry under his control. However, he let go the defence ministry by appointing Khwaja Asif to the post because of the compulsion that the defence minister was called upon to appear in the court in the case of forced disappearance.

POK

- Pakistan and China signed an agreement of “early harvest projects” in the economic corridor under which Beijing will provide more than \$20 billion for projects to generate over 20,000MW of electricity and other crucial infrastructure projects. Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reform, signed the agreement with his Chinese counterpart, Vice Chairman NDRC, Zhang Xiaoqiang, in the presence of presidents of China and Pakistan in Beijing. The projects will include the Karakoram Highway up to Islamabad, Karachi-Lahore Motorway, new Gwadar Airport and economic zones.
- China said the economic corridor that it had been planning to construct to link its western Xinjiang region to Pakistan, through the disputed region of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK), was not directed at “a third party” and would not pose any “detriment” to India's concerns on the Kashmir issue.
- According to the Pakistani vernacular media Pakistan wants to use Gilgit Baltistan as a zone of opportunity.
- Cross Line –of-Control (LoC) trade in Kashmir failed to resume as no goods trucks arrived at the crossing point from PoK, but it re-opened in the Jammu region with nine vehicles crossing over from both sides.

Sri Lanka

- According to the Global Tamil Forum (GTF)'s predictions 23 countries will vote against Sri Lanka in the UNHRC. Those countries are: Czech Republic, Estonia, Montenegro, Romania, Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, United Kingdom of

Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Republic of Korea, India, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Mexico and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The GTF also claims that based on the historical background and recent development, there are 13 countries that would vote against the US resolution. They are: the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, Kuwait, Maldives, Pakistan, Philippines, Indonesia, China, Congo, Cuba and Venezuela. According to GTF, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Gabon, South Africa and Namibia would abstain from voting, while Morocco and Algeria are unpredictable.

- A Sri Lankan government delegation led by Nimal Siripala Desilva, Minister of irrigation and water resource management went to South Africa to understand how the Truth and Reconciliation mechanism of South Africa can help Sri Lanka. Douglas Devananda was also a member of the delegation. He said the problems faced by the two countries were different and could not be compared. At the request of Sri Lanka, President Zuma recently appointed the Deputy President of the African National Congress Cyril Ramaphosa as South Africa's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka to assist the reconciliation process in the island nation.
- The Northern Provincial Council passed a resolution on 18 Feb, calling for the commencement of direct flights from Palaly and Trincomalee to India. The resolution also called for the Kankesanthurai Port to be named as a commercial port. It also called for a recommencement of the ferry service between Thalaimannar and Rameshwaram.
- President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai who was expected to arrive in Sri Lanka on February 23 for three days visit has postponed his scheduled visit due to the recent attack on Afghan troops in Kunar Province.
- India's censure board has refused to release the No Fire Zone for public.
- The Australian Naval Ship HMAS "Melbourne" arrived at the port of Colombo on a goodwill visit.
- Commission to probe Disappearance has said that they also received complain against the IPKF. But they said their mandate to conduct enquiry if from the period 1990-2009.
- A no-confidence motion against the Government regarding drug menace in the country was handed over to the Parliament Secretary by Chief Opposition Whip John Amaratunga on February 21, 2014.
- Advocates of asylum seekers in Australia have condemned the decision to appoint ex Sri Lankan military officer as the acting operation manager in the Manus detention centre.
- Major General Ulf Henricsson, who was heading the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in 2006, said that it was a big mistake for the EU to ban the LTTE under

pressure from the USA and the Sri Lankan government because it stopped the possibility to get a peaceful solution and negotiation.

Prepared by Ms Gulbin Sultana