

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Bangladesh

(December 8-14, 2014)

- **Indian President commits resolution of issues between India-Bangladesh to new Bangladesh High Commission to India; Prime Minister of Bhutan visits Bangladesh; Russian company Intersputnik to sell an orbital slot to Bangladesh; Bangladesh sends one lakh litres of drinking water to Male; Inflation falls in November.**

Indian President Pranab Mukherjee has said his country is fully committed to resolving not only the outstanding issues like the land boundary and Teesta river water sharing deals but also other issues to take the India-Bangladesh relations to a newer height. He made the assurance when newly appointed Bangladesh High Commission to India Syed Muazzem Ali presented his credentials to him at Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi on December 9.¹

Dhaka and Thimphu have sought Delhi's cooperation in easing movement of trucks through Indian territory to expand bilateral trade and economic relations between Bangladesh and Bhutan. In meetings with Bangladeshi ministers, Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, who made a three-day visit to Bangladesh, expressed eagerness to export electricity and bolder that will be used for the construction of the Padma Bridge. Commerce Minister of Bangladesh Tofail Ahmed, who met Tobgay, said Bhutanese trucks could now enter Bangladesh through India for export and import. He said Bhutan was going to generate 30,000MW electricity, and Bangladesh wanted to import some of it. After meeting Tobgay, Finance Minister AMA Muhith said Indian cooperation was must for importing electricity and bolder from Bhutan and stressed the need for a tripartite meeting among Bangladesh, India and Bhutan. President Abdul Hamid emphasised Bhutan's active participation in sub-regional cooperation in water resources management and power-hydropower sector when the Bhutanese Prime Minister called on him at Bangabhaban on December 7. Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad also called on Tobgay at Sonargaon Hotel on December 7 and sought Bhutan's cooperation in hydropower and communication sectors. The Bhutanese PM concluded his three-day visit on December 8.²

¹ "India Fully Committed To Teesta, Land Deals", *The Daily Star*, December 10, 2014 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/india-fully-committed-to-teesta-land-deals-54575>.

² "Thimphu for Dhaka's Passage Thru India", *The Daily Star*, December 8, 2014 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/thimphu-for-dhakas-passage-thru-india-54089>.

Russian company Intersputnik won a contract to sell an orbital slot to Bangladesh for its first satellite Bangabandhu. Bangladesh government will have to pay around US \$36 million for the slot. At present, Bangladesh's demand for a satellite is met by renting bandwidth from different satellite operators, which costs around \$14 million a year. The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council sanctioned Tk 2,967 crore for the satellite project.³

Bangladesh sent 1 lakh litres of drinking water and five desalination machines to the Maldives on December 7, two days after the lone desalination plant in the country's capital Male went out of order, leading to an extensive water crisis and subsequently to a state of emergency. With the supplies, Bangladesh Navy warship BNS Samudra Joy departed Chittagong on December 7.⁴

Inflation continued its fall in November, coming down to 6.21 percent — the lowest in 24 months. The inflation rate, which has been showing a downward trend for the last several months, was 6.60 percent in October. Food inflation was the biggest driver behind the drop in overall inflation in November, sliding to 6.44 percent from 7.16 percent in October, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data. The continuous decline in food prices on the international markets also helped food inflation come down.⁵

(December 15-21, 2014)

● President Abdul Hamid visits India; WB approves \$ 1.1 billion for Bangladesh

President Abdul Hamid made a six-day visit to India at the invitation of his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee. This was the first visit to India in nearly three decades by any incumbent Bangladesh President. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam will accompany the President during the tour.⁶ The two heads of state met at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on December 19. During the meeting, Mukherjee told Hamid that New Delhi attaches the highest importance to relations with Dhaka, saying a strong, stable and prosperous Bangladesh is in India's interest. Indian President Pranab Mukherjee handed over a "historic audio-visual gift" comprising recordings of transmissions made by All India Radio and Doordarshan during the 1971 Liberation War to his visiting Bangladeshi counterpart Abdul Hamid. After the meeting, Mukherjee hosted a dinner for Hamid which was attended by, among others, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Bangladesh's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam and Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Syed Moazzem Ali.⁷

³ "Russian Company Wins Contract For Satellite Slot", *The Daily Star*, December 8, 2014 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/russian-company-wins-contract-for-satellite-slot-54075>.

⁴ "Dhaka Responds To Maldives Water Crisis", *The Daily Star*, December 8, 2014 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/dhaka-responds-to-maldives-water-crisis-54102>.

⁵ "Inflation Hits Two-Year Low", *The Daily Star*, December 10, 2014 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/inflation-hits-two-year-low-54559>.

⁶ "Hamid Flies To Delhi Today", *The Daily Star*, December 18, 2014 at <http://thedailystar.net/hamid-flies-to-delhi-today-55893>.

⁷ "A Historic Gift from a Friend of Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, December 20, 2014 at <http://thedailystar.net/a-historic-gift-from-a-friend-of-bangladesh-56229>.

President Hamid met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi. Without giving any timeframe, Modi told Bangladesh President Md Abdul Hamid that his government is working on resolving the pending issues of LBA and Teesta and is hopeful about an early resolution. During their half-an-hour meeting, he also said India was willing to supply more electricity to Bangladesh apart from the 500MW being already given through a trans-border power grid.⁸

The World Bank has approved approximately \$1.1 billion for three projects to improve quality of primary education, build multipurpose shelters and promote child nutrition in Bangladesh. The projects will benefit about 3.6 crore people by improving the standard of primary education, building coastal communities' resilience to natural disasters, and increasing the nutrition and cognitive development of poor children, the Washington-based lender said in a statement on December 17, 2014.⁹

Sri Lanka

(December 8-14, 2014)

- **19 candidates submitted nominations for upcoming Presidential election in January 2015; Sri Lanka reiterates its full commitment to SAARC charter; Indian Naval Ship 'Sukanya' visits Port of Colombo; 27 Indian fishermen arrested by Sri Lankan Navy; A Japanese expert appointed as sixth foreign adviser to the Missing Persons Commission**

All 19 candidates, including President Mahinda Rajapaksa and common opposition candidate Maithripala Sirisena, handed over their nomination papers to the Elections Commissioner on December 8 to contest the Presidential elections next year. Among the candidates contesting the election in January are 17 candidates from recognised political parties and two independent groups. Two objections had been filed after the time allocated to accept nomination papers closed. Elections Commissioner Mahinda Deshapriya said that one objection was against President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the other against Maithripala Sirisena. However, he said after reviewing the objections, using the powers vested in him as the Elections Commissioner, he rejected the two objections.¹⁰

Sri Lanka says it is fully committed to the principles and objectives of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Charter and will continue to play a constructive role as in the past. In a message on the occasion of the SAARC Charter Day on December 9, Minister of External Affairs Prof. G.L. Peiris reiterated Sri Lanka's "fullest support to SAARC in its efforts of promoting and fostering regional cooperation in South Asia."¹¹

⁸ Bhattacharya, Pallab, "Modi Hopeful But Gives No Timeframe", *The Daily Star*, December 20, 2014 at <http://thedailystar.net/modi-hopeful-but-gives-no-timeframe-56200>.

⁹ "WB Okays \$1.1b Loan", *The Daily Star*, December 18, 2014 at <http://thedailystar.net/wb-okays-1-1b-loan-55873>.

¹⁰ "Candidates Submit Nominations", *Colombo Gazette*, December 8, 2014 at <http://colombogazette.com/2014/12/08/candidates-submit-nominations/>.

¹¹ "Sri Lanka Fully Committed to Principles and Objectives of SAARC Charter", *Colombo Page*, December 9, 2014 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Dec09_1418147527CH.php.

The Indian Naval Ship 'Sukanya' arrived at the Port of Colombo for logistic support on December 9, 2014. It was welcomed by the Sri Lanka Navy in accordance with naval traditions on arrival. The ship's Commanding Officer Commander MD Dorai Babu called on the Deputy Area Commander of the Western Naval Area Commodore KG Paul of the Sri Lanka Navy at the Western Naval Command Headquarters in Colombo. The ship stayed in Sri Lanka till December 12, 2014.¹²

Sri Lanka Navy arrested 27 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu on December 10 night for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary line and fishing in the country's waters. The fishermen were released on December 11 with a warning. Fishermen from Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Karaikal, Thanjavur and Pudukottai had decided to boycott fishing indefinitely from December 11 in protest against the incident.¹³

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa has appointed a Japanese expert and a former international judge Motoo Noguchi as the sixth foreign adviser to the Missing Persons Commission. Noguchi is a former International Judge of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Trust Fund for Victims of the International Criminal Court.¹⁴

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Thousands of people displaced due to flood; President condemns terrorist attack in Peshawar; President expressed concerns about hostage situation in Sydney; Japan deports 26 Sri Lankans; Sri Lankan Government orders with Bajaj Automobile Company for 125,000 motorcycles; Russian naval ships visit port of Colombo.**

Thousands of people were reported to have been displaced as of December 21 by floods which had affected most parts of the country on December 20 and 21. The North Central Province was the worst affected by the floods with over 10,715 people displaced, including 8500 people in Pollonaruwa. In Trincomalee, 3051 people have been displaced and they have been shifted to schools and Temples in the area while in Puttalam 1672 people have been displaced. Meanwhile in Matale, 296 people have been displaced by floods and in Mannar another 840 people have been displaced, the Disaster Management Centre said.¹⁵

President Mahinda Rajapaksa condemned the terrorist attack in Peshawar, Pakistan in which dozens of children were killed and many others were wounded. "Horried to learn of the Peshawar terrorist attack. Targeting of children is most cowardice. Our thoughts & prayers are with

¹² "Indian Naval Ship 'Sukanya' Arrives in Colombo", *Daily Mirror*, December 10, 2014 at <http://www.dailymirror.lk/58569/ukanya-arrives-in-colombo>.

¹³ "Sri Lanka Navy Detains 27 Indian Fishermen, Releases after Warning", *Colombo Page*, December 11, 2014 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Dec11_1418286783CH.php.

¹⁴ "Another International Expert Appointed to Sri Lanka Missing Persons Commission", *ColomboPage*, December 13, 2014 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Dec13_1418487290CH.php.

¹⁵ "Thousands Displaced By Floods", *Colombo Gazette*, December 21, 2014 at <http://colombogazette.com/2014/12/21/thousands-displaced-by-floods/>.

Pakistan," the President tweeted. Meanwhile, the External Affairs Ministry said that the Government of Sri Lanka vehemently condemns the terrorist attack today at a school in Peshawar killing over 125 persons including 84 innocent children and injuring more than 100 others.¹⁶

President Mahinda Rajapaksa, in a twitter message directed to Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, said he was deeply disturbed about the hostage situation in Sydney.¹⁷

Japan has deported 26 Sri Lankans including asylum seekers on December 18, after their applications for refugee status were rejected. The government of Japan has determined that they did not qualify for refugee status rejecting each individual's application twice. Lawyers and activists have denounced the government's move which also deported six Vietnamese nationals as "inhumane". The immigrants' lobby group Provisional Release Association in Japan (PRAJ) has said that it is believed to be the first time the government has deported asylum seekers and visa over stayers using the same flight.¹⁸

The Sri Lankan government has placed an order with India's Bajaj Automobile Company for 125,000 motorcycles. In a stock market disclosure at BSE on December 19, Bajaj Auto Ltd has informed that the Company through its distributor David Peiris Motor Company Ltd. in Sri Lanka had secured a second order from Sri Lanka to supply 125,000 Discover-125M motorcycles. The Company expects to execute the second order for 125,000 bikes in next 3-4 months.¹⁹

Sri Lanka Navy, in accordance with naval traditions, ceremonially welcomed two Russian naval ships arrived at the Port of Colombo on December 19. Two Russian Naval Ships belonging to the Black Sea Fleet, "Moskva" and "Cola", arrived at the port of Colombo on December 19th for replenishment and crews. The Mission Commander and the Moskava's Commanding officer accompanied by the Military Attaché of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Sri Lanka paid a courtesy call on the Commander Western Naval Area, Rear Admiral Dayananda Nanayakkara at the Command Headquarters in Colombo. The visiting Russian ships stayed in Sri Lanka till December 23rd and the crew members are scheduled to take part in a special programme arranged by the Sri Lanka Navy during their stay in Sri Lanka to enhance the friendly relations between the two navies.²⁰

¹⁶ "Mahinda Slams Peshawar Attack", *Colombo Gazette*, December 16, 2014 at <http://colombogazette.com/2014/12/16/mahinda-slams-peshawar-attack/>.

¹⁷ "MR Disturbed Over Sydney Situ", *Colombo Gazette*, December 15, 2014 at <http://colombogazette.com/2014/12/15/mr-disturbed-over-sydney-situ/>.

¹⁸ "Japan Deports 26 Sri Lankan Asylum Seekers", *Colombo Page*, December 19, 2014 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Dec19_1419002745CH.php.

¹⁹ "Sri Lankan Government Orders 125,000 Motorbikes from Bajaj", *Colombo Page*, December 19, 2014 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Dec19_1419012169CH.php.

²⁰ "Two Russian Naval Ships Arrive at Sri Lanka Port", *Colombo Page*, December 20, 2014 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Dec20_1419093297CH.php.

Maldives

(December 8-14, 2014)

- **Task force formed to deal with water crisis in Male, India sends drinking water to Male; China provides 600 tons of water to distribute in Male; President of China Machinery Engineering Corporation meets President Yameen; People's Majlis passed the Budget Bill.**

The Task Force created by President Abdullah Yameen has opened a special fund to raise finance to deal with the water crisis that has hit Malé, the capital of the Maldives, following a serious fire accident at the water treatment plants of Maldives Water and Sewerage Company (MWSC). Speaking to the press, Minister of Defence and National Security Muhammad Nazim, who heads the Task Force, said that the new fund, by the name Malé Water Crisis Management Fund, was open as of December 7. The government had earlier stated that US\$20 million was needed to completely repair the panel boards at the water treatment plant operated by the MWSC. Naazim said that assistance amounting to US\$1.5 million had been received hitherto.²¹

India has donated 475 tons of bottled drinking water by December 8. Indian High Commission spoke to *SunOnline* on December 7 saying that 1000 tons of water had been donated by an Indian navy vessel, in addition to the 475 tons of bottled drinking water. The High Commission said that 104 tons of water were airlifted to Malé on December 5, while 183.2 tons were brought on December 6 and 92.4 tons on December 7.²²

Chinese navy vessel Chun Shindao, which anchored at Malé on December 8, came with 600 tons of water to distribute in the city. According to the Commanding Officer of the ship, it would be in the city as long as the Maldivian government requires. China has also been supplying Malé with bottled drinking water. All commercial flights operated from China to the Maldives, and Chinese Air Force jets have also been continuously supplying water to the city.²³

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom met with the President of China Machinery Engineering Corporation, Mr. Zhang Chun on December 9. In the meeting which was held at the President's Office, discussions were focused on the investment opportunities available in the Maldives. In this regard, President Yameen shared with Mr. Zheng, potential areas of investment in the Maldives, in the fields of commerce, housing, tourism and power generation. President Yameen thanked CMEC and the Government of China for facilitating the 1,000 housing units project. President Yameen also expressed his gratitude for the Government of China, for promptly responding to his appeals for assistance during the Male' water crisis. In this regard, the President especially noted that the first shipment of water assistance that arrived from China sponsored by CMEC.²⁴

²¹ "Task Force Opens Malé Water Crisis Management Fund", *SunOnline*, December 8, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26432>.

²² "India has Donated 475 Tons Of Water To Crisis-Hit Malé", *SunOnline*, December 8, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26431>.

²³ "Chinese Navy Ship Starts Supplying Malé with Water", *SunOnline*, December 8, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26433>.

²⁴ "President Yameen Meets the President of China Machinery Engineering Corporation", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, December 9, 2014 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15071>.

The People's Majlis passed the Budget Bill on December 10, set at 24.3 billion, for the 2015 as adjusted and approved by the Budget Committee of the Majlis. 60 members voted in favour of passing the Budget Bill, while 19 members voted no.²⁵

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **First meeting of the China-Maldives Joint Commission held in Beijing; US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs visits Maldives; President sends messages of sympathy to Pakistan; President congratulates Shinzo Abe; Japanese assistance to Maldives, water crisis resolves; Saudi donour gives \$1 million to the Male crisis water fund; Malaysia pledges \$200,000 to the Male' Water Crisis Management Fund; Abdullah Saeed sworn in as the new Chief Justice of the Maldives.**

A high-level delegation went to Beijing to attend the first meeting of the China-Maldives Joint Commission. The delegation consists of Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture Dr Mohamed Shainee, Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed, and Minister at the President's Office Mohamed Hussain Shareef.²⁶ The first meeting of the Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation was held on December 16. Discussions during the meeting were focused on ongoing and future infrastructure projects in the Maldives, for which the Chinese government has assured assistance. The two governments also reached an agreement regarding initiating discussions on concluding a Free Trade Agreement between the two countries, under which Maldivian fish exporters will enjoy duty concessions for products entering the China market. The agreement will also facilitate the removal of non-tariff barriers that are encountered by traders in cross-border trade between the two countries.²⁷ After the meeting Maldives signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China on joining the Maritime Silk Route. The MoU enables Maldives to take an active role in the construction of the 21st century Maritime Silk Route, strengthen information sharing on national economic development plans, and facilitate more Chinese investment in the Maldives. Discussions regarding Maldives joining the Maritime Silk Route took place during President Abdulla Yameen's visit to China, and during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to the Maldives in September this year.²⁸

The US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Nisha Biswal paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. At the meeting held at the President's Office on December 17, President Yameen and the Assistant Secretary of State exchanged views on enhancing the close friendly relations that exist between the Maldives and the United States. The Assistant Secretary of State also inquired about the efforts and steps undertaken by the

²⁵ "Majlis Passes Budget Bill as Approved by the Committee", *SunOnline*, December 10, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26464>.

²⁶ "Ministers To Attend First China-Maldives Joint Commission Meeting", *SunOnline*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26543>.

²⁷ "First Joint Committee Meeting Held in Beijing", *SunOnline*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26594>.

²⁸ "Maldives Signs MoU on Maritime Silk Route", *SunOnline*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26561>.

Maldives on the socioeconomic development of the country. The President and the Assistance Secretary of State further discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in the international arena on areas of mutual concern such as in global fight against terrorism.²⁹ Ms Biswal also met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon.³⁰ The United States has applauded the Maldives for its accomplishments in relation to democracy, but said that the country still faces challenges such as judicial independence and instances of politically-motivated threats. This came in a statement by US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Nisha Biswal, upon conclusion of her visit to the Maldives.³¹

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has sent messages of sympathy to President Mamnoon Hussain and Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan, on learning of the attack at the Army Public School in Peshawar, which led to the tragic loss of life and injury to over a hundred victims.³²

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has sent a congratulatory message to Mr. Shinzo Abe on his re-election as the Prime Minister of Japan for a third term.³³

Government of Japan has donated \$843,060 to the Maldives following the water crisis sparked by a fire at the Male' Water and Sewerage Company (MWSC). The agreement in this regard was signed on December 15, 2014 at a ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by Maldivian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon and Japanese Ambassador Extraordinary Nobuhito Hobo.³⁴ The government of Japan has also donated medical equipment worth JPY 200 million (MVR 25.94 million), under its Non-project Grant Aid programme. The donation was presented at a ceremony at the Ministry of Health on December 16, by the Chief of Japan International Cooperation System (JICS), and accepted by Minister of Health Mohamed Nazim.³⁵

Chairperson of the task force established by President Abdulla Yameen to handle the water crisis, Mohamed Nazim, said that the problem was fully solved on December 15, and efforts are ongoing to install new panel boards brought in from Singapore.³⁶

²⁹ "US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs calls on the President", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15127>.

³⁰ "US Assistant Secretary of State Meets with Foreign Minister", *SunOnline*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26596>.

³¹ "US: Maldives Faces Judicial Independence Challenges", *SunOnline*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26614>.

³² "President Yameen Sends Message of Sympathy to the Leaders of Pakistan", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15122>.

³³ "President Yameen Congratulates Japanese Prime Minister-Elect", *SunOnline*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15118>.

³⁴ "Japan Donates JPY 100 Million Following Water Crisis", *SunOnline*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26554>.

³⁵ "Japan Donates Medical Equipment Worth MVR 25 Million", *SunOnline*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26569>.

³⁶ "Water Problem Fully Solved, Says Task Force", *SunOnline*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26551>.

A Saudi Arabian donor has provided \$1 million to the Male' Water Crisis Management Fund. Minister of Islamic Affairs Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed said on Twitter today, that \$1 million donated by a Saudi well-wisher following the water crisis has been handed over to the Ministry of Finance.³⁷

The government of Malaysia has pledged \$200,000 to the Male' Water Crisis Management Fund. The decision was conveyed by Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dato' Anifah bin Haji Aman, in a letter addressed to Foreign Minister of Maldives Dunya Maumoon.³⁸

Supreme Court Justice Abdullah Saeed has been sworn in as the new Chief Justice of the Maldives on December 15, soon after the People's Majilis approved his nomination by President Abdullah Yamin Abdul Qayyoom.³⁹

B. Russia

Russia

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Putin discusses Donbas situation with Merkel, Hollande and Poroshenko; Russian naval base in Crimea has been fully integrated with the Black Sea Fleet; Foreign Minister Lavrov says Poroshenko best chance for Ukraine at present; Russia and Pakistan explore currency swaps in bilateral trade; Russia supports Pakistan's full membership of SCO; Foreign Minister Lavrov says US sanctions aimed at regime change in Russia; Hong Kong offers Russia the option of clearing settlements in yuan to reduce currency risks; Customs Union and Vietnam agree on provisions of free trade agreement.**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has held a telephone conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on December 17 wherein they discussed the situation in Donbass. These include the implementation of the ceasefire, economic recovery of the region and provision of humanitarian and social support to the [local] population.⁴⁰

Russia has fully reconstituted the Crimean naval base as part of its Black Sea Fleet. Till March 2014, Sevastopol also housed the Ukrainian naval base.⁴¹

³⁷ "Saudi Donor Gives \$1 Million To Water Fund", *SunOnline*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26626>.

³⁸ "Malaysia to Donate \$200,000 To Water Fund", *SunOnline*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26633>.

³⁹ "Abdullah Saeed Sworn in as New Chief Justice", *SunOnline*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26536>.

⁴⁰ "Putin Discusses Donbas Situation With Merkel, Hollande, Poroshenko: Kremlin", *Sputnik International*, December 17, 2014, <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20141217/1015917810.html>

⁴¹ "Russian Naval Base Resumes in Crimea", *Itar-Tass*, December 21, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/768326>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said in an interview to France 24 TV channel, on December 16, that President Petro Poroshenko is the best chance for Ukraine at present. He urged Mr. Poroshenko to revise his decision targeting financial, economic and social isolation of Ukraine's south-eastern regions.⁴²

Pakistan's Finance Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar has said that Russia and Pakistan are exploring national currency swap deals in bilateral trade despite the depreciation of rouble.⁴³

Russia's Ambassador to Pakistan Alexei Dedov has said that Moscow supports Pakistan's application for full-fledged membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In the year of its presidency, he stressed that Russia "will focus on launching large-scale multi-lateral economic projects, primarily in the areas of transport, energy, science and technology and peaceful use of space. Attention will also be paid to expanding cultural and humanitarian ties."⁴⁴

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on December 16, that American sanctions against Russia are aimed at destabilising the situation in the region and bring about a regime change in Moscow. He stressed that Russia will overcome them and emerge stronger.⁴⁵

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has offered Russia, on December 16, the option of clearing settlements in yuan to bring down currency risks. Moscow has also been invited to participate in infrastructure investment projects.⁴⁶

The Customs Union (comprising of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) and Vietnam have finalized discussions on the major provisions of a free trade agreement. The agreement is likely to increase the trade flow between them from US\$ 4 billion to US\$ 10 billion within a few years.⁴⁷

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Russia and North Korea discuss a 'military activity prevention' agreement; Prime Minister Medvedev holds discussion with his Afghan counterpart; Russia cuts its investments in US government bonds; Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin visits Venezuela; Rosneft to continue Arctic shelf work with Norway; US imposes new sanctions on Russia; Russia's Central Bank**

⁴² "Poroshenko Best Chance For Ukraine At Present — Lavrov", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/767292>

⁴³ "Russia, Pakistan May Still Introduce Currency Swaps In Trade", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/767161>

⁴⁴ "Moscow Supports Pakistan's Application For Full-Fledged Membership in SCO", *Itar-Tass*, December 15, 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/767086>

⁴⁵ "Lavrov Says Has Reasons To Believe Us Sanctions Aim At Russia Regime Change", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/767282>

⁴⁶ "Hong Kong Offers Russia To Use Clearing Settlements In Yuan", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/767124>

⁴⁷ "Customs Union, Vietnam Agree On Provisions Of Free Trade Agreement", *Itar-Tass*, December 15, 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/766920>

raises key interest rate to 17 per cent; Russia's air force to receive 5th generation stealth fighters by 2020; Work on Russia's railway-based Barguzin missile in progress and 400 missiles remain on combat duty; Turkmenistan and Georgia sign agreement on transport cooperation.

The Russian and North Korean governments have discussed, in Moscow on December 15, an agreement on the prevention of military activities. The resolution says that the sides "confirm the commitment to improve the bilateral relations and are convinced of the need to prevent dangerous military activities, to quickly settle by peaceful means any incidents between the armed forces of the states of the sides. The two sides also intend "to display high caution and reasonableness in the activities conducted near the territory or stationing of the armed forces of the state of the other side." The draft agreement has been approved by the Russian government.⁴⁸

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has held discussions with his Afghan counterpart Abdullah Abdullah on the side-lines of the Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting held in Astana on December 15 and expressed hope that cooperation between Russia and Afghanistan will continue in the future.⁴⁹

Russia has gradually cut down the investments of its free financial resources in US government bonds. This figure went down by US\$ 8.8 billion to US\$ 108.9 billion in October, 2014. This tendency has been observed since October 2013, when US government securities reached US\$ 149.9 billion in the Russian portfolio.⁵⁰

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has paid an official visit to Venezuela on December 16, 2014. During the discussions, he expressed gratitude for Venezuela's support on the Ukrainian problem. He also singled out development of ties in defence and related technologies and said they will enable Venezuela to raise the combat readiness of its armed forces. Bilateral trade stood at US\$ 2.4 billion in 2013.⁵¹

Oleg Sochnev, Director of Rosneft's department for ecological localization of equipment and technologies has said that Russia and Norway will continue cooperation on the Arctic shelf and oil major Rosneft will continue exploration works there. Rosneft's deposits in the Arctic are estimated at 38.3 billion tons of oil equivalent. The company has invested around US \$400 billion in its Arctic shelf programme in the last 20 years.⁵²

⁴⁸ "Russia, North Korea Plan To Sign Agreement On Military Activity Prevention", *Itar-Tass*, December 15, 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/767079>

⁴⁹ "Russian Prime Minister And His Afghan Counterpart Express Hope For Continuing Cooperation", *Itar-Tass*, December 15, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/766970>

⁵⁰ "US Notes Russia Cuts Of Investments in US Government Bonds", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/767119>

⁵¹ "Trust between Venezuela, Russia Key Element In Development Of Bilateral Relations", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/767105>

⁵² "Russia's Rosneft To Continue Arctic Shelf Work with Norway", *Itar-Tass*, December 21, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/768412>

U.S. President Barack Obama has signed an executive order, on December 20, on new sanctions against Russia. The document introduces a ban on trade ties with Crimea and 'prohibits the export of goods, technology, or services to Crimea and prohibits the import of goods, technology, or services from Crimea, as well as new investments in Crimea.'⁵³

The Central Bank of Russia has raised key interest rate, on December 16, to 17 per cent annual. This was in response to the sharp devaluation of rouble and rising inflation.⁵⁴

Vladislav Goncharenko, deputy head of the military aviation programmes department at Russia's United Aircraft-building Corporation has said, on December 15 in Moscow, that Russia's Air Force will receive 55 T-50 PAK FA stealth fighters by 2020. PAK FA, which stands for Perspektivnyi Aviacionnyi Kompleks Frontovoi Aviacii, or Advanced Frontline Aircraft System, is a product of the Sukhoi Bureau, where its name is T-50. Five T-50 fighters have already been built and made their maiden flights, three more are under construction.⁵⁵

The commander of Russia's strategic missile force Colonel-General Sergey Karakayev has said that the schematic design of Russia's future railway-based combat missile complex - Barguzin has been finalized and work is now in progress on design documentation. It will build up from the experience of its Soviet predecessor. Such railway complexes armed with solid propellant rockets Molodets were withdrawn from service in 2005. He also said that at present around 400 strategic missiles with warheads assigned for them are currently on combat duty in Strategic Missile Forces.⁵⁶

Turkmenistan and Georgia have signed an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in transport on December 15 in Ashgabat. Both countries confirmed the intention to create a transport corridor to the European and Persian Gulf markets. The parties seek to implement a programme for building a transit and transport corridor to link Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey due to the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway line, which has recently opened. The transport corridor is expected to give an impetus to social and economic restoration of Afghanistan, increase trade relations and involve the country in key regional projects and the international infrastructure.⁵⁷

⁵³ "Obama Imposes New Sanctions on Russia, Bans Economic Ties with Crimea", *Itar-Tass*, December 20, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/768258>

⁵⁴ "Russia's Central Bank Raises Key Interest Rate To 17% as of December 16", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/767106>

⁵⁵ "Russia's Air Force To Receive 55 Fifth Generation Stealth Fighters By 2020", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/767099>

⁵⁶ "Work on Russia's Railway-Based Barguzin Missile In Progress — Commander", *Itar-Tass*, December 16, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/767150>

⁵⁷ "Turkmenistan, Georgia Sign Agreement On Transport Cooperation", *Itar-Tass*, December 15, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/767008>

C. The United States of America

National

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **President Obama's executive action on immigration unconstitutional, a federal Judge says; Obama signs \$1.1 trillion government spending bill; Panel to advise Obama on police-community relationships; U.S. opens full diplomatic ties with Cuba for the first time in more than 50 years; New York to become the second state in the nation to ban fracking.**

President Barack Obama's recent executive action sparing millions from deportation is unconstitutional, a federal judge decided on December 16. The surprise decision from U.S. District Judge Arthur Schwab found the executive action violates the Constitution's separation of powers and the Constitution's requirement that the president "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." The executive action, announced in November, allows about 4 million people living in the U.S. illegally a path to avoid deportation. Obama administration attorneys justified the action in a 33-page memo, writing that decisions would be made on a case-by-case basis, meaning the action is an acceptable use of prosecutorial discretion.⁵⁸

President Obama has signed a \$1.1 trillion bill that will fund nearly every federal government agency through 2015. The only exception in the bill signed is the Department for Homeland Security, which will run out of funding at the end of February. Republican leaders limited funding for the agency so it can force Obama to reverse his executive order, which removes the threat of deportations from millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States.⁵⁹

President Barack Obama is appointing a task force to examine how best to build trust and foster strong relationships between local law enforcement officers and the communities they protect. The 11-member Task Force on 21st Century Policing will be made up of law enforcement representatives, community leaders, academics and youth leaders. The panel is expected to submit recommendations to the president by March. White House senior adviser Valerie Jarrett said the task force would consider, among other things, best practices for the use of body cameras by police.⁶⁰

On December 17, the U.S. opened full diplomatic ties with Cuba for the first time in more than 50 years, in what President Barack Obama termed a reversal of "ineffective" U.S. policy toward the

⁵⁸ Nelson, Steven, "Obama Immigration Action Unconstitutional, Judge Says", December 16, 2014 at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/16/obama-immigration-action-unconstitutional-judge-says>

⁵⁹ "Obama Signs 2015 Government Spending Bill", VOA News, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/president-obama-signs-2015-government-spending-bill/2562244.html>

⁶⁰ "Panel to Advise Obama on Police-Community Relationships", VOA News, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/panel-advise-obama-police-community-relationships/2565337.html>

communist island nation. "Neither the American nor Cuban people are well served by a rigid policy that's rooted in events that took place before most of us were born," Obama said. "Through these changes, we intend to create more opportunities for the American and Cuban people and begin a new chapter among the nations of the Americas."⁶¹ U.S. policy toward Cuba has long been a roadblock to productive relationships with other Latin American countries, but on December 17th announcement that the two nations are renewing diplomatic ties will benefit the region as a whole. New U.S. measures are expected to increase travel and economic cooperation with Cuba, although a formal trade embargo cannot be lifted without congressional approval. The U.S. was the only remaining country in the region that isolated Cuba, with other nations regularly raising the issue of the economic embargo in diplomatic meetings with U.S. officials.⁶² President Barack Obama may have Pope Francis on his side, but some in Washington are already pushing back on the president's announcement on December 17 that the U.S. would be normalizing its relationship with Cuba. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., R-Fl., the son of Cuban immigrants, is among the harshest of critics of the move to re-open diplomatic ties to Cuba after more than 50 years.⁶³

New York is set to become the second state in the nation to ban fracking. Hundreds of studies have linked the controversial oil and gas extraction process – and the chemicals leaked from fracking sites – to air and water contamination, as well as a host of health issues, from headaches and nosebleeds to asthma, neurological disorders and potential cancers. Energy companies and trade groups have vigorously criticized many of the studies. Yet Gov. Andrew Cuomo, in deciding to formalize the Empire State's six-year moratorium on fracking, cited the process's potential health risks as the basis of his decision.⁶⁴

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **President Signs National Defence Authorization Act; Defence Secretary Hagel welcomes Defence Authorization Act, calls for 'more predictable budgets'; Improvement in unemployment at the state level continues to parallel the healthy labour market trends; Obama defends his policies, saying the U.S. economy is improving and America is leading around the world; immigration officials apprehended more people in fiscal 2014 than in the year before, a US report states.**

President Barack Obama on December 19 signed the annual legislation that keeps the Defence Department running. The "Carl Levin and Howard P. 'Buck' McKeon National Defence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015," Obama said in a written statement, "will provide vital

⁶¹ Welsh, Teresa, "U.S. Normalizes Relations With Cuba", *US News*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/17/us-normalizes-relations-with-cuba-as-alan-gross-is-released>

⁶² Welsh, Teresa, "Renewed U.S.-Cuba Ties Will Benefit Larger Relations With Latin America", *US News*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/18/renewed-us-cuba-ties-will-benefit-relations-with-latin-america>

⁶³ Sneed, Ierney, "Obama's Cuba Policy Meets Mixed Reaction in Washington", *US News*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/17/obamas-cuba-policy-meets-mixed-reaction-in-washington>

⁶⁴ Neuhauser, Alan, "Behind New York's Fracking Ban", *US News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/19/behind-new-yorks-fracking-ban>

benefits for military personnel and their families, as well as critical contingency authorities needed to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and to respond to emerging needs in the face of evolving terrorist threats and emergent crises worldwide.”⁶⁵

Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel welcomed the fiscal year 2015 National Defence Authorization Act in a statement issued on December 19, but he called on Congress to work with the department on several fronts. The secretary noted that sequestration remains law. The budget mechanism that enacts across-the-board government spending cuts threatens the defence budget as well. Hagel warned that “if Congress allows sequestration to return in 2016, it will damage our military’s readiness and threaten our ability to execute our nation’s defence strategy.”⁶⁶

Improvement in unemployment at the state level continues to parallel the healthy labour market trends on the national level. And as of November, 20 states had jobless rates below what is considered the natural rate of unemployment, or 5.5 percent, according to the Labour Department. In the past, the Federal Reserve has started to raise interest rates when about a third of states have unemployment rates below the natural level that doesn’t cause inflation to rise – a term the Congressional Budget Office refers to as the non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment, or NAIRU – according to Torsten Slok, chief international economist at Deutsche Bank. But history doesn’t necessarily repeat itself. This time around, that the labour market has improved faster than the Fed itself had anticipated could mean it’s focusing more on the second part of its congressional mandate, inflation.⁶⁷

U.S. President Barack Obama defended his policies during the past year during an annual year-end news conference, saying the U.S. economy is improving and America is leading around the world. Obama began the news conference by saying there is no doubt that the United States is making strides where it counts. He vowed that during his remaining two years in office he will make every possible effort to continue economic growth, in order to make life better for American families. This is Obama’s first White House news conference since the day after his Democratic party’s defeat in the November congressional elections.⁶⁸

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said that immigration officials had apprehended more people in fiscal 2014 than in the year before, but that the number of Mexican nationals was down. The officials said U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s apprehensions of Mexicans had fallen 14 percent, but those of individuals from other countries, predominantly in Central

⁶⁵ “President Signs National Defence Authorization Act”, *DoD News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123866>

⁶⁶ “Hagel Welcomes Defence Authorization Act, Calls for ‘More Predictable Budgets’”, *DoD News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123867>

⁶⁷ Peralta, Katherine, “Fed: Oranges are Lighter than Apples”, *US News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/19/state-job-improvement-under-scores-fed-focus-on-inflation>

⁶⁸ “Obama Hails Strength of US Economy”, *VOA News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-hails-strength-os-us-economy/2566190.html>

America, had risen 68 percent. The U.S. Border Patrol reported more than 486,000 apprehensions nationwide, compared with more than 420,000 in 2013.⁶⁹

International: Asia

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Combat mission in Afghanistan ends, but the U.S. commitment to it will continue, Obama says; US releases 4 Afghan prisoners from Guantanamo; Defence Secretary Hagel strongly condemns the Taliban attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan; Secretary of State Kerry meets Netanyahu as Palestinians push for UN Resolution.**

While the combat mission in Afghanistan is ending, the U.S. commitment to the nation will continue, President Barack Obama told U.S. troops today during a visit to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. "In just two weeks, the transition that we're making in Afghanistan will be complete," he said. "Afghans will take full responsibility for their security." However, Obama cautioned that Afghanistan is still a "very dangerous place." The president listed a range of U.S. military accomplishments, including pushing back the Taliban, training Afghan forces to take the lead and making possible a historic election this year along with the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan's history. Obama said when he took office there were nearly 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, but by month's end, there will be fewer than 15,000 remaining.⁷⁰

The U.S. Defence Department said on December 20 that four Afghans held for more than a decade at the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, had been returned to their home country. Officials said the four detainees — identified as Shawali Khan, Khi Ali Gul, Abdul Ghani and Mohammed Zahir — were released at the request of Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani, after a review of their cases, including security factors. They said the release was a sign of confidence in Ghani, who has been in office for only a few months.⁷¹

Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel on December 16 strongly condemned the Taliban attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, that news reports say left more than 140 people dead, including more than 130 children. "On behalf of all the men and women of the U.S. Defence Department, I extend our deepest condolences to the people of Pakistan following today's ruthless attack on the army public school in Peshawar," the secretary said in a statement.⁷² Meanwhile, the United States condemned the deadly Taliban attack and remains committed to bringing stability to the

⁶⁹ "US Report: Immigration Officials' Apprehensions Rose in 2014", VOA News, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-report-immigration-officials-apprehensions-rose-2014/2566662.html>

⁷⁰ Marshall, Tyrone C. Jr., "Obama: Afghan Combat Mission Ends, But Commitment Endures", DoD News, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123835>

⁷¹ "US Releases 4 Afghan Prisoners From Guantanamo", VOA News, December 20, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-sends-four-guantanamo-prisoners-home-to-afghanistan/2567241.html>

⁷² "Hagel Condemns Taliban Attack on Pakistani School", DoD News, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123838>

Afghanistan-Pakistan region, Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said, emphasizing that the end of the NATO combat mission does not mean an end to U.S. involvement in the region.⁷³

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry held talks on December 15 in Rome with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the first leg of a trip to assess the current state of Israeli-Palestinian issues. The meeting came as Palestinian officials push for a U.N. resolution that would call for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory within two years. A Jordanian-drafted resolution could be introduced at the U.N. Security Council this week. Meanwhile, a senior State Department official said Kerry's goal is to hear what everyone has to say and work on a common path forward, while keeping open the prospect of a two-state solution. But the official said the U.S. does not believe a resolution calling for a hard deadline is the right way to resolve "a very complicated security negotiation."⁷⁴

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Palestinians push for U.N. Resolution despite US concerns; Defence Secretary Hagel authorizes up to 1,300 additional troops to deploy to Iraq; Inherent Resolve airstrikes continue against ISIL; Airstrikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq; Obama signs into law bill authorizing more Russia Sanctions.**

The Palestinians say they will introduce a draft U.N. Security Council resolution setting a deadline for Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian territories, despite U.S. fears it will only heighten tensions in the region. The Palestinian U.N. ambassador, Riyad Mansour, said the plan for a two-year timetable for an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord would be introduced in a form that can be voted on.⁷⁵

Up to 1,300 more U.S. troops, including approximately 1,000 soldiers from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, will begin to deploy to Iraq in late January, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said today. "Their mission will be to train, advise and assist Iraqi security forces," Kirby told reporters at a Pentagon briefing. "This deployment is part of the additional 1,500 troops that the president authorized in November." The roughly 300 troops who are deploying in the same timeframe as the 82nd Airborne group will be from multiple services, the admiral said. Their contributions will be in "largely enabler capabilities," Kirby added.⁷⁶

The strength of the 40-plus nation coalition fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) ultimately will defeat the terrorist group, Army Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, commander, Combined

⁷³ Garamone, Jim, "U.S. Stands With Pakistanis, Afghans Against Taliban", *DoD News*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123844>

⁷⁴ "Kerry Meets Netanyahu as Palestinians Push for UN Resolution", *VOA News*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/kerry-to-meet-netanyahu-as-palestinians-push-for-un-resolution/2559073.html>

⁷⁵ "Palestinians Push for U.N. Resolution Despite US Concerns", *VOA News*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/kerry-to-meet-with-palestinian-officials-amid-push-for-un-vote/2560546.html>

⁷⁶ Richmond, Jake, "Hagel Authorizes Up to 1,300 Additional Troops to Deploy to Iraq", *DoD News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123863>

Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) said on December 18.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, U.S. and partner-nation military forces attacked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists in Syria and Iraq on December 18, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported.⁷⁸ U.S. and partner-nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria on December 19 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct four airstrikes, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported. Separately, U.S. and partner-nation military forces on December 19 conducted 11 airstrikes in Iraq using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists, officials said.⁷⁹

U.S. President Barack Obama has signed into law legislation passed by the U.S. Congress authorizing more sanctions on Russia for its role in the Ukraine crisis. The president said in a statement that while he signed the Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014, it “does not signal a change” in the administration’s sanctions policy. He said at this time, the administration does not intend to impose sanctions under this law, but the Act gives the administration “additional authorities that could be utilized, if circumstances warranted.”⁸⁰

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Obama orders trade ban on Crimea for Russian ‘occupation’; Philippines files murder charges against US marine; Deputy Defence Secretary Bob Work, Indonesian military leader discuss regional stability; Japan, Australia to provide F-35 maintenance sites in Pacific Region; US lawmakers demand cybersecurity reform after Sony hack; US reviews to put North Korea back onto its lists of state sponsors of terrorism.**

President Barack Obama has imposed a wide-ranging trade ban on the Russian-annexed Crimea peninsula, with an executive order that bars exports of key U.S. goods and services and blocks Crimean imports. A White House statement on December 19 said the order is “intended to provide U.S. clarity to American corporations doing business in the region.” It also said it aimed to demonstrate that Washington “will not accept Russia’s occupation” of Crimea. The ban includes sanctions on 24 individuals and companies identified as contributing to unrest in eastern Ukraine. The Russian parliament voted in April to annex the region, despite protests from the European Union and Washington.⁸¹

Philippine prosecutors on December 15 filed murder charges against a U.S. marine over the death of a transgender Filipino outside a former U.S. Navy base, in a case that could test the close

⁷⁷ Marshall, Tyrone C. Jr., “Coalition Will Defeat ISIL, Task Force Commander Says”, *DoD News*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123859>

⁷⁸ “Inherent Resolve Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL”, From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, *DoD News*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123860>

⁷⁹ “Airstrikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq”, *DoD News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123862>

⁸⁰ “Obama Signs Into Law Bill Authorizing More Russia Sanctions”, *VOA News*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-signs-into-law-bill-authorizing-russia-sanctions/2564924.html>

⁸¹ “Obama Orders Trade Ban on Crimea for Russian ‘Occupation’”, *VOA News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-orders-trade-ban-crimea/2566665.html>

security ties between the two allies. A transgender Filipino was found dead on October 11 in a hotel toilet in Olongapo City, northwest of Manila. Private First Class Joseph Scott Pemberton was named a suspect. He is detained at a U.S. facility at the main Philippine army base in Manila. "We filed a murder case," said Emilie Fe delos Santos, head of the public prosecutor's team, adding that she believed there was a strong case, after having reviewed the evidence.⁸²

The importance of Asia-Pacific regional stability and the role of the U.S. rebalance to the region in fostering that stability highlighted a meeting at the Pentagon on December 16 between Deputy Defence Secretary Bob Work and Gen. Moeldoko, commander in chief of the Indonesian armed forces, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Courtney Hillson, spokeswoman for Work, said in a statement summarizing the meeting. "They also reviewed progress made in recent years in our military-to-military cooperation to increase exercises and training, as well as regular defence policy dialogues," Hillson added.⁸³

Japan and Australia will be sharing maintenance and upgrade duties for the F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter based or operating in the Pacific region, the programme executive officer for the aircraft announced on December 17. F-35 heavy air frame maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade capabilities will be provided by Japan in the northern Pacific and Australia in the southern Pacific, Air Force Lt. Gen. Christopher C. Bogdan told reporters. Both countries are expected to have their facilities operational no later than 2018.⁸⁴

The Obama administration formally accused the North Korean government of being responsible for the devastating hacking attack against Sony Pictures Entertainment, providing the most detailed accounting to date of a hugely expensive break-in that could lead to a U.S. response. The FBI said in a statement it has enough evidence to conclude that North Korea was behind the punishing breach, which resulted in the disclosure of tens of thousands of leaked emails and other materials.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, Sony Pictures Entertainment is reeling from the most damaging hack ever against a U.S. corporation, which will likely increase pressure on Congress to pass comprehensive cybersecurity legislation despite years of failing to do so and the retirement of several lawmakers that were key to previous attempts. The FBI announced that North Korea was responsible for the attack that occurred in November, recognizing patterns in the attack and the malware used against Sony that were similar to previous hacks staged by the Stalinist dictatorship. "North Korea's attack on [Sony Pictures Entertainment] reaffirms that cyber threats pose one of the gravest national security dangers to the United States," the FBI wrote in a news release.⁸⁶

⁸² "Philippines Files Murder Charges Against US Marine", *Reuters*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/philippines-files-murder-charges-against-us-marine/2559134.html>

⁸³ "Work, Indonesian Military Leader Discuss Regional Stability", *DoD News*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123846>

⁸⁴ Roulo, Claudette, "Japan, Australia to Provide F-35 Maintenance Sites in Pacific Region", *DoD News*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123854>

⁸⁵ "FBI Officially Blames North Korea for Sony Hack", *Associated Press*, December 19, 2014

⁸⁶ Risen, Tom, "Lawmakers Demand Cybersecurity Reform After Sony Hack", *US News*, December 19, 2014 at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/12/19/lawmakers-demand-cybersecurity-reform-after-sony-hack>

President Barack Obama said the United States is reviewing whether to put North Korea back onto its lists of state sponsors of terrorism following a cyber-attack on Sony Pictures, which U.S. officials blame on the communist nation. Speaking on CNN's State of the Union, Obama said he did not consider the hack an act of war, but a "very costly, very expensive" example of cyber vandalism. North Korea denies it was responsible for hacking Sony Pictures' computer network and posting embarrassing e-mails and other private data.⁸⁷

India-US Relations

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Tom Cutler says balancing energy and green security a policy dilemma; Senate confirms Dr. Vivek Murthy as the new U.S. Surgeon General; India-US climate talks to focus on clean energy, tech R&D; Officials of the "India-US contact group" try to break nuclear logjam ahead of Obama visit; India looks to sway Americans with nuclear power insurance plan; India to be third-biggest defence spender by 2020, IHS projects; Obama's India visit to launch new Indo-U.S. defence agenda; Stripped of her duties, Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade defends conduct.**

Tom Cutler, former director of the Office of European and Asia Pacific Affairs at the US Department of Energy said that the key aspects of India's Energy Security are expanding people's access to energy and having reliable supply of electricity. He was speaking at the International Energy Conference, organised by US Consulate General, Chennai, in association with the Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR), in Kochi on December 12. He said that India in its quest to secure natural gas had recently turned towards the US, which is an emerging exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas. Cutler, who was instrumental in developing various key programmes by the US in energy cooperation with India and South Asia, said that a common policy dilemma for India was to balance energy security and environmental security, given that the country uses a lot of coal.⁸⁸

The Senate has confirmed Dr. Vivek Murthy as the new U.S. Surgeon General after a year-long delay over his support for tougher gun laws. December 15's vote was 51 to 43. President Barack Obama says he applauds the Senate for its vote, saying Murthy will work to make sure all Americans have the information they need to keep safe and so kids will grow up healthy and strong. Many Republicans and some Democrats opposed Murthy for his public backing of stricter gun control and support for the president's signature health care law. But his supporters say the 37-year-old is a well-qualified health expert and will not use his office as a political platform. The U.S. Surgeon General has traditionally been the government's advocate for better health, including

⁸⁷ "Obama: US Might Put N. Korea on Terror List", *VOA News*, December 21, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-asks-china-for-help-in-blocking-north-korea-cyber-attacks/2567789.html>

⁸⁸ "'Balancing Energy and Green Security a Policy Dilemma'", *The New Indian Express*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/kochi/Balancing-Energy-and-Green-Security-a-Policy-Dilemma/2014/12/15/article2571616.ece>

⁸⁹ "Senate Confirms Obama Choice for Surgeon General", *VOA News*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/senate-confirms-obama-choice-for-surgeon-general/2560444.html>

urging Americans to exercise, eat sensibly and not smoke.⁸⁹

India and the United States are expected to announce a joint effort to tackle climate change with focus on clean energy and technology R&D during President Barack Obama's visit to the country in January. Though a big ticket announcement like the US-China deal last month has been ruled out, in keeping with the leadership role that the US has sought to take on in climate negotiations over the last two months, Obama is expected to persuade Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ramp up India's efforts to fight climate change. "I am expecting a useful meeting but we don't have anything in the works of the kind that we were involved with in China," US envoy for climate change Todd Stern said. "We have a substantial desire to work in a constructive and ramped up way with India on climate change and clean energy," he added.⁹⁰

Officials of the "India-US contact group" on civil nuclear cooperation met in Delhi this week to try and break the logjam between both countries ahead of U.S. President Obama's visit to Delhi on January 24. While officials would not confirm the details, a media statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said the discussions were "positive and forward-looking." In an indication that they are trying to find a way around U.S. concerns, the statement said the contact group would meet again in "early January."⁹¹

Reuters reported that India is offering to set up an insurance pool to indemnify global nuclear suppliers against liability in the case of a nuclear accident, in a bid to unblock billions of dollars in trade held up by concerns over exposure to risk. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is hoping the plan will be enough to convince major U.S. companies such as General Electric to enter the Indian market ahead of President Barack Obama's visit at the end of January 2015. Under a 2010 nuclear liability law, nuclear equipment suppliers are liable for damages from an accident, which companies say is a sharp deviation from international norms that put the onus on the operator to maintain safety.⁹²

By the year 2020, India could emerge as the third-biggest country in terms of defence-related expenditure, US-based consulting firm IHS projected in a study published on December 19. India, home to the world's second-largest population, currently stands eighth in total spending on defence (expenditure, procurement, research and development). The country in 2014 spent \$47.78 billion (Rs 3,01,299 crore), higher than those like Germany, Brazil, south Korea, Italy, Canada, according to the IHS study, where the NYSE-listed research firm analysed specific forecasts for defence-

⁹⁰ Goswami, Urmi, "India-US Climate Talks To Focus On Clean Energy, tech R&D", *The Economic Times*, December 17, 2014 at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-12-17/news/57154431_1_todd-stern-climate-change-third-largest-emitter

⁹¹ Haidar, Suhasini, "Officials Try To Break Nuclear Logjam Ahead Of Obama Visit", *The Hindu*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/officials-try-to-break-nuclear-logjam-ahead-of-obama-visit/article6701897.ece?ref=relatedNews>

⁹² Wilkes, Tommy and Miglani, Sanjeev, "Exclusive - India Looks To Sway Americans With Nuclear Power Insurance Plan", *Reuters*, December 19, 2014 at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/12/19/india-nuclear-us-deal-idINKBN0JX11C20141219>

⁹³ Mitra, Sounak, "India to be Third-Biggest Defence Spender By 2020", *Business Standard*, December 19, 2014 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-to-be-third-largest-spender-on-defence-by-2020-114121900369_1.html

related expenditure by 91 countries and captured 98 per cent of the global defence spend.⁹³

A new 10-year defence framework with the United States is likely to be finalised in time for President Barack Obama's visit to India. This will be the highlight of the bilateral negotiations when he arrives in New Delhi next month. The new framework will replace the existing agreement of June 2005. Officials on both sides have confirmed to *The Hindu* that the agreement is "all but done" and awaits a final clearance. The new defence framework will outline a series of exchanges between Indian and U.S. officials, including regular meetings between service and non-service defence personnel, the updated 'Defence Trade and Technological Initiative,' upgraded military and naval exercises, as well as 'knowledge partnerships' between the National Defence universities in both countries. The signing of the framework, along with the visit of the first U.S. President to be chief guest at India's Republic Day ceremony, will be a significant symbol of growing Indo-U.S. defence ties.⁹⁴

Nearly a year ago, when Devyani Khobragade, an Indian diplomat, returned to New Delhi after being arrested by United States marshals in connection with her treatment of her Indian maid, she was celebrated as a symbol of India's offended dignity, and the cause of a serious rift with the United States. But much has changed since then. Relations between the United States and India are on the upswing ahead of a planned visit from President Obama in January 2015. And a recent series of interviews in which Ms. Khobragade recalled her humiliation at being handcuffed and strip-searched have not gone over well with the Ministry of External Affairs.⁹⁵ Khobragade was recently removed from her duties in the ministry's development partnership division and placed on "compulsory wait" after officials determined that she had violated regulations by not informing them that she had obtained U.S. passports for her two daughters. Khobragade had been working at the ministry since she was expelled from the United States in January after being indicted on visa fraud charges while she was deputy consul general for India in New York. MEA officials are now examining whether recent television interviews she gave about her case also violated rules. "I haven't done anything wrong," Khobragade said in a text message exchange. She said she stayed within civil service rules when speaking to the media by expressing her "personal views"

⁹⁴ Haidar, Suhasini, "Obama Visit To Launch New Indo-U.S. Defence Agenda", *The Hindu*, December 20, 2014 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/obama-visit-to-launch-new-indous-defence-agenda/article6708907.ece>

⁹⁵ Barry, Ellen, "India Tires of Diplomatic Rift Over Arrest of Devyani Khobragade", *The New York Times*, December 20, 2014 at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/world/asia/india-tires-of-diplomatic-rift-over-arrest.html?_r=0

⁹⁶ Gowen, Annie, "Stripped of Duties, Controversial Indian Diplomat Defends Conduct", *The Washington Post*, December 21 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/12/21/stripped-of-duties-controversial-indian-diplomat-defends-conduct/>

and not speaking on anything “that can be taken as a criticism of government action or policy.”⁹⁶

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Transgression of Indian airspace by helicopters of Pakistan and China is on increase; Induction of Tejas in Indian Air Force to take place soon.**

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar in a written reply to the Lok Sabha on December 19 gave the details of transgression of Indian airspace by helicopters/aircraft in the border areas during the last three years. As per the details provided, the number of transgressions of Indian airspace in 2012 was 06, 2013, 12, and 2014 (till 15.12.2014) 16. During the last two years and the current year, helicopters of Pakistan and China have transgressed into Indian airspace. The Minister also added that the incidents of violation of Indian airspace are taken up with the concerned countries through established channels including Ministry of External Affairs.⁹⁷

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar informed the Lok Sabha on December 19 that the Indian Air Force (IAF) has placed order for 20 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), Tejas in Initial Operational Clearance (IOC) configuration and 20 more Aircraft in Final Operational Clearance (FOC) configuration. Tejas has already achieved IOC in December 2013 and FOC is likely to be achieved by the end of 2015. The first of the IOC standard aircraft has been built and successfully completed its maiden flight on 30th September 2014. This aircraft will be handed over to IAF by March 2015 after some upgrades. The second aircraft will also be ready by March 2015 for maiden flight. The first 20 aircraft will be built by 2017-18.⁹⁸

International

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **US troops heading for Iraq to train and assist Iraqi Army and Kurdish Peshmerga brigades; Canada adds fifth military transport jumbo jet to its fleet.**

Reports say that one thousand soldiers from the US 82nd Airborne Division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team will be deployed to Iraq in January 2015 to begin training Iraqi and Kurdish brigades. The 1,000 are part of 1,300 service members in total heading for Iraq next month, with the remaining 300 coming from multiple services and serving in counterintelligence, logistics and signals

⁹⁷ "Illegal Entry of Helicopters/Aircraft," *PIB*, December 19, 2014, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=113752>

⁹⁸ "Induction of Tejas in Indian Air Force," *PIB*, December 19, 2014, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=113758>

⁹⁹ "1,000 82nd Airborne Troops Iraq-Bound in January," *Defence News*, December 19, 2014, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/warfare/2014/12/19/iraq-isis-deploy/20643829/>

capacities. Overall, 1,500 US troops are heading for Iraq in early 2015 to train and assist nine Iraqi Army and three Kurdish Peshmerga brigades at several undisclosed sites across Iraq.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, according to reports, Canada's defence minister has announced the addition of a fifth military transport jumbo jet to its fleet. The move is expected to increase Canada's combat and humanitarian reach around the world. Its four existing Globemaster III C17 aircrafts were purchased in 2008-2009 and have been used recently in Canadian and allied airlifts in Afghanistan, the Arctic, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Lithuania, Mali, Sierra Leone and Ukraine.¹⁰⁰

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Northeast India

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **JMB enters Assam's official list of militants; 57 militants surrendered in Manipur; One killed in an IED blast in Imphal; SC directs Centre to fence India-Bangladesh border; Assam alerted on ULFA (I) strike plan.**

In a written reply to a question from AIUDF legislator Hafiz Bashir Ahmed in the state assembly on December 15, Assam Forest minister Rockybul Hussain stated that as many as eight militant groups are "active" in Assam and Harkaut-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) are two such organizations prominent among them. The JMB, at present has at least 20 active members in the state. Hussain, who was replying on behalf of chief minister Tarun Gogoi, also gave a break-down of cadre strength of the other seven outfits. They are anti-talk ULFA (240), NDFB-S (270), KPLT (40), KLO (40), HuM (40), Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (140) and CPI-Maoist (30).¹⁰¹ Reportedly, the Jamaat-ul-Mujaheed in Bangladesh (JMB) was trying to establish a full-fledged network in Assam, particularly in the Muslim-dominated areas and at least ten specially-trained people have already fanned out to different parts of Assam to try and motivate persons to join the fold of the outfit. This vital information came to light during the questioning of Sahanur Alom, one of the key persons of the JMB in Assam and other members of the outfit arrested in Assam and West Bengal. It was also revealed that the JMB started trying to establish bases in Assam after the ethnic riots in the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) area in 2012 where more than hundred people were killed. The JMB took advantage of the situation and started exploring the possibility of expanding bases in the State. The main aims of the JMB were to establish strong roots in the state "not only to protect the Muslim community

¹⁰⁰ "Canada Increases Global Reach With New Military Transporter," *Defence News*, December 19, 2014, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2014/12/19/canada-increases-global-reach-new-military-transporter/20646707/>

¹⁰¹ Kashyap, Samudra Gupta, "HuM, JMB Among Eight Militant Groups 'Active' in Assam", *The Indian Express*, December 16, 2014 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/hum-jmb-among-eight-militant-groups-active-in-assam/>

but also to take revenge of killing of innocents.” The JMB, which is banned in Bangladesh, is believed to have links with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). It may be mentioned here that after busting the network of the JMB in Burdwan, more than 200 bombs were recovered and it was also learnt that the outfit managed to send three consignments of bombs prepared in India to Bangladesh.¹⁰² According to counter-terror sources, the larger goal of the JMB is to establish an Islamic state in Bangladesh with some bordering districts of Assam and Bengal included in it. But after a crackdown by the law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh, the JMB members took shelter in bordering districts of Assam and Bengal.¹⁰³

A total of 57 underground cadres laid down arms and surrendered 47 weapons during a home coming ceremony at 1st battalion Manipur Rifles banquet hall in Imphal on December 15. Among them were 35 cadres belonging to proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (KK Nganba group), 20 Kangleipak Communist Party (Nongdrenkhomba group) and two leaders of People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (VC group). The two leaders of Prepak (VC) include its chairman Nabachandra and finance secretary Chinglen.¹⁰⁴

At least one person was killed and five others (mostly betelnut leaf sellers hailing from Bihar) sustained injuries in an IED blast in the heart of Imphal city on December 15. The incident took place around 11.10 am at the busy Thangal Bazar at MG Avenue, located barely 100 meters from the City Police Station when the petty traders were going about their normal business. So far no armed group has claimed responsibility for the incident.¹⁰⁵

The Supreme Court on December 17 criticized the Centre and Assam government for doing “precious little to stem this tide” of illegal migrants who threaten to erode the entire culture of a state and directed them to secure the Indo-Bangla border through complete fencing and intensive patrolling, besides expediting the process to deport illegal migrants from Bangladesh. A bench of Justices Ranjan Gogoi and R F Nariman directed the central government “to enter into necessary discussions with the Government of Bangladesh to streamline the procedure of deportation” and gave it three months to place before it the outcome of its deliberation. The court also noted that the number of foreigners tribunals, set up to decide the cases of illegal migration, was “abysmally low” and said it was “interesting to know” that while 1.5 lakh people were deported between 1961 to 1965, number of deportation from 1985 till date was a mere 2,000 odd. The bench referred to the Assam Accord of 1985, prescribing that foreigners, who came to Assam on or after March

¹⁰² Choudhury, R Dutta, “JMB Plans To Set Up Network In State Come To Light”, *The Assam Tribune*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec1514/at050>

¹⁰³ Ahuja, Rajesh, “JMB Planned To Kill Bodo Leaders, Blast Assam: NIA”, *Hindustan Times*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/jmb-had-plans-to-kill-bodo-leaders-blast-assam-nia/article1-1297725.aspx>

¹⁰⁴ “57 Ultras Lay Down Arms In Manipur”, *The Assam Tribune*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec1614/oth052>

¹⁰⁵ Samom, Sobhapati, “1 Killed, 5 Hurt In Imphal Blast”, *The Assam Tribune*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec1614/oth050>

25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with the law. The government, it said, will take all effective steps to complete the fencing of the Indo-Bangla border and will also lay motorable roads alongside the international border so as to enable effective and intensive patrolling. The bench also directed the authorities to publish an updated National Register of Citizens with respect to Assam by January 2016.¹⁰⁶

The Centre has alerted the Assam Government about the possibility of an attack by the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) ULFA (I) in Guwahati city following which all the police and security forces engaged in counter-insurgency operations, have been put on high alert. Sources have revealed that dreaded ULFA (I) leader Drishti Rajkhowa has managed to procure at least five sophisticated bombs with timer devices and he is looking for avenues to get those planted in Guwahati city. Security agencies are of the view that the ULFA (I) leader is looking for someone who can sneak into Guwahati city to plant the bombs. It is very likely that the militant outfit would engage hired persons to carry out the job instead of risking its own manpower. There have been reports of movement of GNLA militants through Guwahati and several of them have also been arrested in recent times. Under such circumstances, the possibility of the ULFA trying to engage GNLA members to plant bombs cannot be ruled out. Sources said Rajkhowa, who spends most of his time in Garo Hills of Meghalaya at the bases of the GNLA, is also maintaining close contacts with the leaders of the outfit and whenever the pressure of the security forces increases, he shifts to Bangladesh by taking advantage of the porous border.¹⁰⁷

Left-wing Extremism

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Maoist' propaganda literature surfaced on the Andhra-Odisha border; foreign linkages of CPI (Maoist); four Maoist camps destroyed in Kalahandi district in Odisha.**

The banned CPI (Maoist) is trying to regain its foothold in Agency areas of the Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh, if pamphlets and posters that have surfaced recently are any indication. There has been a lull in Maoist activity in the district for quite some time now. But there was apprehension among police that they would resort to violence during the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) week, which concluded on December 8. However, barring a landmine blast in which there were no casualties, no major incidents was reported during the week. Reportedly, the Maoists had also kidnapped two tribal people branding them as 'police informers'

¹⁰⁶ Anand, Utkarsh, "Secure Indo-Bangla Through Intensive Patrolling, Complete Fencing: SC to Centre", *The Indian Express*, December 18, 2014 at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/secure-indo-bangla-through-intensive-patrolling-complete-fencing-sc-to-centre/#sthash.261CGHn9.dpuf>

¹⁰⁷ "State Alerted On ULFA(I) Strike Plan", *The Assam Tribune*, December 18, 2014 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec1814/at053>

¹⁰⁸ Gopal, B. Madhu, "Maoists Trying To Regroup?", *The Hindu*, December 15, 2014 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/maoists-trying-to-regroup/article6691412.ece>

on the Odisha side of the border few days ago. This coupled with the surfacing of Maoist propaganda literature in Odiya, on the Andhra-Odisha border has given rise to apprehensions that Maoists are trying to regroup. However, police have dismissed such reports.¹⁰⁸

Unraveling the foreign linkages of CPI (Maoist), the Union Home Ministry on December 15 informed Lok Sabha that some senior cadres of the Communist Party of the Philippines were known to have trained members of the domestic Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) outfit on two occasions, in 2005 and 2011. In a reply to a question in Lok Sabha, minister of state for home Kiren Rijiju said that the CPI (Maoist) has “close links with Maoist organizations in the Philippines and Turkey, etc.” Apart from being a member of the conglomerate Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), the LWE groups have also participated in conferences and seminars in Belgium and Germany. “The so-called ‘people’s war’ being waged by the CPI (Maoist) against the Indian state has also drawn support from several Maoist fringe organizations located in Germany, France, Holland, Turkey, Italy, etc,” Rijiju said. While pointing out that the recovery of foreign-made arms and ammunition from the Left-wing extremists in different encounters and operations indicated that they were procuring weapons from various sources, the minister said the possibility of CPI (Maoist) front outfits clandestinely receiving foreign funds could not be ruled out.¹⁰⁹

Security personnel have destroyed four Naxal camps in the Telan forested area in Odisha’s Kalahandi district and have recovered 18 rounds of live ammunition, kit bags, Naxal literature, solar panels, uniforms, batteries and radio sets from these camps. Mr Yeswant Jethwa, IG, South Western range said that there was heavy exchange of fire between the Naxals and security forces. However, no casualty was reported from either side and the red rebels had fled the camps. Jampha, a Central Committee member of the CPI (Maoist), hails from Warangal district in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and has a reward of Rs 25 lakh on his head, also managed to escape along with around forty of his cadres, added Jethwa.¹¹⁰

Radicalisation and Terrorism

(December 15-21, 2014)

- **Centre alerts states on lone-wolf attacks; ‘No information that madarasas involved in training terrorists’: Government.**

After the Intelligence Bureau alerted Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh about a likely lone-wolf attack based on a warning tracked on a pro-ISIS Twitter handle, the Union Home Ministry issued a fresh advisory to all states and Union territories seeking tighter surveillance

¹⁰⁹ “CPI (Maoist) Has Links With Foreign Left-Wing Parties: Govt”, *The Times of India*, December 16, 2014 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/CPI-Maoist-has-links-with-foreign-Left-wing-parties-Govt/articleshow/38465121.cms>

¹¹⁰ “Maoist Camp Destroyed In Odisha’s Kalahandi Dist”, *Odisha Sun Times*, December 17, 2014 at <http://odishasuntimes.com/103666/maoist-camp-destroyed-odishas-kalahandi-dist/>

and policing in the light of a heightened terror threat to crowded places and emphasize on a standard drill laid down in 2010 to insulate schools against terror attacks. The general advisory, issued on December 15, warned of terror attacks in key towns and cities, with crowded places including malls, marketplaces, vital installations and even religious places high on the terror radar. The advisory also asked the police to map vulnerable schools and engage the school managements in preparedness for possible terrorist attacks. Sources in the home ministry said that a fresh threat assessment has pointed to the possibility of lone wolf attacks by radicalized elements, including those swayed by ISIS ideology, as well as a “real” threat of a strike by five SIMI activists who escaped from a Madhya Pradesh prison last year. These activists, last tracked in Hospet (Karnataka) in September 2014, are in touch with Pakistan’s ISI which has entrusted it a “big project” in India. “The SIMI threat is most serious, as compared to that from Indian Mujahideen as around 25 of its cadres are either in Pakistan or Afghanistan and the local cadres largely on their own...as for Kashmiri militant groups, they are now preoccupied with the state elections,” said an intelligence officer. Though the SIMI men are not known to have perfected bomb-making skills, there is a possibility that they can get hold of a sufficiently trained bomb expert. “This will only spell real trouble,” the officer conceded.¹¹¹

In a reply to a written question in Rajya Sabha on December 17, MoS for Home Haribhai Parathibhai Chaudhary informed that the Government has no information whether madarsas in general are involved in training of terrorists; however, during investigations into the Burdwan blast case, it has been disclosed that in three madrasas controlled by illegal Bangladeshi migrants, religious extremism and indoctrination was being preached.

Replying to another question, Chaudhary said that there was an increase in the number of madarsas in border areas of Rajasthan especially in Barmer district but there were no reports about madarsas in the border areas of Rajasthan indulging in anti-national activities.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Jain, Bharti, “After Sydney, Peshawar terror strikes, Centre Alerts States On Lone-Wolf Attacks”, *The Times of India*, December 16, 2014 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/After-Sydney-Peshawar-terror-strikes-Centre-alerts-states-on-lone-wolf-attacks/articleshow/45542295.cms>

¹¹² “No Information That Madarsas Involved In Training Terrorists: Government”, *Economic Times*, December 17, 2014 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/no-information-that-madarsas-involved-in-training-terrorists-government/articleshow/45548132.cms>