

# THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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## I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

### A. South Asia

#### Bangladesh

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **BNP places seven point proposals to end political stand-off; China launches new frigate for Bangladesh navy.**

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson, Khaleda Zia placed a seven-point proposal on December 31, 2014 including holding of a fresh all-inclusive election as soon as possible, to end the political standoff. "Now it is the government who shall have to decide whether it will sit for dialogue accepting our proposals or it will face a movement," Khaleda said at an emergency press conference called at her Gulshan office on New Year's Eve. The ruling Awami League, however, ruled out any possibility of talks later in the night. Party publicity and publication affairs secretary Hasan Mahamud said the next parliament elections would be in 2019. Khaleda's seven-point proposal include creating a level playing field for all political parties, reconstitution of the Election Commission with impartial, competent and honest people before the election schedule is announced, making the voter list error free, dissolving parliament and cabinet before the election schedule is announced, handing over power to an impartial, non-party administration through consensus among all political parties, and deploying members of the armed forces with magistracy power to ensure a peaceful atmosphere conducive to fair polls soon after announcement of the election schedule.<sup>1</sup>

A new type of frigate built for the Bangladesh Navy was launched in the riverside city of Wuhan in central China's Hubei Province on December 30, 2014. The frigate, with a displacement of 1,300 tonnes and maximum speed of 25 knots (nautical miles per hour), is 90 metres long and 11 metres across the beam. It can accommodate 80 crew. It is equipped with 76mm and 30mm naval guns as well as ship-to-ship and ship-to-air missiles. It will be the most advanced frigate in the Bangladesh Navy, which will be a boost to its coastal defence capability and the China-Bangladesh friendship, said Rear Admiral Syed Abu Mansur Arshadul Abedin, assistant chief of naval staff, at the launching ceremony. Bangladesh has bought two frigates from China. The first was launched in November.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Hold Dialogue or Face Movement", *The Daily Star*, January 1, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/hold-dialogue-or-face-movement-57954>.

<sup>2</sup> "China Launches New Frigate for Bangladesh Navy", *The Daily Star*, January 1, 2015 at <http://bd.thedailystar.net/china-launches-new-frigate-for-bangladesh-navy-57961>.

## Sri Lanka

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **PAFFREL observes high level of violation of law run up to the Presidential election; Asian Election Monitoring Network arrives in Sri Lanka to observe the election; Commonwealth Observer Group will monitor the Presidential election; TNA to back common opposition Presidential candidate; UPFA criticises UN Chief for urging country to conduct peaceful election; India constructs 27,000 houses in Sri Lanka.**

An official election monitor in Sri Lanka, People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) says abuse of state resources for election purposes in 2015 presidential election has increased dramatically compared to the 2010 election. A total of 150 violations relating to the Abuse of State Power, Resources & Misuse of State Sector Employees for election purposes have been reported to PAFFREL during the first 35 days of the pre-election period. In contrast, during the entirety of the 68 day pre-election period of the 2010 Presidential Election, only 53 incidents relating to the misuse of state resources for campaign purposes were recorded. During the run up to the 2010 Presidential Election, a total of 757 cases of Electoral Law/General Law violations (both confirmed and unconfirmed) were recorded for the entirety of the pre-election period of 68 days. In the 2015 Election, with nearly two weeks to actual Election Day, over 500 (both confirmed and unconfirmed) incidents have already been recorded by PAFFREL in the first 35 days of the pre-election period.<sup>3</sup>

PAFFREL invited the Asian monitors and 36 foreign election monitors from the Asian Election Monitoring Network arrived in Sri Lanka to observe the polls. According to PAFFREL, a special training programme was held on December 29 to give the foreign monitors an understanding of the proceedings in Sri Lanka. The Asian monitors were invited following discussions held with the Elections Commissioner. The Asian monitors will monitor the pre and post polls environment as well as the election itself. Elections Commissioner Mahinda Deshapriya has also invited Commonwealth monitors for the Presidential elections.<sup>4</sup>

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma called for a level playing field during the Presidential election in Sri Lanka, and adherence to the laws and norms that govern a credible and peaceful election. Sharma said that Dr Bharrat Jagdeo, former President of Guyana, will lead a Commonwealth Observer Group to Sri Lanka, which follows a formal invitation from Sri Lanka's Commissioner of Elections, Mahinda Deshapriya. The nine Observers will be in Sri Lanka from 2 to 14 January 2015. A five-member team from the Commonwealth Secretariat, led by Ms Katalaina Sapolu, Director of the Rule of Law Division, will support them.<sup>5</sup>

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has decided to back common opposition Presidential candidate Maithripala Sirisena at the Presidential election next year. TNA leader R. Sampanthan made the

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<sup>3</sup> "Sri Lanka Election Monitors Record High Levels of State Resource Abuse during Election Campaign", *Colombo Page*, December 29, 2014 at [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_14B/Dec29\\_1419796174CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14B/Dec29_1419796174CH.php).

<sup>4</sup> "Foreign Observers Begin Work", *Colombo Gazette*, December 29, 2014 at <http://colombogazette.com/2014/12/29/foreign-observers-begin-work/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Sharma Urges Level Playing Field", *Colombo Gazette*, December 29, 2014 at <http://colombogazette.com/2014/12/29/sharma-for-a-level-playing-field/>.

announcement at a press conference on December 30 in the presence of other TNA members. The TNA said that it had offered unconditional support to the Government and had not signed an agreement. TNA Parliamentarian M.A Sumanthiran said that the TNA had also not discussed withdrawing troops from the North, as alleged by the Government.<sup>6</sup>

The United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) has criticised the United Nations Secretary-General Ban-Ki-Moon for his call for the government to ensure "peaceful and credible conduct" at the upcoming Presidential election. The statement noted that Sri Lanka is a country with over 80 years of universal adult franchise and a healthy democratic electoral tradition. "In fact this country has been enjoying democratic voting rights many decades before Mr Ban-Ki-moon's country," it said. "The UN Secretary General, who has not asked governments or leaders of many countries with questionable claim to democracy to conduct credible elections, is preaching to Sri Lanka, a vibrant democracy on how to conduct elections," the government said.<sup>7</sup>

The Indian Housing Project in Sri Lanka continues to make excellent progress, with the project reaching its target of constructing or repairing 16,000 houses during 2014, the High Commission of India in Colombo said in a release on January 1. A total of 27,000 houses have been constructed or repaired under this project till date. During 2014, 14,555 new houses were constructed under the project in the Northern Province, and 1,447 in the Eastern Province. In addition, 162 damaged houses were repaired in the Northern Province. With the completion of 26,000 houses under the second phase, 19,000 houses remain to be constructed or repaired under this phase, which is expected to be completed by end-2015. Separately, preparatory work for the third phase of the Indian Housing Project, which involves construction of 4,000 houses for estate workers in the Central and Uva Provinces, has already commenced, and actual construction is expected to start in mid-2015.<sup>8</sup>

## Maldives

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Chinese government expresses its satisfaction with bilateral relations with Maldives; EC President and Vice President to observe Sri Lankan Presidential election; Deputy Secretary General of the Muslim World League visits Sri Lanka; Real GDP growth has been projected to accelerate to 10.5 percent in 2015; President sends message of sympathy to Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.**

Chinese Ambassador to the Maldives Wang Fukang has said that the government of China is satisfied with its bilateral relations with the Maldives. The ambassador made this remark while speaking at a ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 30, to hand over gifts,

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<sup>6</sup> "TNA Decides to Back Maithripala", *Colombo Gazette*, December 30, 2014 at <http://colombogazette.com/2014/12/30/tna-decides-to-back-maithripala/>.

<sup>7</sup> "UPFA Criticizes UN Chief for Wrongful Inferences", *PresInform*, January 1, 2015 at [http://www.priu.gov.lk/news\\_update/Current\\_Affairs/ca201501/20150101upfa\\_criticizes\\_un\\_chief\\_wrongful\\_inferences.htm](http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201501/20150101upfa_criticizes_un_chief_wrongful_inferences.htm).

<sup>8</sup> "India Constructs 27,000 Houses in Sri Lanka", *Colombo Page*, January 1, 2015 at [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_15A/Jan01\\_1420092896CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan01_1420092896CH.php).

including Chinese cultural items, from Chinese First Lady Peng Liyuan to the Maldivian government. The gifts were accepted by Ambassador-at-Large Ahmed Mohamed. The agreement in this regard was signed by Ahmed Mohamed on behalf of the Maldivian government, and by Chinese Ambassador Wang Fukang on behalf of the Chinese government.<sup>9</sup>

Election Commission (EC) President Ahmed Sulaiman and Vice President Amjad Musthafa have departed to Sri Lanka on to observe Presidential Election at Sri Lanka, which will be held on January 8.<sup>10</sup>

Deputy Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Adil bin Ali has paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom on January 4 at the President's Office. President Yameen expressed his appreciation to Dr. Adil bin Ali for his visit to the Maldives. The President and the Deputy Secretary General discussed the efforts being made by the Government in strengthening Islamic faith amongst the people. At the meeting, Dr. Adil bin Ali briefed President Yameen on the various programmes being conducted by the Muslim World League all over the world and enquired about the areas in which his organisation could provide assistance to the Maldives.<sup>11</sup>

According to revised estimates of the National Bureau of Statistics, real GDP growth has been projected to accelerate to 10.5 percent in 2015, up from 8.5 percent in 2014. This increase is driven mainly by the strong growth of the tourism and construction sectors.<sup>12</sup>

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has sent messages of sympathy to Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, following the severe flooding that occurred in the northeast of Malaysia; and to President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, following the loss of Air Asia flight QZ8501 en route from Surabaya to Singapore.<sup>13</sup> President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has also sent a message of sympathy to Sri Lankan President, H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, following the flash floods and mudslides in Sri Lanka.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Ambassador: Chinese Government Satisfied With Bilateral Relations With Maldives", *SunOnline*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26839>.

<sup>10</sup> "EC President and Vice President Depart to Sri Lanka for Election Observation", *SunOnline*, January 2, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26880>.

<sup>11</sup> "Deputy Secretary General of the Muslim World League Calls on the President", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15182>.

<sup>12</sup> "GDP Growth Projection to Accelerate To 10.5 Percent in 2015", *SunOnline*, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26909>.

<sup>13</sup> "President Yameen Sends Messages of Sympathy to Leaders of Malaysia and Indonesia", *SunOnline*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/26842>.

<sup>14</sup> "President Sends Message of Sympathy to the President of Sri Lanka", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15184>.

## B. East Asia

### China

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **People's Liberation Army launches a website to help in procuring military equipment; China keen to promote relations with Latin America; Xi Jinping calls for increased reforms; CPC asserts its intolerance towards intra-Party cliques for personal gains.**

On January 4, 2015, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) launched a website ([www.weain.mil.cn](http://www.weain.mil.cn)). This website is launched in order to help in procurement of military equipment. The PLA will publish new demands for the military on the website on the first working days in January and July. This is a part of the PLA reforms towards military procurements.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, said on December 31 that the Chinese President Xi Jinping will be attending the opening ceremony of the first ministerial meeting of the Forum of China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). This forum is being held on January 8-9. This is to help China in boosting its cooperation with the Latin American countries.<sup>16</sup>

During his new year's speech on December 31, the Chinese President Xi Jinping asserted the need to continue reform and rule of law in 2015. He said that, "We adapted to the new normal of economic growth; actively promoted economic and social development; and further improved the people's lives". He compared the reforms to "a bird's two wings". He further added that there was no turning back now.<sup>17</sup>

According to the statement released on December 29, of the meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, it was argued that, "Organizing cliques within the Party to run personal businesses is absolutely not tolerated".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "PLA Launches Website For Military Equipment Procurement", *China Daily*, January 4, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-01/04/content\\_19232029.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-01/04/content_19232029.htm), accessed on January 5, 2015

<sup>16</sup> Weihua, Chen, "Forum to Elevate China-Latin America Ties", *China Daily*, January 2, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-01/02/content\\_19222365.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-01/02/content_19222365.htm), accessed on January 5, 2015

<sup>17</sup> "Xi Stresses More Reform, Rule Of Law", *China Daily*, December 31, 2014 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-12/31/content\\_19211128.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-12/31/content_19211128.htm), accessed on January 5, 2015

<sup>18</sup> "CPC Vows No Tolerance Of Intra-Party Cliques", *China Daily*, December 29, 2014 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-12/29/content\\_19195582.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-12/29/content_19195582.htm), accessed on January 5, 2015



## C. Southeast Asia

### Southeast Asia

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **JI members arrested in Indonesia; Another disaster in Southeast Asian aviation history; ASEAN Open Skies Policy to be implemented in 2015; Malaysia to organise ASEAN Foreign Ministers retreat; UN concerned about Rohingyas in Myanmar; Fiji happiest country in the world.**

This week in Southeast Asia and Oceania has been very interesting. Few Jemaah Islamiya (JI) members were arrested in Indonesia and the unfortunate incident of AirAsia flight QZ8501 that happened on December 28 was devastating. However, despite three major accidents in the aviation history in 2014 itself, Southeast Asia substantiated its aim of creating an ASEAN Community by 2015 by implementing the open skies policy on the very first day of the New Year. After Myanmar, Malaysia is the new chair of ASEAN with the mission of "Our People, Our Community, Our Vision". In Myanmar, on the other hand, the plight of the Rohingyas continues and the United Nations General Assembly has requested the government to resolve the issue. The Oceanic country, Fiji proved to be the happiest country in the world in a survey conducted by a polling organisation.

The Indonesian police have arrested three including two who had connections with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) leader Dulmatin who was killed by the Indonesian police in 2010. Dulmatin was the alleged mastermind of 2002 Bali bombing. The Jakarta Post reported that the police have arrested Muhammad Shibghotulloh who has given shelter to Dulmatin and was involved in a military training camp in Ambon. Eleven other Indonesians were earlier deported from Malaysia to Indonesia as they were trying to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the first week of December. However, the Police Inspector General Ronny F. Sompie denied the news of Muhammad being a member of ISIS. However, reports indicate that several parts of Indonesia, especially east Java and Poso have been experiencing a surge in the number of youths who are willing to join ISIS and go to Syria to fight on their behalf. The National Police spokesman Agus Rianto mentioned that the JI linkages in Indonesia are not as hard as they used to be in the past as the present leader Abu Bakar Bashir is now in jail in central Java. However, some members are still actively working and loyal to the militant organisation.<sup>19</sup>

As the AirAsia Flight QZ8501, destined for Singapore, went missing, several theories came up to explain the disaster. In fact, the disaster highlights the inadequate safety measures and other insufficiencies persistent in the aviation systems in Southeast Asia. *Reuters* reported that pilots who regularly fly from Indonesia to Singapore are well-aware of the volatile weather conditions and how to take timely decision and declare emergency to avoid any disaster. As AirAsia offers budget flight service, it has become extremely popular in Southeast Asia with its tagline of 'Now Everyone Can Fly'. According to the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation, as a result of introducing

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<sup>19</sup> Herawati, Yenny, "Indonesia Nabs Three Suspected Terrorists", *Khabar Southeast Asia*, December 30, 2014, available at [http://khabarsoutheastasia.com/en\\_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2014/12/30/feature-02](http://khabarsoutheastasia.com/en_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2014/12/30/feature-02), accessed on January 12, 2015.



many other low budget airlines, the numbers of air travellers have jumped by two-thirds to almost 1 billion per year in the last five years in the Asia Pacific. The air traffic routes are extremely busy in Southeast Asia and different companies are making different aircrafts and that leads to a nightmare for the regions' air traffic control (ATS), mentioned one former pilot associated with the Singapore Airlines. As a result of the crowded skies, ATS takes longer time to allow the pilot for taking higher altitude and/or different route to avoid weather deviations, mentioned the same pilot. The Association of Asia Pacific Airlines in one of its reports mentioned that besides making fuel-efficient planes, it is also necessary to improve the infrastructures and invest more on airport terminals, runways, air navigation services etc. Indonesian air traffic controllers still depend on radio reports sent by the pilots to take a note of the distance between flights which causes delays in decision-taking process. This is called procedural separation and it is an outdated system unlike Singapore and many other developed countries where more sophisticated radar separation is being used.<sup>20</sup>

January 1, 2015 was a signature day for ASEAN as the ASEAN Open Skies Policy came into effect on that day. It is named as ASEAN Single Aviation Market. It will not only increase regional and domestic connectivity but also integrate production networks and boost up regional trade. Under this new programme, now the ASEAN airlines will fly freely throughout the region.<sup>21</sup>

Malaysia's term as the chair of ASEAN has started and the ASEAN foreign ministers' retreat will be held at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah on January 27-28, 2015. Malaysia has chosen "Our people, Our Community, Our Vision" as the theme of ASEAN in 2015. The foreign ministers will discuss about the post-2015 vision of ASEAN and the priority goals to be achieved by the ASEAN Community. Other major political, economic and developmental issues will be discussed as well. In 2015, Malaysia is expected to host the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summits in April and November respectively.<sup>22</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has passed a resolution expressing deep concern over the fate of the lakhs of Rohingyas living in Myanmar as the government has denied their citizenship repeatedly. Since June 2012, around 280 Rohingyas have been killed in sectarian violence that took place in the country sporadically. Recently the Myanmar government has claimed that the Rohingyas need to identify themselves as Bengali. The UNGA has requested that the group should be identified as Rohingyas and not as Bengali. The UNGA also requested the government to stop 'arbitrary arrest and detention, forced displacement, rape and other forms of sexual violence' of the Rohingyas. It is argued that after a bright start of reforms in 2011, Myanmar

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<sup>20</sup> Wardell, Jane, and Daga, Anshuman, "Crowded skies In Southeast Asia Put Pressure On Pilots, Air Traffic Control", *Reuters*, December 31, 2014, available at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/12/31/indonesia-airplane-trafficcontrol-idINKBN0K90CK20141231>, accessed on January 12, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> "ASEAN Open Skies Policy to Be Implemented In 2015", *ASEAN Briefing*, available at <http://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/2015/01/02/asean-open-skies-policy-implemented-2015.html>, accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> "ASEAN Retreat to Kick-Start Malaysia's Chairmanship", *Mizzima.com*, January 2, 2015, available at <http://www.mizzima.com/mizzima-news/regional/item/16479-asean-retreat-to-kick-start-malaysia-s-chairmanship/16479-asean-retreat-to-kick-start-malaysia-s-chairmanship>, accessed on January 14, 2015.

has now slowed down the democratisation to some extent and the plight of the Rohingyas is adding to the problem.<sup>23</sup>

Polling organisation WIN/Gallup has conducted a survey amongst the world's 65 countries and Fiji has topped the list in happiness index as 93 per cent of the respondents indicated that they were either very happy or happy. The respondents were asked about the economic prosperity of their countries amongst many other issues. Fiji was followed by Finland. However, though Fiji has topped the list, as a region Oceania's rank was not very noteworthy with around 14 per cent respondents declared themselves as unhappy or very unhappy.<sup>24</sup>

## D. Russia

### Russia

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Russia calls on all states to put Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra on terrorist lists; Foreign Ministers of Russia and US discuss Ukraine and the Middle East; Russian and German foreign ministers discuss situation in Ukraine; Russia and Ukraine sign two contracts for delivery of electric energy to Ukraine; Russia says Ukraine's switch to US nuclear fuel threatens European safety; Moscow ready for new ministerial meeting in Russia-EU-Ukraine format.**

Russia's Foreign Ministry has called upon all states to follow its example by putting the Islamic State (IS) and Jabhat al-Nusra on national terrorist lists and ban their activity. Under the Russian law, the activity of an organization is recognized as terrorist if it includes: the organization, preparation and implementation of terrorist acts, incitement to terror acts, violence against individuals or organizations, destruction of material objects for terrorist purposes, organization of illegal armed groups, criminal groups, organized groups for staging terrorist acts, as well as participation in such actions, recruiting, arming, training and use of terrorists, as well as financing of a priori terrorist organizations or terrorist groups or provision of other assistance to them.<sup>25</sup>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry have discussed, over telephone on January 2, the Palestine-Israeli settlement issue, the situation around Syria, crisis in Ukraine and Russia-US bilateral relations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "UN Urges Myanmar to Give Rohingya 'Full Citizenship'", *Voice of America*, December 30, 2015, available at <http://www.voanews.com/content/un-urges-myanmar-to-give-rohingya-full-citizenship/2578599.html>, accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> "Global Happiness Survey Shows Fijians Are the World's Most Content", *ABC News*, January 1, 2015, available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-31/global-happiness-survey/5994014>, accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> "Russia Calls On All States To Put Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra on Terrorist Lists", *Itar-Tass*, December 29, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/769731>

<sup>26</sup> "Lavrov, Kerry Discuss Situation In Middle East, Crisis In Ukraine By Phone", *Itar-Tass*, January 2, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/770226>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier have held a telephone conversation, on December 29, to discuss the situation in Ukraine in the wake of the December 24 meeting of the Contact Group and exchange of the prisoners of war carried out by the conflicting parties. They stressed upon the need to implement the Minsk accords and establish a pan-Ukrainian dialogue in order to settle the crisis.<sup>27</sup>

Russia and Ukraine have signed two contracts on December 30 for delivery of electric energy to Ukraine. The annual contract takes effect on December 30, 2014 and stipulates the delivery of up to 1,500 MWs of electricity.<sup>28</sup>

Russian Foreign Ministry has said in a statement, issued on December 30, that Ukraine's switch to the use of upgraded nuclear fuel from the United States at its nuclear power plants (NPP) that were built in the Soviet times can threaten safety at both the domestic level and in Europe as well. At present, Ukraine imports about US\$ 600 million worth of nuclear fuel from Russia annually.<sup>29</sup>

Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Nebenzya has said, on December 31, that Moscow is ready for a new ministerial meeting in the Russia-EU-Ukraine format in order to discuss trade and economic relations while factoring in the provisions of an Association Agreement (AA) between Brussels and Kiev. In the past one year, several rounds of meetings have taken place that resulted in European Commission's decision to put off implementation of the rules of Association Agreement until December 31, 2015. In response, Russia had agreed to maintain the preferential trade status for Ukraine over the same period on the condition of inviolability of the present trade regime.<sup>30</sup>

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Pakistan wants Russia to join Central Asia Electricity Transmission Project –CASA1000; Russia says establishment of a free trade zone is long-term goal of Eurasian Economic Union-European Union cooperation; Russia to focus on strategic nuclear forces in 2015; Russia's international reserves hit new 5-year low at US\$ 388.5 billion; Medvedev signs resolution on allocating US\$ 2.6 billion roubles to Yamal LNG; Russia boosts oil reserves by 550 million tons in 2014.**

Pakistan's ambassador to Russia Zaheer Janjua has said, in Moscow on December 31, that Pakistan embraces the idea of Russia joining the regional electricity transmission project in Central Asia - CASA-1000. The 1,200 km project envisions transporting electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Russian, German Foreign Ministers Discuss Situation In Ukraine After Contact Group Meeting", *Itar-Tass*, December 29, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/769900>

<sup>28</sup> "Russia and Ukraine Sign Two Contracts For Delivery Of Electric Energy to Ukraine", *Itar-Tass*, December 30, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/770061>

<sup>29</sup> "Moscow Says Ukraine's Switch To Us Nuclear Fuel Threatens European Safety", *Itar-Tass*, December 30, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/770082>

<sup>30</sup> "Moscow Ready For New Ministerial Meeting In Russia-Eu-Ukraine Format", *Itar-Tass*, December 31, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/770174>

<sup>31</sup> "Pakistan Wants Russia to Join Central Asia Electricity Transmission Project", *Sputnik News*, December 31, 2014, at <http://sputniknews.com/business/20141231/1016441485.html>

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Nebenzya has said, in Moscow on December 31 that the long-term goal of cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the European Union (EU) is the establishment of a free trade zone that is expected to serve as the basis of a common economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific. However, he acknowledged the existing realities that by no means allow for implementing such plans, although the idea itself has elicited 'an ever greater response from the European Union.'<sup>32</sup>

The chief of Russia's General Staff Valery Gerasimov has said on December 29 in Moscow that development of the strategic nuclear force will be the top priority of the Defence Ministry in 2015. He observed that in 2014, three regiments of the Strategic Missile Force had been rearmed with the new Yars system while four strategic bombers Tu-160 and Tu-95MS had been upgraded. Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu had earlier reported that the Strategic Nuclear Forces had added 38 new intercontinental ballistic missiles including 22 submarine-based missiles in 2014. He also added that a special army of the Russian Air Force and Anti-Aircraft Defence for the Arctic will be created in 2015.<sup>33</sup>

The Russian Central bank has said that the country's foreign exchange and gold reserves fell 2.6 per cent to US\$ 388.5 billion in the period from December 19 through December 26. Russia had reserves of US\$ 510 billion in 2013. Its international reserves comprise of foreign currency, special drawing rights (SDRs), a reserve position in the International Monetary Fund and monetary gold.<sup>34</sup>

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has signed a resolution on allocating 150 billion roubles (US\$ 2.6 billion) from the National Welfare Fund to Yamal LNG Co. The amount will be allocated in exchange of Yamal-LNG shares and amends the government resolution on the construction of a liquefied gas facility at the South Tambeisky gas condensate field on the Yamal peninsula. The facility's capacity will be 16.5 million tonnes with stage one scheduled to be launched in 2017. The project cost is estimated at about US\$ 27 billion. Russia's Novatek holds 60 per cent stake in the project with France's Total and China's CNPC having 20 percent stake each. The project is unable to attract Western investments because of anti-Russian sanctions. In an another development, Russia's second largest lender by assets, VTB Bank has received the first aid tranche of 100 billion roubles (US\$ 1.8 billion) from the National Welfare Fund. It is also expected to receive the second instalment of 150 billion roubles (US\$ 2.6 billion) from the National Welfare Fund by the end of the first quarter of 2015.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Free Trade Zone Is Long-Term Goal of EEU-EU Cooperation — Deputy FM", *Itar-Tass*, December 31, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/770167>

<sup>33</sup> "Strategic Nuclear Force To Become Defense Ministry's Priority 2015 — General Staff", *Itar-Tass*, December 29, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/769871>

<sup>34</sup> "Russia's International Reserves Hit New 5-Year Low at \$388.5 Bln as of Dec 26", *Itar-Tass*, December 31, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/770162>

<sup>35</sup> "Medvedev Signs Resolution On Allocating 150 Bln Roubles to Yamal LNG", *Itar-Tass*, December 30, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/770085>

Natural Resources Minister Sergey Donskoy has said, on December 30, that Russia boosted its hydrocarbon reserves by 550 million tons of oil, 900 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 100 million tons of gas condensate in 2014.<sup>36</sup>

## E. Iran, Iraq and the Gulf

### Iran

(December 15-28, 2015)

- **India imported 38 percent more Iranian oil in January-November; Iran unveils monument for fallen Jewish-Iranian soldiers; Assad praises Iran for determination to fight terror; Iran Army launches joint military drill; Senior Iranian commander killed in Iraq; Iran Tests Suicide Drone; Iran's Defence Minister says, Iran is world fourth missile power.**

India imported about 38 percent more oil from Iran in the eleven months to November as an easing of Western sanctions earlier in the year over Tehran's disputed nuclear activities helped boost shipments. India, Iran's top client after China, imported 250,600 barrels per day (bpd) crude last month. Private refiner Essar Oil was the biggest buyer of Iranian oil in November followed by state-run Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemical Ltd. The two are India's only regular monthly importers of Iranian crude.<sup>37</sup>

Iran has unveiled a monument to honour Jewish-Iranian soldiers who fell during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. In the ceremony in Tehran, a senior Iranian parliament member praised the Iranian Jewish community's ties to the state and its "obedience" to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Ruhollah Khomeini before him.<sup>38</sup>

Syrians are determined to "eradicate terrorism and extremist thoughts that are menacing the region and the world," said Assad during a meeting with Ali Larinji. Assad also said that Iran's stance on Syria is of high appreciation, noting that Damascus' "keenness to further bolster cooperation with the Iranian side in all domains in a way that serves the common interests shared by the two countries and the establishment of security and stability in the region".<sup>39</sup>

According to official Islamic Republic News Iran's Army has started a military drill by using various units covering an area of about 2.2 million square kilometres to west of Hormuz Strait. Units from ground forces as well as air force fighters and Navy vessels are participating in the

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<sup>36</sup> "Russia Boosts Oil Reserves By 550 Million Tons in 2014 — Minister", *Itar-Tass*, December 30, 2014, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/769978>

<sup>37</sup> "India Imports 38 Pct More Iranian Oil In Jan-Nov", *Alarabia*, December 17, 2014 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/energy/2014/12/17/India-imports-38-pct-more-Iranian-oil-in-Jan-Nov-.html>

<sup>38</sup> "Monument to Jewish Martyrs Unveiled in Tehran", *IRNA*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.irna.ir/en/Photo/2787730/>

<sup>39</sup> "Assad Praises Iran, Says Syria Determined to Eradicate Terrorism", *Almanar*, December 21, 2014 at <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?eid=186778&cid=23&fromval=1>



war game. The operation is aimed at improving the rapid reaction of the Iranian army.<sup>40</sup> Iranian Air Force on December 28 successfully fired improved Maverick missiles on the fourth day of the 'Mohammad Rasoulallah' war game.<sup>41</sup>

*Presstv* reported that the Public Relations Department of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) stated on December 28 that Brigadier General Hamid Taqavi was killed while on "an advisory mission" in the holy city of Samarra. Taqavi was a military commander during the 1980-1988 Iraqi-imposed war against Iran.<sup>42</sup>

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the fourth missile power in the world, Defence Minister Hossein Dehqan said. "Iran has an acceptable status among countries possessing missile capabilities, and stands after the United States, Russia, and China [in missile power]," Dehqan said in a televised interview with *Al-Alam channel*. Over the past years, Iran has made important breakthroughs in its defence sector, attained self-sufficiency in producing important military equipment and systems, and enhanced the preparedness of its forces by holding various drills, the report from *Tehran Times* said.<sup>43</sup>

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Iran leader suggests direct votes on issues; Rafsanjani calls for broader Iran-Russia relations; Iranian military commander says, "We have forces in Syria, Yemen and Iraq"; Attempt to Assassinate Iranian N. Scientist Foiled by IRGC.**

Iran's president said that he might organize direct referendums that would bypass the institutions the conservatives control and give more of a voice to Iranian voters. President Hassan Rouhani, speaking during a conference on the country's economic problems, said that Iranians were entitled to have major issues put to a nationwide vote, as described in the 1979 Constitution.<sup>44</sup>

The chairman of Iran's Expediency Council Rafsanjani underlined that Iran and Russia have abundant capacities for broadening their ties. "Vicinity, common sea border in the Caspian Sea and also the two countries' rich (natural) resources should be the best reasons for the two countries' officials to strengthen their relations and confront the western sanctions," Rafsanjani said in a meeting with Russian Ambassador Levan Jagarian.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> "Iran Army Launches Joint Military Drill", *IRNA*, December 25, 2014 at <http://www.irna.ir/en/News/81437657/>

<sup>41</sup> "Iranian Fighters Fire Maverik Missiles In Military drill", *IRNA*, December 28, 2014 at <http://www.irna.ir/en/News/81440937/>

<sup>42</sup> "Iranian General Killed In Iraq", *Presstv*, December 28, 2014 at <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/392168.html>

<sup>43</sup> "Iran is World's Fourth Missile Power: Defence Minister", *Pavvand*, December 22, 2014 at <http://www.payvand.com/news/14/dec/1115.html>

<sup>44</sup> Erdbrink, Thomas, "Iran Leader Suggests Direct Votes on Issues", *The New York Times*, January 4, 2015 at [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/05/world/middleeast/irans-president-proposes-direct-referendums-as-a-way-to-bypass-rivals.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/05/world/middleeast/irans-president-proposes-direct-referendums-as-a-way-to-bypass-rivals.html?_r=0)

<sup>45</sup> "Rafsanjani Calls for Broader Iran-Russia Relations to Confront Western Sanctions", *Fars News Agency*, January 4, 2015 at <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13931014001434>



Deputy Head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, Lieutenant Gen. Hossein Salami, said that the forces linked to the Iranian revolution in Iraq, Syria and Yemen are 10 times larger than Hezbollah's forces in Lebanon. Salami also spoke about Yemen's Ansarullah movement, saying that the movement is inspired by the Islamic Republic's principles, and the jihadist groups in Palestine, which are in an "ongoing confrontation with the Zionist entity."<sup>46</sup>

According to Fars News Agency, "In the last two years, the Zionist enemy (Israel) was trying hard to assassinate an Iranian nuclear scientist, but the timely presence of the IRGC security forces thwarted the terrorist operation," said Deputy Chief Liaison Officer of Flight Guards Corps Colonel Ya'qoub Baqeri. Baqeri added that the IRGC is "duty-bound to protect the lives of the country's nuclear scientists."<sup>47</sup>

## Iraq and Syria

(December 15-28, 2015)

- **U.S.-led air strikes kill a former Iraqi Army turned ISIS militant; ISIS executes 150 women who refused to marry; First ever western journalist given access to ISIS returns back; 200 bodies found in mass grave in Syria; Syria says, it shot down Israeli drone.**

Fadel Abdullah al-Hiyali, aka Abu Muslim al-Turkmani who U.S. officials said was killed in recent anti-ISIS air strikes, was reportedly a former Iraqi officer under Saddam Hussein and had served time in a U.S.-run prison before becoming "the right hand man" of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, the militant group's leader. Al-Turkmani, also known as Haji Mutazz, reportedly served as a deputy to Baghdadi, the self-styled "caliph" of ISIS. Al-Turkmani was apparently in charge of overseeing Iraqi provinces under ISIS.<sup>48</sup>

Reports have emerged that Islamic State members in the city of Falluja killed 150 women and underage girls that refused to perform sexual acts for fighters. They reported that after the Islamic State members murdered the women and girls, among them pregnant women, they then proceeded to bury the victims in large mass graves in the city.<sup>49</sup>

The first Western journalist in the world to be allowed extensive access to ISIS territories in Syria and Iraq has returned from the region with a warning: the group is "much stronger and much more dangerous" than anyone in the West realises. Jürgen Todenhöfer, 74, is a renowned German

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<sup>46</sup> "Iranian military commander: We have forces in Syria, Yemen and Iraq", *Middle East Monitor*, January 1, 2015 at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/16115-iranian-military-commander-we-have-forces-in-syria-yemen-and-iraq>

<sup>47</sup> "Security Commander: Attempt to Assassinate Iranian N. Scientist Foiled by IRGC", *Fars News*, January 3, 2015 at <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13931013001240>

<sup>48</sup> "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani: From Iraqi Officer To Slain ISIS Deputy", *Alarabia*, December 19, 2014 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/profiles/2014/12/19/Abu-Muslim-al-Turkmani-From-Iraqi-officer-to-slain-ISIS-deputy.html>

<sup>49</sup> Okbi, Yasser and Hashavua, Maariv, "Iraq: ISIS Murdered 150 Women And Underage Girls For Refusing Sex Acts", *Jpost*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iraq-ISIS-murdered-150-women-and-underage-girls-for-refusing-sex-acts-384969>

journalist and publicist who travelled through Turkey to Mosul, the largest city occupied by ISIS, after months of negotiations with the group's leaders. Once within ISIS territory, Todenhöfer said his strongest impression was "that Isis is much stronger than we think here". He said, it now has "dimensions larger than the UK", and is supported by "an almost ecstatic enthusiasm that I have never encountered in any other warzone".<sup>50</sup>

The bodies of 230 people killed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group have been found in a mass grave uncovered by their relatives in Syria's Deir Ezzor province, a monitoring group reported. The discovery brings the number of members of the Shaitat tribe killed during ISIL's summer advance in Deir Ezzor, near Iraq, to more than 900, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. It said the "vast majority" were civilians, and that many of them were executed in cold blood after the tribe rose up against ISIL. The tribe had earlier driven out rival self-declared jihadists and rebels from the area.<sup>51</sup>

Syria released images of an Israeli drone that landed in Quneitra, not far from the border separating Syria and the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. The photos of the unmanned aerial vehicle which were unveiled show Hebrew writing and stickers indicating that the "Skylark" drone was property of the IDF. Kuneitra has seen heavy fighting between forces loyal to President Bashar Assad and rebels including al-Qaida-linked fighters.<sup>52</sup>

- **Turkey says Russia, Iran should be involved in Syria's political transformation process; ISIS executed 100 of its foreign fighters trying to quit; ISIS selling Christian artefacts, turning churches into torture chambers; ISIS publishes interview of captured Jordanian pilot; ISIS executed nearly 2,000 people since June.**

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has welcomed the peace talks between the Syrian government and the opposition, which will be hosted by Russia in January, saying Russia and Iran should take part in Syria's political transformation process. The opposition groups are expected to agree on the formation of a transition government in Syria.<sup>53</sup>

The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) extremist group has executed 100 of its own foreign fighters who tried to flee their headquarters in the Syrian city of Raqqa, the Financial Times newspaper reported. ISIS fighters in Raqqa said the group has created a military police to clamp down on foreign fighters who do not report for duty. Dozens of homes have been raided

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<sup>50</sup> Withnall, Adam, "Inside Isis: The first Western Journalist Ever To Be Given Access To The 'Islamic State' Has Just Returned – And This Is What He Discovered", *The Independent*, December 21, 2014 at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/inside-isis-the-first-western-journalist-ever-given-access-to-the-islamic-state-has-just-returned—and-this-is-what-he-discovered-9938438.html>

<sup>51</sup> "Over 200 Bodies' Found In Syria Mass Grave", *Aljazeera*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/200-bodies-found-syria-mass-grave-2014121718569341299.html>

<sup>52</sup> "Syrian State Media Unveils IDF Drone Allegedly 'Shot Down'", *The Jerusalem Post*, December 22, 2014 at <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Syrian-state-media-unveils-IDF-drone-allegedly-shot-down-385386>

<sup>53</sup> "FM Says Russia, Iran Should Be Involved In Syria's Political Transformation Process", *Todayzaman*, December 29, 2014 at [http://www.todayszaman.com/national\\_fm-says-russia-iran-should-be-involved-in-syrias-political-transformation-process\\_368316.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/national_fm-says-russia-iran-should-be-involved-in-syrias-political-transformation-process_368316.html)

and many militants have been arrested. Some militants have become disillusioned with the realities of fighting in Syria.<sup>54</sup>

The Islamic State is turning Christian churches in Iraq and Syria into dungeons and torture chambers after stripping them of priceless artefacts to sell on the black market. Last July, ISIS militants used sledgehammers to destroy the tomb of Jonah in Mosul. Around the same time, they were destroying Sunni shrines and mosques in the northern province of Ninevah, including the Shia Saad bin Aqeel Husseinia shrine in the city of Tal Afar and the al-Qubba Husseinia, as well as Christian churches in Syria. The group follows a strict interpretation of the Sunni faith which is against idolatry of anything other than God. ISIS has also threatened to destroy the holy sight of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.<sup>55</sup>

Kassasbeh a Jordanian fighter pilot was captured by ISIS on December 24 after his F-16 jet crashed while on a mission against the jihadists over northern Syria. The crash was the first warplane from the U.S.-led coalition lost in combat since air strikes on ISIS began in Syria in September, and marked a major propaganda victory for the Sunni extremist group. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria group has published what it says is an interview with a Jordanian pilot it captured after his plane crashed in Syria last week.<sup>56</sup>

The Islamic State group has executed nearly 2,000 people since it started its campaign in June to take over large swaths of land in Iraq and Syria. About half of those who have been executed were part of a prominent Sunni tribe that rose up against ISIS in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group in Britain, said. Of those killed, 1,175 were civilians, including four children and eight women.<sup>57</sup>

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **IS Twitter account handler Mehdi Masroor Biswas was in touch with ISIS combatant in Iraq, Police says; Iran in new deal to boost Iraq army; Saudi to reopen Embassy in Iraq; ISIS claims car bomb targeting Syria gas plant; Lebanon to impose visa restrictions on Syrians starting January 5; Western backed Syrian opposition coalition elects new leader.**

Alleged pro-Islamic State (IS) Twitter account handler Mehdi Masroor Biswas was in touch with ISIS combatant stationed in Iraq, a top police official said. Police said to have gathered sufficient

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<sup>54</sup> "ISIS Executed 100 Of Its Foreign Fighters Trying To Quit: Report" , *Daily Sabah*, December 20, 2014 at <http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2014/12/20/isis-executed-its-100-foreign-fighters-trying-to-quit-report>

<sup>55</sup> Chiaramonte, Perry, "ISIS Reportedly Selling Christian Artefacts, Turning Churches Into Torture Chambers", December 23, 2014 at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/12/22/isis-reportedly-selling-christian-artifacts-turning-churches-into-torture-1596164509/>

<sup>56</sup> "ISIS Publishes 'Interview' With Captured Jordan Pilot" , *Alarabia*, December 30, 2014 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/30/ISIS-publishes-interview-with-captured-Jordan-pilot-.html>

<sup>57</sup> Banco, Erin, "ISIS Executed Nearly 2,000 People Since June: Monitor" , *IB Times* , December 28, 2014 at <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-executed-nearly-2000-people-june-monitor-1768284>

evidence to prove that Biswas supported ISIS and also his direct messages on his Twitter handle revealed that he encouraged people to join IS.<sup>58</sup>

Iran is to help Iraq rebuild its army under an agreement that could formalize Tehran's military support for its neighbour, which remains under assault by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group. No details of the pact were released but state television said the two sides had "agreed to continue cooperation in the defence arena with the creation of a national army to protect the territorial integrity and security of Iraq."<sup>59</sup>

The Saudi government is preparing to reopen its embassy in Iraq. Saudi Arabia also plans to set up a general consulate in the Iraqi Kurdish capital of Arbil. Iraqi President Fouad Masoum visited Riyadh late last year, raising hopes of a tentative thaw in long-chilly relations between the Arab neighbours. Saudi Arabia closed its Baghdad embassy in 1990 following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.<sup>60</sup>

ISIS claimed responsibility for a car bomb, which exploded near a gas plant in Syria's Homs province on December 29 killing eight people, including four soldiers, and wounding 15, a monitoring group said. ISIS has previously targeted oil and gas facilities in Iraq and Syria as the group seeks funds for its fight to seize territory for a self-proclaimed Islamic "caliphate."<sup>61</sup>

Lebanon is to impose visa restrictions on Syrians for the first time after being overwhelmed by an influx of refugees. This is the first time that Lebanon has required Syrians to apply for visas. Citizens of both countries have been able to travel freely across their shared border since Lebanon gained independence in 1943. The new rule is the latest in a series of measures taken by Lebanon to stem the influx of Syrians fleeing their country's brutal war.<sup>62</sup>

Syria's opposition-in-exile National Coalition elected Khaled Khoja as the group's president Sunday after its current head, Hadi al-Bahra, opted to not run for re-election. Meanwhile, Syrian opposition factions are expected to meet again in Cairo and endorse a "road map" for negotiating with the regime of President Bashar Assad ahead of a round of meetings scheduled for later this month in Moscow. The report, citing sources in the opposition, said the groups were working to finalize a road map that would recommend the formation of a transitional government with full executive powers, in line with the Geneva communiqué of 2012.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "IS Twitter Account Handler Mehdi Masroor Biswas Was In Touch with ISIS Combatant in Iraq: Cops", *The Times of India*, January 2, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/IS-Twitter-account-handler-Mehdi-Masroor-Biswas-was-in-touch-with-ISIS-combatant-in-Iraq-Cops/articleshow/45733378.cms>

<sup>59</sup> "Iran in New Deal To Boost Iraq Army", *Alarabia*, December 31, 2014 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/31/Iran-in-new-deal-to-boost-iraq-army.html>

<sup>60</sup> "Saudi Delegation To Head To Iraq For Talks On Reopening Embassy", *Alarabia*, January 3, 2015 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/03/Saudi-delegation-to-head-to-iraq-for-talks-on-reopening-embassy.html>

<sup>61</sup> "ISIS Claims Car Bomb Targeting Syria Gas Plant", *Alarabia*, December 29, 2014 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/29/ISIS-claims-car-bomb-targeting-syria-gas-plant.html>

<sup>62</sup> "Lebanon To Impose Visa Restrictions On Syrians Starting January 5", *AlAkhbar*, January 4, 2015 at <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/23085>

<sup>63</sup> "Syrian Opposition Coalition Elects New Leader", *The Daily Star*, January 5, 2015 at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Jan-05/283075-syrian-opposition-coalition-elects-new-leader.ashx>

## The Gulf

(December 15-28, 2015)

- **Saudi rulers reconsider ties to Wahhabi clergy; Three Indians saved from execution in Saudi Arabia; Kuwait accepts war reparation delay; A new chapter opens in Egypt-Qatar relationship, Saudi welcomes; Two women to be tried in 'terror' court for driving in Saudi Arabia; Qatar suspends news channel critical of Egyptian government; Bahrain arrests Shia opposition leader.**

Saudi Arabia's ruling Al Saud royal family are trying to adjust their relationship with the country's strict Wahhabi school of Sunni Islam as they increasingly view the teachings of some of its ultra-conservative clergy as a domestic security threat. Radicalization of Muslims in the world's top oil exporter has led to domestic attacks and the involvement of Saudi citizens in jihadist movements in Iraq and Syria.<sup>64</sup>

Three Indians on death row in Saudi Arabia for the murder of their compatriot have been saved from being executed after an Indian businessman paid nearly \$133,200 in blood money on their behalf.<sup>65</sup>

According to a senior UN official, the United Nations Gulf War compensation fund agreed to defer Iraq's requirement to deposit five percent of its oil revenues for a year due to its budgetary difficulties. Major Powers on the fund's ruling body took the decision by consensus as Iraq's economy is being battered by both low oil prices and war with Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants.<sup>66</sup>

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi met a top Qatari envoy in Cairo as part of Saudi-brokered reconciliation that was hailed by Riyadh as the opening of "a new page" between the two Arab states. The meeting between Sisi and the Qatari envoy is the first since the Egyptian leader took office last year. Qatar also stressed its "complete standing with Egypt, as it has always done," noting that the security of the two states was interlinked.<sup>67</sup>

Two Saudi women detained for nearly a month for defying a ban on females driving were referred to a court established to try terrorism cases. Activists said it was the first time female drivers have been referred to the specialised criminal court in Riyadh, and that their detention is the longest of female drivers in Saudi history.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mcdowall, Angus, "Saudi rulers reconsider ties to Wahhabi clergy", *Reuters*, December 17, 2014 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/17/us-saudi-islam-idUSKBN0JV1M120141217>

<sup>65</sup> "Three Indians Saved From Execution in Saudi Arabia", *Gulfnews*, December 21, 2014 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/three-indians-saved-from-execution-in-saudi-arabia-1.1429781>

<sup>66</sup> "Kuwait Accepts Iraq Gulf War Pay Delay", *Alarabia*, December 18, 2014 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/18/Kuwait-accepts-Iraq-Gulf-war-pay-delay.html>

<sup>67</sup> "Saudi Hails Egypt-Qatar Rapprochement", *Alarabia*, December 20, 2014 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/20/Egypt-s-Sisi-meets-Saudi-Qatari-envoys.html>

<sup>68</sup> "Two Women Referred To 'Terror' Court For Driving In Saudi Arabia", *The Guardian*, December 25, 2014 at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/25/women-charged-saudi-arabia-driving-ban-terror-court>



Qatar has suspending its broadcast of a satellite news channel sharply critical of Egypt's military-led government. The suspension is Qatar's biggest concession yet to an 18-month campaign by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Egyptian government to press Qatar to stop its backing for supporters of Egypt's deposed president, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>69</sup>

Sheikh Ali Salman, head of al-Wefaq Shia bloc, arrested after he took part in protest against general elections. Al-Wefaq which was established in 2002 after an announcement of political reforms the previous year, described Salman's detention as "a dangerous and uncalculated adventure that complicates the political and security scene in Bahrain". The island kingdom has been gripped by tension since 2011 protests led by majority Shia Muslims demanding reforms and a bigger role in running the country.<sup>70</sup>

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Saudi border guards killed in attack; Iran says Saudi Arabia should move to curb oil price fall; Bahrain denounces interference after Washington criticizes arrest.**

Attackers have killed two border guards and injured another near Saudi Arabia's border with Iraq in a shooting and suicide assault, according to the kingdom's Interior Ministry. The attackers opened fire on a border patrol near the city of Arar but when security officers responded, one of the attackers was captured and detonated an explosives belt. ISIL has long held that the Saudi royal family doesn't have legitimacy and therefore is a target. But Saudi's Interior Ministry said that it would not know which group was responsible until it had identified the remains of the attackers, a process it said would take some time.<sup>71</sup>

Falling world oil prices will hurt countries across the Middle East unless Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude exporter, takes action to reverse the slump, Iran's deputy foreign minister told *Reuters*. Hossein Amir Abdollahian described Saudi Arabia's inaction in the face of a six-month slide in oil prices as a strategic mistake and said he still hoped the kingdom, Tehran's main rival in the Gulf, would respond.<sup>72</sup>

Bahraini authorities denounced what they called foreign double standards and interference on January 2, days after their main Western ally Washington criticized the detention of the head of the main Shi'ite Muslim opposition group. Sheikh Ali Salman, head of the al-Wefaq Islamic Society, was arrested after leading a protest rally against elections in November which his party boycotted.

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<sup>69</sup> Kirkpatrick, David D., "Qatar Suspends News Channel Critical of Egyptian Government", *The New York Times*, December 22, 2014 at [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/23/world/middleeast/qatar-suspends-news-channel-critical-of-egyptian-government.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/23/world/middleeast/qatar-suspends-news-channel-critical-of-egyptian-government.html?_r=0)

<sup>70</sup> "Bahrain Detains Shia Opposition Leader", *Aljazeera*, December 29, 2014 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/bahrain-detains-shia-opposition-leader-2014122944554800473.html>

<sup>71</sup> "Saudi Border Guards Killed In Attack", *Aljazeera*, January 5, 2015 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/saudi-border-guards-killed-attack-20151573425245939.html>

<sup>72</sup> "Iran Says Saudi Arabia Should Move To Curb Oil Price Fall", *CNBC*, January 1, 2015 at <http://www.cnbc.com/id/102304969#>.



The U.S. State Department expressed deep concern over the detention, saying it would further inflame tensions in the island kingdom off the coast of Saudi Arabia.<sup>73</sup>

## F. The United States of America

### National

(December 22-28, 2014)

- **US department of defence releases 2015 military pay and compensation rates; Rights Groups want special prosecutor to investigate CIA torture; NYC Mayor urges pause in protests after police killings; US officials warn against complacency in fight against Ebola; DTRA experts scan world horizons for biothreats.**

On December 22, 2014, the Department of Defence announced the 2015 military pay and compensation rates for service members, with most service members receiving a one percent increase in basic pay. The new rates for basic pay, basic allowance for housing, basic allowance for subsistence, and the cost of living allowance rates for the contiguous United States will take effect on January 1, 2015. The Defence Department also released its 2015 contiguous United States cost of living allowance rates.<sup>74</sup>

Two civil rights groups say U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder should appoint a special prosecutor to investigate the CIA's use of torture and other extreme measures during interrogations. The American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch said Monday that a recent Senate Intelligence Committee summary report on the CIA includes descriptions of serious federal crimes not previously investigated by the Justice Department. Those groups want a special prosecutor to be given access to the full 6,700-page Senate report in order to conduct a criminal investigation. Both say failure to conduct a comprehensive criminal investigation would contribute to the notion that torture remains a permissible policy option for future administrations.<sup>75</sup>

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio implored protesters on December 22 to wait until after the funerals of two policemen shot dead in an ambush before resuming rallies that have roiled the city and beyond over the deaths of black men at the hands of police. But de Blasio's plea was quickly dismissed by several activist groups that vowed to continue protests that have stirred the city daily after grand juries chose not to indict police officers who killed Eric Garner in New York and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "Bahrain Denounces Interference After Washington Criticizes Arrest", *Reuters*, January 2, 2015 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/02/us-bahrain-us-idUSKBN0KB0W920150102>

<sup>74</sup> "DoD Releases 2015 Military Pay and Compensation Rates", *DoD News*, December 22, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123873>

<sup>75</sup> "Rights Groups Want Special Prosecutor to Investigate CIA Torture", *VOA News*, December 22, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/rights-groups-want-special-prosecutor-to-investigate-cia-torture/2570206.html>

<sup>76</sup> "NYC Mayor Urges Pause in Protests After Police Killings", *Reuters*, December 22, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/new-york-mayor-protests-police-killings/2570199.html>

U.S. officials are worried that progress in the global effort to curtail the spread of the deadly Ebola virus could lead to overconfidence and a reemergence of an outbreak that has already claimed more than 7,000 lives. Both health officials and lawmakers are warning the fight against Ebola may be entering its most critical phase.<sup>77</sup>

US department of Defence reported that since 2009, when a Pentagon memo to military department secretaries announced that emerging infectious diseases would become part of the chemical and biological defence mission, the Defence Threat Reduction Agency has worked to advance its biosurveillance capabilities. Biosurveillance, at least for the Defence Department, is the process of gathering, integrating, analysing and communicating a range of information that relates to health threats for people, animals and even plants, to help protect troops worldwide, and to increase global health security.<sup>78</sup>

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Obama focused on 'long-term' projects in final two years; US consumer confidence rises; US unemployment claims rise; Global, U.S. population continue to rise; US drone rules remain in hangar in 2014; Obama faces new political landscape in 2015.**

President Barack Obama says, as he enters the final two years of his presidency and with the economy stronger at any time since taking office in 2009, he is able to focus on what he calls "long-term projects" in domestic and foreign affairs. During an interview with U.S. public media organization NPR, Obama also said he won't rule out improved relations with Iran, and cited Myanmar and Tunisia as examples where democracy has a chance to advance. Obama said his executive actions in recent weeks on immigration and Cuba were the result of years of work. He said he had foreseen 2014 as a breakthrough year and, after six years in office and an improving economy, he finally had the opportunity to deal with some thorny issues.<sup>79</sup>

Consumer confidence, which is a key driver of U.S. economic growth, improved in December, according to two studies published December 30. The Conference Board's closely-watched survey shows more consumers have a favourable view of current economic conditions and fewer say the business climate is bad. A separate survey by Gallup questioned more than 2500 consumers and found the most confidence in economic conditions since 2008.<sup>80</sup>

Several economic studies published December 31 paint a mixed picture of the U.S. economy. The Labour Department says the number of people signing up for unemployment compensation rose in the United States last week. Initial unemployment claims rose 17,000 to a nationwide total

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<sup>77</sup> Seldin, Jeff, "US Officials Warn Against Complacency in Fight Against Ebola", *VOA News*, December 22, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-officials-warn-against-complacency-in-ebola-fight/2570180.html>

<sup>78</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "DTRA Experts Scan World Horizons for Biothreats", *DoD News*, December 22, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123875>

<sup>79</sup> Beattie, Victor, "Obama Focused on 'Long-Term' Projects in Final Two Years", *VOA News*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/president-obama-focused-on-long-term-projects-in-final-two-years/2578672.html>

<sup>80</sup> "US Consumer Confidence Rises", *VOA News*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-consumer-confidence-rises/2579044.html>

of 298,000. While the number of layoffs rose from the prior week, the relatively low total number is still consistent with an improving job market.<sup>81</sup>

The global population is expected to top more than 7.2 billion people on New Year's Day 2015, according to the United States Census Bureau, for an increase of more than one percent over the same time last year. Meanwhile, the Bureau estimates there will be more than 320 million Americans.<sup>82</sup>

The United States missed a year-end deadline for publishing new rules on remote-control aircraft, delaying an eagerly awaited step toward using drones in everything from farming to package delivery. Businesses have been clamoring for rules to allow commercial drone flights, fearing the United States is falling behind other countries in developing a multibillion-dollar industry.<sup>83</sup>

President Barack Obama arrived back in Washington January 4 after a two-week vacation in Hawaii, his home state. The political landscape in Washington will change for Obama this week, as Republicans take control of the U.S. Senate when a new Congress convenes. Now with majorities in both houses of the legislature following November elections, Republicans face a dual task - advancing their core beliefs, while also working with the president, a Democrat, during his final two years in office.<sup>84</sup>

## International: Asia

(December 22-28, 2014)

- **US, Afghan generals in Islamabad for border security talks; Pakistan broadens anti-militancy drive; Relations between Pakistan, Afghanistan key to fighting Taliban; Military airstrikes continue against ISIL in Syria and Iraq; Obama, Hagel mark end of Operation Enduring Freedom; North Korea denounces Obama for internet outages.**

Top Afghan and U.S. generals have visited Pakistan amid heightened security concerns following last week's Taliban-led school massacre in Peshawar. Pakistan's army chief General Raheel Sharif addressed anti-terrorism efforts with Afghan General Shir Mohammad Karimi and U.S. General John Campbell, commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. A statement by the International Security Assistance Force said Tuesday's meeting in Islamabad focused on military coordination "on both sides of the border."<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif

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<sup>81</sup> "US Unemployment Claims Rise", *VOA News*, December 31, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-unemployment-claims-rise/2580376.html>

<sup>82</sup> "Global, U.S. Population Continue to Rise", *VOA News*, December 31, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-population-grows-to-more-than-320-million/2577729.html>

<sup>83</sup> "US Drone Rules Remain in Hangar in 2014", *Reuters*, December 31, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/reu-us-drone-regulation-miss-year-end-deadline/2580984.html>

<sup>84</sup> "Obama Faces New Political Landscape in 2015", *VOA News*, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-returns-to-new-political-landscape/2584959.html>

<sup>85</sup> Macchi, Victoria and Gul, Ayaz, "US, Afghan Generals in Islamabad for Border Security Talks", *VOA News*, December 23, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-and-afghan-generals-in-islamabad-for-border-security-talks/2570693.html>

has announced wide-ranging measures to counter religious extremism and terrorism in the country, a week after a Taliban assault on a school killed 150 people, almost all of them children.<sup>86</sup>

Pakistan says its anti-terrorism campaign is focused on all militant outfits operating in the country, without distinguishing between “good” and “bad” Taliban. Adviser on national security and foreign policy, Sartaj Aziz, in an interview tells VOA the policy has resulted in improved counter-terrorism cooperation with neighboring Afghanistan. Since the visit of new Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to Pakistan last month, both sides have reported increased economic and security cooperation to promote regional peace efforts. Pakistani adviser on national security and foreign policy Sartaj Aziz says the recent attack on a military-run school in Peshawar was the first incident to test the resolve of the two countries to jointly take on militants threatening them.<sup>87</sup>

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria on December 23 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted three airstrikes in Iraq using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.<sup>88</sup>

President Barack Obama and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel each issued statements on December 28 marking the end of the combat mission in Afghanistan. After 13 years of combat operations, Operation Enduring Freedom drew to a close today in a ceremony at the International Security and Assistance Force headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan. “Today’s ceremony in Kabul marks a milestone for our country,” Obama said. “At the end of this year,” Hagel said, “as our Afghan partners assume responsibility for the security of their country, the United States officially concludes Operation Enduring Freedom. . . . In 2015, we begin our follow-on mission — Operation Freedom’s Sentinel — to help secure and build upon the hard-fought gains of the last 13 years.”<sup>89</sup>

North Korea denounced U.S. President Barack Obama with a crude personal attack as it blamed the United States for intermittent Internet outages that have isolated Pyongyang during the past week, and recurred again on December 27. A statement issued with apparent top-level North Korean approval contended Obama was responsible for Sony Pictures’ decision to release the film *The Interview*, which tells of a fictional plot by the CIA to assassinate Kim Jong Un, North Korea’s 31-year-old head of state. The North Korean statement, attributed to an unnamed member of the National Defense Commission, the country’s highest ruling body, said: “Obama always goes reckless in words and deeds, like a monkey in a tropical forest.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Gul, Ayaz, “Pakistan Broadens Anti-Militancy Drive”, December 24, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/pakistan-anti-militancy-drive-school-massacre/2572684.html>

<sup>87</sup> Gul, Ayaz, “Relations Between Pakistan, Afghanistan Key to Fighting Taliban”, VOA News, December 27, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/relations-between-pakistan-afghanistan-key-to-fighting-taliban/2575660.html>

<sup>88</sup> “Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq”, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve Public Affairs, DoD News, December 23, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123877>

<sup>89</sup> “Obama, Hagel Mark End of Operation Enduring Freedom”, DoD News, December 28, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123887>

<sup>90</sup> “N. Korea Denounces Obama for Internet Outages”, VOA News, December 27, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/north-korea-blames-us-for-internet-outage/2575642.html>

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Taliban declare 'defeat' of US, allies in Afghanistan; Afghans take over country's security; Pilot reflects on training Afghan air force; Pakistan airstrikes, US drone kill 38 militants; Obama: Iran nuclear deal 'possible', US slaps sanctions on more Iranian targets; Iran says new US sanctions defy nuclear talks' spirit; Iran says no deal with US to ship enriched uranium to Russia.**

Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan on December 29 declared the "defeat" of the U.S. and its allies in the 13-year-old war, a day after the coalition officially marked the end of its combat mission. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force is shifting to a support mission for Afghan army and police more than a decade after an international alliance ousted the Taliban government for sheltering the planners of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on American cities.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, Afghanistan assumed full responsibility for security from departing foreign combat troops on January 1, 2015, a day after Afghan army mortar shells killed at least 20 civilians attending a wedding party in volatile southern Helmand province. The move will test the readiness of 350,000 Afghan forces who will bear responsibility for fighting increasingly organized Taliban insurgents. The U.S.-led coalition troops formally ended their combat mission more than 13 years the Islamist Taliban government was toppled in late 2001 for sheltering the planners of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on American cities.<sup>92</sup>

Air Force Maj. Mary Clark, a UH-1N Huey instructor pilot and the 58th Operations Support Squadron's assistant director of operations, knows what it takes to make a good helicopter pilot. Clark trained pilots at Shindand Air Base, Afghanistan. She prepared 20 student pilots, including three female members of the Afghan air force and male rotary-wing pilots to fly the Russian-made Mi-17, and contributed to nonflying aspects of all pilot training. Clark said she hopes the impact made by the mission she made for a year went beyond producing capable pilots for the Afghan air force.<sup>93</sup>

Pakistan says its airstrikes have killed 31 militants and a suspected U.S. drone strike another seven insurgents in the tribal regions along the Afghan border. Islamabad said its air force destroyed four terrorist hideouts and a suicide bomber training center in the Tirrah Valley of the Khyber tribal district. Pakistan has been targeting Taliban and Lashkar-e-Islam militants in the region since October.<sup>94</sup>

U.S. President Barack Obama says a nuclear agreement with Iran is "possible" and would be a necessary first step in any greater diplomatic engagement between the two countries. In an

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<sup>91</sup> "Taliban Declare 'Defeat' of US, Allies in Afghanistan", *Reuters*, December 29, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/taliban-declare-defeat-of-us-allies-in-afghanistan/2577334.html>

<sup>92</sup> "Afghans Take Over Country's Security", *Reuters*, January 01, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghans-assume-responsibility-for-countrys-security/2581712.html>

<sup>93</sup> Fisher, Jim, "Face of Defence: Pilot Reflects on Training Afghan Air Force", *DoD News*, December 31, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123897>

<sup>94</sup> "Pakistan Airstrikes, US Drone Kill 38 Militants", *VOA News*, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/pakistan-us-drone-kills-seven-militants/2584934.html>



interview with National Public Radio (NPR), Obama said he would be hopeful about working to improved relations under a scenario with an Iran that has a verified peaceful nuclear program, whose economy grows unhampered by sanctions and is “reintegrated into the international community.” Obama said Iran has a chance to “break through” isolation and resolve the nuclear issue, and that Iranian officials should seize the opportunity.<sup>95</sup>

The United States on Tuesday imposed sanctions on nine new targets, saying the entities and people targeted had supported Iran’s efforts to avoid sanctions and backed the government’s human rights abuses, including censorship. U.S. Treasury Department officials said in a statement the latest move was part of an effort to enforce existing sanctions while the United States and other countries continue to negotiate with Iran over its nuclear programme.<sup>96</sup>

Iran criticized the latest U.S. sanctions on nine targets who Washington contends have helped Tehran avoid existing sanctions or commit human rights abuses, saying the sanctions violated the spirit of international talks on Iran’s nuclear program. The new targets include six individuals and one entity suspected of assisting the Iranian government in buying or acquiring U.S. currency, and two companies linked to human rights violations. Iran said the U.S. move contradicted the spirit of the nuclear talks between Iran and the six powers known as “P5+1”: the United States, France, Germany, Russia, China and Britain.<sup>97</sup>

Iran denied on January 3 that it had reached an agreement with the United States to ship its surplus enriched uranium to Russia under new concessions aimed at clinching a comprehensive nuclear deal with six world powers. The Associated Press, citing diplomats, said on January 2 that Tehran and Washington had tentatively agreed on a formula to ship to Russia much of the material that could potentially lead to manufacture of atomic arms by the Islamic republic.<sup>98</sup>

Pentagon officials confirmed on December 31 that a high-ranking member of the al-Shabab militant group in Somalia was killed in a December 29 airstrike. The unmanned U.S. aircraft strike near Saakow, Somalia, killed Tahlil Abdishakur, chief of al-Shabab’s intelligence and security wing, officials said in a statement. Tahlil was responsible for al-Shabaab’s external operations. “His death will significantly impact al-Shabaab’s ability to conduct attacks against the government of the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Somali people, and U.S. allies and interests in the region,” the Pentagon statement said.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> “Obama: Iran Nuclear Deal ‘Possible’”, *VOA News*, December 29, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-iran-nuclear-deal-possible-necessary-for-greater-diplomacy/2577260.html>

<sup>96</sup> “US Slaps Sanctions on More Iranian Targets”, *Reuters*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/reu-us-slaps-sanctions-more-iranian-targets/2579060.html>

<sup>97</sup> “Iran Says New US Sanctions Defy Nuclear Talks’ Spirit”, *Reuters*, December 31, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/iran-says-new-us-sanctions-defy-nuclear-talks-spirit/2580367.html>

<sup>98</sup> “Iran Says No Deal With US to Ship Enriched Uranium to Russia”, *Reuters*, January 03, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/iran-no-deal-ship-enriched-uranium-russia/2584589.html>

<sup>99</sup> “Pentagon Confirms Death of High-ranking al-Shabab Militant”, *DoD News*, December 31, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123899>



(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **US rejects Palestinian statehood resolution at UN; Airstrikes continue against ISIL in Syria and Iraq; USS Fort Worth joins Sampson in search efforts; US suspects North Korea had help attacking Sony; Obama Announces New Sanctions on North Korea; South Korea, Japan, and the U.S to share info on North Korean nuke, missile threats.**

The United States has vetoed a United Nations Security Council draft resolution on Palestinian statehood that demanded Israel withdraw from the occupied territories. Even without the U.S. veto, the measure would have fallen one vote short of the nine it needed among the council's 15 members in order to pass. The U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power explained the veto, saying Israeli-Palestinian peace can only come from "hard choices and compromises" and that the resolution would not move the sides closer to a two-state solution.<sup>100</sup>

U.S. and partner-nation fighter and bomber aircraft conducted six airstrikes against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria on January 3, 2015 Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported. Separately, U.S. and partner-nation fighter aircraft conducted one airstrike against ISIL terrorists in Iraq on January 3, officials said.

Airstrikes in Syria - near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL fighting position and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, four ISIL buildings, three ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL staging areas. Airstrike in Iraq - near Mosul, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.<sup>101</sup>

The littoral combat ship USS Fort Worth has joined the guided missile destroyer USS Sampson in the Java Sea to assist in the Indonesian-led international search effort for downed AirAsia Flight 8501, according to a U.S. 7th Fleet news release issued on January 3, 2015. Ships are being employed to search for the downed aircraft's black boxes and the helicopters are looking for debris, the Sampson's commander, Navy Cmdr. Steven M. Foley told Raddatz. Rigid-hull inflatable boats are also participating in the search effort, he added.<sup>102</sup> Earlier the Indonesian government has requested U.S. assistance in the search for AirAsia Flight 8501.<sup>103</sup>

U.S. investigators believe that North Korea likely hired hackers from outside the country to help with last month's massive cyberattack against Sony Pictures, an official close to the investigation said on December 29. As North Korea lacks the capability to conduct some elements of the sophisticated campaign by itself, U.S. investigators are looking at the possibility that Pyongyang

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<sup>100</sup> "US Rejects Palestinian Statehood Resolution at UN", VOA News, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-vetoes-palestinian-statehood-resolution-un/2579666.html>

<sup>101</sup> "Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq", From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, DoD News, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123908>

<sup>102</sup> "USS Fort Worth Joins Sampson in Search Efforts", DoD News, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123909>

<sup>103</sup> "Indonesia Requests U.S. Help in Search for Missing Aircraft", DoD News, December 29, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123893>

“contracted out” some of the cyber work, according to the official, who was not authorized to speak on the record about the investigation.<sup>104</sup>

On January 2, 2015, US President Barack Obama announced new sanctions on North Korea in the wake of the cyber-attack on Sony Pictures Entertainment late last year. The new sanctions take aim at 3 entities — including North Korea’s primary intelligence agency — and 10 individuals. The U.S. Treasury Department says all are either agencies or officials of the North Korean Government. The 3 entities include North Korea’s primary intelligence arm, the Reconnaissance General Bureau; its state arms dealer, the Korea Mining development Trading Corporation; and scientific research agency, Korea Tangun Trading Corporation. The 10 individuals named are all directly connected with one of the three entities or the North Korean government.<sup>105</sup>

The South Korean and Japanese defence ministries and the U.S. Defence Department have finalized a trilateral information-sharing arrangement concerning the nuclear and missile threats posed by North Korea. This arrangement creates a framework by which the defence authorities of the three nations may voluntarily share classified information, Pentagon officials explained. The arrangement advances the security of the three signatories, officials said, because sharing information on the nuclear and missile threats posed by North Korea will allow for a more effective response to future provocations and during contingencies.<sup>106</sup>

## India-US Relations

(December 22- January 4, 2015)

- **India’s MEA says no further disciplinary action against Khobragade; Indian-American photojournalist Rajan Devadas dies in US; Home Minister Rajnath Singh reviews security situation ahead of US President Barack Obama visit; India, US officials to discuss investment, laws to counter terrorism funding; Nuclear logjam: India, U.S. to work on new proposals; Exciting time for Indo-US relations, says new US ambassador to India Richard Verma; Green energy deal may be a highlight of Obama visit.**

The External Affairs Ministry today did not rule out any further disciplinary action against senior diplomat Devyani Khobragade, who had hit the headlines last year after being arrested in the US in a visa fraud case. Disciplinary as well as administrative action have been taken against Khobragade, who has been put on “compulsory wait” after being removed from the position of Director-level officer in the development partnership division of the ministry. When asked about

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<sup>104</sup> “Source: US Suspects North Korea Had Help Attacking Sony”, *Reuters*, December 29, 2014 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/reu-source-us-suspects-north-korea-help-attacking-sony/2578082.html>

<sup>105</sup> “Obama Announces New Sanctions on North Korea”, *VOA News*, January 02, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-sanctions-north-korea-sony-hack/2583541.html>

<sup>106</sup> “Nations to Share Info on North Korean Nuke, Missile Threats”, *DoD News*, December 29, 2014 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123889>

<sup>107</sup> “No Further Disciplinary Action Against Devyani Khobragade: MEA”, *Press Trust of India*, New Delhi, December 26, 2014 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/mea-no-further-disciplinary-action-against-devyani-khobragade/>

her recent media interviews, External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin said she was bound by the rules of the service and the authorities concerned will focus if “any other things” have been brought to its notice.<sup>107</sup>

Rajan Devadas, one of the most admired Indian-American photojournalists whose lenses chronicled US-India relations for more than half a century, has died. Devadas, a Padma Shri awardee, died of cardiac arrest at Hebrew Home of Greater Washington on December 26. He was 93. In a career spanning more than five decades, Devadas has covered US visit of every Indian Prime Minister from Jawaharlal Nehru to Manmohan Singh besides photographing every US president from John F Kennedy to George W Bush.<sup>108</sup>

Ahead of US President Barack Obama’s visit, Home Minister Rajnath Singh December 30 reviewed the overall security environment in the country and its neighbourhood with the top brass, including Defence Minister, NSA and Army Chief. The inter-ministerial meeting took stock of the prevailing security situation in the country ahead of Obama’s visit to India to attend the Republic Day parade as chief guest.<sup>109</sup>

Top officials from the US and India will meet in Washington to discuss issues related to American investments in India, strengthening of anti-money laundering/counter terrorism financing laws and greater financial market regulations, ahead of US President Barack Obama’s visit later this month. “The meeting is important as all three issues are likely to be on the agenda during the visit,” a Government official told *Business Line*. A delegation led by Finance Ministry officials, which also includes officials from the Commerce & Industry Ministry, will be in Washington to hold a series of meetings with their American counterparts between January 12 and January 15.<sup>110</sup>

Indian and U.S. officials are expected to meet in Delhi next week to discuss two proposals made by India to clear the nuclear logjam, with an added push coming from U.S. President Obama’s impending visit on January 24. *The Hindu* reported that the proposals were put forward during the first contact group meeting on civil nuclear issues held on December 16-17 that had been tasked by President Obama and Prime Minister Modi with finding a way around U.S. objections to India’s supplier liability law. U.S. officials have said they were “hopeful” of some movement in the nuclear deal that has been hanging fire since it was signed in 2008. Although India has allotted project sites for two 1000 mw nuclear reactors each by U.S. companies Westinghouse and GE-Hitachi in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh respectively, no work has started on either.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> “Indian-American Photojournalist Rajan Devadas Dies in US”, *Press Trust of India*, December 28, 2014 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/indian-american-photojournalist-rajan-devadas-dies-in-us-114122800273\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/indian-american-photojournalist-rajan-devadas-dies-in-us-114122800273_1.html)

<sup>109</sup> “Rajnath Singh Reviews Security Situation Ahead of US President Barack Obama Visit”, *Press Trust of India*, December 30, 2014 at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-12-30/news/57528854\\_1\\_security-situation-home-minister-rajnath-singh-defence-minister-manohar-parrikar](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-12-30/news/57528854_1_security-situation-home-minister-rajnath-singh-defence-minister-manohar-parrikar)

<sup>110</sup> “India, US Officials To Discuss Investment, Laws To Counter Terrorism Funding”, *The Hindu Business Line*, January 1, 2015 at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-us-officials-to-discuss-investment-laws-to-counter-terrorism-funding/article6745636.ece>

<sup>111</sup> “Nuclear Logjam: India, U.S. to Work On New Proposals”, *The Hindu*, January 3, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/nuclear-logjam-india-us-to-work-on-new-proposals/article6749677.ece>

The new US Ambassador to India Richard Rahul Verma, who arrived in Delhi on January 2, 2015 three weeks ahead of his President's arrival, said he was looking forward to work with India on the shared goals of security, development and prosperity as he described the times as "exciting" for the ties. 46-year-old Verma, former Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, is the first ever Indian-American to be appointed as the US envoy to India. His arrival comes ahead of US President Barack Obama's visit here later this month to attend Republic Day on January 26 as the Chief Guest.<sup>112</sup>

With US President Barack Obama coming to India later this month, expectations are that New Delhi will manage to do a climate deal along lines of the one between Washington and Beijing. According to Environment Ministry officials, there is a possibility of a discussion on green technology transfer during the Obama visit. There are indications that New Delhi will reach some significant deal on climate technology. According to experts involved in the country's climate change initiatives, a deal must have the "right balance of the political — development, per capita income/consumption, growth — and the strategic — an opportunity to make it big in the clean energy sector."<sup>113</sup>

## II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

### Jammu & Kashmir

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Ceasefire violations by Pakistan breach 11-year-old record; Indo-Pak border firing continues after brief lull.**

In the year 2014, Jammu & Kashmir witnessed a total of 562 incidents of ceasefire violation along both the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB) by Pakistan troops targeting even civilian areas. In Counter-Insurgency (CI) operations in the state, 102 militants were killed, 47 were apprehended while 29 army men lost their lives this year. According to PRO Northern Command Col S D Goswami, as many as 410 ceasefire violations were reported along IB and 152 violations along LoC, in which 19 people, including 5 jawans were killed and over 150 injured. The incidents of ceasefire violations by Pakistan were the highest since the ceasefire agreement of 2003, with the Indo-Pak border witnessing the worst such escalation during August to October which left 13 people, including 2 security personnel dead and thousands displaced. Army also recovered 394 different types of weapons in different operations along the LoC and in hinterland

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<sup>112</sup> "Exciting Time For Indo-US Relations, Says New US Ambassador To India Richard Verma", *The Economic Times*, January 3, 2015 at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-03/news/57633845\\_1\\_india-richard-rahul-verma-nancy-powell-kathleen-stephens](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-03/news/57633845_1_india-richard-rahul-verma-nancy-powell-kathleen-stephens)

<sup>113</sup> "Green Energy Deal May Be A Highlight Of Obama Visit", *The Hindu Business Line*, January 4, 2015 at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/green-energy-deal-may-be-a-highlight-of-obama-visit/article6754007.ece>

in the state. Col. Goswami also added that terrorists had planted 15 IEDs which were detected and defused by the army, averting major tragedies.<sup>114</sup>

One BSF personnel and four Pakistani Rangers were killed as both sides continued resorting to firing at intermittent intervals along the international border in Jammu Kashmir till wee hours of December 1. Giving details, sources said that the trouble erupted when BSF troops in Arnia sector foiled an infiltration attempt from across the border injuring an infiltrator on December 31. Following unsuccessful infiltration attempt, the Pakistani Rangers started firing on BSF posts and even civilian areas at Khawara, Regal, Suchetgarh Kullian and Mawa in adjoining Samba sector, killing a BSF jawan and injuring an ASI. In retaliation firing by the BSF, four Pakistani Rangers were killed whose bodies were seen lying in the open for some time. Taken aback by strong retaliation from Indian side, the Rangers after sometime waved white flags from their posts so that they can retrieve the bodies of their deceased personnel, to which, the BSF responded accordingly. The guns on both sides went silent thereafter, but firing got resumed from Pakistan side at 12.30 am at various places along the international border in Arnia, Samba and Hiranagar sectors. The BSF retaliated and the exchange of fire between two sides continued till 3 am. The latest ceasefire violation by Pakistan has been the third during the last 36 hours as Rangers had on December 30 injured a BSF jawan Amarjeet Singh in Palanwalla sector.<sup>115</sup> After a lull of few hours, Pakistan resorted back to heavy mortar shelling and firing on several BSF posts (about 20) along the India-Pakistan border in Hiranagar and Samba sectors of Kathua and Jammu districts at around 10pm on December 2, drawing a strong retaliation from India that killed two Pakistan Rangers. Meanwhile J & K police confirmed four civilians were injured in firing and shelling by Pakistani troops along the border in Kathua and Samba. Administration has put in place a plan to shift residents to a safer place. According to reports, six personnel of the Pakistan Rangers have been killed in the exchange of fire since December 1, with two casualties post 9:30pm on December 2. The firing and mortar shelling by Pakistani Rangers came from Razab Sheed, Asif Sheed, Chak Bhura, New Pak and Dhandhar posts. Home Minister Singh reportedly ordered the BSF to respond with "appropriate" action after firing started on December 2. Singh also said the firing was unprovoked.<sup>116</sup> Intelligence reports have indicated that at least eight groups of terror suspects have been attempting to infiltrate into Indian territory along the International Border, under the cover of firing by Pakistan Rangers.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> "2014: J&K Witnesses 562 Truce Violations on LoC, IB", *Kashmir Times*, December 29, 2014 at <http://kashmirtimes.com/newsdet.aspx?q=39889>

<sup>115</sup> "Jammu-Kashmir: One BSF Jawan, 4 Pakistani Rangers Killed In Ceasefire Violation Along International Border", *The Indian Express*, December 1, 2014 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/one-bsf-personnel-four-pakistani-rangers-killed-in-firing-along-international-border/>

<sup>116</sup> "Four Civilians Injured, 3 Pak Rangers Killed As India Foils 'Major Infiltration Bid'", *Hindustan Times*, January 3, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/three-pakistan-rangers-killed-in-firing-as-india-foils-major-infiltration-bid/article1-1302798.aspx?hts0021>

<sup>117</sup> "Infiltration Bid By 8 Terror Groups", *The Hindu*, January 3, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pakistanbased-groups-planning-attacks-ahead-of-obama-visit/article6748978.ece>



## Northeast Insurgency

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **Centre amends UPA's insurgency policy; Home Ministry seeks Myanmar help to tackle outlawed Northeast rebels.**

The Ministry of Home Affairs has formulated a new policy of not engaging in talks with any group that is involved in killing civilians. The decision was taken after the NDFB Songbijit faction butchered over 80 innocent adivasis in Assam. The new policy will, however, not affect ongoing talks with other insurgent groups. The MHA had also asked the National Investigation Agency to probe the Assam carnage on some specific points. The NIA has been asked to probe if there was any political or official link behind the carnage of plantation workers, and the agency will also try to find out who were behind the abetting and financing of the NDFB's terror activities in Assam. The sources clarified that the MHA had sought a sustained counter-insurgency operation against the anti-talk faction of NDFB, and that Bhutan has already moved in its armed forces to provide backup support to the Army operations launched in western Assam. The Army has also been asked to step up its operations in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, and the sources clarified that there was no legal restriction on the security forces going across the Arunachal state border in hot pursuit. The MHA has, meanwhile, rejected the line taken by the Assam police that NDFB rebels were taking advantage of the porous border and shelter points in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, given that the mastermind behind the Assam carnage, NDFB commander Bidai, was operating from western Assam till recently.<sup>118</sup>

The Ministry of External Affairs is mounting pressure on Myanmar to carry out joint military operations to bust the hideouts of Indian insurgent groups operating from their uninhabited hilly terrain adjoining the border with India. Disclosing that top NDFB and ULFA rebels are taking refuge in Myanmar, security sources said that nearly 150 NDFB cadres, 200 of ULFA and more than 1,500 rebels of Manipur-based militant outfits are holed up in Myanmar. Informing that NDFB was about to start training of 80 new recruits in the hills of Myanmar in December, security sources said that NDFB self-styled military commander I.K. Songbijit and general secretary and finance secretary of the outfit are also in Myanmar camp.<sup>119</sup> Though the Government of Myanmar has assured support to India to deal with the militant groups, the security agencies are sceptical of the assurance as several times in the past, the Government of India received such assurance but no action was seen on the ground. Sources said that from time to time, the Myanmar army personnel launched only "cosmetic operations", which did not affect the militants in any way. Security sources also admitted that despite deployment of the Assam Rifles personnel, the international border with Myanmar still remains porous, mainly because of the terrain and lack of any physical barrier. Moreover, majority of the posts of the Assam Rifles are not located on the Zero line and these are set up well inside Indian territory.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Anand, Manoj, "No Talks With Rebels Behind Killings: Government", *The Asian Age*, December 29, 2014 at <http://www.asianage.com/india/no-talks-rebels-behind-killings-government-761>

<sup>119</sup> "Joint Operations Likely With Myanmar", *The Asian Age*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.asianage.com/india/joint-operations-likely-myanmar-008>

<sup>120</sup> Choudhury, R Dutta, "Security Agencies Skeptical Of Myanmar's Assurance", *The Assam Tribune*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec3014/at053>



## Left-wing Extremism

- **Maoists conduct Kangaroo court in Telangana; Police bust Maoist gun factory in Jharkhand.**

Maoists conducted a Kangaroo court and thrashed five targeted upper caste villagers of Mukunur in Manthani revenue division of Telangana on the night of December 27. Though the police maintained that very few among the Maoists spoke Telugu indicating that most of them were from the neighbouring state of Chhattisgarh, the sudden surfacing of the Maoist squad (about 30 armed members) and conduct of the Kangaroo court after a gap of more than 15 years in the district had come as a rude shock to the district police. The Naxalite team is believed to have been led by KKW (Karimnagar, Khammam and Warangal) secretary Bade Chokka Rao alias Damodar and Eturunagaram and Mahadevpur area committee secretary Kankanala Raji Reddy alias Venkatesh. Later, the Maoists crossed the river Godavari and entered into the neighbouring Chhattisgarh sensing possible police operations in the region. The intelligence sources said that the Maoists had been moving in the region for the last few months and are now focussing on the recruitment of rural youth into their fold.<sup>121</sup>

The police on December 1 busted an arms factory of a banned Maoist outfit in Simdega district of Jharkhand, barely hours after the arrest of a gun-maker with alleged links to a jailed Kolebera legislator - Enos Ekka. Simdega superintendent of police Rajiv Ranjan Singh said the raid yielded gun-making materials at the factory in Jaldega, about 60 km from the district headquarters. He said the factory was being operated by the People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI), a splinter outfit of the CPI (Maoist). The factory was running for the past 20 days and at least three rifles were "almost ready for use". The materials could have been used for making at least 150 rifles and pistols, SP Ranjan Singh added.<sup>122</sup>

## Terrorism

(December 29-January 4, 2015)

- **One killed in a Low-intensity blast in Bengaluru; Coast Guard intercepts Pak Boat in the Arabian Sea.**

A 38-year-old woman was killed and three persons were injured after an explosion suspected to have been triggered by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) went off on December 28 in front of a popular restaurant on Bangalore's busy Church Street. The blast occurred around 8.30 pm on a footpath adjacent to Coconut Grove. Initial investigations indicate it may have been a pipe bomb, packed with shrapnel in the form of iron pieces. Battery of a timer has been found. The explosion left an eight-inch crater in the ground. All the three victims were hit by shrapnel. No

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<sup>121</sup> Dayashankar, K M, "A Disturbing Message From Maoists" *The Hindu*, December 30, 2014 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/a-disturbing-message-from-maoists/article6736061.ece>

<sup>122</sup> "J'hkhand: Police Bust Maoist Gun Factory, Noose Tightens Around Jailed MLA", *Hindustan Times*, January 2, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ranchi/j-khand-police-bust-maoist-gun-factory-noose-tightens-around-jailed-mla/article1-1302447.aspx>

one has claimed responsibility for the blast so far.<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, five members of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), who escaped from a Madhya Pradesh prison in October 2013, have emerged as prime suspects behind the blast. The five have already been linked to a robbery of Rs 46 lakh from an SBI branch in Telangana's Karimnagar district on February 1, 2014, a blast on Bangalore-Guwahati express on May 1, 2014 that killed a woman, a blast near Pune's Dagadusheth Ganesh temple on July 10, 2014 and an accidental blast in UP's Bijnor on September 12, 2014.<sup>124</sup> According to the preliminary report of a chemical analysis of evidence collected from the blast site, the bomb that exploded in Bangalore on December 28, was made up of a mixture of ammonium nitrate, sulphur, aluminium and potassium chlorate. The forensic findings in conjunction with other details of the bomb, including the metal pipe that was used to make the device, the timer mechanism used to trigger the blast, the electric detonators and projectiles used in the explosion, has led experts from the NIA and other agencies to see a common signature with devices used in Chennai, Pune and Roorkee, and an unexploded bomb on a train in Rewari in 2014.<sup>125</sup>

A fishing boat, suspected to be from Pakistan, exploded after a dramatic chase off the Gujarat coast on New Year's Eve after the vessel was intercepted by Coast Guard near the Indo-Pak maritime boundary in Arabian Sea, raising suspicion that a major terror attack was being planned. The boat's four occupants appeared to have been killed after they blew up the vessel, refusing calls to surrender. In a press statement on December 2, the defence ministry said a suspect boat "carrying explosives" was intercepted by Coast Guard off the coast near Porbandar in Gujarat. The statement further added that the government had received intelligence on December 31 that fishing boat from "Keti Bander near Karachi was planning some illicit transaction" in the Arabian Sea. The statement did not describe the incident as a terror attack. However, intelligence sources said a phone intercept picked up by the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) on the morning of December 31 clearly referred to "explosives" being on the boat and which was to be transferred to another boat. Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar praised the Coast Guard's prompt response saying a major danger had been averted. Meanwhile, some intelligence sources doubted the terror angle saying the boat may have been carrying diesel and its occupants may have been engaged in smuggling.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Johnson, T A, "One Woman Killed, 3 Injured in IED Blast on Bangalore's Church Street", *The Indian Express*, December 29, 2014 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/crime/2-injured-in-explosion-in-bengaluru/>

<sup>124</sup> "5 SIMI Men Who Fled MP Jail Suspects In Bangalore Blast", *The Indian Express*, December 30, 2014 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/simi-men-who-fled-mp-jail-suspects-in-bangalore-blast/>

<sup>125</sup> Johnson, T A, "Bangalore Bomb Similar To Those Used in Chennai, Roorkee, Pune", *The Indian Express*, December 31, 2014 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/bangalore-bomb-similar-to-those-used-in-chennai-roorkee-pune/>

<sup>126</sup> Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy and Sharma, Aman, "26/11 Style Attack Aborted: Blast In Boat Off Gujarat Coast Stokes Terror Attack Fears", *The Economic Times*, January 3, 2015 at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-03/news/57633713\\_1\\_fishing-boat-terror-attack-gujarat-coast](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-03/news/57633713_1_fishing-boat-terror-attack-gujarat-coast)