

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

January 26 – February 1, 2 (1), 2015

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Bangladesh

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **BNP-led alliance enforces hartal in 11 districts; Prime Minister asks police to take necessary steps to stop violence in the country; NIA arrests four JMB members; Bangladeshi delegation visits Myanmar.**

The BNP-led alliance enforced hartal in 11 districts on January 29, including Dhaka, amid its ongoing nonstop blockade. The other districts are Gazipur, Tangail, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Kishoreganj and Mymensingh, Natore and Feni.¹

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ordered the police to take whatever steps necessary to stop the ongoing violence in the country due to blockade and arson attacks. "I'll take the responsibility for whatever happens [due to the action]. But you'll have to ensure the security of the common people. You'll take whatever steps necessary against those responsible for burning and attacking people," she said while addressing an evaluation meeting with senior police officials at her office, marking the Police Week 2015.²

India's National Investigation Agency arrested four more alleged members and recruiters of outlawed Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) on January 28, which is linked to the October 2 Burdwan blast. The four – Dalim Sheikh alias Faijul Hoque Sheikh, Motiur Rehman alias Noor Alam, Habibur Rehman and Ghiyasuddin Munshi – were arrested in different areas of West Bengal and have been put on remand by a Kolkata court. With the latest arrests, the NIA has so far held 16 people including suspected mastermind Sajid, who is a Bangladeshi citizen, in connection with the blast.³

Bangladesh sent a five-member delegation to Myanmar on January 30 to build trust between the two countries through economic cooperation, with special emphasis on the energy sector. During the five-day visit, the delegation, led by Prime Minister's Adviser for Power, Energy and Mineral

¹ "Blockade On: Hartal Called for Today in Dhaka, 11 Districts", *The Daily Star*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/hartal-called-for-today-in-dhaka-11-districts-62210>.

² "Do Whatever Needed To Stop Violence: Pm Asks Police, Says She Will Take Responsibility for Their Actions", *The Daily Star*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/do-whatever-needed-to-stop-violence-62204>.

³ "Burdwan Blast: 4 More JMB Operatives Held in India", *The Daily Star*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/4-more-jmb-operatives-held-in-india-62191>.

Resources Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, would express the intention and make formal proposal to import gas through pipelines and 500 megawatts of hydropower from the Rakhine province of Myanmar.⁴

Sri Lanka

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Shirani Bandaranayake resumed duties as Chief Justice for one day; K. Sripavan appointed as new Chief Justice; The National Executive Council proposes for dual executive system; Indian deputy High Commissioner meets Minister of Industry and Commerce; Samaraweera concludes his official visit to Brussels; Dhanapala meets High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; British Foreign Office Minister Hugo Swire meets Wigneswaran; Finance Minister presents Interim budget 2015; India-Sri Lanka talk on repatriation of refugees; Kamallesh Sharma visits Sri Lanka; Parliament will be dissolved in April: Prime Minister.**

Dr. Shirani Bandaranayake, who was impeached during Mahinda Rajapaksa's Presidency, resumed duties as the Sri Lanka's Chief Justice on January 28, following marching orders issued on Mohan Peiris, who was appointed as the country's 44th Chief Justice by Mahinda Rajapaksa by President Maithripala Sirisena. Bandaranayake however, tendered her resignation on January 29.⁵ Justice K. Sripavan took oaths as the new Chief Justice before President Maithripala Sirisena on January 30.⁶

The National Executive Council of Sri Lanka has reached an agreement on proposed constitutional amendments to be introduced during the 100 day programme. The proposed amendment will look at introducing a dual executive system of governance and re-establishment of the independent commissions. The proposals have been prepared by a special committee appointed by the National Executive Committee comprising President Maithripala Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and representatives of other parties including the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). According to reports, the proposed reforms state that President Sirisena will remain as the Head of State with reduced powers while retaining the defence portfolio and the power to appointment provincial governors and on several other subjects including that of appointing the heads of Sri Lanka's diplomatic missions abroad. The Prime Minister according to the latest proposals will be the Head of the Cabinet. Therefore, the proposed system will be a dual executive system of governance.⁷

⁴ "Dhaka To Seek Myanmar Gas, Electricity: Govt Team Goes To Myanmar Today", *The Daily Star*, January 30, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/dhaka-to-seek-myanmar-gas-electricity-62379>.

⁵ "Shirani is Back as CJ, Mohan Out", *Colombo Gazette*, January 28, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/28/shirani-is-back-as-cj-mohan-out/>.

⁶ "K. Sripavan Takes Oaths As The CJ", *Colombo Gazette*, January 30, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/category/news/>.

⁷ "Sri Lanka's Government Coalition Reaches Agreement On Constitutional Proposals", *ColomboPage*, January 28, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan28_1422418925CH.php.

There is no change whatsoever in Sri Lanka's international or domestic trade positioning due to the arrival of new government, rather, it stands strengthened even more. Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen gave this assurance to the Deputy High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka Arindam Bagchi when the latter made a courtesy call on Minister Bathiudeen January 27 at the Ministry.⁸

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mangala Samaraweera, concluded a two day official visit to Brussels on January 29. During the visit, Foreign Minister Samaraweera met Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Didier Reynders and members of the European Parliament. He also held talks with the European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella, and the European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica. Discussions with these leaders focused on strengthening Sri Lanka's relations with the European Union and Belgium, the steps Sri Lanka has taken and will take to comply with international fishing regulations and the process of re-qualifying for GSP+ tariff concessions. During the fruitful meetings the European Commission offered Sri Lanka assistance in meeting the regulatory requirements that would enable an early lifting of the ban on fish exports to the EU and displayed strong interest in expanding socio-economic ties and development programmes.⁹

Jayantha Dhanapala, Senior Advisor on Foreign Affairs to President Maithripala Sirisena, met the High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in Geneva on January 29, and briefed him on the policies of the newly elected Government. The meeting in Geneva comes as Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein prepares to submit to the UN Human Rights Council, in March, a report based on a UN-led investigation on the war in Sri Lanka.¹⁰

Northern Province Chief Minister C. V. Wigneswaran and British Foreign Office Minister Hugo Swire met in Jaffna on January 29 and discussed the situation in the north. Wigneswaran and Swire had also discussed the March session of the UN Human Rights Council where a report on Sri Lanka is to be submitted.¹¹

The new government of Sri Lanka presented the Interim Budget 2015 in Parliament. The Interim Budget proposes increasing salaries of state sector employees by Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 5,000 out of that will be given in February and remaining Rs. 5,000 in June raising state sector employees' salaries by 47%. About 1.3 million public employees will benefit from the concession. Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake said that although pledged to reduce the prices of ten essential items at the presidential election, the prices of 13 essential food items have been reduced. It is a fulfilling of the pledge of reducing the cost of living of the public. Taxes have been imposed on

⁸ "No Change in Sri Lanka's Liberal Market Policies with India, Minister Assures", *ColomboPage*, January 27, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan27_1422377731CH.php.

⁹ "EU Agrees To Help Lanka Lift Ban", *Colombo Gazette*, January 29, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/29/eu-agrees-to-help-lanka-lift-ban/>.

¹⁰ "Dhanapala Briefs Ra'ad Hussein", *Colombo Gazette*, January 29, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/29/dhanapala-briefs-raad-hussein/>.

¹¹ "Wigi, Swire Discuss Situ in Jaffna", *Colombo Gazette*, January 29, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/29/wigi-swire-discuss-situ-in-jaffna/>.

liquor outlets and bars, distilleries, mobile telephone service providers, TV channels telecasting sports and casinos.¹² Sri Lanka's Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) says the interim budget presented by the new government lacked short and long term economic strategies.¹³

India-Sri Lanka held talks on voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees in the country on January 30. During the first meeting between the officials of the two countries, in which Indian side was led by the Joint Secretary in-charge of Lanka in the External Affairs Ministry, the two sides talked about various aspects related to repatriation. Reportedly, there were also internal consultations on the issue with other ministries in the government, they said.¹⁴

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma arrived in Sri Lanka on January 31 on a three day official visit.¹⁵

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe announced that the current parliament will be dissolved after April 23. General elections will be held in order to form a new parliament. Explaining the future plan, he said the UNP will contest the elections independently and form a national government with the President Maithripala Sirisena led Sri Lanka Freedom Party.¹⁶

Maldives

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

● China and Lithuania will assist Maldives to develop the health sector

Ministry of Health has said that the governments of China and Lithuania have agreed to assist Maldives in the efforts to develop its health sector during the 136th World Health Organisation (WHO) Executive Board Session in Geneva. According to Health Ministry, China has promised to provide medical doctors, medical equipment, and scholarships for medical doctors; as well as to conduct a medical camp in the Maldives. Lithuania has also assured that it would provide medical doctors, and training programmes for medical experts. Maldives is represented at the 136th WHO Executive Board Session, held from 26 January to 3 February 2015, by Minister at the President's Office Mohamed Hussain Shareef, Minister of State for Health Hussain Rasheed, Deputy Director General of Ministry of Health Aishath Samiya, and Director of Health Protection Agency Maimoona Abubakr.¹⁷

¹² "Sri Lankan Government's Interim Budget Brings Relief To People, Imposes Heavy Taxes On Liquor And Casinos", *ColomboPage*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.colombopage.com/>.

¹³ "Sri Lanka Marxist Party Says Short or Long Term Economic Strategies Not Included in Interim Budget", *ColomboPage*, January 30, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan30_1422590179CH.php.

¹⁴ "India-Sri Lanka Hold Refugee Talks", *Colombo Gazette*, January 30, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/30/india-sri-lanka-hold-refugee-talks-2/>.

¹⁵ "Sharma in Lanka To Meet Maithri", *Colombo Gazette*, January 31, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/31/sharma-in-lanka-to-meet-maithri/>.

¹⁶ "Sri Lanka Parliament Will Be Dissolved After April 23 - PM", *Colombo Page*, January 31, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan31_1422725278CH.php.

¹⁷ "China, Lithuania To Assist Health Sector Development Efforts", *SunOnline*, February 1, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27490>.

B. East Asia

China

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **China announces its ideas for the “Belt and Road” initiative; China and the United States start the defence policy talks; China calls for cooperation with Pakistan; Chinese President to be the keynote speaker at the Boao Forum; China and Afghanistan mark the diplomatic relations anniversary.**

On February 1st the Chinese leaders finalized the priorities for the “Belt and Road” initiatives. Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli said at the conference that, “The initiatives are major policy decisions made by the Party and the State Council, which will be of great significance to further opening up to the outside world and promoting regional and world peace”.¹⁸

On January 29, the Pentagon announced that the defence officials from China and the United States will be meeting in Washington DC next week. According to the Pentagon spokesperson Jeff Pool, “US delegation to the next week’s talks will include representatives from the Joint Staff, US Pacific Command, the State Department and the National Security Council, while the Chinese delegation will include representatives of the Ministry of National Defence and other military bodies”.¹⁹

On January 30, the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said that China will carry on with its friendly relations and cooperation with Pakistan. He said that, “China always attaches priority to expanding relations with Pakistan and firmly supports the country’s effort to safeguard its sovereignty, independence and integrity of its territories”. Li met the Pakistan’s National Assembly speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq.²⁰

It was announced that the Chinese President is scheduled to deliver the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 2015 Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) in South China in March. This event is scheduled to take place from March 26-29, 2015.²¹

China and Afghanistan exchanged messages on the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two sides. This also marks the starting of the year of China-

¹⁸ “China Sketches Out Priorities Of ‘Belt And Road’ Initiatives” *China Daily*, February 1, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/01/content_19461058.htm, accessed on February 2, 2015

¹⁹ Jingxi, Mo, “Sino-US Defence Policy Talks Set for Next Week”, *China Daily*, January 31, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-01/31/content_19455450.htm, accessed on February 2, 2015

²⁰ “Premier Li Emphasizes All-Round Cooperation with Pakistan”, *China Daily*, January 30, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-01/30/content_19453337.htm, accessed on February 2, 2015

²¹ “President Xi To Attend Opening Ceremony of 2015 Boao Forum” *China Daily*, January 20, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-01/20/content_19361341.htm, accessed on January 29, 2015

Afghanistan Friendly Cooperation. In his message Xi Jinping said that, “two countries have always understood, respected and supported each other over the past 60 years, and that the friendship between China and Afghanistan has rooted deeply in the hearts of the two people”.²²

Japan

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Japan successfully launches a new spy satellite; Japan and Russia are to hold vice-ministerial level talk in February; Japan and the Philippines are to cooperate on maritime security.**

On February 1, Japan successfully launched a new spy satellite in the orbit. Although it was to be launched on January 29, it had to be postponed due to bad weather. After the launch, Japanese Prime Minister pledged to build a reliable system for intelligence gathering in order to boost national security and enhance Japan’s capabilities to deal with any crisis situation. It needs to be noted that as of today, Japan has four spy satellites in the orbit. Two of them are optical satellites while the other two are radar satellites.²³

On February 12 this year, vice Foreign Ministers of Japan and Russia are to meet in Moscow in order to lay the groundwork for the proposed visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Japan this year. While the Japanese side will be represented by Shinsuke Sugiyama, deputy Foreign Minister for political affairs, Sugiyama’s Russian counterpart Igor Morgulov will lead the Russian delegation. It will be the first vice-ministerial level talk between the two countries since January 2014. During the upcoming talk, the two sides are expected to hold discussion on their long-standing territorial dispute. They might also deliberate on having Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida visit to Russia.²⁴

Recently during the Philippines Defence Secretary Voltaire Gazmin’s visit to Tokyo, he met with his Japanese counterpart Gen Nakatani. During their meeting on January 29, both the leaders agreed to cooperate in the maritime security issues in order to deal with the growing Chinese assertiveness. They also signed a note on defence cooperation and exchanges. Gen Nakatani assured Gazmin that Japan will cooperate with the Philippines in developing staff within the Philippines forces to deal with disaster management.²⁵

²² “Chinese, Afghan Presidents Exchange Congratulatory Messages On Ties”, *China Daily*, January 20, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-01/20/content_19360915.htm, accessed on January 29, 2015

²³ “Japan Launches New Spy Satellites”, *The Japan Times*, February 1, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/01/national/science-health/japan-launches-new-spy-satellite/#.VM8SJNKUfz0>

²⁴ “Japan, Russia To Hold Vice-Ministerial Talks”, *The Japan Times*, February 1, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/01/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-russia-hold-vice-ministerial-talks/#.VM8SfNKUfz0>

²⁵ “Japan, Philippines Defence Chiefs Agree To Cooperate On Maritime Security”, *The Japan Times*, January 30, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/30/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-philippine-defense-chiefs-agree-cooperate-maritime-security/#.VM8TSNKUfz0>

South Korea

- **S. Korea conducts live fire drill near the inter-Korean border; South Korea holds talk with the US and Japan on North Korean nuclear issue.**

On January 27, the South Korean military conducted a live fire drill on the islands of Baengnyeong and Yeonpyong that are situated near the inter-Korean border in the Yellow Sea. The objective of the drill was to check and bolster the South Korean military's preparedness in dealing with any provocation from North Korea in the future. In the said exercise, K-9 self-propelled howitzers, Vulcan guns, etc. were used.²⁶

On January 28, South Korea's top nuclear negotiator Hwang Joon-kook held a three way talk with the nuclear envoys of the US and Japan-Sung Kim and Junichi Ihara to deliberate on the resumption of the long-stalled Six Party Talks (SPT).²⁷ During the meeting, the three agreed to work together towards denuclearizing North Korea. While emphasizing the need to encourage China to play an active role in this regard, the three also averred that the North should take concrete step for the revival of the SPT.²⁸

C. Southeast Asia

ASEAN

(January 19-January 25, 2015)

- **ASEAN Defence Ministers to begin talks; ASEAN Defence officials meet in Malaysia; US Assistant Secretary of State says maritime dispute an issue for all ASEAN Members; ASEAN External Relations Deputy Director says Malaysia aims to finalize plans for ASEAN community; Foreign Minister of Philippines says China's Island building a threat for all ASEAN; Trade Minister of Malaysia says ASEAN delays deeper integration.**

Malaysia hosted ASEAN Defence Ministers meeting (ADMM) this week from January 21st to January 24th. According to the available sources, naval and defence cooperation during humanitarian disasters topped the priority list of issues discussed during the meeting²⁹. The meeting would see participation of ASEAN Senior Defence Officials Meeting (Adsom) Working Group. Officials of Ministry of Defence of Malaysia said they hoped to sign the Joint Declaration on the ASEAN Ready Group with their regional counterparts, under Malaysia's chairmanship this year.

²⁶ "S. Korea Conducts Live-Fire Drill Near Tense Sea Border", *The Korea Herald*, January 27, 2015, at http://www.koreaherald.com/common_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150127001075&dt=2

²⁷ "Seoul, Washington, Tokyo Hold Talks On N.K Nukes", *The Korea Herald*, January 28, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150128000333>

²⁸ "Japan, US, S. Korea Stress Cooperation In N-talks", *The Yomiuri Daily*, January 29, 2015 at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001890481>

²⁹ "ASEAN Defence Ministers To Begin Talks", *The Star Online*, January 20, 2015, at <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/01/20/Asean-defence-ministers-to-begin-talks/>

ASEAN Senior Defence Officials Meeting (Adsom) Working Group was convened at Johor Bahru in Malaysia this week. Apart from the progress of regional defence cooperation, the ADSOM WG also discussed and considered the draft concept papers and guidelines that could further contribute towards the progress and wider development of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) mechanism. The meeting was chaired by Dr Jafri Abdul Jalil, Undersecretary of Policy and Strategic Planning Division at Malaysia's Ministry of Defence³⁰. They commended the various initiatives undertaken by the Sultanate to further strengthen defence cooperation.

The ADSOM WG lauded the efforts and progress in the "Establishment of a Direct Communications Link (DCL) in the ADMM Process³¹" in a bid to provide secure and effective communication to prevent the escalation of maritime disputes in the region. US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel said this week that Chinese activities in South China Sea as "Wholesale reclamation"³² while speaking at the US Philippines Strategic Bilateral Dialogue³³ this week. He also said that chairmanship of ASEAN by Malaysia was expected by him to bring the long awaited Maritime Code of Conduct³⁴. He said, "This is not an issue exclusively for the Philippines and the US but for all 10 ASEAN countries, to see the importance of finding rules-based, peaceful resolution³⁵." ASEAN External Relations Deputy Director who was also an official of ASEAN-Malaysia National Secretariat Zamzuri Khalid, said that he hoped the details for setting the ASEAN Community by 2020 would be finalised soon by this year of chairmanship of Malaysia in ASEAN³⁶. According to him, the move would also entail a deeper and wider integration that would be beneficial for ASEAN countries in future.

At the US-Philippines Bilateral strategic Dialogue this week, Albert Del Rosario, said that China's reclamation of islands in South China Sea was a threat for all members of ASEAN and also warned that a warning last year that Beijing was reclaiming land around isolated reefs in the South China Sea to turn them into islands which could hold fortified positions or even airstrips³⁷. The Minister said, "I will re-emphasize this and invite the concern of the Association of South East Asian Nations

³⁰ "ASEAN Defence Officials Regional Cooperation Meet concluded" *The Brunei Times*, January 27, 2015 at <http://m.bt.com.bn/news-national/2015/01/27/asean-defence-officials-regional-cooperation-meet-concluded>

³¹ Ibid.

³² "US: Maritime Dispute An Issue For All ASEAN Members", *PhilStar.com*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/01/22/1415428/us-maritime-dispute-issue-all-asean-members>

³³ For Information On US-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, Please See The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Strategic Assessments, Philippines website at <http://www.dndph.org/press-releases/ph-us-strategic-dialogue>

³⁴ For Information On The Maritime Code Of Conduct, Please See *ASEAN.org* at <http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/china/item/declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea>

³⁵ "US: Maritime Dispute An Issue For All ASEAN Members", *PhilStar.com*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/01/22/1415428/us-maritime-dispute-issue-all-asean-members>

³⁶ "Malaysia Aims To Finalise Details For ASEAN Community", *The Sun Daily*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.thesundaily.my/news/1303492>

³⁷ "China Island Building A Threat For All ASEAN:DFA", *ABS CBN NEWS.com*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/01/22/15/china-island-building-threat-all-asean-dfa>

(ASEAN) states because it is a threat to all of us³⁸." Malaysian Trade Minister Mustapha Mohamed during his visit to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, commented that though ASEAN would officially call itself a single market by year's end, but "big things" like seamless travel within the 10-nation bloc would only come in 2020³⁹. His country Malaysia is currently the chair of ASEAN on the basis of rotating presidency.

Southeast Asia

(January 19-January 25, 2015)

- **Brunei firms focus on Oman to expand beyond Southeast Asia; Cambodia inaugurates elite police academy funded by Vietnam; East Timor looking ahead to develop national development bank; Indonesian Foreign Minister makes first time visit to Malaysia; Laos hosts meeting of Thailand-Laos Joint Committee in its capital; Myanmar hosts ASEAN tourist forum; Flooding situation worsens in Malaysia; Commandos of Philippines National Police suffers casualties; Singapore Armed Forces unveils plan to mark 50 years of existence; Vietnam hold 7th Security, Defence and Political Dialogue with US; Thailand to develop jointly villages with Cambodia.**

At the recently concluded Oman-Brunei Business forum, Deputy Minister of Brunei, Dato Ali Apong would look forward to Oman to make economic outreach beyond Southeast Asia. He said, "Oman is a very important platform for companies in Brunei to reach to other GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries and also Africa⁴⁰." Deputy Prime Minister of Brunei is also the current chairman of Brunei Economic Development Board.

Interior minister of Cambodia Sar Kheng, in presence of the minister for internal security of Vietnam has inaugurated a police academy in Kompong Speu province, which was funded with \$2.2 Million by Vietnamese Government⁴¹. The facility has been opened at a location which is currently 90 kilometres west of the national capital Phnom Penh. The interior ministers of both the nations also signed off on a plan to strengthen cooperation on combating crime along their countries' shared border, and agreed that Cambodia would send an unspecified number of police to Vietnam for training⁴².

East Timor has initiated an official process to launch an official development bank in the country for the first time in the history of the nation. Ágio Pereira, Minister of State and the Presidency of

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "ASEAN To Declare Single Market But Delays Deeper Integration: Malaysia", *YAHOO News*, January 24, 2015 at <http://news.yahoo.com/asean-declare-single-market-delays-deeper-integration-malaysia-134610570.html>

⁴⁰ "Brunei Firms Eye Oman To Expand Beyond Southeast Asia", *Times of Oman*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.timesofoman.com/News/46040/Article-Brunei-firms-eye-Oman-to-expand-beyond-Southeast-Asia>

⁴¹ "Hanoi Funded Police Academy Inaugurated in Kompong Speu", *The Cambodian Daily*, January 19, 2015 at <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/hanoi-funded-police-academy-inaugurated-in-kompong-speu-76366/>

⁴² Ibid.

the Council of Ministers and the government's official spokesman, quoted, "It's good to see that steps are being taken for the creation of the Timor-Leste National Development Bank, which will enable Timorese businesses to grow, create jobs and build the nation's economic infrastructure⁴³."

Indonesian foreign minister Retno Marsudi arrived in Malaysia this week to attend the ASEAN Foreign Minister's retreat which was scheduled to begin on January 27⁴⁴. This visit was her first visit to country. Malaysian foreign ministry said in their official release, "This visit will provide opportunity for both Foreign Ministers to discuss bilateral and regional issues of common interest and pave way towards improving the existing cooperation between two countries in various fields⁴⁵."

On January 24, Foreign ministry of Laos hosted the Thailand-Lao PDR Joint Committee meeting to explore areas of joint cooperation between the two neighbouring countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos said in its statement that the meeting would generate opportunities to both the Thai and Laotian people, including labour cooperation in workers' nationality identification through the issuance of the smart card ID for Laotian workers in Thailand⁴⁶.

Myanmar has hosted the 34th ASEAN Tourism Forum in Nay Pwi Taw. The forum was held in Myanmar for the first time and was scheduled to happen for a period of eight days. 2000 delegates from ASEAN countries and elsewhere attended the event. H.E. U Htay Aung, Union Minister of the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, said, "We would like to extend a warm welcome to all ATF 2015 delegates, sellers, buyers, media and trade visitors to Myanmar. I hope the meetings, discussions and conversations we will have over the next few days will be fruitful, and that at the same time, you will have the opportunity to experience for yourself Myanmar's rich culture and biodiversity, as well as our people's charm and hospitality⁴⁷."

In Malaysian Borneo, the flooding situation worsened this week with Sarawak being the worst affected province. Floods forced 3,812 people from 939 families to be evacuated and 36 schools in various parts of the state⁴⁸. Thousands of people who used the Pan Borneo highway linking the Kingdom of Brunei and the provinces of Sabah and Sarawak got stuck after the water rose as high as four feet at Kampung Batu Danau in Sarawak⁴⁹.

⁴³ "Timor Leste Starts Setting Up National Development Bank", *Macau Hub*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.macauhub.com.mo/en/2015/01/22/timor-leste-starts-setting-up-national-development-bank/>

⁴⁴ "ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat in Sabah Begins", *The Malaysian Insider*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/asean-foreign-ministers-retreat-in-sabah-begins-bernama>

⁴⁵ "Indonesian Foreign Minister Arriving In Malaysia For Working Visit", *New Straits Times online*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.nst.com.my/node/70847>

⁴⁶ "Thailand-Laos Meeting To Create Public Benefits, Says MFA Spokesman", *National News Bureau of Thailand*, January 23, 2015 at http://thainews.prd.go.th/centerweb/newsen/NewsDetail?NT01_NewsID=WNPOL5801230010012

⁴⁷ "Historic 34th ASEAN Tourism Forum Kicks Off In Nay Pwi Taw, Myanmar", *Global Travel Industry News*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.eturbonews.com/54766/historic-34th-asean-tourism-forum-kicks-nay-pyi-taw-myanmar>

⁴⁸ "Flood Situation Worsens In Sarawak", *Borneo Post Online*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.theborneopost.com/2015/01/20/flood-situation-worsens-in-sarawak/>

⁴⁹ "Flood Cut Off Roadusers Linking Brunei, Sabah And Sarawak", *Borneo Post Online*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.theborneopost.com/2015/01/20/floods-cut-off-roadusers-on-highway-linking-brunei-sabah-and-sarawak/>

On 25th January, the elite commandos of Philippines National Police suffered heavy casualties while conducting anti-terror raids at Tukanalipao in Mamasapano Township. The available sources have said while conducting the anti-terror raids, the government did not notify the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the main Muslim insurgent group in the region, which signed a peace deal⁵⁰ with the government in March and has had a relatively successful ceasefire agreement with government troops and the rebels inflicted heavy casualties during the encounter, which some have said as a “misencounter”⁵¹. Till date, more than 25 bodies of the slain commandos were recovered by Philippines Government in collaboration with locals. Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebel leader Mohagher Iqbal has said the 11,000-strong Moro group would file a protest over the police commandos’ action, but added the incident was not likely to undermine the peace process between rebels and the government⁵².

The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) unveiled its plan this week to mark 50 years of its service to Singapore through a number of activities. Starting from February 12th, 2015, the event which has been termed as SAF50@Vivo would continue for four days and would combine assets and capabilities from the Singapore Army, the Republic of Singapore Navy and the Republic of Singapore Air Force apart from paying tributes to the people who have contributed to the defence, security and sovereignty of Singapore⁵³.

*The Seventh Vietnam-US Political, Security and Defence Dialogue took place in Hanoi on January 22-23. The honourable chairs were Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Ha Kim Ngoc and US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Puneet Talwar. They exchanged views on activities to mark 20 years of normalisation of bilateral diplomatic ties between the two countries. They also discussed measures to promote Vietnam-US cooperation in regional and global mechanisms and also discussed measures to enhance collaboration in numerous fields, including maritime security, disaster relief, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the fight against drug smuggling, peacekeeping operations and law enforcement issues joint commitments for peace, stability, prosperity and security in Asia-Pacific*⁵⁴.

Chief of Army Staff of Thailand, Udomdej Sitabutr, speaking upon his return from a visit to the neighbouring country said that Cambodia had agreed to join forces with Thailand to develop 60 villages on the Chong Arn Ma border crossing and to eventually form a province in the contested

⁵⁰ “Philippines Sign Peace Deals With Muslim Rebels: No More War-Enough!”, *The Star.com*, March 27, 2014 at http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2014/03/27/philippines_signs_peace_deal_with_muslim_rebels_no_more_war_enough.html

⁵¹ “Philippine Forces Retrieve Commandos’ Bodies At Rebel Base”, *The Star.com*, January 25, 2014 at <http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2015/01/26/philippine-forces-retrieve-commandos-bodies-at-rebel-base.html>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “The SAF Marks 50 Years Of Formation”, *Ministry of Defence, Singapore official release*, January 22, 2015 at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2015/jan/22jan15_nr.html#VMzCR3nnMh8

⁵⁴ “Vietnam, US Hold 7th Political, Security, Defence Dialogue”, *Vietnamnet Bridge*, January 26, 2015 at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/121982/vietnam-us-hold-7th-political-security-defence-dialogue.html>

border region⁵⁵. The delegation from Thailand discussed the border problems with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Tea Banh during their visit to Cambodia.

Oceania

(January 19-January 25, 2015)

- **Chief of Australian Defence Force (ADF) reaffirms Australia's commitment to Afghanistan; Foreign minister of New Zealand to attend African Union summit; Fiji government meets Indian business delegation to Fiji; Papua New Guinea government contradicts statement of immigration minister of Australia on violence at Manus Island.**

The Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin in a meeting with NATO officials and other chiefs of defence staffs in Brussels, assured on Australia's ongoing commitment to Afghanistan. Air Chief Marshal said, "While there is significant global attention on current operations in Iraq, our mission in Afghanistan has changed, not ended. Australia and our international partners have not forgotten the people of Afghanistan⁵⁶." He added, "The Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) is a confident and capable force which demonstrated its ability to maintain Afghanistan's security during the historic 2014 Presidential election. Our job is to keep working with them to continue to build and maintain a sustainable security force for the future⁵⁷."

Foreign minister of New Zealand Murray McCully travelled to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia to attend the summit of 24th African Union Summit. Mr McCully said, "This Summit is attended by ministers from nearly all of the 54 African Union states and allows New Zealand to engage directly on issues like regional security, agricultural cooperation, and renewable energy⁵⁸." He also said, "As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, New Zealand is committed to listening to all states on matters that come before the Council, and the AU Summit is a chance to hear directly from African leaders"⁵⁹.

Top Indian businessmen visited Fiji this week and they were met in Fiji by Permanent Secretary of Fiji for Industry, Trade and Tourism, Shaheen Ali, and the executive chairman of Investment Fiji, Truman Bradley. Mr Ali said, "Indian businesses are showing strong interest in investing in

⁵⁵ "Villages To Go In Disputed Border Area", *Bangkok Post*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/459291/villages-to-go-in-disputed-border-area>

⁵⁶ "Chief of Defence Force Reaffirms Australia's Commitment To Afghanistan", *Department of Defence, Govt. of Australia media release*, January 22 2015 at <http://news.defence.gov.au/2015/01/22/chief-of-the-defence-force-reaffirms-australias-commitment-to-afghanistan/>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "McCully to AU Summit and Jordan", *beehive.govt.nz, Official website of New Zealand government* January 25, 2015 at http://beehive.govt.nz/release/mccully-au-summit-and-jordan?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+beehive-govt-nz%2Fportfolio%2Fforeign-affairs+%28Foreign+Affairs+-+beehive.govt.nz%29

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Fiji in areas, such as, construction, medical, energy, film making, agriculture, to name a few⁶⁰. He also said, “Investment between Fiji and India has immense potential, especially, with the efforts of the two governments to create an enabling environment for trade and investment to take off⁶¹.”

Papua New Guinea government has contradicted the statement of Immigration minister of Australia that detainees in Manus Island, who were seekers of political asylum in Australia⁶², used weapons during a protest. The immigration minister Peter Dutton said that asylum seekers were armed with makeshift weapons when security guards forced entry into Delta compound to end a three-day blockade⁶³.

Southeast Asia

(January 26- February 1, 2015)

- **ASEAN Foreign Ministers retreat warned about China’s land reclamation in Spratly; Myanmar not ready for AEC by 2015; Japan to Invest in railway connecting Cambodia and Thailand; China-Myanmar pipeline inaugurated; Friendship Bridge between Laos and Myanmar; New Cyber Security Agency in Singapore; North Korean delegation to visit Southeast Asia; Fiji’s agriculture minister visited India.**

China has been in focus in this week in Southeast Asia as many of these countries expressed concern over China’s land reclamation in South China Sea. On the other hand, as ASEAN is moving towards forming the ASEAN Economic Community, few expressed their apprehension over Myanmar’s inability to join the force in the World Economic Forum, held at Davos. On the economic front, besides China, Japan is coming up as a major investor in Southeast Asia as it committed to help in building a railway connecting Cambodia and Thailand. China and Myanmar have opened a pipeline on trial which will benefit China immensely and diversify its energy sources in a more comprehensive manner. At the bilateral level, Myanmar and Laos have decided to augment their efforts to construct a friendship bridge to enhance cooperation between each other. On the security front, Singapore has decided to form a comprehensive cyber security agency which will look after all cyber security related issues in the country. A North Korean delegation will visit Southeast Asia in the first week of February, as reported by their state media. Finally, bilateral relationship between Fiji and India got a boost up as both these countries decided to enhance cooperation in the agricultural sector.

⁶⁰ “Big Indian Investors Show Interest in Fiji”, *Fiji Sun Online*, January 26, 2015 at <http://fijisun.com.fj/2015/01/26/big-indian-investors-show-interest-in-fiji/>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Welcome to Manus, The Island That Has Been Changed Forever By Australian Asylum-Seeker Policy”, *The Guardian*, December 16, 2014 at <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2014/dec/16/-sp-welcome-to-manus-island-changed-forever-australian-asylum-seeker-policy>

⁶³ “Manus Island: PNG Government contradicts Peter Dutton’s comments That Protesting Asylum Seekers Used Weapons”, *ABC.NET.AU*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-21/png-contradicts-dutton-on-weapons-in-manus-standoff/6032066>

Few ASEAN countries raised concern over the issue of China's land reclamation in South China Sea at the foreign ministers' retreat in Malaysia in the last week of January 2015. China is reportedly building artificial islands on Spratly and the area is disputed between Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan. Malaysia's foreign minister Anifah Aman mentioned that ASEAN countries are concerned about this recent development in South China Sea. The senior officials will now devote more hard work towards the early conclusion of the Code of Conduct on South China Sea to reduce the level of aggression shown by China. Malaysia, the chair of ASEAN for 2015, has instructed Thailand, the country coordinator for China and ASEAN to increase regular visits between two parties to enhance cooperation.⁶⁴ Philippine foreign minister Albert del Rosario mentioned that "The massive reclamation issue presents a strategic policy dilemma for ASEAN".⁶⁵ He also mentioned that ASEAN has been unable to address this issue as a collective.

Analysts say that Myanmar is not ready for the ASEAN single business market by the end of 2015. Its lack of infrastructure may create several problems and it may be difficult for the country to benefit from the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), at least, initially. It was apprehended that besides Myanmar, three more countries in the grouping will be unable to join the force of AEC. In the World Economic Forum held in Davos, few were however optimistic about AEC and its implementation by 2015. Thailand's deputy prime minister was one of them.⁶⁶

Japan has agreed to build a railway to connect Thailand and Cambodia via Kanchanaburi in Thailand. Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha is expected to sign the Memorandum of Understanding during his upcoming visit to Japan in February 2015. Prior to this attempt, Japan tried to build a rail line between Thailand and Myanmar via Kanchanaburi in 1945. However, the project was halted. Sources from Thailand mentioned that Japan was approached for investment in Dawei project as well. Very soon, Japan is expected to ink the deal on Dawei.⁶⁷

China and Myanmar have opened a direct pipeline (771 km.) for a trail operation which will reduce China's dependence on oil import via Malacca Straits and South China Sea and can bypass countries like Brunei, Vietnam, Philippines and Malaysia, countries having territorial disputes with China. The project, initiated in 2010, was a joint venture between China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE).⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Sim, Shuan, "ASEAN Countries Urged To Stand Up To China Over South China Sea", *The International Business Times*, January 28, 2015, available at <http://www.ibtimes.com/asean-countries-urged-stand-china-over-south-china-sea-1797766>, accessed on February 4, 2015.

⁶⁵ "ASEAN Ministers Express Concern Over Chinese Actions At Sea", *Jakarta Post*, January 28, 2015, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/01/28/asean-ministers-express-concern-over-chinese-actions-sea.html>, accessed on February 4, 2015.

⁶⁶ "Burma 'Not Ready' for Asean Single Market by End of 2015", *The Irrawaddy*, January 27, 2015, available at <http://www.irrawaddy.org/business/burma-ready-asean-single-market-end-2015.html>, accessed on February 4, 2015.

⁶⁷ Fernquest, Jon, "Thai-Japan railway to link Burma & Cambodia", *Bangkok Post*, January 28, 2015, available at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/learning-from-news/461169/thai-japan-railway-to-link-burma-cambodia>, accessed on February 5, 2015.

⁶⁸ Sim, Shuan, "China-Myanmar Crude Oil Pipeline Opens For Test Runs", *The International Business Times*, January 28, 2015, available at <http://www.ibtimes.com/china-myanmar-crude-oil-pipeline-opens-test-runs-1797942>, accessed on February 5, 2015.

Myanmar and Laos have intensified efforts to build a friendship bridge over Mekong River to connect Tachileik, Shan State in Myanmar with Laungnamtha province of Laos. The iron bridge will be a two-lane motorway. In July 2011, the plan was mooted during Laotian prime minister's visit to Myanmar and in February 2013 the construction work began. Laos and Myanmar share 230 km of border and their diplomatic relations started in 1995. However, compared to other neighbours, bilateral trade between Laos and Myanmar is not significant and it is expected that the new friendship bridge will enhance their bilateral relationship.⁶⁹

From April 1, a new cyber security agency will replace the existing Singapore Infocomm Technology Security Authority (SITSA) and take over activities of the ICT regulator, Infocomm Development Authority (IDA). The new set up will be called as Cyber Security Agency (CSA). CSA will not only develop the government's cyber security capabilities but will also enhance local IT security systems. Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister in charge of cyber security will give leadership to CSA while David Koh, deputy secretary for technology at the Ministry of Defence will be the chief executive of the CSA.⁷⁰

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) will send a high-level team to visit seven Southeast Asian countries in the first week of February 2015. The delegation will be led by Vice Foreign Minister Ri Kil Song and they will visit Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. The state media did not report about the purpose of this visit.⁷¹

Fiji's Minister for Agriculture, Rural & Maritime Development and National Disaster Management, Inia Seruiratu visited Kochi and met Coconut Development Board (CDB) chairman T K Jose. Both sides have agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding very soon on technology transfer in the coconut sector. The Fijian minister informed that during PM Narendra Modi's visit to Fiji, they have expressed interest in cooperation with India in the agricultural field, especially seed development and training and exchange of experts. The Fijian minister and his team came to Kochi to attend the 51st ministerial meeting of the Asian and Pacific Coconut Community.⁷²

⁶⁹ "Myanmar, Laos To Speed Up Building Friendship Bridge", *Global Times*, February 1, 2015, available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/905157.shtml>, accessed on February 5, 2015.

⁷⁰ Yu, Eileen, "New Government Agency To Oversee Singapore's Cybersecurity Operations", *ZDNET*, January 27, 2015, available at <http://www.zdnet.com/article/new-government-agency-to-oversee-singapores-cybersecurity-operations/>, accessed on February 5, 2015.

⁷¹ "DPRK Delegation To Visit Southeast Asia", *Xinhua Net*, January 29, 2015, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-01/29/c_133956346.htm, accessed on February 6, 2015

⁷² "India to Ink MoU with Fiji Shortly", *The New Indian Express*, February 1, 2015, available at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/India-to-Ink-MoU-with-Fiji-Shortly/2015/02/01/article2646677.ece>, accessed on February 6, 2015.

D. Russia

Russia

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **President Putin calls Ukrainian army ‘NATO legion’ with an aim to contain Russia; Russia and Japan discuss North Korean nuclear issue; Israel looking to maintain good relations with Russia; Russia asks Indian companies to tap its natural resources; Russia to respond to possible disconnection from SWIFT; Russia exported over US\$15 billion worth of armaments to 60 countries in 2014; Russia exploring the creation of a joint orbital station with India and China; Russia promises Tajikistan military aid as international forces leave Afghanistan; Russia warns Bosnia and Herzegovina against ammunition supplies to Kiev; EU extends sanctions on Russia to September; Gazprom to develop natural gas infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan; S&P downgrades Russia’s sovereign credit rating to junk; Half of Russian defence ministry’s expenditure in 2015 to be used on armament programme; Russian government determines seven priority sectors in combating crisis; Poll shows 80 per cent of Russians ready to give up Western food; Public poll shows China to be friendliest for Russia while US is the most hostile; Russia likely to test launch Sarmat 100-ton ballistic missile in 2016-2017.**

President Putin has on January 26 in St. Petersburg called the Ukrainian army ‘a NATO legion’ with a goal to contain Russia. He also asserted that the Kiev government has abandoned the path of peaceful settlement to the existing conflict and has no intention to settle it in political ways.⁷³

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov has on January 23 in Moscow discussed the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula with Japan’s chief negotiator on North Korea Junichi Ihara. It was reported that their positions on the nuclear issue is ‘not identical.’⁷⁴

Israel’s Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s, during his visit to Moscow on January 27, has said that maintaining good relations with Russia is one of the top priorities for Israel. He was quoted as saying ‘Israel is a small country in the heart of the most unstable region and since its birth Israel has been in the centre of geopolitical, ideological, religious, diplomatic and sometimes military collisions on the global scale. We simply cannot afford neglecting warm relations with such significant international player as Russia. However, Russian-speaking politicians in Israel have serious disagreements with Russian foreign policy officials concerning a number of principal issues. In particular, our evaluations and opinions on the ways out of the regional crisis in the Middle East do not coincide in many regards and will hardly come to terms in the nearest future.’

⁷³ “Putin Calls Ukrainian Army ‘NATO Legion’ With Geopolitical Aim To Contain Russia”, *Itar-Tass*, January 26, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/773395>

⁷⁴ “Russian, Japanese Diplomats Discuss North Korea’s Nuclear Problem – Foreign Ministry”, *Itar-Tass*, January 26, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/773043>

He also stated that Israel is exploring the opportunity to create a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union.⁷⁵

Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov has said on January 27 that Russia seeks Indian investment in developing its huge natural resources sector and thereby moves trade patterns from a long-standing supplier-consumer relationship to a new economic partnership. He referred to Russia being one of the global leaders of hydrocarbon production and export and India being one of the major consumers.⁷⁶

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has said, on January 27, that 'western countries' threats to restrict Russia's operations through the SWIFT international bank transaction system will prompt Moscow's counter-response without limits.⁷⁷

President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia exported more than US\$ 15 billion worth of military products to more than 60 foreign countries in 2014 while new contracts worth almost US\$ 14 billion were signed during the same period. He noted that Russia is a reliable and predictable partner on the global armaments market and it does not link fulfilment of its commitments to the current political situation. Moscow will also be expanding its presence on the markets of arms sales in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the near future.⁷⁸

Russia is exploring the possibility of a joint manned orbital station with India and China as part of a common strategy to create technological alliances and may take up the matter during the BRICS summit scheduled to be held in Ufa in July. Other perspective areas for further research could be modular rockets using methane as fuel and also the creation of an aerospace vehicle, which could be used in the future to construct a fighter or a bomber of the sixth generation.⁷⁹

Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov, during his visit to Dushanbe on January 28, has said that Russia will help Tajikistan build its military capabilities in order to tackle the uncertain security situation that is likely to emerge post the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ "Israel's Top Priority To Maintain Good Relations With Russia – FM Lieberman", *Itar-Tass*, January 26, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/773255>

⁷⁶ "Russia Asks Indian Companies To Tap Its Natural Resources", *Business Standard*, January 27, 2015 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/russia-asks-indian-companies-to-tap-its-natural-resources-115012700547_1.html

⁷⁷ "Russia To Respond To Possible Disconnection From SWIFT – PM", *Itar-Tass*, January 27, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/773628>

⁷⁸ "Russia Exported Over \$15 Billion Worth Of Armaments To Over 60 Countries in 2014 – Putin", *Itar-Tass*, January 27, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/773700>

⁷⁹ "Russia May Create Joint Orbital Station With India, China", *The Economic Times*, January 27, 2015 at http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/46031057.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

⁸⁰ "Russia Promises Tajikistan Military Aid As International Forces Leave Afghanistan", *Itar-Tass*, January 28, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/773849>

Foreign Ministry's official spokesman Alexander Lukashevich has called on Bosnia and Herzegovina to abandon plans of supplying ammunition to Kiev and said that such weapons will prove to be counter-productive.⁸¹

The EU Council has extended the sanctions against individuals and corporations in Russia to September 2015 in response to the deterioration of the situation in south-eastern Ukraine.⁸²

Kyrgyzstan's Prime Minister Djoomart Otorbaev has announced in Bishkek on January 30 that Gazprom will develop the gas distribution network development throughout the country. The project envisages installation of gas supply services to 411 populated localities of the republic. Gazprom had bought a controlling stake in Kyrgyzstan's natural gas company Kirgizgaz last spring and has expressed its willingness to invest about 20 billion roubles (US\$ 290 million) in the country.⁸³

Ratings agency S&P has cut Russia's sovereign credit rating, on January 26, to junk status and thereby brought it below investment grade for the first time in a decade. Warning of difficult times ahead for Russia's economy, S&P said that it had cut the rating from BBB- to BB+ and that Russia's economic growth prospects, hit by low oil prices and Western sanctions over the Ukraine crisis, had worsened.⁸⁴

Deputy Defence Minister Tatiana Shevtsova has said on January 26 that the Defence Ministry will channel more than half of all expenditures to fund the state armament programme. She added that the defence budget will not be cut despite the current economic situation and the state defence order will grow by 20 per cent year on year in 2015 and 40 per cent in 2017.⁸⁵

The Russian government has published a crisis plan for 2015. The document provides allocation of seven key areas for implementation of measures to combat the crisis. These include supporting import substitution and export of non-primary items, including high-tech products, promoting the development of small and medium-sized businesses, creating opportunities for raising finance in significant sectors of the economy, including the implementation of state defence orders, payment of additional inflationary costs for the low-income population, reducing labour market tensions, optimizing budget expenditures and increasing the stability of the banking system.⁸⁶

⁸¹ "Russia Warns Bosnia And Herzegovina Against Ammunition Supplies To Kiev", *Itar-Tass*, January 29, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/774074>

⁸² "EU Council Decides To Prolong Anti-Russian Sanctions Through To September", *Itar-Tass*, January 29, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/774303>

⁸³ "Gazprom To Take Up Natural Gas Infrastructure Development Project In Kyrgyzstan", *Itar-Tass*, January 30, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/774323>

⁸⁴ "S&P Downgrades Russia's Sovereign Credit Rating to Junk", *The Moscow Times*, January 26, 2015, at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/s-p-downgrades-russia-s-sovereign-credit-rating-to-junk/514927.html>

⁸⁵ "Half of Russian Defence Ministry's Expenditures In 2015 To Be Used On Armament Programme", *Itar-Tass*, at January 26, 2015, <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/773027>

⁸⁶ "Russian Government Determines Seven Priority Sectors In Combating Crisis", *Itar-Tass*, January 28, 2015 at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/773770>

According to an all-Russian poll presented by the Sociology Institute of Russia's Academy of Sciences, about 80 per cent of Russians are ready to give up Western foodstuffs for the sake of strengthening the state. Similarly, about 10 per cent of the respondents agreed to their wage and pension freeze in coming years and 12 per cent will consent to tax hikes.⁸⁷

According to an opinion poll conducted by the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (VTSIOM), Russians believe that at the moment their country has the friendliest relations with China, Belarus and Kazakhstan and has hostile relations with the United States. The poll embraced 1,600 people in 132 Russian localities. The error margin is within 3.5 per cent.⁸⁸

It has been reported that Russia will test the 100-ton ballistic missile Sarmat in 2016-17. The missile is expected to replace strategic missile Voyevoda (NATO reporting name - Satan).⁸⁹

E. Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Gulf

Iran

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Iran sends warning to Israel via US on Syria attack; Republicans push for immediate vote on Iran sanctions bill; Bohner invitation to Netanyahu to speak on "Threat of Iran" bypassing White House causes concern among US generals.**

Iran's official IRNA reported that Iran told US that Israel has crossed "red lines" and the Islamic Republic will respond refereeing to the airstrike which killed an Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Mohammed Allahdadi with a Hezbollah commander and the son of the group's late military leader, Imad Moughniyeh, on January 18 attack on a Hezbollah convoy on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights. Israel has struck inside Syria several times since the start of the Syrian civil war, mostly destroying weaponry such as missiles that Israeli officials said were allegedly destined for Iranian-backed Hezbollah, Israel's long-time foe in neighbouring Lebanon.⁹⁰

According to a report, Senate Republicans are pressing the majority leader to put an Iran sanctions bill up for an immediate vote in the floor after it passed a key committee. The Senate Banking Committee passed the legislation- co-authored by Robert Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey, and Mark Kirk, Republican of Illinois- despite warnings from the White House that any sanctions

⁸⁷ "Poll Shows 80% Of Russians Ready To Give Up Western Food", *Itar-Tass*, January 28, 2015 at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/773896>

⁸⁸ "China Friendliest Country For Russia, The US – Most Hostile – Poll", *Itar-Tass*, January 28, 2015 at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/773856>

⁸⁹ "Russia's Sarmat 100-ton Ballistic Missile May Be Test Launched In 2016-2017 – Source", *Itar-Tass*, January 29, 2015 at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/774071>

⁹⁰ "Vowing To Respond, Iran Says Israel Crossed 'Red Lines' With Syria Attack", *Jerusalem Post*, January 27, 2015 at <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Vowing-to-respond-iran-says-israel-crossed-red-lines-with-syria-attack-389183>

at this juncture would derail the ongoing nuclear talks with Iran. But President Barack Obama has said to veto the final bill if it reaches his desk after passing both houses of Congress.⁹¹

House Speaker John Boehner invitation to Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to attack Obama's Iran policy in Congress has received with public criticisms from the White House and the top US generals are increasingly critical at Israeli Premier's irresponsible behaviour.⁹²

Iraq and Syria

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **ISIS chemical weapons expert 'killed' in airstrike; Japanese captive killed by ISIS; Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani liberated from ISIS; Syrian government and opposition delegations meet in Moscow; Hezbollah leader Nasrallah says "The rules of engagement with Israel is over".**

The U.S. Central Command said a chemical weapons expert of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was killed in a coalition airstrike last week near Mosul, Iraq. The air raid took out Abu Malik, whose training "provided the terrorist group with expertise to pursue a chemical weapons capability," the military said in a statement. The statement said Abu Malik had been a chemical weapons engineer during the rule of Saddam Hussein and then joined al-Qaeda Iraq in 2005.⁹³

The fate of a Jordanian pilot held by ISIS was unclear hours after an online video purported to show the militant group beheaded Japanese journalist Kenji Goto. No mention was made in the video released of Muath Al Kasasbeh, who was captured in December when his fighter jet crashed near a Daesh stronghold in Syria, Gulf news reported. Jordan is part of a US-led coalition that has carried out airstrikes since September against Daesh targets in Syria, where the radical group controls considerable territory. Amman have been under immense pressure at home in recent weeks to free Al Kasasbeh and bring him back to Jordan. It has offered to swap an Al Qaeda prisoner, Sajida Al Rishawi, for Al Kasasbeh but demanded proof the pilot is still alive.⁹⁴

The Syrian town of Kobane has been fully liberated from the Islamic State (IS) group according to fighters from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). The Syrian Observatory on Human Rights (SOHR), an opposition NGO, corroborated the announcement, reporting that fighters had "expelled all Islamic State fighters from Kobane and have full control of the town". "The Kurds are pursuing some jihadists on the eastern outskirts of Kobane, but there is no more fighting

⁹¹ "GOP Pushes For Immediate Vote On Iran Sanctions Bill", *Presstv*, January 30, 2015 at <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/01/30/395394/GOP-pushes-for-immediate-vote-on-Iran->

⁹² "Netanyahu's Congress Invitation Raises Eyebrows Among Some US Generals", *Aljazeera America*, February 2, 2015 at <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/2/2/netanyahu-visit-concerns-american-generals.html>

⁹³ "ISIS Chemical Weapons Expert 'Killed' In Airstrike", *Alarabia*, January 31, 2015 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/31/U-S-Coalition-strike-kills-ISIS-chemical-weapons-expert-.html>

⁹⁴ "Jordanian Pilot's Fate Unclear As Daesh Executes Japanese", *Gulfnews.com*, February 1, 2015 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/jordan/jordanian-pilot-s-fate-unclear-as-daesh-executes-japanese-1.1449826>

inside now,” said SOHR head Rami Abdel Rahman. Kobane, located in a region of northwest Syria also known as Rojava or Syrian Kurdistan, had been under siege from IS since September 2014. While other long-term battles have continued on in Syria and Iraq, the fight in Kobane has received unparalleled media coverage.⁹⁵

Syrian opposition figures and representatives of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad began talks in Moscow aimed at restarting long-stalled peace negotiations to end the country’s brutal war. The 32 members of various opposition groups tolerated by the authorities in Damascus and six members of the official Syrian delegation led by the ambassador to the United Nations Bashar Jaafari began their meeting which commentators told had low hope of any substantial outcome. The opposition figures at the meeting would not immediately insist on establishing a transition government to ease Assad from power.⁹⁶

“Don’t try us,” Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah spoke referring to Israel in a televised speech broadcast during a memorial ceremony to honour the six Hezbollah fighters and the Iranian general killed in an Israeli airstrike in Syria earlier this month. Hezbollah’s chief said that while Israel isn’t worried about thousands of armed militants from the al-Nusra Front – al-Qaeda’s branch in Syria – near territories it occupies, the Zionist state “was scared on January 18 of six unarmed Hezbollah fighters and an Iranian in civilian vehicles.” Observers from the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) confirmed in a report published in December documenting cooperation and coordination between the Israeli army and militant groups in Syria.⁹⁷

The Gulf

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Significant reshuffle in Saudi cabinet under new king; Bahrain strips 72 of citizenship for ‘harming’ kingdom.**

King Salman, who ascended the throne, reappointed Prince Khaled Al-Faisal as governor of Makkah in place of Prince Mishaal bin Abdullah and Prince Faisal bin Bandar governor of Riyadh, replacing Prince Turki bin Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz. He removed Prince Bandar bin Sultan from the position of the secretary-general for National Security Council and special envoy of the king.⁹⁸

Bahrain had revoked the citizenship of 72 people convicted of “harming the interests of the kingdom” in unrest by the Shiite majority since 2011. The official BNA news agency said their

⁹⁵ “Kurds Drive Out IS, Take Back Kobane” , *Middle-east Eye*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/kobane-back-kurdish-control-after-driving-out-islamic-state-1796876626>

⁹⁶ “Syrian Rival Delegations Meet In Moscow” , *Alarabia*, January 28, 2015 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/28/Syria-opposition-Assad-representatives-meet-in-Moscow-.html>

⁹⁷ “Nasrallah: The Rules of Engagement with Israel Are Over” , *Alakhbar English*, January 30, 2015 at <http://english.alakhbar.com/node/23514>

⁹⁸ “Massive Cabinet Shake-Up” , *Arabnews.com*, January 30, 2015 at <http://www.arabnews.com/featured/news/696656>

nationality had been rescinded in a decree as part of measures to “preserve security and stability and fight the danger of terrorist threats”. The tiny but strategic Gulf nation has been rocked by unrest since a 2011 Shiite-led uprising demanding a constitutional monarchy and more representative government.⁹⁹

F. The United State of America

National

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dempsey says sequestration is ‘Absolutely Crazy’; Hagel ‘Quintessentially American,’ Obama says at farewell tribute; Army chief of staff Odierno says sequestration threatens Army readiness; Chief Naval Officer Greenert explains value of presence, danger of cuts; Sequestration casts shadow on shrinking, aging air force fleet; Under Secretary Kendal says sequestration will harm U.S. military superiority; Marine Corps commandant highlights sequestration’s impact; Offset strategy puts advantage in hands of U.S., allies; Defence Department moves data to the cloud to lower costs, improve security.**

Sequestration is “absolutely crazy,” will hurt national security and make it “impossible” for the United States to meet its global commitments, according to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The world has changed dramatically since sequestration was passed into law in the Budget Control Act of 2011, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said. Dempsey spoke in an interview aboard his plane as he returned to Washington following a European trip focusing on threats to the continent. The changes in the global environment since 2011 include the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Russia’s fuelling of instability in Ukraine, and a “host of security issues,” he said. The sequestration mechanism forces across-the-board government spending cuts, a “mechanical withdrawal” that “doesn’t allow you to balance your books,” Dempsey said.¹⁰⁰

On January 28, President Barack Obama hosted an armed forces farewell tribute to retiring Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia. “Today is a celebration of a quintessentially American life; a man from the heartland who devoted his life to America,” Obama said. From his time as a boy in Nebraska, to volunteering for a war that would see him pull his own brother from a burning vehicle, to leading the charge to ensure veterans exposed to Agent Orange were treated fairly, to the Senate – where he led the fight to establish the Post-9/11 GI Bill – and then on to head the Defence Department through a difficult transition, Hagel’s career

⁹⁹ “Bahrain Strips 72 Unrest Convicts Of Citizenship” , *The Daily Star*, January 31, 2015 at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Jan-31/285968-bahrain-strips-72-unrest-convicts-of-citizenship.ashx>

¹⁰⁰ Ferdinando, Lisa, “Dempsey: Sequestration is ‘Absolutely Crazy’”, *DoD News*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128040>

has been characterized by service to others, the president said. "Thanks to Secretary Hagel's guiding hand, this institution is better positioned for the future," he said.¹⁰¹

With sequestration looming in the 2016 budget, the Army chief of staff told the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 28 that the national security environment is the most uncertain he's seen in his nearly 40 years of service. Gen. Ray Odierno reported that instability continues to increase globally, especially in light of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, whose unforeseen expansion and erosion of order there and in Syria have significantly heightened conflict in the region and beyond. During the past three years "we have already significantly reduced the capabilities of the United States Army, and this is before sequestration begins again in 2016," Odierno told the Senate panel. Sequestration's possible return also portends additional cuts of 70,000 active-duty troops, an additional 35,000 from the National Guard, and another 10,000 from the Army Reserve by fiscal year 2020, Odierno added. Odierno explained sequestration's impact from a strategic perspective.¹⁰²

Presence remains the mandate of the Navy and the service must operate forward "when and where it matters," the chief naval officer testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington on January 28. However, sequestration in 2013 not only whittled the Navy's contingency response force to one third, but forced reductions in afloat and ashore operations, generated ship and aircraft maintenance backlogs, and compelled the Navy to extend unit deployments, Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert said. "Sequestration resulted in a \$9 billion shortfall in 2013, below our budget submission ... degraded fleet readiness and created consequences from which we are still recovering," the admiral said.¹⁰³

Today's Air Force is not only smaller, but its diminutive fleet is older than it has ever been, the service's chief of staff said on January 28 in remarks at the Senate Armed Services Committee. Air Force Gen. Mark A. Welsh III reported to Congress that the challenge to modernize won't be easy, and will require accepting prudent operational risk in some mission areas for a period of time. At Budget Control Act funding levels, the Air Force will no longer be able to meet the operational requirements of the Defence Strategic Guidance, nor will it be able to defeat an adversary while denying a second adversary or defending the homeland, the general maintained. When the Air Force deployed to Operation Desert Storm in 1990, the service had 188 fighter squadrons, Welsh said. Today, 54 remain and that number could drop to 49 in the next couple of years, he said.¹⁰⁴

The severe, multiyear budget cuts of sequestration will have a negative impact on the Defence Department and U.S. military technological superiority, Under Secretary of Defence for Acquisition,

¹⁰¹ Roulo, Claudette, "Hagel 'Quintessentially American,' Obama Says at Farewell Tribute", *DoD News*, January 28, 2015 at

¹⁰² Lyle, Amaani, "Odierno: Sequestration Threatens Army Readiness", *DoD News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128061>

¹⁰³ Lyle, Amaani, "Greenert Explains Value of Presence, Danger of Cuts", *DoD News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128065>

¹⁰⁴ Lyle, Amaani, "Sequestration Casts Shadow on Shrinking, Aging Air Force Fleet", *DoD News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128068>

Technology and Logistics Frank Kendall told a congressional panel on January 28. Kendall testified before the House Armed Services Committee with Air Force Lt. Gen. Mark Ramsay, director of force structure, resources and assessment for the Joint Staff. The topic was the Department of Defence and technological change. Kendall said that what he's seeing in foreign military modernization, particularly China's, is "a suite of capabilities that are intended – clearly, to me at least – to defeat the American way of doing power projection, the American way of warfare when we fight in an expeditionary manner far from the United States." U.S. military systems depend on a few high-value assets, he added.¹⁰⁵

While the Marine Corps can meet Defence Department Strategic Guidance requirements, there is no margin, and even absent sequestration the service will need recovery years following a decade of war, the service's commandant testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington on January 28. Sequester will exacerbate current challenges and result in fewer active-duty Marine Corps battalions and squadrons, Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. told the Senate panel. Yet, despite budget concerns, the Marine Corps remains ready to help defend the nation and its global interests, Dunford said, with more than 30,000 Marines forward deployed and engaged around the world.¹⁰⁶

In the face of one of the most volatile security environments the United States has faced in decades, the Defence Department's Defence Innovation Initiative seeks to halt the erosion of the nation's military technological superiority, Deputy Defence Secretary Bob Work said on January 28. The initiative, in concert with a new offset strategy, will put "the competitive advantage firmly in the hands of allied capabilities and American power projection over the coming decades," Work said in remarks prepared for delivery at a forum hosted by the Centre for New American Security.¹⁰⁷

Defence Department is moving its data to the cloud, driven by cost reductions, technical efficiencies and security considerations, Acting Chief Information Officer Terry Halvorsen told military and industry leaders gathered in Washington on January 29. Halvorsen's office hosted the first of what it characterized as a series of DoD CIO Cloud Industry Days – meetings intended to promote a continuous, open dialogue with industry that will shape DoD's approach to the business of information technology, or IT, and cyber. Cloud computing is part of a government-wide effort to modernize and streamline government IT, and Halvorsen said that in the early stages of transitioning to the cloud, and moving as much as possible into the commercial cloud, it's important to communicate with defence industry partners.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Pellerin, Cheryl, "Kendall: Sequestration Will Harm U.S. Military Superiority", *DoD News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128067>

¹⁰⁶ Lyle, Amaani, "Marine Corps Commandant Highlights Sequestration's Impact", *DoD News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128062>

¹⁰⁷ Roulo, Claudette, "Offset Strategy Puts Advantage in Hands of U.S., Allies", *DoD News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128064>

¹⁰⁸ Pellerin, Cheryl, "DoD Moves Data to the Cloud to Lower Costs, Improve Security", *DoD News*, January 30, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128083>

International: Asia

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **US, Afghanistan review terrorist threats, security environment; Three US defence contractors shot dead at Kabul airport; Islamic state claims branch in Pakistan, Afghanistan; Pakistani-Afghan cooperation viewed as key to anti-drug efforts; Competent, willing partnerships result in gains against ISIL; Airstrikes continue against ISIL in Iraq, Syria; Freedom House: democratic ideals under threat around globe; US firms concerned about China's new cyber regulations; US, Japan trade negotiators close to striking key deal; Japan, US decry latest beheading by Islamic State; US supports Seoul's outreach to Pyongyang.**

U.S. and Afghan officials have reviewed the status of terrorist threats and the security situation in Afghanistan. During a three-day visit to Afghanistan that ended Monday, assistant to the U.S. President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Lisa Monaco also discussed with Afghan officials regional interests and ways to optimize counterterrorism efforts during the next two years. The U.S. official and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also discussed ways the United States can help strengthen the Afghan security forces in the future.¹⁰⁹

Three U.S. defence contractors helping train Afghan air force personnel were gunned down at the Kabul airport on January 29 in what military sources say was an "insider attack." Details on the killings are scarce. The new international "Resolute Support" mission involving a small contingent of around 12,000 mostly U.S. troops started on January 1 and is to focus on training Afghanistan's national security force. Despite the introduction of new measures, including a requirement that coalition forces be armed at all times and stricter vetting procedures for Afghan security members, incidents continue to occur sporadically.¹¹⁰

Even as the Islamic State was in retreat from Kobani in northern Syria this week, the militant group claimed growing influence farther afield. Fighters loyal to IS said they carried out a deadly attack on January 27 on a hotel in Libya's capital. The day before, an IS spokesman announced the expansion of the self-styled caliphate in South Asia. Abu Muhammad al-Adnani declared in an online message "we bring the mujahideen the good news of the Islamic State's expansion to Khorasan," a reference to the historical region that now encompasses Afghanistan, Pakistan and what Adnani called "nearby lands." Adnani's comments confirmed what Pakistani security analysts view as a growing threat.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ "US, Afghanistan Review Terrorist Threats, Security Environment", *VOA News*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-afghanistan-review-terrorist-threats-security-environment/2613851.html>

¹¹⁰ "3 US Defense Contractors Shot Dead at Kabul Airport", *VOA News*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghanistan-suicide-bombing-targets-funeral/2618555.html>

¹¹¹ Hussain, Iftikhar, "Islamic State Claims Branch in Pakistan, Afghanistan", *VOA News*, January 27, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/islamic-state-claims-branch-in-pakistan-afghanistan/2615944.html>

Increasing counterterrorism and border security cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan has raised hopes for more effective anti-drug regional efforts. Despite significant international investment to counter illicit drug production in Afghanistan, a recent U.N. survey found that the country had seen a surge in areas used for poppy cultivation for a third consecutive year. Pakistani authorities said the increase in Afghan drugs coupled with the withdrawal of the bulk of NATO forces from the war-shattered country posed even a bigger challenge to their counternarcotics efforts.¹¹²

The success of Kurdish forces battling Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists in the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani is an example of what can be done with a reliable, willing and capable partner, the Pentagon press secretary said on January 27. A number of factors led up to January 26th announcement by U.S. Central Command that anti-ISIL forces now control about 90 percent of the embattled town, Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby told reporters.¹¹³

Meanwhile, U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria and Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on February 1.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, the international rights group Freedom House reports that 2014 saw an overall decline in political rights and civil liberties around the world, concluding that democratic ideals are under the greatest threat in 25 years. The group ranked Syria at the bottom and cited violence in Ukraine. 2014 was marked by an explosion of terrorist violence and brutal tactics, according to the international rights group Freedom House, making it an “exceptionally grim” year. In its annual report, released on January 27, the group notes that the decline in democratic ideals spread across the world, with Syria receiving the lowest country score in over a decade.¹¹⁵

U.S. business groups have sent a letter to China’s top security policy body, calling for “urgent discussions” and “dialogue” over new cybersecurity regulations that would force them to hand over technology secrets in order to keep doing business in China. Details of the letter’s contents that were leaked to the media say the new regulations would require technology companies doing business in the financial sector to hand over their source code and adopt Chinese encryption algorithms. More than a dozen U.S. business groups, including the American Chamber of Commerce, issued the letter.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Gul, Ayaz, “Pakistani-Afghan Cooperation Viewed as Key to Anti-Drug Efforts”, *VOA News*, January 27, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/pakistan-afghanistan-cooperation-anti-drug-efforts/2615814.html>

¹¹³ Roulo, Claudette, “Competent, Willing Partnerships Result in Gains Against ISIL”, *DoD News*, January 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128052>

¹¹⁴ “Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Iraq, Syria”, From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, *DoD News*, February 1, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128086>

¹¹⁵ Behn, Sharon, “Freedom House: Democratic Ideals Under Threat Around Globe”, *VOA News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/rights-group-worldwide-democratic-freedoms-at-historic-low/2616397.html>

¹¹⁶ Ide, William, “US Firms Concerned About China’s New Cyber Regulations”, *VOA News*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-firms-concerned-about-chinas-new-cyber-regulations/2618229.html>

Progress on a 12-nation trade agreement has been hindered because the United States and Japan have not been able to reach agreement in two critical market sectors. The two nations figure prominently among ten others working on an agreement that would create a so-called free trade zone comprised of 40 percent of the world's economy. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the leading trade policy initiative of the Obama administration, has been four years in the making and it hinges on Tokyo and Washington sorting out their key differences. Six days of critical talks between Japanese and American officials began on January 26 in New York.¹¹⁷

Japan and the United States have condemned Islamic State extremists for the apparent beheading of a Japanese journalist, hours after a grisly Internet video showed the execution. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called the killing an "inhumane and contemptible act of terrorism" and vowed he would never forgive the killers. In Washington, President Barack Obama described the killing as "heinous murder." The statements came hours after a video purported to show Japanese journalist Kenji Goto kneeling next to a hooded man who was holding a knife to the journalist's throat. The footage, which conforms to other beheading videos posted by the extremists, ends with a picture of a decapitated body.¹¹⁸

Two U.S. diplomatic envoys are in Northeast Asia this week to consult with allies on stalled negotiations with North Korea about its nuclear weapons programme. Washington has been bolstering regional support for maintaining sanctions on North Korea even as it expresses support for Seoul's recent unconditional offer to meet with Pyongyang. After meeting with officials in Seoul, Wendy Sherman, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, said there is no disagreement between the United States and South Korea over how to deal with North Korea. North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the United States began talks in 2003 with the aim of ridding the Korean peninsula of nuclear weapons. Those talks were suspended after Pyongyang launched a ballistic missile.¹¹⁹

India-US Relations

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Obama pledges \$4 billion economic aid to India, but says trade barriers remain; Obama's appearance at India's Republic Day sends message to China; Nuclear deal with Narendra Modi dominates US media coverage of Barack Obama's India trip; US sees role for India in battle against Islamic State; US pleased with 'tangible progress' on key issues with India; China's shadow looms large over Obama visit to India; U.S. and India share sense of unease**

¹¹⁷ Herman, Steve, "US, Japan Trade Negotiators Close to Striking Key Deal", *VOA News*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-japan-trade-negotiators-seen-as-close-to-striking-key-deal/2616415.html>

¹¹⁸ "Japan, US Decry Latest Beheading by Islamic State", *VOA News*, January 31, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/japan-says-hostage-negotiations-deadlocked/2622666.html>

¹¹⁹ Padden, Brian, "US Supports Seoul's Outreach to Pyongyang", *VOA News*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/washington-voices-support-for-seoul-outreach-to-pyongyang/2618030.html>

over China; Barack Obama says US and India can be 'best partners'; India ready to join APEC, US to help; China red-flags India's entry into NSG, may push for Pakistan.

U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged \$4 billion in American investments and loans to India, but said trade between the world's two largest democracies is still marked by "so much untapped potential." On the second day of a three-day visit to India, Obama told a business conference attended by U.S. and Indian corporate executives there are "still too many barriers, hoops to jump through" in completing deals between the two countries. He noted that bilateral U.S.-India trade totals only \$100 billion annually, less than a fifth of American business deals with Chinese companies.¹²⁰

U.S. President Barack Obama joined Indian leaders on the reviewing stand at a military parade in New Delhi on January 26 in a display of strengthened ties between the world's largest democracies as an increasingly assertive China shifts Asia's power balance. The American president's appearance at India's symbolically important Republic Day celebrations came a day after a summit meeting at which the two countries agreed to deepen cooperation on defence and economic development at a time of mounting global tensions. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on January 25 there had been a "transformation" in the two nations' relations, adding: "We are prepared to step forward firmly to accept the responsibility of this global partnership for our two countries and toward shaping the character of this century."¹²¹

The "breakthrough" achieved by India and the US over the landmark civil nuclear deal, six years after it was signed, dominated American media coverage of US President Barack Obama's unprecedented second visit to the country on the invitation of PM Narendra Modi. 'Obama, (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi Say Progress Made on Civil Nuclear Trade', said a headline of *The Wall Street Journal*, while another in *The Washington Post* said 'Obama, India's Modi claim breakthrough on nuclear issues.' *The New York Times* said Obama swept aside past friction with India to report progress on climate change and civilian nuclear power cooperation as he sought to transform a fraught relationship marked by suspicion into an enduring partnership linking the world's oldest and largest democracies.¹²²

India could play a role in battling Islamic State, the White House said on January 26 during a visit to New Delhi by President Barack Obama, underlining Washington's confidence that India is increasingly prepared to engage on global security issues. U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes said India's involvement could focus on intelligence on the flow of money and militants

¹²⁰ "Obama Pledges Economic Aid to India, but Says Trade Barriers Remain", *VOA News*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-is-guest-of-honor-india-republic-day-parade/2613401.html>

¹²¹ Fairclough, Gordon, "Obama's Appearance at India's Republic Day Sends Message to China", *The Wall Street Journal*, January 26, 2015 at http://www.wsj.com/articles/obamas-appearance-at-indias-republic-day-sends-message-to-china-1422245039?mod=wsj_india_main

¹²² "Nuclear Deal With Narendra Modi Dominates Us Media Coverage Of Barack Obama's India Trip", *PTI*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.financialexpress.com/article/industry/nuclear-deal-dominates-us-media-coverage-of-barack-obamas-india-trip/35101/>

to the radical Islamist group active in Syria and Iraq rather than deploying troops on the ground. “When you look at our broader counter-terrorism cooperation and how we’re tracking the flow of fighters and terrorist financing, there I do think we want to find space for cooperation,” he told reporters.¹²³

On January 26, the US said it is “very pleased” with the “tangible progress” on key issues like the civil nuclear deal, defence agreements and clean energy cooperation reached with India during President Barack Obama’s visit to India. “We leave here tomorrow very pleased with both the tangible progress on issues like the civilian nuclear agreement, the defence agreements, the clean energy cooperation, but also I think feeling as if space is open for a much broader US-Indian collaboration on regional and global issues and on trade and commercial relations,” US Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes told American reporters here travelling with Obama. Noting that Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have spent more time together than was initially planned, Rhodes said the close personal relationship between the two leaders is an important asset for India-US relations.¹²⁴

As President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met in New Delhi this week, the shadow of a third player hung over the talks: neighbouring China, which has complicated relationships with both the United States and India. To Obama, forging deeper ties with India fits in neatly with his efforts to deepen U.S. influence in countries on China’s doorstep. And as the world’s largest democracy, India is a particularly attractive partner to the U.S. as it seeks to cultivate a robust regional counterbalance to communist China. Obama’s trip didn’t go unnoticed in China, where foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said U.S.-India relations “could promote mutual trust and cooperation in the region.” But the state-run news agency Xinhua dismissed Obama’s visit as “more symbolic than pragmatic, given the long-standing division between the two giants, which may be as huge as the distance between them.” Commentary in China’s government-controlled media is frequently used as a means of criticizing or casting doubt on the diplomatic moves of other countries.¹²⁵

When President Obama landed in New Delhi for a three-day visit, he brought a long list of issues to discuss, like energy and trade. But when he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India sat down to talk, the first 45 minutes were dominated by just one: China. Mr. Obama and his aides discovered to their surprise that Mr. Modi’s assessment of China’s rise and its impact on the greater strategic situation in East Asia was closely aligned with their own. Just as they did, Mr.

¹²³ “Barack Obama visit: US Sees Role For India In Battle Against Islamic State”, *Reuters*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.financialexpress.com/article/industry/barack-obama-visit-u-s-sees-role-for-india-in-battle-against-islamic-state/35135/>

¹²⁴ “US Pleased With ‘Tangible Progress’ On Key Issues With India”, *PTI*, January 26, 2015 at http://zeenews.india.com/business/news/economy/us-pleased-with-tangible-progress-on-key-issues-with-india_117257.html

¹²⁵ “China’s Shadow Looms Large Over Obama Visit To India”, *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2015 at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/obama-modi-declare-era-of-new-trust-in-us-india-relations/2015/01/25/a084222c-a515-11e4-a162-121d06ca77f1_story.html

Modi seemed increasingly uneasy about China's efforts to extend its influence around the region and interested in a united approach to counter them. He agreed to sign a joint statement with Mr. Obama chiding Beijing for provoking conflict with neighbours over control of the South China Sea. He suggested reviving a loose security network involving the United States, India, Japan and Australia. And he expressed interest in playing a greater role in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, where India could help balance China's influence.¹²⁶

President Barack Obama said the United States could be India's "best partner" on January 27 as he wrapped up a three-day visit to New Delhi by highlighting the shared values of the world's biggest democracies. Speaking to an audience of young people at Siri Fort Auditorium in New Delhi, the US president reiterated that the relationship between Washington and New Delhi "can be one of the defining partnerships of this century" but warned the battle against climate change would be doomed unless India was fully on board. The speech was the finale of a packed visit which has seen a dramatic upturn in an often troubled relationship, including the signing of a new "friendship" declaration between Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "India and the United States are not just natural partners – I believe that America can be India's best partner," said Obama after receiving a rapturous welcome from a group of around 1,500 people. "I'm here because I am absolutely convinced that both our peoples will have more jobs and more opportunity, our nations will be more secure, and the world will be a safer and more just place when our two democracies stand together," Obama said.¹²⁷

India is ready to join APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) and the US has committed to facilitating an Indian membership. This, say Indian and US sources, is key to India's economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region and build Indian dominance of the Indian Ocean region. India's APEC membership should be seen with the US-India decision on Sunday to cooperate in building aircraft carriers for India. This is the more important strategic vision outlined on Sunday, where it says seemingly innocuously, "US welcomes India's interest in joining the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, as the Indian economy is a dynamic part of the Asian economy." India was invited to the APEC summit in Beijing in 2014 by the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, but no invitation to join the grouping was made by the Chinese president. India had said then a membership would have to be supported by the US. On Sunday, the US agreed to help India's case.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Baker, Peter and Harris, Gardiner, "U.S. and India Share Sense of Unease Over China", *The New York Times*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/27/world/us-and-india-share-sense-of-unease-over-china.html>

¹²⁷ "Barack Obama Says US and India Can Be 'Best Partners'", *The Times of India*, January 27, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Barack-Obama-says-US-and-India-can-be-best-partners/articleshow/46027264.cms?prtpage=1>; Pande, Aru, "Obama: America Can Be India's Best Partner", *VOA News* at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-us-india-should-work-together-on-poverty-energy-projects/2614904.html> January 27, 2015

¹²⁸ Bagchi, Indrani, "India Ready To Join Apec, US To Help", *The Times of India*, January 27, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/India-ready-to-join-Apec-US-to-help/pmarticleshow/46024577.cms?prtpage=1>

China on January 26 reacted coldly to strong indications that the United States would back India for a membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, with the Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying cautioning that any such move “requires very careful consideration from all member countries”. “We support the group carrying out discussions on admitting new members, and at the same time we encourage India to take next steps to satisfy the relevant standards of the group,” Hua said, indicating India should first accept the Non-Proliferation Treaty before aspiring for a place in the NSG.¹²⁹

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Tejas achieves yet another technological breakthrough with three consecutive start-ups of its engine; MoD to bring about major changes in the Defence Procurement Procedure and the Defence Production Policy.**

Tejas, the Indian Light Combat Aircraft has achieved yet another milestone with three consecutive start-ups of its engine after overnight soak in extreme cold (around -15°C) conditions of Laddakh winter. Significantly, the feat was achieved without any external assistance. Starting the fighter aircraft under such extreme condition without any external assistance or heating is a technology challenge which the team LCA has successfully accomplished. The engine starter is developed indigenously by HAL and Aero Engine Research and Design Centre (AERDC), Bangalore.¹³⁰

The Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar has said that MoD would be bringing about major changes in the Defence Procurement Procedure and the Defence Production Policy to provide greater autonomy to the Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) units. It will help in their expansion and diversification. The minister also stressed that delegating powers to DPSUs would enable them to take decisions which in turn will improve the serviceability of the platforms available to the Armed Forces.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Dasgupta, Saibal, “China Red-Flags India’s Entry Into NSG, May Push For Pakistan”, *The Times of India*, January 27, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/China-red-flags-Indias-entry-into-NSG-may-push-for-Pakistan/articleshow/46024533.cms?prtpage=1>

¹³⁰ “LCA TEJAS Achieved Yet Another Accomplishment,” *PIB*, January 28, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115007>

¹³¹ “More Autonomy To Be Given in Decision Making to DPSUs and OFBs for Better Performance: Parrikar,” *PIB*, January 30, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115092>

International

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Patriot air defence systems sent by Spain to Turkey deployed at the Adana province of Turkey; Engine failure at take-off led to the last month's deadly crash of the Greek Air Force F-16.**

Reports say that the Patriot air defence systems sent by Spain to Turkey as part of a NATO mission have been deployed at a base in the Adana province of Turkey. Five launchers have been deployed at the base, each equipped with four missiles. The system primarily aims to protect Turkish soil from potential missile threats from neighbouring Syria. The Spanish Patriots, stationed to counter ballistic missile threats, would be kept at the Turkish base for about a year. Some 150 Spanish soldiers also will be stationed in Turkey to operate the system. The NATO alliance has deployed Patriot surface-to-air missiles to Turkey twice before, once in 1991 and later in 2003, during both gulf wars. The current deployment is seen in the backdrop of a potential Syrian missile attack.¹³²

Meanwhile, according to reports, an engine failure at take-off led to the last month's deadly crash of the Greek Air Force F-16, which killed 11 personnel at a NATO air base in Spain. Nine of the personnel lost were French, while the two Greek pilots lost their lives. A crash inquiry has been launched and the F-16's black boxes have been recovered. The F-16 had an engine breakdown at take-off and fell right on top of aircrafts which were getting ready to fly, full of fuel. Among the aircraft hit by the F-16 were two French Alpha jets and two Mirage 2000-D fighters. The pilots were taking part in advanced multinational training in the NATO Tactical Leadership Program, based at the Spanish air base.¹³³

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Kashmir gun battle leaves army commanding officer, 2 militants dead; Three Injured as Pakistan Rangers target Indian posts along IB in Jammu.**

An army officer who was awarded a gallantry medal this Republic Day, a policeman and two Hizbul Mujahideen militants were killed in a fierce gunfight in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama

¹³² "Spanish Patriots Deployed to Southern Turkey," *Defence News*, January 29, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/land/weapons/2015/01/29/turkey-patriot-spain-adana-syria-missile-nato/22517335/>

¹³³ "Mercier: Engine Failure Prompted F-16 Crash," *Defence News*, January 29, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/air-space/strike/2015/01/29/spain-f-16-crash-france-air-chief-mercier-engine-failure/22517145/>

¹³⁴ "Colonel MN Rai, Who Received Gallantry Medal On R-Day, Killed In J-K encounter", *Hindustan Times*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/colonel-who-recieved-gallantry-medal-on-r-day-killed-in-encounter/article1-1311147.aspx>

district on January 27. Colonel M N Rai, commanding officer of 42 Rashtriya Rifles, died in hospital after being hit by bullets at a village in Tral, 36 km from Srinagar.¹³⁴

In yet another ceasefire violation along the international border, Pakistani Rangers on January 29 resorted to small arms firing on border out-posts (BoPs) in R S Pura and Arnia sub-sectors of Jammu district, prompting BSF to retaliate. There has been a half-a-dozen ceasefire violations by the Pakistani forces in the past over one week. On January 27, Pakistani rangers resorted to small arms firing on two to three BoPs in Arnia sub-sector of Jammu district, forcing BSF to retaliate.¹³⁵ Three civilians were injured as Pakistan troops resort to heavy firing, mortar shelling in Arnia and R S Pura sub sectors of Jammu, police said.¹³⁶

Northeast Insurgency

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **Low intensity blasts rock Assam on R- Day; Banglabhashi Yuba Chatra Parishad stages Dharna in Assam; NDFB (S) area commander gunned down, 5 rebels held in Kokrajhar; NIA nabs four more suspects in Burdwan blast case; Two suspected Kuki militants killed in Manipur; Assam and Bhutan discusses border security.**

Suspected militants of banned Ulfa (Independent) triggered two low-intensity blasts in Digboi town in Assam's Tinsukia district on January 26. There was no casualty from the blasts. The first blast took place at around 7.15 am near SBI Digboi branch office and second twenty minutes later near a railway track. After the blasts, Ulfa (I) publicity secretary Arunudoy Asom made telephone calls to several media houses and claimed responsibility of the twin blasts in Digboi. Ulfa (I), Ndfb (S) and KLO- three banned militant outfits of Assam and Cor Com, a conglomerate of seven Manipuri militant outfits have opposed Republic Day celebration in Western South East Asia (as these militants outfits calls northeast region of the country).¹³⁷

Activists of the Banglabhashi Yuba Chatra Parishad staged a two-hour long sit-in dharna at Tinkonia in Tinsukia district of Assam on January 26, demanding a halt to harassments allegedly being meted out to the Hindu Bangla-speaking people of the state in the name 'D' voters. They also demanded that all the cases against the Hindu Bangla-speaking people pending in the tribunal courts should immediately be dropped, reservation of jobs be ensured for the Hindu Bangla-

¹³⁵ "Pakistan Violates Ceasefire In Jammu's Arnia Sector, 3 Persons Injured", *The Times of India*, January 29, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Pakistan-violates-ceasefire-in-Jammus-Arnia-sector-3-persons-injured/articleshow/46058802.cms>

¹³⁶ "Three Injured as Pakistan Rangers Target Indian Posts Along IB in Jammu", *The New Indian Express*, January 30, 2015 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/Three-Injured-as-Pakistan-Rangers-Target-Indian-Posts-Along-IB-in-Jammu/2015/01/29/article2642743.ece>

¹³⁷ Patowary, Digambar, "Two Blasts In Assam On R-Day, No Casualty Reported", *Hindustan Times*, January 26, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/2-blasts-in-assam-on-r-day-no-casualty-reported/article1-1310730.aspx>

speaking youths in government and other sectors, and the names of the Hindu Bangla-speaking people be included in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) unconditionally.¹³⁸

A platoon commander of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB–Songbijit faction), identified as Jornelush Narzary alias Jangkla, was killed in an encounter with security forces on January 28 at Repu Reserve Forest under Kachugaon police station of Kokrajhar. One 7.65mm pistol, four live rounds of ammunition and two grenades were recovered from the slain militant. Meanwhile, two NDFB(S) militants and three over ground workers were apprehended by troops of Red Horns Division and Assam Police in Chirang and Kokrajhar districts. The operation was planned based on specific intelligence provided by the Gajraj Military Intelligence Unit. Among the arrested cadres is Sansuma Brahma alias B Susrwn, a 35th batch Myanmar-trained rebel. One 7.65mm pistol, two-country made revolvers, crude bomb and two hand grenades were recovered during the operations.¹³⁹

The NIA on January 28 arrested four people who were suspected to be hardcore members of the banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) terror outfit and who were also alleged recruiters, taking to 16 the number of people it has nabbed in its probe, reports PTI. The four – Dalim Sheikh alias Faijul Hoque Sheik, Motiur Rehman alias Noor Alam, Habibur Rehman and Ghiyasuddin Munshi – were arrested from different parts of West Bengal. Giving details about the arrest, NIA claimed in a statement that Dalim Sheikh was “full time member” of JMB and was involved in setting up bases and hideouts, raising and collecting funds, radicalising youths and providing tactical and material support to their senior Bangladeshi members of JMB in expanding their network to India.¹⁴⁰

Two suspected Kuki National Front (KNF) members were killed while three others sustained injuries in an alleged encounter with troops of Assam Rifles at Kadangband area in Manipur’s Imphal West district on January 28. However, family members told the media that one of the slain militant Khupneilal was an innocent civilian and secretary of Kangchup Chingkhong Village Authority and Vice President of Kuki Inpi Tuibul Lhang, Kangchup, the sources added. Meanwhile, police claimed that two small arms, 10 detonators and one explosive cake were recovered from the possession of the deceased.¹⁴¹

Top bureaucrats of the governments of Assam and Bhutan participated in the 10th two-day border district coordination meeting which concluded in Bongaigaon on January 29. The meet, among

¹³⁸ “Stir By Banglabhashi Yuba Chatra Parishad”, *The Assam Tribune*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan2815/state054>

¹³⁹ “NDFB (S) Area Commander Gunned Down, 5 Rebels Held”, *The Sentinel*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=216380&dtP=2015-01-30&ppr=1#.VNM6ptKUf4>

¹⁴⁰ “Four More Held For Burdwan Blast”, *The Assam Tribune*, January 29, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan2915/at053>

¹⁴¹ Samom, Sobhapati, “2 Kuki Militants Killed In Manipur”, *The Assam Tribune*, January 30, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan3015/oth050>

other things, discussed law and order on both sides of the India-Bhutan border. The meeting was facilitated by Assam Commissioner and Secretary of Home and Political department, LS Changsan and Sonam Topgay, Director General of Bhutan's Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. The deputy commissioners and the superintendents of police from Baksa, Udalguri, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Kamrup and Bongaigaon districts also participated in the meeting. Assam shares 267 km of border with Bhutan.¹⁴²

Left-wing Extremism

(January 26-February 1, 2015)

- **CRPF opens hospitals in Naxal hotbed; Maoist influence wanes in east-Maharashtra; Maoists go on rampage in Chhattisgarh panchayat polls; NHAI office vandalised in Kochi; Maoist bandh hits train services in Bihar.**

To mark the Republic day, the CRPF inaugurated two first-of-their kind 'battlefield' hospitals in the Naxal hotbeds of Bastar in Chhattisgarh which will provide immediate first aid to injured security forces personnel undertaking anti-Maoist operations as well as locals in the area. The mini combat-support hospital, aided with life sustaining and resuscitation gadgets, are the first operational medical facility for security troops operating in various Maoist-affected states. The hospitals have been housed inside the fortified Central Reserve Police Force camp in both the violence-hit districts in south Bastar.¹⁴³

As the State police and paramilitary forces continued to increase their hold over Maoist areas, particularly in Gadchiroli, for the second year in a row, the red corridor in Maharashtra's east is shrinking. In the past two years (2013-14), some trends have emerged, making evident the state's dominance and the success of its surrender policy. Maoists are surrendering, their casualties increased and in effect, the number of attacks dropped. Eighty-nine Maoists, of different ranks have surrendered so far, while 39 were killed in police encounters during this period. Further, the number of security personnel who died reduced drastically in the last two years, when compared with the first 10 years of the new millennium. The security forces' upper hand is because of their aggressive stance, according to Anup Kumar, inspector general (IG), anti-Maoist operations.¹⁴⁴

During the first phase of panchayat polls in Chhattisgarh on January 28, Maoists looted ballot boxes from around 30 booths in Sukma, Dantewada and Kanker in Bastar, the officials added. Besides, rebels also fired at a polling party in Kanker district. "No injury or causality was reported

¹⁴² "Indo-Bhutan Meet Held", *The Assam Tribune*, January 30, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan3015/state054>

¹⁴³ "CRPF Opens Combat-Support Hospitals In Naxal hotbed of Bastar", *The Economic Times*, January 26, 2015 at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-26/news/58470061_1_bastar-dantewada-chintalnar

¹⁴⁴ Panigrahi, Debasish, "The Maoist Question: All Quiet On Maharashtra's Eastern Front?", *Hindustan Times*, January 27, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai/the-maoist-question-all-quiet-on-maharashtra-s-eastern-front/article1-1311213.aspx>

in the incident," *PTI* quoted inspector general of police (intelligence wing) Deepanshu Kabra as saying.¹⁴⁵

A project office of National Highway Authority of India in Kochi was attacked allegedly by Maoists on January 29. Police have recovered pro-Maoist literature from the office premises. Some of the pamphlets recovered from the office premises have slogans in protest against development of the highways under BOT scheme. In Kerala, the opposition against NH development under BOT scheme was spearheaded by fringe Muslim and ultra-Left outfits. Although mainstream parties have supported widening of the highways into 45-meter width, the government could not go ahead with land acquisition mainly due to the protest from local people and traders.¹⁴⁶

A 12-hour bandh called by Maoists on January 30 halted trains for several hours in Bihar, leaving thousands of passengers stranded. The Maoists called the protest in Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to condemn police action against them. On the night of January 30, a group of armed Maoists broke into the cabin of the Bhaluhi halt in the Naxal-affected Jamui district and asked cabin man Dinesh Arya to stop trains in the Danapaur-Howrah section, said Arvind Rajak, chief public relations officer of East Central Railway. Two dozen trains on the route were stopped for eight hours, he said. Traffic was restored on January 31 morning after CRPF personnel inspected the track and a goods train was run to make sure that the track was safe," said Mr. Rajak. Also, the Maoists blew up a mobile tower at Mananpur in Lakhisarai district on January 31. They also attacked Rani Bazar in Nawada district and beat up several villagers.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Kaiser, Ejaz, "Maoists Go On Rampage In Chhattisgarh Panchayat Polls", *Hindustan Times*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/maoists-go-on-rampage-in-chhattisgarh-panchayat-polls/article1-1311583.aspx>

¹⁴⁶ Philip, Shaju, "Another Maoist attack? NHAI Office In Kochi Attacked, Police Recover Naxal Literature", *The Indian Express*, January 29, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/another-maoist-attack-nhai-office-in-kochi-attacked-police-recover-naxal-literature/>

¹⁴⁷ Tewary, Amarnath, "Maoist Bandh Hits Train Services In Bihar", *The Hindu*, February 1, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/maoist-bandh-hits-train-services-in-bihar/article6844254.ece>