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Indian Ocean Watch

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Editor

Ruchita Beri

Contributors

Saurabh Mishra

Nachiket Khadkiwala

Kuhoo Saxena

This Newsletter tracks developments in the following countries of the Indian Ocean region

Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In the month of March, several significant developments took place in the maritime security domain. Australia announced programme to provide patrol boats to island countries in the Pacific Ocean. It also hosted the Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung; and the two countries signed agreement furthering security ties. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi went on an official visit to Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. During this visit, India and Mauritius, announced a new agreement on security cooperation. He also inaugurated the donated maritime surveillance radar in Seychelles. Indonesian Navy revealed restructuring plans on the lines of the US Pacific Fleet. Several criminal/pirate strikes were reported on vessels off Indonesian coast.

On the economic cooperation front, Australia considered enhancing its navy in such a way that it does not lose shipbuilding jobs. Bangladesh expressed willingness for a multidimensional relationship with Thailand; and a free access to the country's market for its products as well. Indonesia exempted 30 more countries from visa requirement to boost tourism. Kenya Tourism Board announced a plan to launch global promotional campaign to revamp its tourism industry. Interestingly, analysts said that Malaysia experienced high growth in tourism despite airline tragedies in 2014. It was reported that the Madagascar fisheries are being plundered by illegal foreign vessels, especially Chinese. Seychelles and Singapore signed MoU to create synergies for growth cooperation.

On the environmental concerns and disaster risk management front, Australia proposed a federal law banning dumping in the Great Barrier Reef. Seychelles banned import of aquarium organisms to protect its amphibians. There were fears that Norway pension fund might withdraw from the India-Bangladesh thermal power plant on environmental grounds. Kenya started the first water fund in Africa. This may serve as a model for other water-stressed countries in the continent. An analysis of the long-term data taken by various agencies revealed that Mauritius' coasts have been eroded by 11 per cent during the years. The Tanzania President's Office informed that the country would receive US\$380 million loan from India for its two crucial water projects.

Hope the readers find this issue useful.

Editor

MARITIME SECURITY

Australia to provide patrol boats to Pacific island countries

Australia's Minister of Defence, Kevin Andrews, issued a statement on March 6, 2015, announcing the Request for Tender (RFT) for up to 21 Pacific Patrol Boats under the Pacific Maritime Security Program, Project SEA3036 Phase 1. The program is aimed at providing patrol boats to Pacific island countries to enable them take an active part in securing their own extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). The project is also seen as means to enhance Australia's shipbuilding industry. The project will require huge investment as boats worth US\$462 million will be sold; and taking into account the through life sustainment and personnel costs, an estimated US\$1.07 billion will be spent over 30 years.¹

Australia and Vietnam further improve their security ties

During the two day official visit of Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, Australia and Vietnam agreed to further security ties by signing a joint agreement. Under the agreement, 120 Vietnamese military personnel will be trained in Australia with Vietnam participating in joint military training exercises. The communique issued called for an increased cooperation in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC) as well as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Vietnam is Australia's fastest growing trade partner, with bilateral trade of US\$6 billion in 2014.²

Australia and Indonesia hold a joint Maritime Security Conference

Starting from March 30, 2015, Australia's Border and Custom Protection Service and Indonesian Maritime Security Agency hosted the sixth Maritime Security Desktop Exercise, a three day long event in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The event was aimed at enhancing cooperation on maritime security and maritime-resource protection. Range of issues were discussed like the South China Sea dispute, illegal fishing and flows of illegal migrant workers. Australia, Sri Lanka, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Maldives, Pakistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, Laos, Singapore, and India are countries that participated in the exercise.³

India and Mauritius sign agreement on security cooperation

As part of Indian Government's Indian Ocean outreach, India and Mauritius announced a new security cooperation agreement on March 11, 2015. The announcement was made during the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mauritius as a part of his three-nation tour to the Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka. The two countries signed on five agreements during the visit. These include, agreements regarding "ocean economy" or "blue economy", memorandum of understanding (MoU) regarding India taking the responsibility of building sea and air links for the Agalega Islands, extending a

¹ "Australia to build 21 patrol boats for its neighbors", *Marine Log*, March 6, 2015, at http://www.marinelog.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=8825:australian-yards-to-build-21-patrol-boats-for-use-by-pacific-nations&Itemid=231

² "Vietnam, Australia strengthen security ties", *Voice of America*, March 18, 2015, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/vietnam-australia-strengthen-security-ties/2685230.html>

³ "Indonesia hosts Asia-Pacific nations for maritime security conference", *Jakarta Globe*, March 30, 2014, at <http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/indonesia-hosts-asia-pacific-nations-maritime-security-conference/>

US\$500 million Line of Credit for development or security projects that Mauritius will decide on. The 1,300 tonne India-built coastal patrol vessel BCGS Barracuda was also commissioned in service of Mauritius during Mr Modi's visit.⁴

The Prime Minister of India inaugurates maritime surveillance radar in Seychelles

A maritime surveillance radar system donated by India to Seychelles was activated by Narendra Modi, the prime minister of India, during his visit to the country from March 10-11, 2015. The Coastal Surveillance Radar station is located in the central region of the main island of Mahé. Modi described the station as another symbol of cooperation between the two countries. The installation of this surveillance radar in Seychelles is a part of the maritime security agreements signed with Seychelles worth US\$10 million. They included the supply of the radar system and a Dornier surveillance aircraft. One Dornier has already been delivered to Seychelles in early 2013. Prime Minister Modi also announced that another Dornier would be given to the Seychelles Coast Guard in future.⁵

India's Foreign Minister emphasises on maritime security cooperation among IOR countries

Speaking at the inauguration of a conference in the city of Bhubaneswar in the eastern state of Odisha, India, on March 20, 2015, Sushma Swaraj, the Indian Foreign Minister, said that India values its trilateral maritime security cooperation with Sri Lanka and Maldives and is also exploring the possibilities of expanding the cooperation to include other countries

in the Indian Ocean region, particularly in Seychelles and Mauritius. The theme of the conference was "Renewing the Maritime Trade and Civilisational Linkages." The participants in the conference were primarily from the 20 member states of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Ms Swaraj said that India is looking forward for building closer cooperation in the maritime domain, regularise bilateral maritime exercises and strengthen the dialogues between the navy and the coast guards with all littoral countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). She also said that the full potential of intra-regional trade remains untapped.⁶

No new fishing licenses to foreign vessels in Indonesian waters

Fishing industry in several ASEAN countries may be impacted as Indonesia has become very strict towards foreign fishing vessels in its waters. Many ASEAN countries have partly depended on fish catch from the Indonesian territorial waters. Susi Pudjiastuti, the Indonesian Maritime and Fisheries Minister, said that her country would not issue any new licences to foreign vessels. A moratorium on licensing was already in force since December 2014 that would end on April 30, 2015. She said that there was no reason to continue with the moratorium as the verifications have been completed. Boats have been identified that would never again be allowed to fish in Indonesian waters. New foreign boats would also be not allowed to fish. Although some of foreign vessels have passed the verification process, there's still a chance that they would not be allowed to operate in Indonesian waters as the country has banned fishing trawls since January 2015.⁷

⁴ "India and Mauritius announce security cooperation pact", *The Hindu*, March 12, 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-and-mauritius-announce-security-cooperation-pact/article6983499.ece>

⁵ "India activates maritime surveillance radar in the Seychelles", *Defence Web*, March 18, 2015, at http://www.defencewebsite.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38413:india-activates-maritime-surveillance-radar-in-the-seychelles&catid=108:maritime-security&Itemid=233

⁶ "Sushma Swaraj says India values its trilateral maritime security", *News 1st*, March 21, 2015, at <http://newsfirst.lk/english/2015/03/sushma-swaraj-says-india-values-trilateral-maritime-security-cooperation-sri-lanka-maldives/84805>

⁷ "Indonesia will not issue new licences to foreign fishing vessels: Minister", *Channel NewsAsia*, March 17, 2015, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-will-not-issue/1722300.html>

Indonesian Navy restructures on the lines of the US Pacific Fleet

Admiral Ade Supandi, the Chief of Indonesian Naval Staff, said that the Indonesian naval force is restructuring itself after the blueprint of the US Pacific Fleet. This restructuring is being done as per the wishes and approval of the President Joko Widodo. For more efficient operation and control, the Indonesian Navy will have three fleets – eastern, western and central – that would report to a new headquarters. Indonesia has a long-term 20 years plan to strengthen its maritime security and it wants to create a main fleet, like the US Pacific Fleet, that would respond to and command deployments as per the requirements made by the three areas. President Widodo has laid out ambitious plans to develop the fishing industry, improve port infrastructure and boost sea defenses. The country is strictly handling the issues of illegal fishing, piracy and is also grappling with the neighboring territorial disputes. The budget for the Indonesian navy would be substantially increased to implement the 20 year plan. The country needs to raise the number of ships in its various zones from 15-20 to somewhere between 100-150 ships. It is in talks with its potential future suppliers that include the Netherlands and some local companies as well.⁸

Several criminal strikes happened on vessels off Indonesia

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) informed that armed pirates hijacked a product tanker off Pulau Repong, Indonesia. Seven armed and masked men boarded Singa Berlian, a tanker, and took control of the ship by taking the crew members hostage on March 9, 2015 at 21:08h local time. The incident

happened around 37 nautical miles south of Pulau Repong. The communication and navigational equipment of the tanker were damaged by the pirates after which they transferred the marine oil cargo to another ship. The pirates injured one of the crew members who were taken hostage. The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) dispatched investigative vessel after the tanker owner Sin Soon Hock informed the agency about the incident.⁹ Two other incidents of piracy were also reported off Indonesia on March 21, 2015. ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ReCAAP ISC), headquartered at Singapore, reported that four men illegally boarded Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier, Capetan Giorgis that was approximately 3.8 miles off Tanjung Sengkuang, Batam. But no harm to the crew and missing goods were reported from the incident. In another incident on the same day, a Luxembourg-flagged container, MSC Vancouver, was boarded by seven armed men while the ship was approximately nine nautical miles northeast of Pulau Karimun Besar. They robbed of the second engineer's gold chain and watch before fleeing from the scene.¹⁰

Iranian observation aircraft flies over US navy helicopter in Persian Gulf

An unarmed Iranian observation Y-12 aircraft approached a US Navy MH-60R armed helicopter which was flying from the deck of the USS Carl Vinson on a routine patrol in international airspace. The US navy released photos of the incident and have claimed that they have been witness to a number of Iranian equipment over the Gulf Region. This is not unnatural because Iran has considerably increased its influence in the international waters especially in the Persian Gulf region due to its strategic importance to them. Even though the incident has

⁸ "Indonesia using U.S. Pacific Fleet as blueprint for naval buildup", *Bloomberg*, March 19, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/19/asia-pacific/indonesia-using-u-s-pacific-fleet-as-blueprint-for-naval-buildup/#.VXU6-VIprdF>

⁹ "Pirates hijack tanker off Pulau Repong, Indonesia", *IHS Maritime 360*, March 18, 2015, at <http://www.ihsmaritime360.com/article/17118/pirates-hijack-tanker-off-pulau-repong-indonesia>

¹⁰ "Pirates board two vessels off Indonesia", *IHS Maritime 360*, March 23, 2015, at <http://www.ihsmaritime360.com/article/17181/pirates-board-two-vessels-off-indonesia>

not escalated, the US Navy feels that if such activities by the Iranian side are carried on it could lead to clashes between both sides in future.¹¹

Malaysian Maritime Department approves Indian Register of Shipping as its RSO

The Indian Register of Shipping (IRClass) has been cleared by the Malaysian Marine Department (MMD) to act as a Recognised Security Organisation (RSO) for ships operating under Malaysian Flag Administration. The IRClass would verify and approve ship security plans, issue or endorse International Ship Security Certificates for Malaysian registered ships, etc. The MMD has given the approval to provide complete statutory certification to ships registered in Malaysia and further improve services to the ship-owners. IRClass is also an RSO for 25 other flag administrations across the world that together account for approximately 50 per cent of total international tonnage. It is also the RSO for Indian and Sri Lankan port facilities. The IRClass covers a wide range of shipping, offshore and industrial projects and it is a full member of the International Association of Classification Societies as well.¹²

Maritime patrol and surveillance was the focus at the LIMA 2015 show in Malaysia

The Langkawi International Maritime & Aerospace (LIMA) show 2015 (March 17-21) had Maritime patrol and surveillance as its most important theme. Sources report that Malaysia is in the process of clearing a requirement for six to eight long-range maritime patrol aircrafts (MPA). The potential for business attracted a range of companies to the show including Boeing, Saab, Dassault, and Indonesian Aerospace. The show, this year, was different from

that of 2013 in the sense that a number of companies came to participate with their products instead of only Alenia Aermacchi, the company actively promoting an MPA aircraft in the last show. Malaysia has limited maritime surveillance capabilities despite being a country with a long coast line and extensive economic interests at sea. Only four King Air 350 aircrafts are operated by the country in its maritime surveillance missions. Events and geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia has increased the importance of maritime surveillance for Malaysia. The incident of incursion by 200 armed Filipinos in Sabah in early 2013 is still fresh. They had to be confronted with the Malaysian artillery, air strikes and ground forces. Such incidents are pushing Malaysia to increase its maritime surveillance capabilities substantially.¹³

Philippines denies any offer or deal on Sabah with Malaysia

Charles C Jose, Assistant Secretary, The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Philippines, denied reports that the Philippines offered Malaysia to drop its claim on Sabah in lieu of its support regarding Philippines' territorial dispute with China in the United Nations. VERA Files, a website run by veteran Filipino journalists, had reported that the offer was indicated in a *note verbale* sent to the Malaysian Embassy. However, Jose explained that the note contained only clarifications about Malaysia's maritime claims in the South China Sea. "We were asking Malaysia to clarify two points with respect to their maritime claims in the South China Sea," Mr Jose said. He referred to a request made by Philippines for Malaysia to confirm that its extended continental shelf (ECS) is entirely from the mainland coast of Malaysia, and that it does not claim entitlement to maritime areas beyond the

¹¹ "CNN: Iranian aircraft flies close to navy helicopter in Persian", *BREITBART*, March 31, 2015, <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2015/03/31/cnn-iranian-aircraft-flies-close-to-navy-helicopter-in-persian-gulf/>

¹² "Malaysia authorises IRClass as RSO", *IHS Maritime 360*, March 13, 2015, at <http://www.ihsmaritime360.com/article/17068/malaysia-authorises-irclass-as-rso>

¹³ "LIMA: Malaysian maritime patrol battle heats up", *Flight Global*, March 18, 2015, at <http://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/lima-malaysian-maritime-patrol-battle-heats-up-410283/>

12 nautical miles from any maritime feature on the Spratly Islands. This is to be noted that VERA Files had claimed that it could get a copy of the referred *note verbale* indicated to a “quid pro quo.”¹⁴

Singapore, Malaysia Conduct Maritime Exercise

The Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) and the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) conducted a 12-day long Malapura bilateral maritime exercise in Malaysia. It involved about 600 personnel from both the navies. They carried out joint planning, drill and training at the Changi Naval Base (CNB). They also engaged in conventional naval warfare and maritime security operations training in the Strait of Malacca. Both the navies engage in bilateral and multilateral activities regularly as part of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). The two countries are conducting maritime exercises since 1984.¹⁵

Seychelles releases Indian captains facing charges under the Fisheries Act

The Seychelles Attorney General's Office confirmed that the two captains, who were charged and detained for illegal fishing by Seychelles, have been released on March 24 due to lack of evidence against them. They have been released about two months after they were intercepted in the Seychelles waters with other 19 Indian fishermen who were released and repatriated on March 3, 2015. The captains, M Jerine and S Gracious, who were left facing prosecution

under the Fisheries Act 1986, were held with their colleagues by the Seychelles' authorities on January 28, 2015. They have been released after investigating the different elements of the case. The charges against the captains were withdrawn as the Global Positioning System (GPS) showed that their vessels were outside of the Seychelles territorial waters.¹⁶

Comesa supports EU-Funded Maritime Security Centre in Seychelles

As the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has given approval to the project proposal, Seychelles is on its way to establish an Operation Coordination Centre funded by the European Union under its Maritime Security Programme (MASE) costing US\$40.7 million to promote maritime security in region of East and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (ESAOI). The Seychelles Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has informed that the COMESA “expressed its support for a bilateral agreement between Seychelles and Madagascar on the establishment of two maritime centres.” This expression came out during the 14th Meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on March 28, 2015. Recently, Seychelles had reached an agreement “following numerous discussions between the involved parties” regarding the establishment of an Operation Coordination Centre in Seychelles to combat maritime insecurity, and a Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar.¹⁷

¹⁴ “No Sabah deal with Malaysia”, *Business World*, March 30, 2015, at <http://www.bworldonline.com/content.php?section=Nation&title=&145no-sabah-deal-with-malaysia&8217&id=105327>

¹⁵ “Singapore, Malaysia conduct maritime exercise”, *MarineLink.com*, March 15, 2015, at <http://www.marinelink.com/news/singapore-malaysia387651.aspx>

¹⁶ “Indian captains released”, *Seychelles Nation*, March 27, 2015, at <http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=244921>

¹⁷ “Comesa lends support for establishment of EU-funded maritime security centre in Seychelles”, *Seychelles News Agency*, March 30, 2015, at <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/2656/COMESA+lends+support+for+establishment+of+EU-funded+maritime+security+centre+in+Seychelles>

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

With an eye on saving shipbuilding jobs, Australia enhances its Navy

In order to protect shipbuilding jobs, protect vital commodity exports and respond better to regional conflicts, Australia is considering to bolster its naval fleet on a continual basis. The Australia's defence ministry said that it is looking at a strategy to build warships and submarines on rolling bases to save the declining shipbuilding sector. The strategy will also guard against the loss of vital shipbuilding expertise during periods when vessels weren't being built. The increased naval capacity will be vital for protecting commodity exports as 70 per cent of Australia's exports move by sea. The enhanced naval presence will also reassure regional allies alarmed by China's growing military assertiveness. Australia aims to increase its military spending to 2 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2024 from the current level of 1.8 per cent.¹⁸

Bangladesh to announce 2016 as Tourism year, takes up mega plan to develop sites

Bangladesh Government is set to announce 2016 as the Tourism Year and has initiated on a mega plan for the development of existing and potential tourist sites in the country. This has been integrated into the plan approved by the Bangladesh Tourism Board on December 18, 2014. The decision on the matter was taken in the National Tourism Council meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 4, 2015. The intention is to speed up the work for the development and expansion of the tourism sector in Bangladesh. Ms Hasina wishes to bring the

Sundarbans under eco-tourism. The feasibility of international river cruises from Bangladesh was also discussed in the Council meeting. Presently, a river cruise starts from Chennai, India, and passes through Bangladesh's maritime boundaries to end its journey in Singapore via Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia. Bangladesh needs to sign a protocol with several countries including India if it intends to enter into this network. The Discussions in the Council also included the issue of visa on-arrival, long-term multiple visas and e-visa to draw more visitors to Bangladesh.¹⁹

Bangladesh shrimp exports to Russia shows signs of recovery

Bangladesh has started exporting shrimp to the Russian Federation again after a three months of break. It exported over 18 tonnes of shrimps worth US\$ 200,585 in the first sixteen days of the month of March 2015. Due to economic recession and weaker Ruble in Russia, the Russian importers had stopped importing from Bangladesh from December, 2014. This is to be noted that Russia imports five per cent of its shrimps demand from Bangladesh. The recession in Russian economy is being linked with the sanctions imposed by the US government and European Union on Russia due to the Ukrainian crisis. The price of Bangladeshi "Black Tiger" shrimps is higher than that of Vietnamese and Indian species, for which the Russian buyers preferred to buy cheaper species due to economic downturn. However, with the recent exports, the Bangladeshi shrimps export to Russia is showing a sign of resumption.²⁰

¹⁸ "Australia looks to bolster naval power", *The Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 2015, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-looks-to-bolster-naval-power-1427782101>

¹⁹ "Bangladesh takes up mega plan to develop tourism hotspots for foreigners in 2016", *bdnews24.com*, March 4, 2015, at <http://bdnews24.com/business/2015/03/04/bangladesh-takes-up-mega-plan-to-develop-tourism-hotspots-for-foreigners-in-2016>

²⁰ "Bangladesh resumes shrimp exports to Russia", *Dhaka Tribune*, March 17, 2015, at <http://www.dhakatribune.com/economy/2015/mar/17/shrimps-export-russia-resumes>

Bangladesh looks for a multidimensional relationship and free access to its products in Thailand

To offset the heavy trade imbalance with Thailand, Bangladesh is calling for a duty- and quota-free access to the country's market. Saida Muna Tasneem, Bangladesh's Ambassador to Thailand, met General Tanasak Patimapragorn, Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Bangkok on March 19, 2015. She listed out a number of products for such access and requested Mr Patimapragorn to encourage Thai investors to invest in Bangladesh as well, especially in power generation, food processing, tourism and hospitality, automobiles, machinery, shipbuilding, electronics, hospital, etc. She also stressed the need for exemption of visa for diplomatic and official passports, issue of Bangladeshi workers in Thailand, cooperation on fisheries and livestock. Bangladesh also wishes for exploring new institutional cooperation on tourism and culture, defence and security between the two countries. Mr Patimapragorn also expressed his government's keen interest in deepening the active bilateral engagement with Bangladesh.²¹

India and Sri Lanka strengthen economic ties

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two day visit to Sri Lanka from March 13-14, 2015 resulted in the signing of agreements which included India extending a credit line to Lanka to ensure funds for infrastructure and development and expand support for military training. The new Sri Lankan government under President Sirisena would also like to boost the economic ties between the two countries to counter

the Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean Region and ensure the establishment of a more effective free trade agreement between the two sides. The commerce secretaries of the two countries had met in Colombo before to explore ideas to boost trade and increase Lankan exports to India under the FTA. India, on its part, is also considering investing in the island nation's manufacturing sector, for example, automobile parts, pharmaceuticals, textile and engineering products to help boost its economy and increase the export capacity of Sri Lanka.²²

Indonesia's revised short-visit visa policy elongates visa-exemption list to boost tourism

Sofyan Djalil, Indonesia's Minister for Economic Affairs, announced an economic policy package that would be implemented to boost the Indonesian economy and improve the country's current account balance. A policy change to implement the package involves the introduction of a visa-free travel into Indonesia. Now, foreigners from 30 more countries would be allowed to enter Indonesia without a visa from April 2015. The country, currently, exempts only 15 countries from visa requirements for short visits. Notable in the current policy is the inclusion of Australia among the new countries added to the visa-exemption list. Australia contributed about 12 percent of total foreign tourists in Indonesia in 2014 – the largest after Singapore and Malaysia. The Australians were probably not included in the list earlier, most likely due to its problems with Indonesia regarding migration and the imminent execution of two Australian drug traffickers. Indonesia hopes that the policy change would help increase revenue in its tourism sector by attracting more foreign tourists.²³

²¹ "Bangladesh seeks free access for its products to Thailand", *The Daily Star*, March 20, 2015, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/bangladesh-seeks-free-access-its-products-thailand-72618>

²² "PM Narendra Modi to push economic ties in Sri Lanka, may extend Line of Credit for infra projects during his 2-day trip", *The Economic Times*, March 9, 2015, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-09/news/59931670_1_indian-ocean-region-president-maithripala-sirisena-pm-narendra-modi

²³ "Visa policy for short visits to Indonesia revised to boost tourism", *Indonesia-Investments*, March 17, 2015, at <http://www.indonesia-investments.com/news/news-columns/visa-policy-for-short-visits-to-indonesia-revised-to-boost-tourism/item5396>

Iran states commitment to help Yemen improve its economy and fight against terrorism

Iran is to stand by the Yemeni people in their fight against terrorism and in improving their economy. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and Africa Affairs, Amir-Abdollahian, informed that the Yemeni economic delegation had important talks with the representatives of Iran's economic and private sectors. He also assured that Iran would help Yemen in developing its infrastructure and also revive its trade and economy. However, Amir-Abdollahian also stressed that there is a need for improving regional cooperation and consultation among regional nations on how to develop Yemen. He highlighted that the international organisations based in Middle East also have to make serious efforts to improve the security and welfare of the Yemeni people.²⁴

Kenya Tourism Board to launch global promotional campaign to boost tourism

In its effort to boost its tourism sector, Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) has earmarked KES140 million for global promotion through advertisement campaigns. The government is trying to revive the sector that is suffering from a low recently due to insecurities and perceived Ebola threats. The campaign is intended to start from April, 2015. The Kenyan Government has launched unique tourism products to address the problem. The KTB has allocated over KES15 million to promote charter airlines tour operators to improve traffic to tourist destinations. The government is also looking collaborations with the private enterprises to help recover the sector.²⁵

Madagascar fisheries being plundered by illegal foreign vessels

The livelihood of Fishermen in Madagascar are being ruined by the massive illegal Chinese, Thai and South Korean fishing vessels in the Indian Ocean surrounding Madagascar. The income of the local fishermen has tumbled. Fishermen claim that big Chinese ships are robbing their fish and wiping away their livelihoods. Madagascar's fishing stock is one of the richest on the African Continent and the Indian Ocean Region. However, due to lack of fishing capabilities and facilities, these stocks are open to illegal foreign plunder. Reports say that illegal fishing in the island nation has threatened the livelihood of about 100,000 people in the coastal fishing communities in the country. Toamasina and Nosy Be are the worst hit coastal cities. According to the Madagascar Fisheries and Wildlife Commission, the annual rate of decreasing shark stock in its waters by 2001 was 6 per cent that has risen up to 23 per cent in 2014. An affiliate of the national Confederation of Malagasy Workers, the Antananarivo Boat Fishers Agency, reported that in 2004 there were 406 boat fishers under its membership that has come down to only 159 in 2015. The fishing community primarily blames the Chinese vessels for their plight. However, Volanirina Ramahery, a marine program coordinator for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), said that there are laws in Madagascar to protect marine life but they "are not properly implemented." To the worst, Madagascar has just 11 speed boats to patrol its 4828 km coast and policing officers are bribed by the poachers. It has also been reported that Chinese, while fishing, use DDT also, a dangerous pesticide

²⁴ "Iran backs Yemen in fighting terrorism, improving economy: Diplomat", *PRESS TV*, March 13, 2015, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/03/13/401684/Iran-backs-Yemen-in-antiterror-bid>

²⁵ "Kenya Tourism Board releases Sh140 million for tourism campaigns", *Standard Digital*, March 8, 2015, at <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000154024/kenya-tourism-board-releases-sh140-million-for-tourism-campaigns>

banned by the UN Stockholm Convention. The substance kills large number of fish and periphery sea life; this has also been linked with severe health problems in human beings.²⁶

Malaysia experiences high growth in tourism despite airline tragedies in 2014

Analysts say that despite the two Malaysian airplane catastrophes in 2014, the tourism industry in the country is doing well. They even go up to the extent of saying that the higher visibility of Malaysia due to the unfortunate incidents might have indirectly helped as the visitor numbers experienced strongest growth in years. Tourism in Malaysia grew at its fastest rate since 2008. Although the statistics for the whole year of 2014 haven't been released, the data for January-October 2014 shows an approximately 10 per cent growth while it was only 2.3 per cent in the same period of the year 2013. The growth in just ten months in 2014 was equivalent to the total growth for the whole years in 2012 and 2013. This is to be noted that the growth came up despite a sharp fall in tourist numbers from China. However, some tour operators feel that the industry also benefited from a weaker currency in the last quarter of 2014. This made Malaysia a more attractive destination to foreigners.²⁷

Malaysia to allocate US\$81.45 million for connectivity plan to Port Klang

The Malaysian Government intends to allocate US\$81.45 million to improve the last-mile connectivity and access to Port Klang as part of its government initiative to boost exports. This is being done under the Logistics and Trade Facilitation

Masterplan announced by Najib Razak, the Prime Minister of the country on March 16, 2015. Although no specifications of the plan were given or elaborated, this government has promised, in the past, to "improve last-mile connectivity to Port Klang including access road, railway network, and traffic management system". The implementation of the plan may make Malaysia as the preferred logistics gateway to Asia.²⁸

Seychelles hosts India's Prime Minister on official visit; signs four agreements

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Seychelles on March 10, 2015. He was received by the Seychelles' President James Michel, Vice-President Danny Faure, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Transport Joel Morgan and several other high level officials. Seychelles was Mr Modi's first stop in his three-nation tour in the Indian Ocean Region. The other two destinations in the loop were Mauritius and Sri Lanka. The visit was a part of the rejuvenation of India's relationship with the Indian Ocean Region countries. Seychelles and India had established diplomatic relations long back on June 29, 1976 but Modi is the second Indian prime minister to visit Seychelles after Indira Gandhi who visited the country in 1981.²⁹ Four agreements were signed between the two countries during this visit. The first is on renewable energy cooperation, the second in the field of hydrography, the third on the sale of navigational charts and the fourth for the development of facilities on Assumption Island. Mr Modi announced that his country would give another Dornier aircraft and a coastal surveillance radar system to Seychelles to strengthen surveillance of

²⁶ "Madagascar fisheries ravaged by foreign plunder", *Equal Times*, March 23, 2015, at <http://www.equaltimes.org/madagascar-fisheries-ravaged-by#.VXXU6IIprdE>

²⁷ "Tourism thrives in Malaysia despite airline tragedies", *The Seattle Times*, March 3, 2015, at <http://www.seattletimes.com/life/travel/tourism-thrives-in-malaysia-despite-association-with-tragedy/>

²⁸ "Malaysia to boost connectivity to Port Klang", *IHS Maritime 360*, March 19, 2015, at <http://www.ihsmaritime360.com/article/17142/malaysia-to-boost-connectivity-to-port-klang>

²⁹ "Seychelles warmly welcomes Indian PM", *Seychelles Nation*, March 11, 2015, at <http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=244764>

its EEZ. Modi also announced the waiver of visa requirement for the citizens of Seychelles travelling to India.³⁰

Seychelles and Singapore sign MoU to create synergies for growth cooperation

Seychelles and Singapore have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to better share experiences and opportunities in various economic sectors including financial services, port development, trade and public-private partnerships. On the occasion of the signature on the MoU, Jean-Paul Adam, the Seychelles' Minister for Finance, Trade and The Blue Economy, said that Singapore owes its success not only to its geostrategic location but also to its sound investment in right infrastructure; that is built upon the power of ideas and investment in people. Similarly, Seychelles also wishes to invest in people-centred development as well as the power of ideas. Development of financial and port services including transshipment and bunkering are the other major areas of cooperation between the two countries under this MoU.³¹

South Africa announces ZAR600 million plan to boost tourism sector

Derek Hanekom, the Tourism Minister of South Africa, announced a series of new incentives to help tourism operators grow their businesses and to improve South Africa's tourism attractions. His announcement revealed plans for an investment of about ZAR600 million to grade the tourism establishments and look for new markets for their products. The tourist sites in the country would also be fitted with renewable energy sources. The last two

decades have been good for the South African tourism industry and the rate of growth in the sector has significantly exceeded the overall economic growth. Tourism contributes around 9.5 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product of South Africa and supports about 1.4 million jobs directly or indirectly. The Tourism Incentive Programme conceives an investment of ZAR557 million to support tourism enterprises over the medium term. The programme is in line with South Africa's overall industrial policy, which includes employment generation, building local industry and transforming to a green economy.³²

South African firm TRAC to invest US\$10.9 million to revamp road

South Africa's Trans-African Concessions (TRAC) operates and manages the 570 km long EN4 motorway from Maputo Port in Mozambique to Witbank, a South African industrial town, on a 30-year lease contract. TRAC has revealed that it has a plan to invest US\$10.9 million to revamp a seven kilometre stretch of the road in Matola in Mozambique. According to TRAC, this stretch of the road is in very poor state due to overloading of the vehicles moving on it. This is also one of the busiest roads in southern Africa. The EN4 Toll Route has been a major contributor to the development and progress of the Southern African Region; and has played an axel role in cross-border co-operation between South Africa and Mozambique. Around 48,000 trucks pass through the toll gate at the Maputo end daily. The investment by TRAC is expected to improve the transport conditions on the road. The company also expects that the police should effectively stop overloading of the vehicles passing through the motorway.³³

³⁰ "India and Seychelles sign four bilateral agreements", *Seychelles Nation*, March 12, 2015, at <http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=244770>

³¹ "Seychelles, Singapore aim to create synergies for shared growth", *Seychelles Nation*, March 17, 2015, at <http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=244820>

³² "R600m plan to help SA grow its tourism sector", *SouthAfrica.info*, March 11, 2015, at <http://www.southafrica.info/news/business/tourism-110315.htm#.VXc4W1IprdE>

³³ "Mozambique: S/Africa firm to invest \$10.9m to revamp road infrastructure", *Star Africa*, March 21, 2015, at <http://en.starafrika.com/news/mozambique-safrica-firm-to-invest-10-9m-to-revamp-road-infrastructure.html>

Tanzania's Bagamoyo port project under criticism

Tanzania's Bagamoyo port project is under fire for several reasons these days. In the past, Bagamoyo was a gateway for the colonisers to the heart of Africa. Trade in timber, ivory and slaves surged on the east coast harbour. The port later fell down with the fall of the colonial powers. Now Tanzania has a plan worth US\$11 billion for the rejuvenation of the port and make it the largest port in the region. The project is being funded by China Merchant Holding International and the Omani sovereign wealth fund. The project has ambitions to dwarf Kenya's Mombasa port that is the East Africa's trade gateway some 300 km to the north of Bagamoyo. It would also include an industrial zone, rail and road links to benefit from the growth in a region that is set to exploit its newly found oil and gas reserves. However, there are many doubts if there is a real need for the project; and if the location of the port would be appropriate given that the Dar-es-Salaam port is at a distance of just 75 km from the site. The doubts get deepened given the distance of the port is far from the gas deposits off Tanzania's southern coast. Political reasoning is also at its full play as President Jakaya Kikwete is from Bagamoyo. It is said that he wants to make the port as his legacy for the people. The project is also being criticised on the basis that it is being push forward despite Tanzania's current budget crunch and cuts in its infrastructure spending. The ground breaking ceremony for the project has been indefinitely delayed and there is no hope for it to take place before the October 2015 election season.

Some critics say that Tanzania should focus on increasing the capacity of the Dar-es-Salaam port instead of constructing a white elephant in the form of the Bagamoyo port.³⁴

Tanzania's Exim Bank establishes its fifth branch in Comoros

In the process of increasing its reach and taking its services closer to the customers of the Comoros island, the EXIM Bank Tanzania has opened its fifth branch at Mitsamiouli in Grand Comoros. The Bank's subsidiary in Tanzania, the Exim Bank Comoros, has become the fastest growing bank in the Union of Comoros. The Governor of the Central Bank of Comoros commended the bank for its contribution in the financial sector in the Union. Mr Ganesh Kumar, the Bank's Country Head, said that the bank is committed to bring the benefit of the best technology in banking services apart from its expansion.³⁵

Tanzania and Kenya resolve tourism issue

Tanzania and Kenya have resolved their tourism row by deciding to maintain the status quo. Kenya would allow Tanzanian registered vehicles to access Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) and the Kenya Airways would continue normal operations in Tanzania. Mr Bernard Membe, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, informed that the President of Tanzania Mr Jakaya Kikwete and Mr Uhuru Kenyatta, the President of Kenya, resolved with their mutual understanding and consent.³⁶

³⁴ "Tanzania's port plans under fire", *The Maritime Executive*, March 15, 2015, at <http://maritime-executive.com/article/tanzanias-port-plans-under-fire>

³⁵ "Tanzania: Exim Bank opens fifth branch in the Comoros", *Daily News Online*, March 17, 2015, at <http://www.m.dailynews.co.tz/index.php/biz/42636-exim-bank-opens-fifth-branch-in-the-comoros>

³⁶ "Tanzania: Kikwete, Kenyatta resolve tourism row", *Daily News Online*, March 23, 2015, at <http://www.dailynews.co.tz/index.php/local-news/42880-jk-kenyatta-resolve-tourism-row>

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS/ DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

Proposed federal law in Australia bans dumping in Great Barrier Reef

Australian government will soon pass a law that bans dumping of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The regulation would forever end the disposal of capital dredge spoil within the marine park – an area 345,000 square kilometers in size. Capital dredging is the removal of an undisturbed area of the seabed. The industrial activity spurred by the enlargement of port facilities has put the reef in grave danger. The ban would mean that the dredged material will have to be dumped onshore rather than dumping it in the sea, which is a cheaper option. The coal terminals of Abbot Point, Dalrymple Bay and Hay Point and the coal and LNG port of Gladstone, all lie in the area of the reef. Indian conglomerates Adani and GVK have agreed with the Queensland state government that they will dispose of their dredge spoil onshore.³⁷

IMO to discuss new shipping routes proposed by Australia to protect Coral Reef

After getting the approval of International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) sub-committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue, the Australian proposal of new sea routes will go for approval to the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee in May 2015. The two new routes proposed are five nautical miles wide with one route taking shipping to East of Diamond passage on one side, with the second route west of Homes Reef. The aim is to reduce the risk of ship collisions and groundings by separating opposite traffic, at the

same time ensuring ships keep clear of reefs, shoals, and island in the sensitive marine environment.³⁸

Norway pension fund may withdraw from the India-Bangladesh coal plant

Although it has an investment of only US\$56 million in the proposed joint US\$1.2 billion India-Bangladesh coal fired Rampal power plant, Norway's pension fund may withdraw from this, citing environmental threat. The proposed coal plant is to be built on the edge of the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest. Environmentalists, citizens, artists and social activists have been protesting against the proposed 1,320 megawatt plant for more than two years. About 20,000 people had marched from Dhaka to Dighraj demanding the scrapping of the project in September 2013. The Sundarbans are United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's world heritage as well as a Ramsar wetland site. Environmentalists feel that the project will not only pollute the mangrove forest but the emissions from this will also contribute to climate change, of which Bangladesh is a victim. A group of activists says that out of the estimated production of 20,000 megawatts of cheap electricity production from the plant, 50 per cent will be destined for India while Bangladesh will have to bear all the negative impacts. Keeping all these in sight, the council on ethics of Norway has recommended to the country's pension fund to exclude the Rampal thermal power plant from its portfolio "due to an unacceptable risk of the company contributing to severe environmental damage."³⁹

³⁷ "Australia bans dumping within Great Barrier Reef", *Marine Link*, March 16, 2015, at <http://www.marinelink.com/news/australia-dumping-barrier387662.aspx>

³⁸ Zoe Reynolds, "New Coral Sea shipping routes proposed", *IHS Maritime 360*, March 23, 2015, at <http://www.ihsmaritime360.com/article/17186/new-coral-sea-shipping-routes-proposed>

³⁹ "Norway may pull investment from Indian firm over Bangladesh coal plant", *theguardian*, March 10, 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/india-untamed/2015/mar/10/norway-may-pull-investment-from-bangladeshs-coal-plant>

India, China and Bangladesh face increasing risk from river floods

A study by the US-based think-tank World Resources Institute and four research groups from the Netherlands has estimated that around 21 million people in the world are affected by floods in a typical year. India, Bangladesh and China are at the most of risk due to their rivers flooding almost every year. Increasing numbers of people are threatened due to climate change and population growth affecting the low lying areas of these countries. The number of people affected from floods could rise to 54 million due to climate change and socio-economic development by the year 2030. The study projects that the 80 per cent of the people affected would be living in 15 emerging nations, led by India, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam and Pakistan.⁴⁰

Indonesian minister defends deforestation due to the need of palm oil industry

The growing global demand for palm oil is making Indonesia a leading contributor to deforestation and global warming, the rate of deforestation being greater than even the rate in Brazil's Amazon region. However, Prabianto Mukti Wibowo, assistant deputy minister for forestry in the Economic Affairs Ministry, Indonesia, said that clearing forests for palm oil plantations is a "technical" matter and it should not be tied with trade discussions. He was speaking at a land and poverty conference organised by the World Bank. The primary Asian customers of the Indonesian palm oil – led by India, China and Pakistan – have no concern about deforestation, although they buy about 55 per cent of the product's total exports. On the other hand, Europe puts

extreme pressure on Indonesia against deforestation while it buys only eight per cent of the oil's export from Indonesia. Mr Wibobo said that palm oil industry is important for Indonesia's development as it generates five million jobs benefitting 15 million people. He also informed that the rate of deforestation in his country declined rapidly between 2009 and 2013. He emphasised that the issue should be reserved for discussion in forums like the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and be treated as a technical matter, not a trade issue.⁴¹

Kenya burns 15 tonnes of ivory towards fulfilling the promise to burn all stockpiles

With a promise of destroying all its stockpile in the year 2015, Kenya burnt 15 tonnes of ivory on March 3, 2015. This is a step forward in Kenya's attempt to stop elephant poaching in the country. Due to high demands of ivory in Asia, especially China, elephant poaching has surged across the sub-Saharan Africa in the last few years. To deal with the menace, Kenya is following a policy of ivory beyond economic use. The burning of the stock also marked African Union-designated Wangari Maathai Day. Wangari Mathai was an environment friendly minister who was awarded Nobel Prize for her contribution to the environment. Kenya has also passed legislations imposing harsher penalties for wildlife crimes.⁴²

Kenya starts first water fund in Africa

Towards achieving its goal of providing clean water to 9.3 million people by protecting the country's longest river basin, Kenya launched Africa's first water fund on March 20, 2015. The fund is a public-private partnership that targets for raising US\$15 million for

⁴⁰ "India, Bangladesh, China most at risk from river floods: Study", *The Times of India*, March 6, 2015, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/environment/global-warming/India-Bangladesh-China-most-at-risk-from-river-floods-Study/articleshow/46475167.cms>

⁴¹ "Indonesia defends deforestation for palm oil on economic grounds", *Reuters*, March 25, 2015, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/25/us-indonesia-palmoil-forests-idUSKBN0ML20020150325>

⁴² "Kenya burns 15 tonnes of ivory in anti-poaching fight", *Defence Web*, March 4, 2015, at http://www.defencweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38241:kenya-burns-15-tonnes-of-ivory-in-anti-poaching-fight&catid=87:border-security&Itemid=188

the purpose. The fund could be a model for other water-stressed countries in Africa. Charles Oluchina, director of the field programmes of The Nature Conservancy, a US-based charity supporting the fund, said at the inauguration of the fund, that the investment initially is very little but this is “a way of trying to begin to shift the mindset.” Kenya swings between drought and flood almost every year and huge aid is required to compensate the loss of people, crop and other materials. Therefore, the collaborative fund seeks to invest in agroforestry, drip irrigation, terracing and planting vegetation on riverbanks. It has already started a pilot project in which 5,000 farmers belonging to the ‘Green Belt Movement’ are planting trees. The project is expected to bring benefits to the Kenya Electricity Generating Company and the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company to the tunes of US\$600,000 and US\$250,000 respectively on an annual basis. These companies as well as Coca-Cola and East Africa Breweries are supporting the initiative.⁴³

Malaysia to restructure and strengthen its disaster management agency

Speaking at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Management on March 14, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, said that his country is thinking of reshaping its disaster management agency to make it more strong and efficient in order to enable it to cope with the current disaster scenario of the country. The country is also intending to set up an effective early warning system as well as a centre of excellence for research on disaster management. The nation's experience of the December 2014 floods force it to do more for the nation's resilience towards disaster. The country is trying to learn from the best practices of different countries and adopt and adapt what it

finds suitable for itself. In order to deal with the problem of floods the five phases of disaster management – prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery – will be given due emphasis by the government. Mr Yassin highlighted that Malaysia has always been considered as less vulnerable but its climate related disasters have intensified recently. The monsoon and the resultant floods in 2014 was the worst ever faced by the country.⁴⁴

Long term data in Mauritius reveal 11 per cent coast erosion

Raj Dayal, the Minister of Environment, Sustainable Development, Disaster and Beach Management, Mauritius, revealed that the long term data (1967 to 2012) by various agencies show that that about 11 per cent of Mauritius' coastal areas have been eroded. Albion, Bel Ombre and Mont Choisy are the worst hit during the last decade. The minister was speaking at a two-day regional seminar on Landslide and Coastal Zone Management in the Southwest Indian Ocean Islands. The data revealing the disaster are findings of the project for Capacity Development on Coastal Protection and Rehabilitation that is being carried out by the Ministry in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The project that is expected to submit its final report by June 2015 has helped identify some 14 sites for revamp of beach and coastal protection during 2015-2017.⁴⁵

Mozambique being stripped of its primeval forest cover by Chinese

Poor Mozambicans are involved in illegal logging for Chinese companies. The Chinese lend local people some money to buy equipment and make them dependent. They later force these people to continue logging to pay off their debts. The Chinese avoid the heavy costs of logging licence and the compulsion to

⁴³ “Kenya launches Africa's first water fund to combat shortages”, *Reuters*, March 20, 2015, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/20/us-kenya-water-idUSKBN0MG1GW20150320>

⁴⁴ “Malaysia to reshape disaster management agency to be more robust: Muhyiddin”, *The Sun Daily*, March 14, 2015, at <http://www.thesundaily.my/news/1354806>

⁴⁵ “Mauritius: 11 per cent of coastal areas eroded”, *Dredging News Online*, March 10, 2015, at <http://www.sandandgravel.com/news/article.asp?v1=19366>

plant trees by buying timber from individual Mozambicans. Ana Alonso, a Spanish writer campaigning against illegal forest logging, says that if the rules are respected by the Chinese companies, they would make a profit of about 10 per cent only. She further highlights that illegal logging through bribing officials and using locals instead of paying for legal permit increases the profit to the tune of about 50 per cent. The high rate of forest cutting is revealed at the ports where tens of thousands of tree trunks are kept waiting in the compounds before being shipped to China. This gives a feeling like the Mozambican primeval forests are being rapidly cleared by the Chinese companies. Similar illegal logging also happens in countries like Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Cameroon, Gambia, Madagascar, Russia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.⁴⁶

Seychelles bans import of aquarium organisms to protect its amphibians

Seychelles has banned the import of all aquarium living organisms into the country with immediate effect. The bio-security committee of the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change and the Ministry of Finance have imposed the ban due to concerns over possibility of intrusion of chytrid fungus identified as the main source of an amphibian killing disease. Seychelles has taken the step to protect its high number of amphibians that are uniquely found in the country. Six endemic frogs including the world's tiniest sooglossid frogs and seven caecilians species are found on Mahé, Praslin and Silhouette islands only. According to scientific studies, there has been a significant global decline in amphibian population that is attributable to the threatening fungus that is mostly transmitted through the pet trade and organism import.⁴⁷

Tanzania would receive US\$380 million 'water loans' from India

The Tanzania President's Office stated that the country would receive US\$380 million in loans from India to finance its two major water projects. US\$100 million have been offered by India for the improvement of water supply to Dar-es-Salaam and another US\$280 million to bring water from Lake Victoria to Tabora, Nzega and Igunga towns. Dar-es-Salaam has a fast growing economy that contributes about 40 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Tanzania. The population of the city is expected to double in the next 15 years increasing the pressure of water supplies. Hence, the two projects are vital for Tanzania which also suffers from flooding, and insect-borne diseases.⁴⁸

Tanzania and Kenya sign MoU on cross-border illegal forest trade

To reduce cross-border illegal trade in forest resources like timber and charcoal, Tanzania and Kenya have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) through their respective forest agencies. The MoU spells out a five-year plan on trans-boundary collaboration around law enforcement in the border areas of the two countries. The two countries are trying to limit widespread illegal deforestation that affects soil quality and adds to climate change. Tanzania and Kenya have been mired in illegal trade in forest products recently. An East Africa Wildlife Society study in collaboration with the Tanzania Natural Resources Forum titled 'the Trade in Forest Products Between Tanzania and Kenya', carried out between May and October 2011, revealed that Tanzania might have lost about US\$8.33 million annually due to illegal trade in forest products.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ "Mozambique will be stripped of its forests 'in just a few years'", *Mail & Guardian*, March 20, 2015, at <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-03-19-moz-will-be-stripped-of-its-forests-in-just-a-few-years>

⁴⁷ "Import of aquarium fish banned", *Seychelles Nation*, March 26, 2015, at <http://www.nation.sc/article.html?id=244910>

⁴⁸ "Tanzania to get \$380 million loans from India for water projects", *Reuters*, March 17, 2015, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/17/us-tanzania-water-loans-idUSKBN0MD20B20150317>

⁴⁹ "Tanzania agrees with Kenya on forests", *East African Business Week*, March 29, 2015, at <http://busiweek.com/index1.php?Ctp=2&pl=3040&pLv=3&srl=49&spl=27&cl=10>

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This newsletter, compiled by the IDSA covers the recent developments in the fields of maritime security, economic cooperation and environmental concerns/ disaster risk management in the various countries of the Indian Ocean region.



No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg,
Delhi Cantt., New Delhi - 110 010
Tel. (91-11) 2671-7983 Fax.(91-11) 2615 4191
E-mail: contactus@idsa.in Website: <http://www.idsa.in>