

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Bangladesh

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Bangladesh provides humanitarian assistance to Nepal; US officials visit Dhaka to attend the 4th Bangladesh-US Partnership Dialogue; Bangladesh-India signs draft agreement on coastal shipping; Reported irregularities in city corporation polls in Dhaka and Chittagong-BNP back candidates boycott polls midway; AL wins maximum seat.**

Dhaka has sent humanitarian assistance, including six Army medical teams, medicine and other relief materials to Kathmandu to help the people of Nepal in the wake of the devastation caused by a massive earthquake on April 25. Reportedly, a 34-member delegation, including a representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and crew members of the Air Force on board a C-130 aircraft of the Bangladesh Air Force reached Kathmandu with 10 tonnes of relief materials tents, essential medicines, dry food, water and blankets.¹

US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman and Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Desai Biswal came to Dhaka on April 30 on a two-day visit to attend the 4th Bangladesh-US Partnership Dialogue.²

Bangladesh and India have signed a draft agreement on coastal shipping, a move that will reduce the cost of export and import between the two countries by two thirds. The draft deal was signed at a meeting in New Delhi on April 20. The final agreement will be signed during the upcoming visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan said at a media briefing in Dhaka on April 29. Bangladesh's Shipping Secretary Shafique Alam Mehdi and India's Shipping Secretary Rajive Kumar signed the draft agreement. At present, for transporting goods between Bangladesh and India, the consignment has to be sent to Colombo or Singapore first. It is then shipped to any port in India or Bangladesh. After the signing of the final agreement, any ship from India will be able to come directly to Dhaka and anchor in an inland port.³

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) announced its decision to pull out of the city corporation polls in Dhaka and Chittagong on April 28 election around 12:20pm, about three and a half hours

¹ "Dhaka Sends Relief Goods for Quake Victims", *The Daily Star*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/dhaka-sends-relief-goods-quake-victims-79488>.

² "Dialogue with US Begins Today", *The Daily Star*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/dialogue-us-begins-today-79866>.

³ "Cost of Shipping to India Set to Drop", *The Daily Star*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/global-business/cost-shipping-india-set-drop-79811>.

before the voting closed, claiming most of their polling agents were either barred from entering the poll centres or forced out.⁴

Awami League (AL) however, dismissed the allegation and stated that the BNP's boycott was pre-planned. Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed told journalists that he visited several polling centres and saw no irregularities anywhere.⁵ Expressing disappointment the US and the UK have called for a swift, impartial and transparent investigation into the allegations of election irregularities. "We are disappointed by widespread, first-hand, and credible reports of vote-rigging, intimidation and violence that have occurred at polling stations, and the BNP's decision to boycott the city corporation polls," said a statement of the US embassy in Dhaka. The statement also said, "It is important that irregularities be investigated transparently and impartially, and we call on all parties involved to work within the law and avoid violence at all costs." In a post-election statement, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Gibson also expressed his disappointment "that the BNP felt it had to withdraw its endorsed candidates from the city corporation elections partway through voting". Both the envoys visited polling centres in Dhaka during the poll.⁶

The United Nations and the EU have also called for a probe into the allegations of irregularities in Dhaka and Chittagong city corporation polls by the competent authorities.⁷ Australia and Canada have also expressed concerns over reports of anomalies and violence during the polls.⁸ The city corporation polls were not credible by any standard, says Election Working Group (EWG), a platform of 28 non-partisan civil society organisations.⁹ A total of 76 foreign observers from 16 foreign diplomatic missions, the UN, electoral and right organisations based in Dhaka observed the polls.¹⁰

The ruling Awami League-backed candidates won most of the councillor posts in city polls. Out of 90 councillor posts in two city corporations in Dhaka, the AL favourites won 57. In Chittagong, 35 AL-blessed councillor hopefuls became winners, according to the Election Commission. The results of three wards in Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) have been suspended. Eight

⁴ "Polls Bubbles Burst", *The Daily Star*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/polls-bubbles-burst-79654>.

⁵ "Voting Free of Fear, Interference: PM", *The Daily Star*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/voting-free-fear-interference-pm-79682>.

⁶ "US, UK Upset over Rigging, Intimidation", *The Daily Star*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/us-uk-upset-over-rigging-intimidation-79685>.

⁷ "UN, EU for Probe into Election Anomalies", *The Daily Star*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/un-probe-election-anomalies-79841>.

⁸ "Australia, Canada Worried at Polls Irregularities", *The Daily Star*, May 1, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/australia-canada-worried-polls-irregularities-80060>.

⁹ "Not Credible: Observes Election Working Group about City Polls", *The Daily Star*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/not-credible-79842>.

¹⁰ "76 Observers from Foreign Missions to Monitor Polls", *The Daily Star*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/76-observers-foreign-missions-monitor-polls-79511>.

councillor candidates blessed by the BNP won in Dhaka though the party pulled out from elections midway through the polling day.¹¹

Sri Lanka

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Parliament passed the 19th amendment; GTF, US and UK welcome the 19th amendment; John Kerry visits Sri Lanka; Sri Lanka provides rescue and relief assistance to Nepal; Growth momentum of the Sri Lankan economy continued in 2014-Central Bank of Sri Lanka; China shows goodwill gesture to Sri Lanka; Bangladesh naval ship visits Port of Colombo.**

The Bill entitled "Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution" was passed with amendments by the Parliament of Sri Lanka on April 28, 2015. Second Reading of the Bill was passed by the House after having taken, a division by name (215 in favour; 1 against). Subsequent to the Committee Stage, the Third Reading was passed with a majority of two-thirds after having taken, a division by name (212 in favour; 1 against; 1 abstained; 10 absent).¹²

Under the 19th Amendment, the maximum term of a President to hold office has been limited to two terms. Apart from this it has also been decided to re-appoint the independent commissions by restoring the 17th amendment. The new reforms will result in the President losing the power to dissolve parliament after one year of its election. According to the proposed reforms the President cannot dissolve the parliament until 4 years of election. However, the President would remain as the Head of State and Head of Security Forces.

The Tamil Diaspora organization, the Global Tamil Forum (GTF) has commended Sri Lanka's leadership for successfully adopting the 19th Amendment to the Constitution reversing the undemocratic measures adopted by the previous regime.¹³

The US and the UK welcomed Sri Lanka's constitutional reforms to limit powers of executive presidency and restore democracy.¹⁴

United States Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Sri Lanka on May 2, 2015 and called on the Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo.¹⁵ He also met Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera. Sri Lanka's

¹¹ Chowdhury, Prabir Barua, "AL Bags Most of Councillor Posts", *The Daily Star*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/al-bags-most-councillor-posts-79857>.

¹² "19A To the Constitution Passed in Parliament", *News Line*, April 29, 2015 at http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201504/2015042919a_constitution_passed_parliament.htm.

¹³ "Tamil Diaspora Organization Commends Sri Lanka Leadership for Adopting 19th Amendment", *ColomboPage*, May 3, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May03_1430658888CH.php.

¹⁴ "US Welcome Sri Lanka's Constitutional Reforms", *ColomboPage*, April 30, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Apr30_1430362205CH.php. "UK Congratulates Sri Lanka on Passing 19th Amendment to Constitution", *ColomboPage*, April 29, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Apr29_1430317260CH.php.

¹⁵ "U.S. Secretary of State Meets Sri Lankan President", *ColomboPage*, May 2, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May02_1430551899CH.php.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mangala Samaraweera issuing a statement on the occasion of the official visit of US Secretary of State John Kerry said the Secretary Kerry's visit is a momentous occasion for Sri Lanka as it is the first official visit by a US Secretary of State in 43 years. He said the two sides continued a dialogue that began during his visit to Washington in February this year and agreed to formalize the bilateral relationship through a partnership dialogue that will enable the two countries to continue this engagement on a regular basis.¹⁶ Kerry concluded his brief visit to Sri Lanka on May 3 after meeting with the leaders of main Tamil political party Tamil National Alliance (TNA) including the Chief Minister of the Northern Province C. V. Wigneswaran.¹⁷

Sri Lanka sent a rescue and relief contingent of 48 Army personnel to Nepal on April 26 to assist relief efforts in Nepal following the devastating earthquake. A Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) also brought back the Sri Lankans from Nepal who wanted to return.¹⁸ The second Sri Lankan Airlines flight UL 4195 with 97 service personnel and supplies to assist relief efforts in earthquake-hit Nepal was sent on April 29.¹⁹ This is the first time in its history, that an SLAF Aircraft has been utilized for a rescue mission in a foreign country.

The growth momentum of the Sri Lankan economy continued, while inflation declined further to low single digit levels during 2014, the Central Bank said in its annual report for 2014. The Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka Arjuna Mahendran submitted the 65th Annual Report of the Monetary Board of the Central Bank to Minister of Finance Ravi Karunanayake on April 29. According to the report, the economy that was initially projected to grow in real terms by 7.8 percent, recorded a growth of 7.4 percent in 2014, in comparison to the growth of 7.2 percent in 2013. In nominal terms, GDP amounted to US dollars 74.9 billion in 2014, compared to US\$ 67.2 billion in 2013. Accordingly, GDP per capita increased to US\$ 3,625 in 2014 from US\$ 3,280 in the previous year. Inflation remained at single digit levels for the sixth consecutive year, with year-on-year and annual average inflation declining to 2.1 percent and 3.3 percent, respectively, by end 2014, from 4.7 percent and 6.9 percent, respectively, at end 2013. The unemployment rate remained low at 4.3 percent during the year compared to 4.4 percent in the previous year.²⁰

In a goodwill gesture, the Government of China of the Sichuan Province has agreed to offer the World Travel Fair to be staged in the Sichuan Province free to Sri Lanka Tourism together with free live coverage of the fair on Leshan TV channel, stated Sri Lanka Tourism Promotions Bureau Chairman Rohantha Athukorala. Athukorala made the announcement post the meeting with Sichuan Province Vice Governor Huang Yanron and China National Tourism Administration

¹⁶ "Sri Lanka, U.S. Agree to Build on a Multifaceted Bilateral Relationship, Forge Stronger Links", *ColomboPage*, May 2, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May02_1430553563CH.php.

¹⁷ "US Secretary of State Meets Sri Lanka's Tamil Leaders", *ColomboPage*, May3, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May03_1430654654CH.php.

¹⁸ "Sri Lanka Air Force Brings Back 42 Sri Lankans from Nepal", *ColomboPage*, April 28, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Apr28_1430202521CH.php.

¹⁹ "Sri Lanka Sends Second Flight With Service Personnel And Supplies to Nepal", *ColomboPage*, April 29, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Apr29_1430324462CH.php.

²⁰ "Growth Momentum of Sri Lanka Economy Continued In 2014 With A 7.4% Rate - Central Bank Annual Report", *ColomboPage*, April 29, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Apr29_1430326238CH.php.

Director General Li Shihon on the side-lines of the Annual Conference of PATA 2015 staged at Leshan, Sichuan Province, China.²¹

Sri Lanka Navy, in accordance with naval traditions, welcomed a Bangladesh naval ship "Somudra Joy" arrived at the Port of Colombo on April 28 on a three-day goodwill visit.²²

Maldives

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Maldives to donate MVR 50000 to Nepal; EU delegates meet political parties in Maldives; Opposition protest rally turned violent; Maldivian national reserve increased by 29 percent at the end of March; Tourists arrival increased in Maldives.**

The Maldivian government has decided to donate MVR 50,000 to those affected by the earthquake in Nepal. Meanwhile, President Yameen sent a message of sympathy to Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala following the disaster on April 25, 2015.²³

A team from the European Union (EU) has met with the governing PPM and the opposition MDP. PPM said that the current political state of the country was discussed with the EU emissary in the meeting held at the PPM office. The EU emissary also met with the opposition MDP as well. However, the topics of discussion at the meetings are not clear. Jumhooree Party said that EU emissary did meet with them and discussed the political state of the country. While an EU emissary has met with the officials of PPM, EU has released a statement to free the former president Mohamed Nasheed and the former Defence Minister, Colonel-retired Mohamed Nazim without any conditions. European Union has called to impose a travel ban on and to freeze international assets belonging to members of the Maldivian government and their leading supporters in the business community. And it calls for the freedom of expression and the freedom of the judicial system. The EU statement also says that the Maldives should be allowed to run a free democracy and that moderate Muslims should have equal opportunity. It also calls for a full investigation of the missing journalist, Ahmed Rilwan.²⁴

Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) has said that the Maldivian national reserve has increased by 29 percent at the end of March, which is import of three months. According to the financial review issued by the MMA, the national reserve has US\$ 644.9 million at the end of March which is 29 percent increase compared to last year. MMA statistics show US\$ 195.6 million in the usable reserve. MMA said that it shows a growth of 44 annually and a monthly growth of 48 percent.²⁵

²¹ "China Offers Sichuan Province World Tourism Fair Free for Sri Lanka", *ColomboPage*, April 28, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Apr28_1430199622CH.php.

²² "Bangladesh Navy Ship Arrives at Sri Lankan Port on Goodwill Visit", *ColomboPage*, April 28, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Apr28_1430241889CH.php.

²³ "Maldives To Donate \$50,000 to Nepal", *SunOnline*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29415>.

²⁴ "EU Meets with PPM, MDP and JP", *SunOnline*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29452>.

²⁵ "A 29 Percent Increase in Maldivian Reserve", *SunOnline*, May 3, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29517>.

Tourist arrivals increased by 6.5 percent in March 2015 compared to March 2014, Ministry of Tourism has announced. According to Monthly Statistics published by the ministry, tourist arrivals for the month of March 2015 stood at 112,427, while that for the corresponding period in 2014 stood at 105,560. Tourist arrivals in March 2015 was highest from Europe - going from 56,995 in March 2014 to 58,916 in March 2015. The second most number of tourists visited Maldives in March 2015 from North East Asia, made up mainly of China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Arrivals from this region increased from 41,349 in March 2014 to 44,155 in March 2015.²⁶

B. East Asia

China

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **China keen to build a prosperous society by 2020; China upset with the activities of the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea; China announces aid to Nepal; China sends a contingent to participate in parade in the Red Square.**

While speaking at a collective study session of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee's Political Bureau on April 30, the Chinese President asserted the need for "coordinated development between urban and rural areas". He further added that, "the most arduous task for China to comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society lies in the vast rural areas, especially in those impoverished rural areas". China wants to build a moderately prosperous society by 2020.²⁷

China has again asked the Philippines and Vietnam to halt their activities on China-owned islands in the South China Sea. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said, "China expresses grave concern and strong opposition to these illegal activities". This was in response to the ongoing construction activities undertaken by the Philippines and Vietnam on the islands and reefs which China considers to be a part of the Nansha Islands.²⁸

Beijing announced that it will be sending a second batch of humanitarian aid to the earthquake hit Nepal. This second batch of aid is worth 6.5 million dollars. This was announced by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce on April 29.²⁹

Russia is organizing a major parade in Moscow marking the 70th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War (World War II). For this parade China has announced that it will be sending a

²⁶ "Tourist Arrivals Increase By 6.5 Percent", *SunOnline*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29405>.

²⁷ "Chinese Peasants Should Share Fruits Of Development: Xi" *China Daily*, May 1, 2015 at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/01/content_20597702.htm accessed on May 5, 2015

²⁸ "China Tells Philippines, Vietnam To Cease Intrusive Action At Sea" *China Daily*, April 30, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/30/content_20586042.htm accessed on May 5, 2015

²⁹ "China Announces Second Nepal Aid Supply" *China Daily*, April 29, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-04/29/content_20578826.htm accessed on May 5, 2015

contingent to take part in this parade. According to Li Hui the Chinese ambassador to Russia, "It will be the first time that China has dispatched contingent to take part in the military parade in Red Square".³⁰

C. Southeast Asia and Oceania

ASEAN

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **26th ASEAN Summit concluded in Kaula Lampur; ISIS attack foiled on ASEAN Summit; China says US welcome to use civilian facilities in South China Sea.**

The 26th ASEAN Summit concluded in Kaula Lampur on April 27 with the adoption of three declarations, including the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on a People-Oriented, People-Centred ASEAN, which reiterates about formation of ASEAN community by the end of this year. The declaration spelled out ASEAN's specific commitments on the political, economic and socio-cultural pillars that will help create sustainable development in the region. The two other documents adopted were the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates, which solidified ASEAN's recognition of and adherence to moderation as a tool for bridging differences and resolving disputes, and the Declaration on Institutionalizing the Resilience of ASEAN and its Communities and People to Disasters and Climate Change.

The Langkawi Declaration, an initiative championed by Malaysia over the past few years, promotes moderation as a tool for bridging differences. The Declaration was being viewed as one of ASEAN's contributions to global peace and security. The Declaration on Institutionalizing the Resilience of ASEAN and its Communities and People to Disasters and Climate Change is built on the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change 2014 adopted at last year's summit in Myanmar.³¹

Malaysia also continues to use its ASEAN chairmanship year to strengthen regional cooperation against the Islamic state threat, which it has been busy countering at home including during the run-up to the summit itself. Malaysia was already set to convene a Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Radicalization and Extremism in October. But there are also reports suggesting a potential informal ministerial meeting between Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand next month as well.

Some of the expected measure which were not tabled or put off during the summit included a common ASEAN time zone. ASEAN currently has four different time zones; alignment to single time zone would facilitate business dealings and would help forge a more cohesive ASEAN Community expected by the end of 2015. The idea was originally proposed by Singapore back in 1995, but differences still remain within the grouping on the matter. Little progress has been

³⁰ Yunbi, Zhang, "PLA's Moscow Debut Confirmed", *China Daily*, April 28, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/28/content_20558904.htm accessed on May 5, 2015

³¹ "3 Declarations Adopted In 26th ASEAN Summit", *Inter Aksyon*, available at <http://www.interaksyon.com/article/109640/3-declarations-adopted-in-26th-ASEAN-summit>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

done on the South China Sea issue. Despite efforts by Philippines, the country chair Malaysia was not ready to take up any concrete action in the form of a joint statement condemning China's assertive behaviour on the South China Sea. This again shows the lack of togetherness amongst the ASEAN states on the issue. The draft statement mentioned that China's land reclamation efforts are destabilizing peace, security and stability; however, beyond these steps, little progress took place.³²

Malaysian police, on April 26, arrested 12 people linked to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and seized explosives, foiling a plan to attack several locations in and around the capital city just one day before the country was set to host the ASEAN summit. The male accused, aged 17 to 41 were suspected of plotting attacks on strategic targets and governmental interests around the Klang Valley. The plans were in response to calls by ISIS to launch terrorist attacks on moderate Islamic countries seen as "enemies of ISIS". Following the attacks, the Malaysian Police heightened the security for the ASEAN summit, but it was not confirmed whether the attack was linked to the summit. The Southeast Asian country has not seen any significant militant attacks but has arrested 92 citizens on suspicion of links to ISIS. Authorities have identified 39 Malaysians in Syria and Iraq.³³

The United States and other countries will be welcome to use civilian facilities China is building in the South China Sea for search and rescue and weather forecasting "when conditions are right", China's navy chief has told a senior U.S. officer. China claims 90 per cent of the South China Sea, which is believed to be rich in oil and gas, with overlapping claims from Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan. Recent satellite images show China has made rapid progress in building an airstrip suitable for military use in the disputed Spratly Islands and may be planning another. Those moves, along with other reclamations, have caused alarm around the region and in Washington too, with the issue dominating a summit of Southeast Asian leaders this week, to China's displeasure. In a teleconference with the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Jonathan Greenert, China's navy chief Wu Shengli said China's building work in the South China Sea would not affect freedom of navigation or overflight. "Instead, it will improve the ability in these seas of public services like weather forecasting and maritime search and rescue, fulfilling international obligations to maintain the security of international seas," Wu said, according to a Chinese Defence Ministry statement released late on April 30.³⁴

Southeast Asia

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Myanmar rebels convene in Wa region; Graves of suspected Myanmar Rohingya found at Thai-Malaysia border camp; President of National Assembly of Lao PDR visits Singapore;**

³² "What Did the 26th ASEAN Summit Achieve?", *The Diplomat*, available at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/what-did-the-26th-ASEAN-summit-achieve/>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

³³ "Malaysia Police Say Violent Plot Foiled Ahead of ASEAN Summit", *Strait Times*, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/12-people-armed-explosives-planning-causing-chaos-nabbed-malaysia-20#sthash.2TIOXtnk.dpuf>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

³⁴ "China Says US Welcome to Use Civilian Facilities in South China Sea", *The Economic Times*, available at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-05-01/news/61723914_1_south-china-sea-spratly-u-s-chief, accessed on May 7, 2015.

Cambodia strongman PM Hun Sen seeks 2018 re-election; Cambodia PM to donate \$100,000 to Nepal Quake Relief; Australian mum 'caught carrying ice' faces death penalty in Malaysia; World leaders congratulate VN on reunification day; Vietnam buys deadly new missiles capable of hitting China; Thailand increases defence budget by 7 per cent; Royal Brunei Armed Forces joins SAF in providing assistance to Nepal quake victims.

A host of Myanmar ethnic rebels began talks in the isolated Wa region bordering China on May 1 as they mull whether to agree a full ceasefire with the government, an armed group official said. The United Wa State Army (UWSA) holds sway over a secretive patch of borderland with a thousand-strong rebel fighting force, long accused of drug smuggling. It called the meeting of around a dozen ethnic armed groups in April, despite not being part of the country's peace talks. The talks began on May 1 and were expected to last until May 6. President Thein Sein has secured a draft deal with 16 rebel groups to end decades of fighting, described by the United Nations as a "historic and significant achievement". The government wants a full nationwide ceasefire before elections in November seen as a test of reforms after decades of military rule.³⁵

Police found dozens of shallow graves, a corpse and an ailing survivor on May 1 at an abandoned jungle camp in an area of southern Thailand that is regularly used to smuggle Rohingya Muslims, as well as Bangladeshis and other migrants, to third countries. The grim discovery was a sharp reminder of the brutal human trafficking networks that operate in Thailand, despite repeated assurances by authorities they are addressing the root causes. Acting on a tip from villagers, teams of police and rescuers were dispatched into the mountains of Padang Besar, a sub-district in Songkhla province. Reaching the camp on foot, they found a shelter with at least one corpse, said police Col. Weerasant Tharnpiem, adding there appeared to be several other bodies as well.³⁶

President of the National Assembly of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) Pany Yathotou made an official visit to Singapore from April 28 to April 30, at the invitation of Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob. A press statement by the Office of the Clerk of Parliament on April 30 said Madam Pany was accompanied by a 12-member delegation comprising National Assembly Members and government officials. Madam Pany called on Madam Halimah at the Parliament House. Both of them reaffirmed the warm inter-parliamentary relations between Singapore and Lao PDR, and agreed that there was potential for greater cooperation in the area of human resource development between both legislatures. They also looked forward to further cooperation between Singapore and Lao PDR.³⁷

Asia's longest-serving leader, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, announced his intention on April 29 to run for another term, warning that only his re-election in 2018 would keep the country from civil war. The announcement will come as little surprise to Cambodians, who have heard

³⁵ "Myanmar Rebels Convene in WA Region", *Bangkok Post*, available at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/548519/myanmar-rebels-convene-in-wa-region>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

³⁶ "Graves of Suspected Myanmar Rohingya Found at Thai-Malaysia Border Camp", *CTV News*, available at <http://www.ctvnews.ca/world/graves-of-suspected-myanmar-rohingya-found-at-thai-malaysia-border-camp-1.2353487>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

³⁷ "President of National Assembly of Lao PDR Visits Singapore", *Channel NewsAsia*, available at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/president-of-national/1817316.html>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

the 63-year-old, self-styled “strongman” promise to stay in power until he is 74 and also predict a descent to the dark days of conflict without him at the helm. “Hun Sen will win again, that’s because the victory is with peace like this. People don’t have to flee and crawl,” Hun Sen said in a speech, making his customary reference to himself in the third person. Analysts say the former Khmer Rouge soldier, who has been prime minister for 30 years, appears intent on building a political dynasty by promoting his three US military-trained sons to top positions in the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) and the army.³⁸

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has pledged to contribute \$100,000 in disaster-relief aid to Nepal after an earthquake on April 25 left more than 4,300 people dead and over 8,000 injured. According to a statement released by the Foreign Ministry on April 27 announcing the donation on behalf of the government, the funds were promised after Mr. Hun Sen sent a condolence message to Nepal’s Prime Minister, Sushil Koirala, on April 26. “The Royal Government of Cambodia hopes that the meagre donation will contribute to mitigating the hardships of the victims, and with the timely efforts of the Government of Nepal, the victims’ situation will recover soon,” the statement says. According to the U.N., more than 1.4 million people are in need of food aid as a result of the magnitude 7.9 earthquake.³⁹

An Australian woman faces a possible death sentence for drug trafficking in Malaysia after a prosecutor said on April 29 a chemist’s report confirmed the substance found in her bag was crystal methamphetamine. Maria Elvira Pinto Exposto, a 52-year-old mother of four, was arrested on December 7 at Kuala Lumpur airport with 1.1 kilograms (2.4 pounds) of the drug, also known as ice, court documents showed. Malaysia has a mandatory death penalty by hanging for anyone found guilty of carrying more than 50 grams of a drug. Previously, two Australians were hanged in 1986 for heroin trafficking — the first Westerners to be executed in Malaysia. Although, few people have been executed in Malaysia in recent years, but in light of recent Indonesian executions, Australia is likely to observe the proceedings very closely.⁴⁰

Lao and Russian leaders have sent their congratulatory messages to Vietnamese leaders on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of liberation of southern Vietnam and national reunification day on April 30. Party General Secretary and State President Chummaly Sayasone, Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, and National Assembly Chairwoman Pany Yathotu of Laos sent messages of congratulations to Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, and National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Sinh Hung. The messages underscored that under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam and with Vietnamese people’s determination, Vietnam defeated neo-colonialists, paving the way for the Ho Chi Minh Campaign’s victory and ultimate national reunification. This victory has been the pride of

³⁸ “Cambodia Strongman PM Hun Sen Seeks 2018 Re-Election”, *Strait Times*, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/cambodia-strongman-pm-hun-sen-seeks-2018-re-election-20150429#sthash.bcuxe6zy.dpuf>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

³⁹ “Cambodia PM To Donate \$100,000 to Nepal Quake Relief”, *Cambodia Daily*, available at <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/hun-sen-to-donate-100000-to-nepal-quake-relief-82861/>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁴⁰ “Australian Mum ‘Caught Carrying Ice’ Faces Death Penalty in Malaysia”, *The Star*, available at <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Regional/2015/04/30/Australian-mum-faces-death-penalty-as-Malaysia/>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

Vietnamese, Lao people and peace lovers worldwide. The liberation of southern Vietnam in 1975 created important opportunities for the victory of Laos' struggle for independence and the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on December 2, 1975, the messages said. In his message cabled to Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, Russian President V. Putin said this great day is a reminder of the courage, steadfastness, and heroism of Vietnamese people during their arduous struggle to defend their rights to freedom and independence. Those past struggle days tested the firm foundations built for the two nations' friendship and cooperation.⁴¹

Vietnam is in the process of acquiring 50 anti-ships and land attack 3M-14E Klub supersonic cruise missiles for its burgeoning fleet of SSK Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines, Der Spiegel Online reports. According to the article, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) recently updated data on its website, based on information obtained from the United Nations' register of conventional arms, indicating that Russia has already delivered 28 missiles over the last two years to Hanoi, although the precise number remains unknown. The Klub is a Russian-made conventional supersonic cruise missile, "designed to destroy targets protected by sophisticated active air defences and countermeasures," *deagel.com* explains. It is an export variant of Russia's "carrier killer" 3M-54 (NATO designation: SS-N-27A "Sizzler") and capable of long-range precision strikes. While it is unknown whether the anti-ship variant of the weapon sold to Vietnam is the 3M-54E Klub-S (range 220km) or 3M-54E1 (range 300km) – both of which can be launched from submarines – the land-attack variant is almost certainly the 3M-14E (range 300km), capable of carrying a 450kg warhead. The purchase of land attack cruise missiles mark a "massive shift" beyond advancing the Vietnamese's Navy's anti-ship capabilities, according to naval analyst Carl Thayer quoted by *Reuters*. "They've given themselves a much more powerful deterrent that complicates China's strategic calculations," he added. Principal targets for the new missile could be the Chinese naval base at Sanya on China's Hainan Island and military facilities (e.g., ports and airfields) that China is building in the potentially oil-rich South China Sea.⁴²

Thailand's military-run government has proposed a 2016 defence budget of THB207 billion (USD6.3 billion), a nominal increase of 7 per cent over military spending in 2015. According to budgetary figures announced by the government on April 29, the 2016 defence budget will represent nearly 8 per cent of the total state expenditure in the year. It also amounts to approximately 1.5 per cent of GDP. The budget will be submitted to the National Legislative Assembly for approval in mid-year before the beginning of Thailand's new fiscal year at the end of October. Government records have not yet detailed a breakdown of the defence budget, although, according to IHS Jane's Defence Budgets, the Royal Thai Army traditionally receives around half the expenditure with the air force and navy each receiving about 22 per cent.⁴³

⁴¹ "World Leaders Congratulate VN on Reunification Day", *Viet Nam Net*, available at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/129471/world-leaders-congratulate-vn-on-reunification-day.html>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁴² "Vietnam Buys Deadly New Missiles Capable of Hitting China", *The Diplomat*, available at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/vietnam-buys-deadly-new-missiles-capable-of-hitting-china/>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁴³ "Thailand Increases Defence Budget by 7%", *IHS Jane's 360*, available at <http://www.janes.com/article/51042/thailand-increases-defence-budget-by-7>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

Two Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) C-130 aircraft departed for Kathmandu on April 30 morning at about 5am and 11am, respectively, the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) said. The two aircraft ferried sustenance and medical supplies, six additional SAF personnel from the Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Coordination Centre (RHCC) and eight personnel from the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF), it said in a press release. The additional RHCC personnel will augment the existing team already on the ground assisting the Nepalese disaster management authorities and military in coordinating the relief effort, said MINDEF. The RBAF personnel will join the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) medical team deployed to Gokarna town, where both armed forces will work together to provide medical assistance to the earthquake victims. The deployment of RBAF personnel was coordinated through the Brunei international liaison officer to the RHCC, and demonstrates the defence ties between the SAF and RBAF, MINDEF added.⁴⁴

India and Southeast Asia

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Poor connectivity hinders business with Northeast India: Vietnam Envoy; Singapore air to start premium economy class on India services.**

India's northeast is considered the gateway to Southeast Asia and crucial for its Act East Policy, but Vietnam's envoy in New Delhi says that poor road and air connectivity are a hindrance to developing tourism and other economic linkages with it. "There is need for the Vietnam tourism industry to earn revenue. But there is no point in the Southeast Asian nations to endorse tourism in India's northeast, as the people and the region are similar to ours," Vietnam's Ambassador to India Ton Sinh Thanh told media on April 27. Thanh also said the poor road and air connectivity in the northeast - both within the region and to the outside world - "makes it difficult for outsiders to reach the interior areas, which is a major hurdle". According to Thanh, even in terms of trade Vietnam "has not benefited much" from the northeast region in comparison to other parts of India and economically the northeastern region of India has "nothing much to offer". The ambassador said Vietnam faces tough competition from the other Southeast Asian nations like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines in terms of attracting tourists from India. Though the number of tourists from India to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) rose in the last three years, from 18,000 in 2011 to 55,000 in 2014, only a meagre 0.25 percentage chose to travel to Vietnam, he said.⁴⁵

Singapore Airlines will introduce a premium economy class category in its Airbus A380 aircraft on flights between Singapore and Mumbai and Delhi, from October. The premium economy class fare will be 20-25 per cent more than the economy class fare, said David Lau, General Manager,

⁴⁴ "Royal Brunei Armed Forces Joins SAF in Providing Assistance to Nepal Quake Victims", *Channel NewsAsia*, available at: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/royal-brunei-armed-forces/1816238.html>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁴⁵ "Poor Connectivity Hinders Business with Northeast India: Vietnam Envoy", *Silicon India*, available at <http://www.siliconindia.com/news/business/Poor-Connectivity-Hinders-Business-With-Northeast-India-Vietnam-Envoy-nid-181951-cid-3.html>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

India, Singapore Airlines. There will be 36 premium economy class seats on the flight's upper deck, he told Media. The premium economy class will be introduced on flights to Delhi on October 13 and to Mumbai on October 21, he said. The airline has similar category on flights from Singapore to Australia, Japan, the UK and the US, he said. "India is now a key target market for us. We have analysed for long to introduce this segment to Indian destinations," he said.⁴⁶

Oceania

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Australian animals at risk of extinction from climate change; NZ Defence Force chief meets Iraqi counterpart; China wants 'de facto' control of sea, says PH; Earthquake of magnitude 7.1 strikes off Papua New Guinea.**

One in six species could face extinction by the end of the century as a direct result of increasing global temperatures, an analysis of the threat posed by climate change to wildlife has found. If the world continues down the existing path of carbon dioxide emissions, the rate of mass extinction will not just get worse for every 1C extra rise in global average temperatures, it will actually accelerate, the study discovered. The endemic plants and animals of South America, Australia and New Zealand are particularly at risk of rising temperatures because for many of these rare species there is nowhere else to go when their only homeland becomes uninhabitable, scientists found.⁴⁷

The chief of the New Zealand Defence Force has met with his counterpart in Iraq's capital. Lieutenant General Tim Keating visited Baghdad, with the main reason for the day long visit being to meet with Chief of Staff of the Iraqi Army, General Babakir Zebari. He says they discussed the Iraqi Army's training schedule and the role of New Zealand soldiers when they soon start training Iraqi forces at the Taji Military Camp near Baghdad. General Keating says General Babakir Zebari thanked New Zealand for providing valuable training assistance for his forces.⁴⁸

Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario on April 26 urged the ASEAN to stop China's "destabilizing activities" in the South China Sea, warning that Beijing was poised to take "de facto control" of the area. At the foreign ministers' meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Del Rosario said: "Is it not time for ASEAN to say to our northern neighbour that what it is doing is wrong and that the massive reclamation must be immediately stopped? On this most important issue, is it not time for ASEAN to finally stand up for what is right?" He

⁴⁶ "Singapore Air to Start Premium Economy Class on India Services", *The Hindu Business Line*, available at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/industry-and-economy/logistics/singapore-air-to-start-premium-economy-class-on-india-services/article7155098.ece>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁴⁷ "Australian Animals at Risk of Extinction from Climate Change", *Fraser Coast Chronicle*, available at <http://www.frasercoastchronicle.com.au/news/australian-animals-risk-extinction-climate-change/2624930/>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁴⁸ "Defence Force Chief Meets Iraqi Counterpart", *Newstalk ZB*, available at: <http://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/news/world/defence-force-chief-meets-iraqi-counterpart/>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

stressed that the global community—from US senators to the ASEAN secretary general, and G7 foreign ministers—had come up with a statement on the “issue unfolding in our region.” China’s reclamation activities are so massive that “if it is allowed to be completed, our northern neighbour will succeed in defining and imposing its unlawful sovereignty claim over more than 85 percent of the South China Sea,” Del Rosario said. “ASEAN should assert its leadership, centrality and solidarity. ASEAN must show the world that it has the resolve to act in the common interest,” he said. It was the strongest statement yet issued by the Philippines in the ASEAN, which has always deemed the maritime dispute as a heavy burden. Most of its members are dependent on China for trade.⁴⁹

An earthquake of magnitude 7.1 struck off Papua New Guinea on May 1, 128 km south-south-west of Rabaul, at a depth of 61 km, the United States Geological Survey reported. There were no immediate reports of damages or casualties. Rabaul, a town on East New Britain Island, lies in the shadow of Mount Tavurvur, an active volcano. Rabaul was destroyed in 1994 during a severe eruption. The area was struck by a 6.9 quake on April 30.⁵⁰

D. Russia

National

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Russia’s ministry of justice cancels registration of Navalny’s party; Russia to explore resuming the production of TU-160 bombers; Russia’s Central Bank cuts key rate to 12.5 per cent; Russian internet regulator blocked 4,500 websites in 2014 for promoting ‘extremism’; Roscosmos to unite rocket and missile engine manufacturers in one holding; Russia test fires its Bal missile system for the first time; Russia to set up S-400 missile regiments in Kamchatka.**

Russia’s ministry of justice has, on April 28, revoked registration of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny’s party - the Party of Progress. The party’s failure to register its regional branches in at least half of Russia’s constituent regions was given as the reason for its de-registration.⁵¹

Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu has given instructions, on April 29, to explore resuming the production of Tupolev Tu-160 supersonic strategic bombers at the Kazan aviation plant in Tatarstan. The Russian Air Force currently operates about 15 Tu-160 strategic bombers and are in line to be modernised. Russia is also developing a new strategic bomber codenamed PAK DA

⁴⁹ “China Wants ‘De Facto’ Control of Sea, Says PH”, *Inquirer.net*, available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/121554/china-wants-de-facto-control-of-sea-says-ph#ixzz3ZXaAwuTb>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁵⁰ “Earthquake of Magnitude 7.1 Strikes off Papua New Guinea”, *Reuters*, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/01/us-quake-papua-idUSKBN0NM3E520150501>, accessed on May 7, 2015.

⁵¹ “Russia’s Ministry Of Justice Cancels Registration Of Navalny’s Party”, *Itar-Tass*, April 28, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792307>

(prospective aviation complex of long-range aviation). The bomber is expected to make its first flight in 2019 and become operational during 2023-2025.⁵²

Russia's Central Bank has, on April 30, lowered the key interest rate by 150 percentage points to 12.5 per cent. This is the third rate cut since the beginning of year when the rates had peaked at 17 per cent.⁵³

Russia's internet regulator has said, on April 29, that 4,500 websites were blocked in the country in 2014 due to their extremist content. In December 2013 President Vladimir Putin had signed a law that allows websites to be blocked without authorization from a court.⁵⁴

Russia's federal space agency Roscosmos is drafting proposals to create a holding company that will bring together the manufacturers of engines for rockets and missiles. Consolidation of enterprises of the rocket and missile engineering industry into larger holding companies began in 2010 when Roscosmos proposed to redistribute all the enterprises and research organizations in the industry into six enlarged entities. Under the plan, one super-corporation was to design and manufacture satellites of all types, the second would produce launch vehicles, and the third would be responsible for manned spacecraft and orbital stations. Since that time, the idea and the concept have been subjected to several modifications but the main guideline remains unchanged. For instance, a holding company responsible for all the aspects of instrument engineering is being formed around the Rossiyskiye Kosmicheskiye Sistemy (Russian Space Systems) corporation and is likely to encompass eight R&D enterprises.⁵⁵

Russia's Pacific Fleet's spokesman Captain First Rank Roman Martov has said, on April 28, that Pacific Fleet has carried out the first launch from the new missile system Bal. The system was commissioned in 2014.⁵⁶

A spokesman for Russia's Eastern Military District Roman Martov has said, on April 29, that a third batch of equipment for a regiment of the S-400 "Triumph" air defence missile systems has been sent to Kamchatka. Three battalions of S-400 missile systems will replace the S-300's. The S-400s have been deployed near Moscow, St. Petersburg, Severomorsk - the headquarters of the Northern Fleet, Kaliningrad region and southern regions and coast of Sea of Japan in the Far East. The S-400 is a new generation anti-aircraft system, which can be equipped with very long-range

⁵² "Russian defence minister orders to consider restarting Tu-160 missile carrier production", *Itar-Tass*, April 28, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792402>

⁵³ "Russia's Central Bank Cuts Key Rate From 14% to 12.5%", *Itar-Tass*, April 30, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/792621>

⁵⁴ "Russian Internet Watchdog Blocked 4,500 Websites Last Year for 'Extremism'", *The Moscow Times*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-internet-watchdog-blocked-4500-websites-last-year-for-extremism/520002.html>

⁵⁵ "Russian Space Agency Set To Unite Rocket And Missile Engine Manufacturers In One Holding", *Itar-Tass*, April 28, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/792114>

⁵⁶ "Russia's New Bal Missile System Test-Fired In Far East For First Time", *Itar-Tass*, April 28, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792206>

missiles (up to 400km), long-range (250km) and medium-range (120km). It is capable of shooting down small aircrafts to cruise missiles and ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads.⁵⁷

International Affairs

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Russia to cooperate in fight against new threats if West shows interest; NATO conducts anti-submarine exercises in Norway; Finland fires charges at suspected submarine; Poland's president signs law on establishing Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian military brigade; Czech president says anti-Russian sanctions are counter-productive; Gazprom discusses prospects of cooperation with North Korea; Russia and China to hold military exercises in the Mediterranean; Russia and China discuss joint helicopter project details; Russia holds military drills in Tajikistan; Turkish President says Putin wrong to call Armenian killings a genocide; US department of defence seeks to extend operation of Russian RD-180 rocket engines up-to 2022.**

The Kremlin Chief of Staff Sergei Ivanov has said, in Moscow on May 2, that 'Russia plans to continue cooperating with the United States and Western Europe to combat modern challenges and threats provided they want Moscow to join these efforts'. He added that Iran is a 'good example' of the success of Russia and the West working together to solve common challenges.⁵⁸

NATO's has initiated anti-submarine drills, dubbed Dynamic Mongoose 2015, off Norway's western coast on May 4. The manoeuvres will last until May 14 and involve a total of 20 warships, aircraft and submarines. It involves the participation of Sweden which is not a NATO member.⁵⁹

The Finnish military has fired, on April 28, handheld underwater depth charges as a warning against a suspected submarine in waters near Helsinki. The incident comes amid growing military tensions with neighbouring Russia. Finnish Defence minister Carl Haglund did not say whether Russia was involved. He told the Finnish media that the target could have been a submarine, and that it has likely left the area. Finland shares an 833 mile (1,340 km) border with Russia. Regional tensions were reflected earlier in April after a joint statement by Nordic countries — Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland — that directly cited the Russian "challenge" as grounds to increase defence cooperation.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ "Third Batch Of Equipment For S-400 Missile Regiment Arrives in Russia's Kamchatka", *Itar-Tass*, April 29, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792395>

⁵⁸ "Russia Ready To Cooperate In Fight Against New Threats If West Shows Interest In This", *Itar-Tass*, May 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792815>

⁵⁹ "NATO's Large-Scale Anti-Submarine Exercises Start in Norway", *Itar-Tass*, May 4, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/792932>

⁶⁰ "Amid Russia Tensions, Finnish Military Fires Charges at Suspected Submarine", *The Moscow Times*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/amid-russia-tensions-finnish-military-fires-charges-at-suspected-submarine/519907.html>

President of Poland Bronislaw Komorowski has signed a resolution, on May 4, to establish the Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian military brigade. The brigade will be formed as part of the European Union's combat groups with an aim to participate in operations under the UN, NATO and EU aegis. The manpower and military hardware assigned by the three countries to the military contingent will stay at the places of their permanent location and will be subordinated to the brigade's command during exercises and accomplishment of missions. The brigade's first military exercises are scheduled for the autumn of 2015. The contingent is expected to reach its full combat readiness in two years and have a strength of up to 4,500 servicemen.⁶¹

Czech President Milos Zeman has said, in Prague on May 3, that the 'West should abandon its sanctions against Russia as they are counter-productive and whip up tensions'. He added that these sentiments are shared by leaders of Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. He also stressed on the importance of economic cooperation between Russia and the European Union.⁶²

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller has discussed prospects of interaction in the natural gas sphere with Minister of Oil Industry of the North Korea Pae Hak in Moscow on April 28. In the past, Gazprom had explored building a gas pipeline to Seoul through North Korea.⁶³

Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng has said, on April 30, that Russia and China will hold joint naval drills in the Mediterranean Sea in the middle of May, 2015. 'Defensive actions at sea, replenishment of supplies, escorting vessels, joint actions to ensure sea transportation security and practical use of armaments' will be practiced during the drills.⁶⁴

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has said, on April 28, that Russia and China are likely to agree on the final contract for creating a joint Russian-Chinese helicopter during the visit of President Xi Jinping to Moscow in May. He added that Roscosmos is negotiating the delivery of domestic space rocket engines to Beijing and establishing a joint lunar station.⁶⁵

Russia has held a military exercise in Tajikistan on April 29 wherein units of the 201st military base practised anti-terrorist operations. The military base in Tajikistan is the largest Russian ground force outside the national territory with its strength expected to be increased to 9,000 servicemen from the current 7,000 by 2020.⁶⁶

⁶¹ "Poland's President Signs Law On Establishing Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian Military Brigade", *Itar-Tass*, May 4, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/792931>

⁶² "Czech President Says Anti-Russian Sanctions Are Counter-Productive And Whip Up Tension", *Itar-Tass*, May 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/792891>

⁶³ "Gazprom Discussed Prospects Of Interaction In Natural Gas Sphere with North Korea", *Itar-Tass*, April 28, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/792310>

⁶⁴ "Russia, China to Hold Joint Drills In Mediterranean In Mid-May", *Itar-Tass*, April 30, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/792727>

⁶⁵ "China, Russia Agree On Joint Helicopter Project Details — Deputy PM", *Itar-Tass*, April 30, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792128>

⁶⁶ "Russia Holds Large-Scale Military Drills in Tajikistan", *Itar-Tass*, April 29, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792458>

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has said, on April 27, that Russia should account for its actions in Ukraine and Crimea before calling the 1915 mass killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks a genocide. He was quoted as saying that “it’s not the first time Russia used the word genocide on this issue. I’m personally sad that Putin took such a step. What is happening in Ukraine and Crimea is evident. They should firstly explain these before calling it genocide”.⁶⁷

The US Department of Defence has asked, on April 29, the Congress to extend operation of Russian-built RD-180 rocket engines for launching military and intelligence satellites into orbit up to 2022. This was stated by the head of US Air Force Space Command General John Hyten.⁶⁸

India-Russia Relations

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **President Pranab Mukherjee to attend Russia’s victory day parade.**

President Pranab Mukherjee will attend Russia’s Victory Day parade that is scheduled to be held on May 9, 2015. He will be one of the 25 heads of states in a BRICS grouping that includes Chinese President Xi Jinping, South African President Jacob Zuma and Brazilian President Dilma Rouseff. During his visit, Mr. Mukherjee is likely to meet President Vladimir Putin, make a public address at a Russian think-tank and attend a cultural exchange programme called ‘Namaste India’. The Indian Army will also send a 70-member contingent of the Nine Grenadiers to march along with the Russian and a contingent of China’s army at Moscow’s Red Square.⁶⁹

E. Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Gulf

Iran

(April 20-April 26, 2015)

- **Australia and Iran to share intelligence in campaign against ISIL; Iran backs pipeline to China under ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative.**

Australia and Iran have agreed to share intelligence relating to Australians fighting with extremist groups in Iraq, Australia’s Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, has announced according to the Guardian. Around 100 Australians are believed to be fighting for ISIL or related groups in Iraq

⁶⁷ “Turkish President Says Putin Wrong to Call Armenian Killings a ‘Genocide’”, *The Moscow Times*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/turkish-president-says-putin-wrong-to-call-armenian-killings-a-genocide/519825.html>

⁶⁸ “Pentagon Insists On Extending Operation Of Russian Rd-180 Rocket Engine Up To 2022”, *Itar-Tass*, April 29, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/792350>

⁶⁹ “Pranab’s Visit To Moscow Signals ‘Strategic Autonomy’”, *The Hindu*, May 5, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pranab-mukherjees-moscow-visit-signals-strategic-autonomy/article7171452.ece>

and Syria. Bishop revealed the details of the cooperation after a meeting with Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, describing it as an extraordinary deal that will have beneficial outcomes in the fight against global terrorism.⁷⁰

Iran says it has ambitious plans to extend its energy delivery network to China under Beijing's massive "One Belt, One Road" push to boost regional connectivity. The official said Iran would expand its railways, roads, ports, telecoms sector and energy security under a five-year development plan. "Setting up an extended network of energy pipelines would help regional security and development". Iran has already built a natural gas pipeline to its border with Pakistan, which has so far balked at constructing a link on its side amid threats of sanctions from Washington.⁷¹

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Senate rejects amendment to Iran bill, not considering Iran deal treaty; Iran, Turkey to trade in own currencies.**

The US Senate has voted against an amendment to a bill requiring a possible nuclear agreement with Iran to be reviewed by Congress. The amendment, introduced by Republican Senator Ron Johnson, wanted a final Iran deal to be submitted to the Senate as a treaty. The Senate voted 57-39 to reject the measure. Sen. Johnson said Iran nuclear agreement "is so important to the security of this nation and world peace that it raises to the level of a treaty." Senator Bob Corker, the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is the author of the bill, the Iran Nuclear Review Act, which would allow Congress to review any final deal.⁷²

Jalal Ebrahimi, the head of Iran-Turkey Joint Trade Council, said the idea for Tehran and Ankara to trade in rial and lira was raised during the recent visit to Tehran by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ebrahimi said Iran and Turkey will pay each other through their own currencies in equal amounts to the dollar or the euro. He said this was part of a package of proposals to ease trade between the two countries. Another solution, he said, was to start barter between the two countries. The official further added that the local currency payment mechanism will ease trade between Iran and Turkey, adding that the central banks of the two countries will provide the required guarantees.⁷³

⁷⁰ "Australia and Iran to Share Intelligence In Campaign Against ISIL" , *Tehran Times*, May 7, 2015 http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=246235

⁷¹ "Iran Backs Pipeline To China Under 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative" , *Presstv*, April 25, 2015 <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/04/25/408042/Iran-China-gas-pipeline-sanctions-trade-nuclear-zarif-kerry-obama-rouhani-Pakistan>

⁷² "Senate Rejects Amendment To Iran Bill, Not Considering Iran Deal Treaty" , *Presstv* , April 29, 2015 <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/04/29/408659/US-Senate-iran-nuclea-deal->

⁷³ "Iran, Turkey To Trade In Own Currencies" , *Presstv* , May 3 , 2015 <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/05/03/409259/iran-turkey-currencies-rial-lira-dollar-sanctions-nuclear-talks-nuclear-talks-nuclear-agreement-unsc-p51-senate-congress-obama-rouhani-zarif-mohammad-javad-zarif-kerry-john-kerry>

Iraq and Syria

(April 20-April 26, 2015)

- **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi 'wounded in air strike in Iraq'; Russia arms Iraq, Syria to help combat Islamic State: Lavrov; Boko Haram changes name to 'Islamic State in West Africa'; Islamist fighters seize Syria's Jisr al-Shughour.**

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is no longer in operational control of the organisation after being wounded in an airstrike, it has been reported. Baghdadi, who is the self-described 'caliph' or spiritual leader of ISIL, was seriously hurt in a strike in a village in western Iraq on March 18. The report said that his wounds were at first thought to be so serious that he might die, and that while he had since staged a gradual recovery, he was not at present involved in the direct day-to-day control of the terror group. When they first heard of his wounds, ISIL deputies convened meetings to discuss who might take over as leader.⁷⁴

Russia is arming Iraq and Syria to help them fight Islamic State, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, calling the radical militant group the main threat to his own country's security. "Islamic State is our main enemy at the moment. If only because hundreds of Russian citizens, hundreds of Europeans, hundreds of Americans fight alongside IS," he said in an interview. "They are already coming back and to enjoy themselves could stage vile acts at home. "Russia has criticized air strikes by a U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State positions in Syria and Iraq, and encouraged Washington to work with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the battle against IS.⁷⁵

Terrorist group Boko Haram has changed its name to 'Islamic State in West Africa.' following its affiliation with Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), pulse reported. Boko Haram pledged its allegiance to fellow terrorist group, Islamic State (ISIS) in March 2015. ISIS accepted the pledge and encouraged members to extend operations to West Africa. The group is said to have released new photos of its members and announced its new name.⁷⁶

Islamist insurgents including al-Qaeda's wing in Syria, Nusra Front, captured the north western Syrian town of Jisr al-Shughour on April 25, for the first time in the four-year-old conflict. Syrian state media said the army had redeployed to the town's surroundings "to avoid civilian casualties". They said the army was battling "a large number of terrorists coming from the Turkish border. "The capture of the strategic town is the latest in a series of setbacks for government forces in the south and the north.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ "Isil Leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi 'Wounded In Air Strike in Iraq' by Colin Freeman", *The Telegraph*, April 21, 2015 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11552314/Isil-leader-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi-wounded-in-air-strike-in-Iraq.html>

⁷⁵ "Russia Arms Iraq, Syria To Help Combat Islamic State: Lavrov", *Reuters*, April 22, 2015 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/22/us-mideast-crisis-russia-lavrov-idUSKBN0ND1GL20150422>

⁷⁶ "Boko Haram Changes Name To 'Islamic State in West Africa'", *News 24 Nigeria*, April 24, 2015 <http://www.news24.com.ng/National/News/Boko-Haram-changes-name-to-Islamic-State-in-West-Africa-20150424>

⁷⁷ Karouhny, Mariam, "Islamist Fighters Seize Syria's Jisr Al-Shughour, Army Says Redeploys", *Reuters*, April 25, 2015 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/25/us-syria-crisis-town-idUSKBN0NG09220150425>

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Iraqi forces kill senior ISIL commander in Salahuddin; Death toll from U.S.-led strike rises to 52 civilians in Syria; Nusra Front captures key government held city in Syria; Islamic State militants 'kill 300 Yazidi captives'.**

Iraqi security forces have managed to kill a senior commander of the ISIL Takfiri militant group during a clean-up operation in the country's troubled Northern Province of Salahuddin. Iraqi soldiers killed a Chechen ISIL commander, known by his nom de guerre Abu Ibrahim al-Shishani, in an operation purging an area in the province of ISIL remnants. The source added that Shishani was responsible for organizing ISIL militant attacks against Baiji oil refinery, located 180 kilometres (112 miles) north of the capital, Baghdad, over the past month. The death toll from an air strike by U.S.-led forces on the northern Syrian province of Aleppo has risen to 52 including seven children, a group monitoring the conflict said.

Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the British-based Observatory for Human Rights, said the death toll from May 1st strike was the highest civilian loss in a single attack by U.S. and Arab forces since they started air raids against hard-line Islamist militant groups in Syria such as Islamic State. U.S.-led forces are also targeting the group in Iraq. The Britain-based Observatory said the raid had mistakenly struck civilians in a village on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River in Aleppo province, killing members of at least six families.⁷⁸

Syrian rebel fighters, including the Al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, captured the north-western Syrian city of Jisr al-Shughour, for the first time in the four-year-old conflict. Syrian state media said the army had redeployed to the city's surroundings "to avoid civilian casualties." They said the army was battling "a large number of terrorists coming from the Turkish border." The capture of the strategic city is the latest in a series of setbacks for government forces in the south and north. Opposition fighters and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group, said the city, on a road between the coastal city of Latakia and city of Aleppo, was now fully controlled by rebels.⁷⁹

A statement from the Yazidi Progress Party said 300 captives were killed on May 1 in the Tal Afar district near the city. Iraqi Vice-President Osama al-Nujaifi described the reported deaths as "horrific and barbaric". Thousands of members of the religious minority group were captured last year.⁸⁰

The Gulf

(April 20-April 26, 2015)

- **Saudi-led coalition declares end to Yemen air strikes; Oil surges as Saudi resumes Yemen strikes.**

⁷⁸ "Death toll from U.S.-Led Strike Rises To 52 Civilians in Syria", *Reuters*, May 2, 2015 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/02/us-syria-strike-idUSKBN0NN08G20150502>

⁷⁹ "Syrian Rebels Seize Key Government-Held City", *Aljazeera*, April 15, 2015 <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/4/25/syrian-government-reportedly-loses-stronghold-in-idlib.html>

⁸⁰ "Islamic State: Militants 'Kill 300 Yazidi Captives'", *BBC World*, May 2, 2015 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32565809>

The Saudi-led coalition that has been bombing Yemen for almost a month says its military operation "Decisive Storm" has ended and a new campaign aimed at protecting civilians and preventing Houthi fighters from operating has begun. Brigadier-General Ahmed al-Asiri, the coalition's spokesperson, said that the coalition had achieved its military goals in Yemen and a new operation, called "Renewal of Hope", would aim to protect civilians and combat "terrorism".⁸¹

Global oil prices advanced as the Saudi Arabia-led coalition renewed airstrikes in Yemen, stoking new supply concerns about the crude-rich Middle East. U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate for June delivery gained \$1.58 at \$57.74 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent North Sea crude for June delivery, the global benchmark, advanced \$2.12 to \$64.85 a barrel. "The market may be drawing support from Saudi Arabia's resumption of airstrikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen, with an increased geopolitical risk premium helping to offset weaker-than-expected PMI data from both China and the eurozone," said Tim Evans of Citi Futures.⁸²

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Saudi Arabia used cluster bombs in Yemen, rights groups say.**

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said it had evidence that the bombs were used at least twice against Houthi rebels. There were no reports of casualties. Cluster bombs spread small bombs over a wide area and can leave unexploded munitions buried in the ground. They are banned under a treaty signed by 116 countries, but not Saudi Arabia. The US and the other countries in Saudi Arabia's military coalition are not signatories of the 2008 treaty either. The US does however bar the sale of the weapons to countries that use them in civilian areas.⁸³

F. The United State of America

National

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **US economic growth stalls; US jobless claims at 15-year low; Obama Administration expands cyber defence strategies; Obama sends pay, retirement commission recommendations to Congress; US Military: Reported sexual assaults increase 11 percent; Official provides update on combat jobs for women; Gayle Smith nominated to lead USAID; Baltimore violence draws international coverage; 'Vital' to seek truth in Freddie Gray death; Hillary Clinton: Baltimore unrest shows need for change; Baltimore 'victory rally' follows charges in detainee death; Immigrant removals continue to decline under Obama.**

⁸¹ "Saudi-Led Coalition Declares End To Yemen Air Strikes", *Aljazeera*, April 22, 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/saudi-led-coalition-begins-phase-yemen-campaign-150421155500641.html>

⁸² "Oil Surges As Saudi Resumes Yemen Strikes", *Alarabia*, April 24, 2015 <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/energy/2015/04/24/Oil-surges-as-Saudi-resumes-Yemen-strikes-.html>

⁸³ "Yemen: Saudi Arabia Used Cluster Bombs, Rights Groups Says", *BBC World*, May 3, 2015 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32572408>

U.S. economic growth slowed sharply in the first three months of this year. The April 29th report from the Commerce Department says the gross domestic product expanded at an annual rate of just two-tenths of a percent. That is much slower than the 2.2 percent rate of the last quarter of 2014. The GDP is the sum of all goods and services produced in a nation and the broadest gauge of economic health. Economists blame the slowdown on unusually foul winter weather and a strike that stopped shipping in the usually busy U.S. West Coast ports. Before the latest GDP report, the National Association for Business Economics, surveyed key economists at companies across the United States and found expectations for “solid economic growth” remain intact in spite of recent “disappointing” economic data.⁸⁴

U.S. jobless claims fell to a 15-year low last week, as the number of Americans signing up for unemployment aid fell 34,000 to a nationwide total of 262,000. The April 30th report from the labour Department shows that’s the lowest level of job layoffs since the year 2000. Economists say weekly claims below 300,000 are evidence of an improving job market.⁸⁵

President Barack Obama pledged to put cyber issues at the core of his legislative agenda. He’s sought to change how the public and private sectors share information about online threats and bolster some privacy protections for citizens while maintaining a robust NSA. Now the administration is turning its attention to Washington’s two central pillars of national security: the military and espionage services. In the last month, both the Pentagon and the CIA have issued broad strategy statements, vowing to assertively move and expand their operations into the cyber sphere to protect and defend vital U.S. security interests.⁸⁶

President Barack Obama sent the recommendations of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission to Congress on April 30. In the letter accompanying the report, Obama thanked the commission members and said their recommendations “represent an important step forward in protecting the long-term viability of the all-volunteer force, improving quality of life for service members and their families and ensuring the fiscal sustainability of the military compensation and retirement systems.” The president is prepared to support specific proposals for 10 of the Commission’s 15 recommendations. Since the commission released its report to the president in January, DoD officials have been over the recommendations with a fine-toothed comb. The department and the White House want to move slowly on four of the commission’s 15 recommendations and will begin executing the remaining 10. The four that require more study are: the proposal for a blended retirement system, reserve component duty statuses, exceptional family member support and commissary and exchange consolidation.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ “US Economic Growth Stalls”, *VOA News*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-economic-growth-stalls/2741849.html>

⁸⁵ “US Jobless Claims at 15-year Low”, *VOA News*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-unemployment-report/2743130.html>

⁸⁶ Bernard, Doug, “Obama Administration Expands Cyber Defense Strategies”, *VOA News*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-administration-expands-cyber-defense-strategies/2736402.html>

⁸⁷ Garamone, Jim, “Obama Sends Pay, Retirement Commission Recommendations to Congress”, *DoD News*, May 1, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128710>

The Pentagon's latest annual report on sexual assaults in the U.S. military says the number of reported assaults rose 11 percent from 2013 to 2014. However, the report estimates the total number of sexual assaults — reported and unreported — actually decreased from 2013 to 2014. The military received 6,131 reports of sexual assault involving service members in fiscal 2014. The report says female victims made the majority of reports, but were not the majority of victims. The report estimates that 10,600 men and 9,600 women in the U.S. armed forces were sexually assaulted in 2014.⁸⁸

Since the Defence Department rescinded a 1994 policy that excluded women from serving in direct ground combat positions, the services have opened about 91,000 jobs to female service members, the Joint Staff's vice director said in Washington on April 27. Air Force Maj. Gen. Jacqueline D. Van Ovost spoke at a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace event that looked at changes made by the Defence Department, the services and U.S. Southern Command for servicewomen since the 2013 repeal of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule. Early next year, Defence Secretary Ash Carter is expected to announce final decisions to integrate remaining closed occupations and any approved exceptions to policy. The repeal was endorsed by then-Defence Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey. "Today, 95 percent of all [military occupational specialties] are open to women," Van Ovost said. "Women are contributing in unprecedented ways to the military's mission of defending our nation."⁸⁹

President Barack Obama has nominated Gayle Smith to serve as the top administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the federal agency mainly responsible for administering civilian foreign aid. If the Senate confirms the nomination, Smith would succeed Rajiv Shah, who left the post in February after serving for five years. In a statement on April 30, national security adviser Susan Rice described Smith as "a valued colleague and friend." Smith most recently served alongside Rice as senior director for development and democracy on the National Security Council staff, where her responsibilities included global development, democracy and humanitarian assistance issues.⁹⁰

The unrest in the U.S. city of Baltimore has made international headlines. On April 27th violence was sparked by the funeral of Freddie Gray, 25, who died April 19. His death came one week after being arrested, during which he suffered a broken neck and fell into a coma. Six Baltimore police officers have been suspended as the death is being investigated. Gray's death, demonstrators say, is another case of a U.S. police department resorting to lethal force against young African American men. Britain's *Guardian newspaper* gave the story wide coverage. In a column by Simon Jenkins, the paper lamented that "police in the U.S. and U.K. have become over-armed security agencies forming a lobby powerful enough to scare politicians into giving them whatever they

⁸⁸ Babb, Carla, "US Military: Reported Sexual Assaults Increase 11 Percent", *VOA News*, May 01, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/military-reported-sexual-assaults-increase/2745687.html>

⁸⁹ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Official Provides Update on Combat Jobs for Women", *DoD News*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128680>

⁹⁰ "Gayle Smith Nominated to Lead USAID", *VOA News*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/gayle-smith-nominated-to-lead-usaid/2743473.html>

want.” India’s *The Times of India* newspaper focused on a viral video that emerged from the riots, which reportedly showed a mother berating her son for participating in the riots.⁹¹

Following the announcement of charges against six Baltimore police officers involved in the arrest of Freddie Gray, U.S. President Barack Obama said on May 1 that “it is absolutely vital that the truth comes out” on what happened to the 25-year-old African-American man who died in police custody last month. “What I think the people of Baltimore want more than anything else is the truth,” said President Obama in remarks at the White House. “That’s what people around the country expect.” Obama said it would not be appropriate for him to comment on the legal processes involved, but that he wants to make sure the legal system “runs the way it should,” saying “justice needs to be served.”⁹²

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton spoke out on the unrest in Baltimore Wednesday in a speech in New York. She is the first presidential candidate to publicly address the situation in detail, though some of the Republican presidential contenders have touched on the issue, deploring street violence and urging calm. Clinton’s remarks came in a speech at Columbia University. “We have to come to terms with some hard truths about race and justice in America,” she said. Clinton said the U.S. needs to confront a number of issues in the wake of the unrest in Baltimore following the death of a young black man, Freddie Gray, in police custody. The Gray case is the latest in a series of deadly encounters between young black men and police around the country over the past several months. Clinton said it was time to end what she called “the era of mass incarceration” of young, low-level criminal offenders, as well as the lack of funding for drug and mental health programmes.⁹³

Thousands of protesters marched to Baltimore City Hall on May 2, chanting “no justice, no peace” amid heavily armed police and National Guard troops, a day after the announcement that six police officers had been charged in the death of Freddie Gray. The mood throughout the day was largely celebratory, but law enforcement officials said the 10 p.m. curfew would stay in place. Some protesters defied the curfew shortly after it went into effect, and police made several arrests. The Associated Press reported that police detained one man at Pennsylvania and North avenues, the site of a riot and looting earlier in the week. The handcuffed man had been pepper-sprayed, and police were pouring water into his eyes to try to ease the effects of the spray. A medic was summoned.⁹⁴

The Obama administration is on pace to deport the fewest number of immigrants in nearly a decade, according to internal government data obtained by *The Associated Press*. As of April 20, federal immigration officials sent home 127,378 people in the United States illegally. That puts immigrant removals on track to be among the lowest since the middle of President George W.

⁹¹ Hilburn, Matthew, “Baltimore Violence Draws International Coverage”, *VOA News*, April 28, 2015

⁹² “Obama: ‘Vital’ to Seek Truth in Freddie Gray Death”, *VOA News*, May 01, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-says-it-is-vital-to-seek-truth-in-freddie-gray-death/2744861.html>

⁹³ Malone, Jim, “Hillary Clinton: Baltimore Unrest Shows Need for Change”, *VOA News*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/hillary-clinton-baltimore-unrest-shows-need-for-change/2741819.html>

⁹⁴ “Baltimore ‘Victory Rally’ Follows Charges in Detainee Death”, *VOA News*, May 02, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/thousands-expected-to-rally-in-baltimore/2745907.html>

Bush's second term. The internal statistics reveal a continuing decline in deportations even as the Obama administration fights a legal challenge to a plan it announced late last year to shield millions of immigrants from deportations. The new figures, contained in weekly internal reports not publicly reported, average about 19,730 removals a month for the first six months of the government's fiscal year that began in October. If that trend continues, the government will remove about 236,000 by September - the lowest figure since 2006, when 207,776 were sent home.⁹⁵

International: Asia

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Kerry wraps up historic Sri Lanka visit; DoD humanitarian assistance survey team arrives in Nepal; Humanitarian operations in Nepal aggressively increasing; Counter-ISIL military coalition concludes planning conference; ISIL experiencing setbacks in Iraq, Syria, Centcom says; Navy to accompany U.S.-flagged ships in Strait of Hormuz; U.S., Japanese officials announce new defence guidelines; Carter: U.S, Japan defence guidelines 'break new ground'; Revised strategic guidelines key to stability, Japan's Defence Minister says; Korea, China wary of US-Japan military pact; US envoy rails at N. Korean diplomats for UN disruption; Obama, Abe pledge to complete Pacific Rim trade pact; Abe addresses US Congress, dogged by wartime issues; S. Korea, China criticize Japan PM Abe's speech; China says worried by new US cyber strategy; Expert: China's nuclear warning may be sign of frustration with US; Leaders discuss U.S.-Australia defence cooperation.**

John Kerry wrapped up the first visit to Sri Lanka by a U.S. Secretary of State in 43 years, during which he praised the country's democratic reforms and said Washington is looking to broaden bilateral ties with the country. Before departing for Africa, Kerry held talks with the leaders of the Tamil National Alliance, the main party of Sri Lanka's minority Tamil population. Kerry said it will take time for Sri Lanka to reach true reconciliation following its decades-long ethnic conflict with Tamil separatists. He added that lasting peace, especially after a civil conflict "requires policies that foster reconciliation, not resentment." He also called for an investigation into the cases of thousands of Tamils who went missing during the conflict. Discussing trade, Kerry said South Asia is one of the world's least economically integrated regions. He said the U.S. is backing economic integration among countries in South and South East Asia, as a way to strengthen local economies.⁹⁶

U.S. Pacific Command continues to work closely with the U.S. Embassy in Nepal and U.S. Agency for International Development colleagues to determine how Pacom forces and assets can assist the government of Nepal in the aftermath of an April 25 earthquake that killed thousands of people and has affected millions more. The U.S. military has transported members of the USAID disaster assistance response team and urban search and rescue teams to Nepal, as well as a joint humanitarian assistance survey team of about 20 people to support the response team.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ "Immigrant Removals Continue to Decline Under Obama", *Associated Press*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/ap-immigrant-removals-continue-to-decline-under-obama/2741225.html>

⁹⁶ Dockins, Pamela, "Kerry Wraps Up Historic Sri Lanka Visit", *VOA News*, May 02, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/kerry-travels-to-sri-lanka-to-cheer-on-democratic-reforms/2745781.html>

⁹⁷ "DoD Humanitarian Assistance Survey Team Arrives in Nepal", *DoD News*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128696>

Humanitarian operations in earthquake-stricken Nepal are aggressively increasing to assist millions of survivors throughout the country, including those in hard to reach remote areas in need of food, water, shelter, medical care and other life-saving essentials. Most of the aid so far has been distributed to Nepal's earthquake victims in and around the capital, Kathmandu. People living close to the epicentre of the quake, in remote towns and villages along the foothills of the Himalayas, have been virtually cut off from aid.⁹⁸

More than 300 military representatives from 39 nations concluded a weeklong operational planning conference at Macdill Air Force Base, on May 1, 2015 that further developed and refined coalition campaign plans designed to degrade and defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), according to officials. "Planning the coalition campaign is a challenging but essential step in our aim at defeating Daesh," said French Army Maj. Gen. Bernard Commins, chairman of the coalition planning and strategy group at U.S. Central Command, using another term that refers to the terrorist group ISIL. "Success relies on the cohesion of this coalition — sixty-two nations for one mission. That's where we are." On the ground, Iraqi forces have stopped Daesh expansion and are rolling them back, Commins said.⁹⁹

While Beiji and Ramadi in Iraq remain contested between Iraqi security forces and extremist Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant militants, ISIL is experiencing setbacks, a U.S. Central Command spokesman said on May 1. Speaking to reporters in the Pentagon via teleconference, Air Force Col. Patrick Ryder provided a weekly update on Centcom's operational highlights in the fight against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. In central Iraq, Iraqi security forces continue to conduct operations to secure the city of Karmah, and they have retaken territory around the Tigris River canal, Ryder said.¹⁰⁰

Ships from U.S. Naval Forces Central Command in Bahrain have begun accompanying U.S.-flagged maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, Defence Department officials said. Sufficient U.S. naval forces are assigned to the command to meet the requirements of the accompanying mission, officials said, adding that Navcent will coordinate with shipping-industry representatives to ensure the operations go smoothly and efficiently. The mission was prompted by two incidents this week in the Strait of Hormuz in which Iranian navy patrol vessels harassed commercial motor vessels traversing the strait.

On April 24, four Iranian patrol boats approached the U.S.-flagged merchant ship Maersk Kensington, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren said during an April 29 briefing.¹⁰¹

The new U.S.-Japan defence guidelines will fundamentally change the way Japan and the United States cooperate on defence matters, a senior defence official said recently. The official spoke on background in advance of April 27th release, calling the guidelines "a big deal" for both countries.

⁹⁸ Schlein, Lisa, "Humanitarian Operations in Nepal Aggressively Increasing", *VOA News*, May 01, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/humanitarian-operations-in-nepal-aggressively-increasing/2744775.html>

⁹⁹ "Counter-ISIL Military Coalition Concludes Planning Conference", *DoD News*, May 1, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128719>

¹⁰⁰ Cronk, Terri Moon, "ISIL Experiencing Setbacks in Iraq, Syria, Centcom Says", *DoD News*, May 1, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128721>

¹⁰¹ Pellerin, Cheryl, "Navy to Accompany U.S.-Flagged Ships in Strait of Hormuz", *DoD News*, May 1, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128707>

The guidelines are the foundation on which the United States and Japan base their cooperation as allies. "It's a big deal because the region has changed since we last revised the guidelines in 1997," the official said. "It's a big deal because [as] Japanese capabilities have increased, Japan's ability to contribute to regional peace and stability has increased." The new guidelines come on the heels of Japan's reinterpretation of their constitution in July 2014. Under the reinterpretation, Japan will be able to defend other countries that may come under attack. "This is the exercise of collective self-defence," the official said. The new guidelines allow for increased regional and global cooperation in the U.S.-Japanese alliance. This will be most noticeable in peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, international intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations, missile defence and a variety of other areas, the official noted.¹⁰²

American and Japanese national security leaders unveiled the new guidelines for U.S.-Japan defence cooperation on April 27, saying the new rules will promote peace and stability not only in the region, but worldwide. Secretary of State John Kerry, Defence Secretary Ash Carter, Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Fumio Kishida and Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani announced the results of the Security Consultative Committee meeting here today.

Known as the "2-plus-2" meetings, the discussions covered all aspects of the U.S.-Japanese alliance, but the revision of the defence guidelines — the first since 1997 — took precedence.

The guidelines lay out how the United States and Japan will work together, and come after the Japanese government reinterpreted their constitution to allow a greater international role, including greater military cooperation.¹⁰³

The Japanese welcome the American rebalance to the Pacific, and Japan Self-Defence Force personnel look forward to working even more closely with U.S. personnel as a result of changes to the U.S.-Japan strategic guidelines, Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani said in an exclusive interview on April 26. The defence guidelines provide a foundation for U.S.-Japan cooperation. The new changes will now allow Japanese Self-Defence Forces to coordinate with American forces worldwide, and they'll also allow the two countries to cooperate in two new domains — space and cyber. The guidelines also call for an alliance coordination mechanism that will improve planning and coordination between U.S. and Japanese forces.¹⁰⁴

A new defence pact between the United States and Japan that will give Tokyo's forces a more ambitious global role provoked wary reactions from neighbours South Korea and China on April 28. Even though South Korea may stand to benefit from a stronger Japanese military presence to counter the North Korean threat and China's rising power, officials remain reluctant because of lingering tensions over Tokyo's wartime past.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Garamone, Jim, "U.S., Japanese Officials Announce New Defence Guidelines", *DoD News*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128675>

¹⁰³ Garamone, Jim, "Carter: U.S, Japan Defense Guidelines 'Break New Ground'", *DoD News*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128678>

¹⁰⁴ Garamone, Jim, "Revised Strategic Guidelines Key to Stability, Japan's Defence Minister Says", *DoD News*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128677>

¹⁰⁵ Padden, Brian and Ide, William, "Korea, China Wary Of US-Japan Military Pact", *VOA News*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/korea-china-wary-of-us-japan-military-pact/2737447.html>

The U.S. envoy to the United Nations on April 30 strongly criticized North Korean diplomats for disrupting a U.N. event on North Korean human rights. The event organized by the U.S. mission to the U.N. in New York featured several speakers, including the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Samantha Power, and three North Korean defectors. Three diplomats from the North Korean mission to the U.N. attended the event. One of them, Ri Song Chol, a counsellor at the North Korean mission, unexpectedly read a statement after a North Korean defector spoke.¹⁰⁶

U.S. President Barack Obama and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged Tuesday to complete a 12-nation Pacific Rim trade agreement even as the American leader acknowledged there is opposition in both countries. Abe, whose state visit to the United States comes 70 years after the end of the two countries' bitter World War II conflict, called for the "early conclusion" of negotiations over the trade deal. The two leaders did not announce any details about the remaining barriers to completing an agreement that would open up exports for both Japanese and American manufacturers, along with those in 10 other nations. The Pacific trade deal, and a companion one with European nations, has drawn opposition in the U.S. from labour unions and Democratic lawmakers who normally are allies with Obama, a Democrat. They contend it will cost many U.S. workers their jobs as corporations move their operations overseas in pursuit of cheaper labour costs.¹⁰⁷

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has become the first Japanese leader to address a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress. Abe highlighted the strong bonds between Japan and the United States and expressed support for a proposed Pacific trade agreement. But some Asian-American lawmakers expressed bitter disappointment that Abe failed to apologize to women his country sexually enslaved during World War II. Abe made history in the U.S. Congress on April 29. He also turned back to the history of 70 years ago, noting he visited the World War II Memorial in Washington before his speech. "What's done cannot be undone," Abe said, adding that on behalf of Japan, "I offer with profound respect my eternal condolences" for those deaths.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile, authorities in South Korea and China were mostly critical of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's speech to the U.S. Congress. In his speech on April 29 to a joint session of the U.S. lawmakers, Abe expressed remorse over the war and offered condolences for those who died. But Abe did not offer leaders in South Korea and China what they have been calling for: a direct acknowledgment and apology for the atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army during its colonial rule over much of Asia. In particular, they want Japan to atone for the sexual enslavement of some 200,000 girls and women, referred to as "comfort women."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Cho, Eunjung, "US Envoy Rails at N. Korean Diplomats for UN Disruption", *VOA News*, May 01, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/north-korean-diplomats-disrupt-human-rights-event/2745701.html>

¹⁰⁷ "Obama, Abe Pledge to Complete Pacific Rim Trade Pact", *VOA News*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-to-host-japan-abe-at-white-house/2737372.html>

¹⁰⁸ "Abe Addresses US Congress, Dogged by Wartime Issues", *VOA News*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/abe-addresses-us-congress-dogged-by-wartime-issues/2742638.html>

¹⁰⁹ Padden, Brian, "S. Korea, China Criticize Japan PM Abe's Speech", April 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/south-korea-china-criticize-japan-prime-minister-shinzo-abes-speech/2743322.html>

China's Defence Ministry expressed concern on April 30 at the Pentagon's updated cyber strategy that stresses the U.S. military's ability to retaliate with cyber weapons, saying this would only worsen tension over Internet security. The strategy presents a potentially far more muscular role for the U.S. military's cyber warriors than the Pentagon was willing to acknowledge in its last strategy rollouts in 2011 and singles out threats from Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. China is frequently accused by the United States and its allies of engaging in widespread hacking attacks, charges Beijing always vociferously denies.¹¹⁰

China's recent warning that North Korea might have expanded its nuclear weapons capability could be a sign of Beijing's growing frustration with Washington's refusal to have dialogue with Pyongyang, a former nuclear arms adviser to President Barack Obama said. Last week, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that China's top nuclear experts told U.S. nuclear specialists that Pyongyang may already have 20 warheads. Previously, U.S. experts have estimated that Pyongyang has between 10 and 16 nuclear weapons.¹¹¹

Deputy Defence Secretary Bob Work met yesterday with Australian Assistant Minister for Defence Stuart Robert at the Pentagon to discuss the deep bilateral defence cooperation between the U.S. and Australia, according to a Defence Department news release. During the 30-minute meeting, Work conveyed his gratitude for Australia's current and past contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the release said. The deputy secretary and assistant minister discussed opportunities for collaboration on the department's Defence Innovation Initiative, progress on Australia's 2015 Defence White Paper, and business reforms within their respective organizations, according to the release.¹¹²

India-US Relations

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **U.S. Ambassador upbeat about smart cities potential in India; US to sell India \$96 mn worth of follow-on support for its C-130J fleet; US Defence Secretary to visit in June to ink defence agreement; India-US ties set to become stronger, says Consul-General Thomas Vajda; India, US agree to renew pact on agricultural cooperation; Indian, American scientists chosen for environmental prize.**

Describing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "100 Smart Cities" represents the "largest" potential area for U.S. investment and commercial cooperation, U.S. Ambassador Richard Verma has said. Addressing the annual general meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in India on April 28, Verma sought to develop a symbiotic relationship between U.S. businesses and the U.S.

¹¹⁰ "China Says Worried by New US Cyber Strategy", *Reuters*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/china-says-worried-by-new-us-cyber-strategy/2743396.html>

¹¹¹ Baik, Sungwon, "Expert: China's Nuclear Warning May Be Sign of Frustration With US", *VOA News*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/expert-says-china-nuclear-warning-might-be-sign-of-frustration-with-us/2737293.html>

¹¹² "Leaders Discuss U.S.-Australia Defense Cooperation", *DoD News*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128683>

government that could work together to address challenges in the way of becoming India's "best" partner, in line with President Barack Obama's vision. "Cooperation on infrastructure development and Prime Minister Modi's 'Smart Cities' initiative" are "two of the largest potential areas for U.S. investment and commercial cooperation," he said.¹¹³

The US State Department has approved the sale of \$96 million worth of follow-on support for C-130J Super Hercules aircraft to India to enable the Indian Air Force to remain mission-ready for disaster relief and international humanitarian assistance needs like in quake-hit neighbouring Nepal. Pentagon's arm handling foreign military sales notified the US Congress of this possible sale to India last week saying the "proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic military balance in the region." "This proposed sale of additional equipment and support will enable the Indian Air Force to sustain a higher mission-ready status for its C-130J fleet," the US Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said. India needs this support for its Super Hercules aircraft to ensure its aircraft operate effectively to serve its transport, local and international humanitarian assistance, and regional disaster relief needs, the agency said. The principal contractor will be the Lockheed-Martin Company in Marietta, Georgia, DSCA said.¹¹⁴

The new US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter will be visiting India in June and will sign the enhanced Defence Framework Agreement for the next ten years between the two countries.

Also on the agenda will be the nearly USD 2.5-billion deal for 22 Apache and 15 Chinook heavy-lift helicopters besides taking forward the talks on proposed co-development and co-production of military technology, ranging from aircraft carrier launch systems to mini drones. Pointing out that India and US are tracking some 77 different line of effort that came out of President Barack Obama's visit here, US Ambassador to India Richard Verma said, "We have re-energised or launched 30 new initiatives, 30 different dialogue". He said it was not just about cooperation in South Asia but both countries now have a "very robust architecture" for East Asia as well.¹¹⁵

US Consul-General in Mumbai Thomas L Vajda, today, said in Bhopal that the US-Indo ties were set to become stronger in the future. "The ties between the two nations are strong and will grow stronger in future. There are many things common between India and US like democracy, federal system, and stand against terrorism, which binds the two nations," said Mr Vajda, on his first visit to Madhya Pradesh. Arrival of new President in the White House after the next year's elections in the US would not affect the relations between the two countries, he added.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ "U.S. Ambassador Upbeat about Smart Cities Potential in India", *Indo-Asian News Service (IANS)*, April 29, 2015 at http://www.indiawest.com/news/india/u-s-ambassador-upbeat-about-smart-cities-potential-in-india/article_9e54244e-ee6b-11e4-bf53-eb4771926f79.html

¹¹⁴ "US to Sell India \$96 Mn Worth Of Follow-On Support For Its C-130j Fleet", *Indo-Asian News Service (IANS)*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/us-sell-india-96-mn-worth-follow-support-c-130j-fleet-2218306.html>; and, see "US Okays \$96 Million Sale Of Spares And Support for Super Hercules 130J to India", *Press Trust of India (PTI)*, April 29, 2015 at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-29/news/61652859_1_super-hercules-indian-air-force-c-130j

¹¹⁵ "US Defence Secretary To Visit In June To Ink Defence Agreement", April 28, 2015 at http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/us-defence-secretary-to-visit-in-june-to-ink-defence-agreement_1586371.html

¹¹⁶ "India-US Ties Set to Become Stronger, Says Consul-General Thomas Vajda", *Press Trust of India (PTI)*, April 28, 2015, at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-us-ties-set-to-become-stronger-says-consul-general-thomas-vajda-758904>

US Ambassador to India Richard Verma today called on Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh and both agreed to take steps to renew the 2010 agricultural pact between two countries to include new areas. The Minister expressed interest in the US technology, especially weather forecasting systems for improving preparedness as well as redressal of problems caused by natural calamities. "Issues of mutual cooperation and also cooperation for ensuring world food security were discussed," said an official statement issued by the Agriculture Ministry. The two countries agreed to give renewed focus on cooperation in agriculture and take immediate steps for renewing the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2010 at the earliest possible with inclusion of new areas in the light of changing requirements and circumstances, it said. According to the Ministry's statement, the US and India also decided to amicably resolve sanitary and phytosanitary issues between the two countries for enhanced bilateral trade.¹¹⁷

This year's Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement is being awarded to two scientists who have worked for conservation on the land and in the ocean. Madhav Gadgil of India and Jane Lubchenco of the United States are being honoured for working with communities to preserve the environment while protecting people's livelihoods. Bamboo crops in the Western Ghats, a mountain range in western India, have been depleted by the paper industry. Gadgil said that has hurt local villagers who rely on the plants to make baskets and other products. Earlier, the crops "were exploited through the state machinery and largely they were auctioned off to traders, to industries," said Gadgil. "Now the communities have rights to manage these."¹¹⁸

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **20 Indian Air Force aircrafts crashed during the last three years and the current year; Fourteenth edition of the Indo-French naval exercise VARUNA concludes.**

The Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar gave the details of Indian Air Force (IAF) aircrafts crashed during the last three years and the current year to the Rajya Sabha on April 28. It is as under:

Year	No. of aircraft crashed
2012-13	06
2013-14	06
2014-15	08
2015-16 (upto 23.4.2015)	Nil

¹¹⁷ "India, US Agree To Renew Pact On Agricultural Cooperation", *PTI*, May 1, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/india-us-agree-to-renew-pact-on-agricultural-cooperation/articleshow/47123401.cms?prtpage=1>

¹¹⁸ O'Sullivan, Mike, "Indian, American Scientists Chosen for Environmental Prize", *VOA News*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/indian-american-scientists-environmental-prize/2741059.html>

The loss to the Government, due to such air crashes, assessed so far is estimated at Rs.574.42 crore in terms of value of aircraft and service property. The minister said that every IAF aircraft accident / incident is thoroughly investigated by a Court of Inquiry to ascertain the cause of accident and the recommendations of the completed Court of Inquiry are implemented. Significantly, the minister said that the main reasons for these accidents were human error and technical defect.¹¹⁹

The Fourteenth (14th) edition of Indo-French naval exercise (VARUNA) concluded on May 2 off the coast of Goa. The ten day long exercise commenced on April 23, 2015 and included both a harbour and sea phase. The French Navy was represented by Aircraft Carrier Charles de Gaulle, two destroyers Chevalier Paul and Jean de Vienne, replenishment tanker Meuse and a maritime patrol aircraft Atlantique 2. The Aircraft Carrier Charles de Gaulle was carrying its complement of fighter aircraft Rafale M, Strike Aircraft Super Etendard, E2C Hawkeye AWACS and helicopters Dauphin and Alouette 3. From the Indian side Aircraft Carrier INS Viraat, destroyer Mumbai, stealth frigate Tarkash, guided missile frigate Gomati, replenishment tanker Deepak, submarine Shankul and a few Fast Attack Craft participated. Aviation assets of the Indian Navy included carrier-borne fighter aircraft Sea Harriers, maritime reconnaissance aircraft P-8 I and Dorniers along with integral helicopters Seaking 42B and Chetak. The scope of Exercise VARUNA included the entire gamut of maritime operations ranging from Aircraft Carrier Operations, Anti Submarines Warfare Exercises, Maritime Interdiction Operations to multi-ship replenishment exercise. Regular IN-FN interaction over the years has allowed both navies to gradually and systematically increase the complexity and professional content of the joint exercises. VARUNA aims at deriving mutual benefit from the experiences of the two navies. The exercise goes a long way in enhancing interoperability between the two navies and also showcases the close ties between the two countries¹²⁰

International

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Qatar deal boosts French arms exports; Georgia's acting Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili appoints a staunchly pro-Western defence minister.**

Reports say that Qatar's planned signing of €6.3 billion (US \$7.1 billion) of contracts for the Rafale fighter jet and missiles boosts French arms exports to more than €15 billion, the highest value France has ever reached in a single year. French President François Hollande is due to attend the May 4 signing for 24 fighters by Dassault Aviation and missile maker MBDA in Doha. The Qatari deal, the third in as many months, follows Egypt and India deals. The deal includes MBDA Mica air-to-air and Meteor long-range air-to-air missiles, Scalp cruise missiles, and Sagem's armement air-sol modulaire, a powered smart bomb.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ "AIR Crashes of IAF Aircraft," *PIB*, April 28, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=119837>

¹²⁰ "Indo - French Naval Exercise Varuna 2015 Concludes," *PIB*, May 02, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=121113>

¹²¹ "Qatar Deal Helps France Set Export Record," *Defence News*, May 3, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/industry/2015/05/03/qatar-deal-helps-france-set-export-record-dassault-rafale/26647835/>

Meanwhile, according to reports, Georgia's acting Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili has appointed a staunchly pro-Western politician as his new defence minister in a move aimed at boosting the country's efforts to join NATO, underscoring Georgia's strong commitment to Euro-Atlantic and European integration. The new defence minister Mrs Tinatin Khidasheli, who served as a chair of the parliamentary committee for European integration, is a respected and trusted figure in Washington and European capitals. Significantly, Georgia's bid to join NATO and the European Union infuriated Russia, which bitterly opposes the alliance's expansion into former Soviet republics.¹²²

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Panun Kashmir seeks a "separate homeland" with "UT" status; Centre spent Rs 7200 crore as SRE in JK since 1989; "Composite Townships" in Kashmir violate UN resolutions: Pakistan.**

Panun Kashmir, an organisation of migrant Kashmiri Pandits, on April 27, reiterated that the rehabilitation of the community was only possible if a "separate homeland" with the status of "Union Territory" was created within the valley. "Panun Kashmir wants a return to freedom and not a return to the servitude of a Muslim State. When we demand the creation of a Union Territory, North and East of river Jhelum in Kashmir valley, we could be rehabilitated, it is not political positioning. It is in fact the only way to ensure the return," said the convener of Panun Kashmir, Agnishekhar. He also alleged that the reported process initiated by the government of India towards the return and rehabilitation of the community to the Kashmir valley was done without even consulting the community.¹²³

Government of India has disbursed over Rs 7200 crore to Jammu and Kashmir on Security Related Expenditure (SRE) since 1989. "Since 1989, Rs 7207.96 crore have been released in favour of Jammu and Kashmir government under Security Related Expenditure (SRE) to meet Police and Relief and Rehabilitation expenditures in view of militancy," reveals a report of Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Giving the breakdown, the report reveals that Rs 4735.51 crore have been reimbursed under SRE (P) and 2472.45 under SRE (R&R) till March 15, 2015. During last financial year, Rs 287.94 crore was released under SRE (P) and Rs 160 crore under SRE (R&R), the report added.¹²⁴

¹²² "Georgia PM Appoints Pro-West Defence Chief," *Defence News*, May 1, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/05/01/georgia-pm-appoints-pro-west-defense-chief-with-eye-on-nato/26723793/>

¹²³ "KP's Rehab Possible If Homeland Is Carved: Panun Kashmir", *Greater Kashmir*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2015/Apr/28/kp-s-rehab-possible-if-homeland-is-carved-panun-kashmir-19.asp>

¹²⁴ Sagotra, Yogesh, "Centre SPENT RS 7200 CRORE as SRE in JK since 1989", *Greater Kashmir*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/jammu/centre-spent-rs-7200-crore-as-sre-in-jk-since-1989/184901.html>

Pakistan on April 30 said the proposed "Composite Townships" in Kashmir valley in order to settle migrant Kashmiri Pandits is a violation of UN Security Council resolutions. A spokesperson of Pakistan Foreign Office, Tasneem Aslam in her regular briefing told reporters: "Any effort to create special dedicated townships or zones, or any other step to alter the demographic make-up of Jammu and Kashmir, is in violation of the UN Security Council resolutions." "We have already seen how the people of Jammu and Kashmir are resisting it," Aslam said.¹²⁵

Northeast India

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Bangladesh Border Guards seeks BSF help to open BOPs; Assam-based truckers launch indefinite blockade of Mizoram; Cabinet delinks Assam from LBA with Bangladesh; Security forces gunned down one APDPF cadre and arrested 6 others in Arunachal; Centre awards Rs 15000 cr road projects in North-East; AMEF Chief killed in an encounter in North Garo Hills.**

To increase its presence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Border Guards (BGB) has sought its Indian counterpart BSF's help in using Indian roads to establish BOPs, official sources confirmed at Agartala on April 26. At present, the BGB has skeleton presence in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), still considered a militant hotbed from where anti-Indian elements reportedly carry out subversive activities in Tripura. It is pertinent to mention that establishment of BGB BOPs in the CHT in Bangladesh will help in containing the militancy in Tripura since most of the camps of Indian insurgent groups including NLFT (BM) are located there.¹²⁶

A large number of vehicles were stranded in Assam and Mizoram on the border areas on April 27 as a number of organisations in Assam's Cachar and Hailakandi districts have called for indefinite economic blockade of Mizoram from April 27. The road blockade was organised by truck owners and drivers associations of Lailapur, Bagha and Hailakandi towns adjoining Mizoram and other organisations apparently in protest against the recent checking of Inner Line Permits (ILPs) by civil societies in Aizawl.¹²⁷

The Union Cabinet on April 29 approved the long-pending – and controversial – Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh, ahead of bringing the Constitution Amendment Bill associated with it in Parliament next week. However, in a major departure, it has de-linked Assam from the agreement for now.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ "Separate Townships For Kashmiri Pandits Violation Of Security Council Resolutions: Pak", *Greater Kashmir*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/mobi/news/185083-story.html>

¹²⁶ "Bangla Force Seeks BSF Help To Open BOPs", *The Assam Tribune*, April 27, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=apr2715/oth050>

¹²⁷ "Truckers Launch Indefinite Blockade of Mizoram", *The Assam Tribune*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=apr2815/oth054>

¹²⁸ Gupta, Smita, "Cabinet Delinks Assam From New Border Pact", *The Hindu*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/cabinet-delinks-assam-from-new-border-pact/article7155681.ece>

In a major breakthrough, a joint team of security forces on April 29 arrested six cadres of Arunachal Pradesh Depressed People's Front (APDPF) besides gunning down one cadre during a fierce gunbattle when the forces were carrying out a search operation in Deban area of Changlang district in Arunachal Pradesh, police said. The little known outfit was formed by some misguided Chakma youths to carry out extortion, kidnapping, etc., in Diyun, Miao and Namsai areas. The group has approximately 10-12 cadres who have undergone armed training in Bangladesh last year.¹²⁹

In a boost to infrastructure development in the North East, Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari on May 1 said the government will award road projects worth Rs 15,000 crore in the region by December. "Of the total Rs 15,000 crore road projects envisaged for the North East, Rs 6,000 crore worth highways will be developed in Arunachal Pradesh, Rs 2,000 crore projects each in Nagaland and Meghalaya and the remaining ones in other parts of the region," Gadkari said. The Union Minister, who was in Shillong to dedicate four-laning of Shillong Bypass and Jorabat-Barapani section of the highway to the nation, said the Central Government will encourage the local contractors in the region to take up civil works for road projects with the aim of providing employment to the local population.¹³⁰

In a major boost to the ongoing counter- insurgency operations launched by Meghalaya police, the chief of the Achik Matgrik Elite Force (AMEF) Jack Marak was killed in an encounter with security forces. The encounter took place in the early hours on May 2 in Mandadrop village under Kharkutta police outpost in North Garo Hills. The operation was led by Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team of Meghalaya police. Police recovered one AK-47 with two magazines, 49 live rounds of 7.62 pistol, one 9 mm pistol with one magazine, four live rounds of 9 mm, one magazine of 7.62 pistol with two live rounds, 14 electric detonators, fuse wire, eight gelatin sticks, demand notes, diaries and a number of mobile SIM cards.¹³¹

Left-Wing Extremism

(April 27-May 3, 2015)

- **Quit or die, Maoists warn policemen in Bastar; RDF has close links with CPI (Maoist): NIA; Chhattisgarh police gunned down a PLGA commander in Bastar; Top Maoist surrenders in Visakhapatnam.**

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) has warned lower rung policemen working in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh to leave their jobs or "get killed at the hands of PLGA (People's Liberation Guerrilla Army) guerrillas." In a press statement issued by Madhavi, secretary of the West Bastar Divisional Committee of the Maoists, the banned outfit took responsibility for the killing of Constable Bira Basant, who was abducted on April 7 and found dead two weeks later in Bijapur

¹²⁹ "1 Militant Killed, 6 Nabbed In Arunachal", *The Assam Tribune*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=apr3015/oth051>

¹³⁰ "Road Projects Worth Rs 15,000 cr in NE", *The Assam Tribune*, May 2, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=may0215/oth050>

¹³¹ Dey, Biplab Kr, "Militant Chief Killed in North Garo Hills", *The Assam Tribune*, May 3, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=may0315/oth052>

district. Blaming the State government and the Bijapur police for the death of Bira, the Maoist leader claimed that the district police did not initiate a dialogue for his release.¹³²

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which probed the case related to the secret meeting organised by the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) at a lodge in Mavelikkara in Kochi, Kerala has found that the RDF has close links with the CPI (Maoist). As per the NIA report, the link between the RDF and the CPI (Maoist) was revealed by a protected witness of the NIA. "The protected witness revealed that the affairs of the Revolutionary Democratic Front had been managed by the central committee of the CPI (Maoist)," the NIA report stated.¹³³

Chhattisgarh police shot dead a commander of Maoists' People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) in Kondagav district of restive Bastar region on May 1. "An encounter took place between a police team and the Maoists near Kondgud village of Kondagav early morning on May 1. Maoist's Kiskodo Local Operating Squad (LOC) commander Ful Singh Salam was killed in the encounter and we managed to recover his dead body," informed Bastar range Inspector General (IG) of Police, S.R.Kalluri. Mr.Kalluri termed the killing of Ful Singh Salam as a "big success" and added that he carried a reward of Rs.15 lakh on his head. Police also recovered a hand grenade from the deceased Maoist commander.¹³⁴

Deputy Commander of Korukonda Area Committee of the banned CPI (Maoist) Vanthala Mallesh has surrendered to DIG of Police (Visakha Range) A. Ravi Chandra on May 1. He was with the Maoist movement since 2008 and 41 cases, including six murders, several cases of violence like blasting the coffee pulper unit at Cherukumpakla, destroying road laying equipment, bid to attack police parties with landmines, distribution of coffee plantations to Girijans, etc. was registered against him. He carried a reward of Rs. 1 lakh on his head. Mallesh said he decided to surrender since his health was not good. He was also upset with the Maoists making Girijans kill Girijans and was worried over being caught in an encounter with the police.¹³⁵

¹³² Dahat, Pavan, "Quit or Die, Maoists Warn Policemen in Bastar", *The Hindu*, April 28, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/quit-or-die-maoists-warn-policemen-in-bastar/article7151053.ece>

¹³³ Antony, Toby, "RDF has Close Links with CPI (Maoist): NIA", *The New Indian Express*, April 29, 2015 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/RDF-has-Close-Links-With-CPI-Maoist-NIA/2015/04/29/article2788193.ece1>

¹³⁴ Dahat, Pavan, "Maoist Commander Gunned Down in Bastar", *The Hindu*, May 1, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/maoist-commander-gunned-down-in-bastar/article7162113.ece?ref=sliderNews>

¹³⁵ "Top Maoist Surrenders", *The Hindu*, May 2, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Visakhapatnam/top-maoist-surrenders/article7163159.ece>