

South Asia Centre
Minutes of the Meeting
January 7, 2014

Dr. Smruti S. Pattanaik chaired the meeting.

Members Present

Dr. Smruti Pattanaik, Dr. Sumita Kumar, Mr. Vishal Chandra, Mr. Pushpa Adhikari, Dr. Nihar Nayak, Dr. Priyanka Singh, Dr. Yaqoob ul Hassan, Ms. Gulbin Sultana, Mr. Shreyas Deshmukh and Mr. Abhimanyu Singh.

Mr. Qais Mowafaq, an Afghan journalist also attended the meeting and briefed the current developments in Afghanistan.

Topic of Discussion

Sri Lanka

- President Mahinda Rajapaksa made a state visit to Jordan, Palestine and Israel. During his two day official visit to Palestine two agreements were signed between the foreign ministers of Palestine and Sri Lanka: one of which was to form a joint commission between the two countries and the other to establish a vocational training center for Palestinian youth in Ramallah. The Government of Palestine conferred President Rajapaksa with the “Star of Palestine” - the highest award of the State of Palestine. President Rajapaksa, on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka, conferred the “Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana” awards on former Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and current President Mahmoud Abbas.
- The United States Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues, in the Office of Global Criminal Justice at the Department of States Stephen J. Rapp was on a six-day visit to Sri Lanka. This was Ambassador Rapp's second trip to Sri Lanka as Ambassador-at-Large. He visited Sri Lanka in February 2012 just before the U.S. successfully tabled a resolution on Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2012. The U.S. officials' visit this time again two months ahead of the UN Human Rights Council Sessions due to commence on March 3 in Geneva would be viewed as crucial. Reportedly, Ambassador Rapp's visit would be followed by U. S. Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, Nisha Desai Biswal.
- The Presidential Commission in Sri Lanka to probe disappearances will commence sittings from January 18. The inaugural sitting of the Commission is scheduled to be held in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi from January 18 to 20. The Commission had reportedly received 11,500 complaints on disappearances and 7,500 of them are from the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The commission will work closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) during the process of investigations.
- The UNP has been planning to discuss with all the opposition parties including the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Democratic Party, Tamil National Alliance

(TNA), Frontline Socialist Party, left parties and other minor groups to unite all the opposition against Mahinda Rajapaksa in the coming parliamentary and presidential election.

Nepal

- Formation of second Constituent Assembly (CA) got delayed because parties had failed to submit the Proportional Representation (PR) lists of candidates. In the mean time another new problem has emerged in Nepali politics. The UCPN-Maoist, CPN-UML and RPP-Nepal are demanding fresh elections for President. According to the Interim Constitution, the president shall remain in the post until the promulgation of the new constitution. Since the constitution was not promulgated in the first CA, parties are raising the question of fresh mandate to the President. However, Nepali Congress (NC) and Madhesh based parties have opposed any move to hold fresh elections for the president. The controversy over who can summon the first session of the newly elected Constituent Assembly was also raging.
- UCPN Maoist is planning to restructure the party. Baburam faction within the party wants Prachanda to resign and demanding for leadership on rotation basis. However, there is nothing new about it. As far as UCPN Maoist is concerned, it is a known fact that Prachanda wants to keep the party under his control and Baburam challenges Prachanda's leadership, whereas Narayan Shreshtha Kazi keeps shifting his side from Prachanda to Baburam.
- Split in NC and the RPP has been speculated. Within the NC Sushil Koirala may face challenge from Deuba and Ram Chandra Paudel.
- Commenting on the second CA election in Nepal, Centre members have argued that the Nepali leaders have made a mistake by going for second Constituent Assembly election. Even India also made a mistake by allowing the CA election to happen. The election results show that political instability is likely to continue and the second CA would not be able to resolve the pending issues of federalism and system of governance. Continuous instability in Nepal will affect India big way. As far as Nepal is concerned, PMO dominates the decision making process and unfortunately, the PMO was misguided by some influential Nepali political leaders on the functioning of the first CA. It was observed that during Nehru era India could manage Nepal very well, but the situation has completely changed now. It was also pointed out that India invested too much on first generation of leadership as a result it does not have much influence over the new generation.
- According to a Supreme Court judgement negative voting will be introduced in the next local body election in Nepal. Centre members however feel that though the idea of negative voting is good one, timing of introducing the concept is not appropriate.

POK

- Federal minister for Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan affairs, Chaudhry Barjees Tahir said that proposed Pak-China economic corridor would bring prosperity in the region.

Bhutan

- King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck made a five-day official visit to India starting from January 6, 2014. This was the King's second visit to the country in the last 12 months.
- Freedom of Press in Bhutan was reduced during 2010-2013.

Bangladesh

- Bangladesh General Election was held on January 5, 2014 amidst bandhs and violent incidences. Bangladesh National Party (BNP) boycotted the election and called for 48 hours bandhs. On the day of election 21 people were killed and around 100 booths were put on fire. Voting did not take place in 41 booths as voters did not come to cast their votes. Awami League (AL) led by Sheikh Hasina secured 232 out of 300 Parliamentary seats. The Jatiya party (JP) of former military dictator Hussain Muhammad Ershad won 33 seats. Reportedly, Ershad had to take part in the election unwillingly as he was prevented from withdrawing his nomination paper on the last day.
- As far as constitution is concerned, the 5th January election is legal and constitutional, even though the voter turnout was less than 40%. The provision of care taker government to conduct the election was repealed from the Constitution in 2011. Yet the legitimacy of this government is being questioned because 153 AL members were declared elected unopposed to a house having 300 elected members.
- According to the AL, the tenure of the last government gets over on January 24, 2014. To avoid any kind of stalemate and to give continuity to the government after January 24, AL decided to go ahead with the election. It has been speculated that after January 24, Sheikh Hasina government might consult the opposition to conduct a fresh election. However, as of now both the AL and the BNP are hell bent on their respective position on the issue of caretaker government.