

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **India oks new phase of uplift projects; Security pact with US meaningless; Intelligence chiefs hold anti-terror talks.**

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi on February 1, 2016. Javid Faisal, deputy spokesman for the CEO, told *Pajhwok Afghan News* that Abdullah discussed improved bilateral relations in political, military, cultural and business fields with Modi. A statement from the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi said Abdullah also met Swaraj. The two leaders conferred on various issues of mutual interest. Abdullah and Modi watched as officials from the two countries signed an agreement on visa-free travel for diplomats. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Vikas Swarup tweeted: the two sides agreed on promotion of stronger diplomatic ties. Sushma conveyed Abdullah India's approval of the third phase of developmental projects in Afghanistan. "Strategic partnership would benefit the two people." Abdullah later left for Jaipur to attend a conference on counter-terrorism on February 2. The conference has been organised by the India Foundation in association with Sardar Patel University of Police Security and Criminal Justice.¹

Former President Hamid Karzai criticized the US for lagging in cooperation with the war-hit country in campaign on terrorism, and said endorsement of security pact with Washington is useless while no peace exists. "At a time when there is no peace, inking the security pact with the US doesn't benefit Afghanistan," Karzai told *FNA* on February 3. "We had demanded the US to start the process of peace in Afghanistan more serious and tangible and if the US acted upon its undertakings and the Afghanistan peace process, we would consider the security pact as fruitful," he added. Noting that the US presence in Afghanistan was aimed at fighting against terrorism and extremism, he lamented that the situation in his country exacerbated every day and hopes for establishment of peace in Afghanistan faded out. In September 2014, officials from Afghanistan and the United States signed a long-delayed security agreement to allow American troops to stay in the country after the end of the year, filling a campaign promise by President Ashraf Ghani. Ghani's predecessor, Karzai, had long refused to agree to the deal, souring his ties with the United States. Karzai cited his anger over civilian deaths and his belief that the war was not fought in the interests of his country.²

Pakistan and Afghan intelligence chiefs on February 5 held talks in Islamabad in an effort to boost intelligence sharing and bridge trust gap, official sources said. Lt. General Rizwan Akhtar, the director general of Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence held nearly two-hour talks with Masoud

¹ "CEO Meets Modi: India Oks New Phase of Uplift Projects", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 2, 2016, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=14350

² "Security Pact with US Meaningless without Peace: Karzai", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 4, 2016, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=14371

Andarabi, chief of Afghan National Directorate of Security, the sources said. The meeting was held amid growing interaction between the military and intelligence officials of the two countries after the visit to Islamabad by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in December that also paved the way for the launch of a four-nation mechanism for reconciliation process in Afghanistan. The next quadrilateral meeting of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States will be held in Islamabad. Sources said diplomats during the two previous meetings held in Islamabad and Kabul had suggested the interaction between the Pakistani and Afghan military and intelligence officials to boost cooperation. The meeting of the intelligence chiefs also reviewed options to build trust that is necessary for security cooperation. Senior military officials of the two countries also met in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi on February 4 and both sides "reiterated that terrorists operating on either side of border will not be allowed to use their soil for any terrorist activity on either side of the border." An army statement said both sides expressed resolve to continue the interaction for better military to military coordination.³

Pakistan

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Seminaries sealed under NAP; Official spells out efforts to export defence products; Pakistan ready to share its counter-terror expertise with others.**

Acting under the National Action Plan (NAP), law-enforcement agencies have so far sealed 182 religious seminaries in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa because of their involvement in promoting extremism and other suspicious activities. As part of the strategy to choke terror financing, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has so far frozen Rs1 billion in 126 accounts which have a link to banned militant organisations. Law-enforcement agencies have also recovered around Rs251 million in cash. The money was traded through Hawala and Hundi. Data shows that the government has recovered Rs19.77 million from suspects involved in the 2004 'Chowk Yadgar Operation' in Peshawar. The government has put names of 8,195 people in the fourth schedule and 188 on the Exit Control List. Movement of 2,052 hardcore militants has been restricted. Similarly, the government has registered 1,026 cases and arrested 230 terror suspects. There were 64 banned organisations in the country while 74 have been declared unlawful by the United Nations. Activities of some organisations are constantly being monitored and their activists are under surveillance. With regard to hate speech, over 1,500 books and other hate material have been confiscated and 73 shops have been sealed. Law-enforcement agencies have registered 2,337 cases for hate speeches and material and arrested 2,195 people.⁴

Major General Agha Masood Akram, director general of the Defence Export Promotion Organisation (DEPO), said on February 1 that Pakistan was trying to access the international defence products market to enhance its exports and have a reasonable degree of foothold in the international market. "This goal is being achieved by providing technologically compatible and cost-effective solutions, thereby expanding the consumer base," Akram told a gathering at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) on February 1. The LCCI had invited the

³ "Pak, Afghan Intelligence Chiefs Hold Anti-Terror Talks", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 6, 2016, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=14381

⁴ "182 Seminaries Sealed under NAP", *Dawn*, February 1, 2016, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1236704/182-seminaries-sealed-under-nap>

DEPO to organise an exhibition in Lahore on the pattern of IDEAS, which would help highlight the potential of Pakistan's defence production industry. LCCI Senior Vice President Almas Hyder, Vice President Nasir Saeed and executive committee members were also present. Akram said the defence production industry of Pakistan had made a momentous technological and innovative advancement and a special attention was being paid to the export of defence products. He said that Pakistan had the ability to meet its domestic defence needs and cater to the needs of the world. He said the international community was surprised at the achievements made by Pakistan in the defence field. He informed the participants that as a national platform the DEPO was providing active support to the national defence manufacturing/service sector and the export chain through facilitation, coordination and promotion for a sustainable growth of defence exports. Akram said the DEPO was facilitating and promoting export of defence products and coordinating marketing efforts with the defence manufacturing sector by setting up Pakistani pavilions at the international exhibitions abroad and holding IDEAS in Pakistan. He said the DEPO, in collaboration with Pakistan's defence production sector (both public and private), was committed to providing a progressive response to developments in the world and meeting today's technological needs with tomorrow in mind.⁵

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif visited the National Counter-Terrorism Training Centre (NCTC) in Pabbi on February 4 and witnessed the Pakistan-Sri Lanka-Maldives exercise, an Inter-Services Public Relations press release said. The two-week 'Eagle Dash-I' exercise was focused on counter-terrorism operations and sharing of field combat experiences of three armed forces. Owing to successes achieved by Zarb-i-Azb military operation, a large number of friendly countries have requested Pakistan Army to organise training for their troops at the NCTC, which is equipped with latest facilities. The Pakistan Army has so far conducted exercises with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, China and Jordan to enhance their combat efficiency. Pakistani troops have also imparted counter-terrorism training to police and other law-enforcement agencies of all four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir. The army chief congratulated the participants of the exercise for displaying high level of professionalism and combat skills.⁶

Bangladesh

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Bangladesh foreign secretary makes bilateral visit to India; Bangladesh foreign secretary summons Pakistani envoy; Prime Minister Hasina addresses South Asian speakers' summit on achieving the SDGs.**

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Md. Shahidul Haque, made a two-day bilateral visit to New Delhi at the invitation of his Indian counterpart Dr. S. Jaishankar. The two Foreign Secretaries met on February 1, 2016 and discussed the whole range of bilateral issues including security and peace; water resources management; power and energy sector cooperation; trade, business and investment; development cooperation; sub-regional cooperation; connectivity; regional and multilateral cooperation, and people-to-people contact. The duo took stock of the progress of the

⁵ "Official Spells Out Efforts To Export Defence Products", *Daily Times*, February 2, 2016, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2016-02-02/page-3/detail-7>

⁶ "Pakistan Ready To Share Its Counter-Terror Expertise With Others: COAS", *Dawn*, February 5, 2016, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1237501/pakistan-ready-to-share-its-counter-terror-expertise-with-others-coas>

implementation of the Joint Declaration issued by the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India in June 2015.⁷

Acting Foreign Secretary Rear Admiral (Retd) Khurshed Alam summoned Pakistani envoy Shuja Alam and handed over a strongly worded note in Dhaka on February 2, a day after a staff member of Bangladesh High Commission in Islamabad, Jahangir Hossain, personal officer at the press wing of the Bangladesh High Commission, went missing for seven hours.⁸

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the speakers and parliamentarians of South Asia for allocating budgets to enable the countries for the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). "As a key institution of democracy, parliaments have an important role to play in making the SDGs a success. Practical steps need to be taken to advance the integration of the goals at the national level and monitor progress," Hasina said in her address in the closing session of the first-ever South Asian speakers' summit on achieving the SDGs at a city hotel in Dhaka on January 31.⁹

Sri Lanka

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **India will support President Sirisena's vision for Sri Lanka – President Mukherjee; External Affairs Minister of India Sushma Swaraj visits Sri Lanka; Sri Lanka to implement a five-year plan to monitor and combat human trafficking; Sri Lanka Navy participates in International Fleet Review 2016; Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for South Asia Michael Delaney visits Sri Lanka; IMF advises Sri Lankan Government to take urgent measures to narrow fiscal deficit; Sri Lanka central bank liberalises foreign currency accounts.**

Indian President Pranab Mukherjee said that India, as a close friend and neighbour, would support President Maithripala Sirisena's vision for Sri Lanka. Extending greetings to Sri Lankan Government and its people on Independence Day Anniversary on February 4, President Mukherjee said "it gives me immense pleasure to extend warm felicitations and best wishes to Your Excellency and to the people of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on the occasion of the 68th Anniversary of your Independence."¹⁰

External Affairs Minister of India, Sushma Swaraj, led an inter-ministerial delegation to Colombo from February 5-6, 2016 for the 9th Session of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission. She co-chaired the Joint Commission meeting on February 5, 2016 with her Sri Lankan counterpart Mangala Samaraweera. The Joint Commission meeting, which was held after a gap of three years, reviewed the progress and developments in bilateral relations since the 8th Session held on January 22, 2013. On February 6, 2016, Minister Swaraj inaugurated the exhibition "Rise of Digital India" at the

⁷ "Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Meets His Indian Counterpart in New Delhi", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, February 2, 2016, at <http://www.mofa.gov.bd/media/bangladesh-foreign-secretary-meets-his-indian-counterpart-new-delhi>.

⁸ "Dhaka Hands Protest Note To Islamabad", *The Daily Star*, February 2, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/politics/pakistan-envoy-summoned-211324>.

⁹ "PM for Speakers' Role in SDGs", *The Daily Star*, February 1, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/pm-speakers-role-sdgs-210460>.

¹⁰ "India will Support President Sirisena's Vision for Sri Lanka – President Mukherjee", *PMD News*, February 4, 2016, at <http://www.pmdnews.lk/india-will-support-president-sirisenas-vision-sri-lanka-president-mukherjee/>.

BMICH, which showcases advances made by India in the information technology and the digital revolution over the years. During her visit, Minister Swaraj called on President Maithripala Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. She also met Leader of Opposition, R. Sampanthan, as well as representatives of the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress and Indian Origin Tamil parties.¹¹

The Sri Lankan government has received approval from the Cabinet of Ministers to implement a five-year plan to monitor and combat human trafficking. Sri Lanka has ratified the UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children (Palermo Protocol) in 2015. The National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, recognising the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to combat the serious offence of human trafficking, has developed a five year national strategic plan to monitor and combat human trafficking. Accordingly, the Cabinet has approved the 'National Strategic Plan to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking 2015-2019' presented by the Minister of Justice Wijayadasa Rajapakse.¹²

Commander of Sri Lanka Navy Vice Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne represented Sri Lanka at the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2016 held in India from February 4-8, 2016. A 275-member Sri Lankan delegation, led by Vice Admiral Wijegunaratne, and Sri Lanka Navy's Flag Ship SLNS Sayura took part in the second IFR organised by the Indian Navy and hosted by the Eastern Naval Command in the Bay of Bengal off Andhra Pradesh. International Fleet Review 2016 is an international military exercise hosted and conducted by Indian Navy on behalf of the President of India. Its objective is to enhance mutual trust and confidence with neighbouring navies by inviting their ships to participate in the event.¹³

Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for South Asia Michael J. Delaney visited Colombo and met with Minister of Development Strategy and International Trade Malik Samarawickrema and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Public Enterprise Development, the Board of Investments, the Department of Commerce, and the Prime Minister's office ahead of the upcoming Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) talks in Washington.¹⁴

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff mission, concluding a five-day visit to Sri Lanka on February 5, 2016, advised the Sri Lankan Government to urgently make a stronger effort to narrow the fiscal deficit and put the public finances on a sustainable path although recent economic performance has been positive in a number of respects. The IMF staff mission visited Colombo from February 1-5 to discuss recent economic developments and policies for the year ahead. The team met with government and Central Bank officials, as well as representatives of academia, civil society and the private sector. The team issued a statement at the conclusion of its visit, where it mentioned "Recent economic performance has been positive in a number of respects. Real GDP growth of 5.2 per cent in the first three quarters of 2015 was achieved in the context of continued

¹¹ "Visit of Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj to Colombo, February 5-6, 2016", *High Commission of India, Colombo, Press Release*, February 6, 2016, at <http://www.hcicolombo.org/press.php?id=584>.

¹² "Sri Lanka To Implement a Five-Year Plan To Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking", *ColomboPage*, February 5, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Feb05_1454691275CH.php.

¹³ "Sri Lanka Navy Participates in International Fleet Review 2016", *ColomboPage*, February 6, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Feb06_1454735692CH.php.

¹⁴ "Top US Official and Lanka Have Talks on Labour Issues", *Colombo Gazette*, February 2, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/02/02/top-us-official-and-lanka-have-talks-on-labor-issues/>.

low inflation. Most sectors have shown positive growth, with particularly robust activity in tourism. Benefiting from low oil prices, the external current account balance has also narrowed to an estimated 2 per cent of GDP by end-2015, compared with 2.6 per cent in 2014. However, the government fiscal deficit for 2015 is estimated to have exceeded the original budget target. Based on the budget framework for 2016, IMF staff estimates suggest the fiscal deficit could widen further. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's public debt has risen to over 74 per cent of GDP by end-2015. Despite the narrowing of the current account, capital outflows have intensified and the overall balance of payments deteriorated. These outflows were accompanied by downward pressure on the rupee and a decline in central bank gross foreign exchange reserves mainly due to short-term capital outflows as experienced in many emerging markets. The mission has advised the government to urgently make a stronger effort to narrow the fiscal deficit and put the public finances on a sustainable path. The mission urged the authorities to take a growth and investment friendly approach to lowering the size of the 2016 budget deficit focusing mainly on measures to raise revenues by broadening the tax base, simplifying and making equitable the tax system, and improving tax administration, to lay the groundwork for further consolidation and debt reduction while also allowing for higher public investment.¹⁵

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka announced on February 5 that it has eased the restrictions on remitting and transacting foreign currencies with immediate effect. "Foreign currencies can henceforth be remitted out of NRFC, RFC and RNNFC accounts and FEEA for any purpose and prior approval need not be obtained for such remittances," the Central Bank said in a statement. The measure has been taken to turn Sri Lanka into an international financial centre. Up to US\$ 10,000 or its equivalent can be withdrawn in cash from such accounts for any purpose. Earlier money withdrawals were allowed for certain purposes like to meet education or medical expenses.¹⁶

Maldives

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Maldivian chief of defence force meets Indian Navy chief; European Parliamentary delegation visits Maldives; Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon attends the Chinese New Year celebration in Male; Former President Nasheed meets with Secretary General of Common Wealth; A high-level Maldivian delegation visits Colombo and Singapore.**

Chief of Defence Force of Maldives, Major General Ahmed Shiyam, made an official visit to India, and met with Chief of Naval Staff of India Admiral Robin Kumar Dhowan. During the meeting held at Visakhapatnam Eastern Naval Command on February 7, the two officers talked about the strong diplomatic ties between the two countries, and discussed ways to improve military ties. Shiyam noted the huge help provided by Indian Government in training Maldivian officers, and thanked the Indian government for it. Shiyam was in India to join the biggest fleet review in history of Indian Navy from February 4-8, 2016.¹⁷

¹⁵ "IMF Advises Sri Lankan Government to Take Urgent Measures to Narrow Fiscal Deficit", *ColomboPage*, February 5, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Feb05_1454684810CH.php.

¹⁶ "Sri Lanka Central Bank Liberalizes Foreign Currency Accounts", *ColomboPage*, February 5, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Feb05_1454652564CH.php.

¹⁷ "Chief of Defence Force Meets Indian Navy Chief", *SunOnline*, February 7, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36136>.

A delegation from European Parliament arrived in Maldives on February 7 upon invitation of Maldivian Government. The delegation said that they were hopeful that Maldives would resolve issues and develop democratic values so that sanctions against the country would not be necessary. Speaking during a press conference held at Hotel Jen on February 9, British representative for European Parliament Richard Cobbett said that they did not want to have to press sanctions against Maldives. Cobbett said that the purpose of the European Parliament delegation's visit to Maldives was to prove that they wanted to hear everyone's voices and open a genuine dialogue with everyone in order to develop democratic values in the country. The delegation said that all political parties and government officials had been open for discussion. The delegates met with President Abdulla Yameen, Foreign Minister Dhunya Maumoon and Environment Minister Thoriq Ibrahim, as well as all political parties and civil societies in the country.¹⁸

Foreign Minister, Dunya Maumoon attended a function to celebrate the Chinese New Year at Hotel Jen on February 1, 2016. Speaking at the function, Minister Dunya said that the Maldives is a good destination for investors. Minister Dunya said that the Maldives has policies that assure guarantees to investors and foreign partners. She said that those policies empower the country's sustainability at the international community. The Chinese Ambassador to the Maldives, Wang Fukang also spoke at the ceremony saying that the interactions between the people of China and the Maldives are increasing and is enriching the relationship between the two countries.¹⁹

Former President Mohamed Nasheed, who is currently in the UK for a spine surgery, met with the Secretary General of the Common Wealth, Kamlesh Sharma. Former First Lady Laila Ali and the MDP Chairperson Ali Waheed joined the former President at the meeting. President Nasheed announced the meeting on his official Twitter account.²⁰

A high-level Maldivian delegation comprised of Minister for Legal Affairs at the President's Office, Uza Aishath Azima Shakoor, Minister of Environment and Energy, Thoriq Ibrahim, Minister of Tourism, Moosa Zameer and Under Secretary at Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Ali Naseer Mohamed visited Sri Lanka and Singapore From January 28 to February 1, 2016 to brief the local and International media operating in Colombo and Singapore about the current issues in the Maldives. The Maldivian delegation also met and briefed the High Commissioner of the United Kingdom, the Ambassador of Germany and Charge d'affaires of America in Colombo on the recent developments in the country.²¹

¹⁸ "Delegates from European Parliament Arrive in Maldives", *SunOnline*, February 7, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36139>. "European Parliament: Hopeful for Democratic Development So Sanctions Will Not Be Necessary", *SunOnline*, February 9, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36197>.

¹⁹ "Dunya: Chinese Investors Come to Maldives Because the Government Is Good", *SunOnline*, February 1, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36059>.

²⁰ "Ex-President Nasheed meets with Secretary General of Common Wealth", *SunOnline*, February 1, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36050>.

²¹ "Maldives Team Briefs International Media in Singapore", *The Presidency, Republic of the Maldives*, February 1, 2016, at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=16384>. "Maldives Team Briefs Sri Lanka's Media", *The Presidency, Republic of the Maldives*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=16385>.

B. East Asia

China

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Xi Jinping and Park Geun-hye have a telephonic conversation; Chinese outpost in Djibouti to help peacekeeping missions; China and Cambodia hold the third meeting of China-Cambodia Inter-Governmental Coordination Committee; 10,000 special troop to help in keeping the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor safe; New Command Centres for the PLA.**

Chinese President Xi Jinping had a telephonic conversation with the President of South Korea Park Geun-hye on February 5. During the conversation Xi asserted that the Korean Peninsula can, “neither be nuclearized nor have warfare and unrest”. He also added that China is completely committed to the idea of de-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. In response Park said that, “said the ROK expects close coordination by the international community and expects the UN Security Council to respond as soon as possible to effectively tackle the current situation on the Korean Peninsula”.²²

Chinese Foreign Ministry told the *China Daily* on February 4 that, “China’s first overseas naval logistics support outpost – expected to be built in Djibouti – is needed to handle difficulties encountered by Chinese peacekeeping fleets”. In addition the Foreign Minister of Djibouti Mahamoud Ali Youssouf told the *Reuters*, “We understand that some Western countries have worries about China’s willingness to have military outposts outside of China”.²³

China and Cambodia held the third meeting of China-Cambodia Inter-Governmental Coordination Committee in Beijing on February 4. During the meeting Liu Zhenmin, Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister said that China will be helping the ASEAN countries to maintain peace in Southeast Asia. Liu further argued that, “China and Cambodia have agreed that the South China Sea issue should be properly handled by China and ASEAN countries”.²⁴

According to a senior Pakistani diplomat, Syed Tariq Fatemi, Pakistan has agreed to set up a special force of around 10,000 troops to protect the Chinese people and enterprises along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Fatemi added, “We have decided to create a special force of highly trained military people who will be specially equipped and will have special organizations in concerned ministries backing them”.²⁵

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army has been overhauled and divided into five new command centres. The new areas are Eastern Theatre Command, Southern Theatre Command, Western Theatre Command, Northern Theatre Command and Central Theatre Command. Xi Jinping presented flags to the top officers from the newly established command areas. He said that, “the

²² “Xi: Korean Peninsula Should Not Have Warfare or Unrest”, By Zhang Yunbi, *China Daily*, February 6, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/06/content_23414804.htm, accessed on February 8, 2016

²³ “Outpost in Djibouti ‘To Help Fleets’”, By Zhang Yunbi/Wang Xu, *China Daily*, February 5, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/05/content_23401903.htm, accessed on February 8, 2016

²⁴ “China and Cambodia Agree Approach To South China Sea Issue”, By Wang Qingyun, *China Daily*, February 4, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/04/content_23399371.htm, accessed on February 8, 2016

²⁵ “Special Troops To Help Keep China-Pakistan Corridor Safe”, By Wang Xu, *China Daily*, February 2, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/04/content_23385711.htm, accessed on February 8, 2016

five theatre commands are responsible for dealing with security threats in their respective strategic fields, maintaining peace, containing wars and winning wars, noting their pivotal role in safeguarding the country's overall national security and military strategies".²⁶

Japan

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Prime Minister Abe joined the 2016 National Rally demanding the return of the Northern Territories; Japanese response to North Korea's Ballistic Missile Launch; Japan signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement; Japan-Iran Investment Agreement signed.**

On February 7, Prime Minister Abe joined the annual National Rally demanding the return of the Northern Territories in Tokyo. February 7 is celebrated as the Northern Territories Day in Japan. Abe stressed that "I must say it is extraordinary that this issue has not been resolved over the 70 years since the end of World War II"²⁷ and reiterated his resolution to tirelessly work toward a resolution of the Northern Territories issue through dialogues at the summit level. Addressing the rally, Abe underscored that during his conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, both countries agreed to hasten coordination of schedules so that he can visit Russia at a suitable time prior to President Putin's trip to Japan.

Japanese foreign ministry registered protest against North Korea's ballistic missile launch through the North Korean Embassy in Beijing on February 7. The statement called it wholly unacceptable and stressed that such development is in violation of successive United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, and against the spirit of the Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks of 2005. Japanese foreign minister Fumio Kishida, later held telephone meetings with seven foreign ministers of South Korea, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, Italy, Malaysia, and the U.S. to coordinate carefully in reacting to the development. As the G7 Chair and a non-permanent member of the UNSC, Japan urged Pyongyang to truly implement the UNSC resolutions and the Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks.²⁸

On February 4, Japan signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement together with representatives from 11 other participating nations in Auckland. State Minister of Cabinet Office, Shuichi Takatori, signed it on behalf of Government of Japan. TPP Agreement endorses liberalization of trade in goods and services and investment in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁹

During Iranian Economic Affairs and Finance Minister, Ali Talebnia's visit to Japan, Agreement between Japan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investment was signed on February 5. The objective is to further protect and promote investment between the two countries. It specifies the treatments rendered to investment activities and investments when an enterprise of a contracting party invests in the other, for example national

²⁶ "PLA Overhauls Regional Command System To Improve Joint Capability", By Zhao Lei and Zhang Yunbi, *China Daily*, February 2, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/02/content_23348897.htm, accessed on February 8, 2016

²⁷ "2016 National Rally to Demand the Return of the Northern Territories", *Kantei*, February 7, 2016 at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/actions/201602/07article1.html

²⁸ "Response to the Ballistic Missile Launch by North Korea", *MOFA*, February 7, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001032.html

²⁹ "Signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement", *MOFA*, February 4, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001013.html

treatment, most-favoured-nation, fair and equitable, observance of undertaking, prohibition to impose or enforce special requirements including export requirement, conditions for expropriation and compensation, free transfers requirements and procedures for dispute settlements.³⁰

The Korean Peninsula

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **North Korea fired a long-range rocket from the Dongchang-ri; Russia registers opposition against THAAD; South Korea pledged to intensify efforts to increase exports.**

On February 7, North Korea fired a long-range Unha-type rocket from the Dongchang-ri launch site. Earlier on February 2, Pyongyang notified U.N. agencies regarding the launch of a satellite sometime between 8 and 25 of the same month. However, on February 6, International Maritime Organization was intimidated of North Korea's strategy to advance the launch date between February 7 and 14.³¹ The rocket seemingly circled the Kwangmyongsong-4. While Pyongyang tried to push it as a weather satellite to develop meteorological science, observers stressed that this development reflects the state's capabilities and intents to develop longer-range ballistic missiles.³² On February 7, South Korean President Park Geun-hye, condemning the launch, set up a meeting of the National Security Council including Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, Defence Minister Han Min-koo, Unification Minister Hong Yong-pyo and Director of the National Intelligence Service Lee Byung-ho to deliberate how to respond to this development.³³ President Park called it an "unacceptable provocation" and urged the UNSC to rapidly impose tough sanctions on Pyongyang.³⁴ Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se reached out to US Secretary of State John Kerry and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and shared assessments of the North Korean situation.³⁵ The UNSC pledged to impose new sanctions in response.

Reports in the South Korean media suggested that Russia is against positioning of an advanced U.S. missile defence system, Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system (THAAD) in South Korea. This is of the reason that such step could destabilize the region's security. Seoul has considered introducing THAAD in reaction to North Korea's latest nuclear test. Besides Russia, China have articulated disapproval to this idea since it would imply even better U.S. military presence in the region. Authorities argued that "Russia believes that the deployment of THAAD to

³⁰ "Signing of the Japan-Iran Investment Agreement", *MOFA*, February 5, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001016.html

³¹ "Chronology of North Korea's missile, rocket launches", *Yonhap*, February 7, 2016 at <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2016/02/07/0200000000AEN20160207002300315.html>

³² "Thomas Karako, 2016 North Korea's February 2016 Satellite Launch", February, 2016 at <http://csis.org/publication/north-koreas-february-2016-satellite-launch-0>

³³ "Park Holds NSC Meeting Over N. Korea's Rocket Launch", *Yonhap*, February 7, 2016 at <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2016/02/07/0301000000AEN20160207001800315.html>

³⁴ "(4th LD) N. Korea Launches Long-Range Rocket", *Yonhap*, February 7, 2016 at <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2016/02/07/0200000000AEN20160207004500315.html>

³⁵ Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se Speaks by Phone with his Japanese Counterpart in the wake of North Korea's Long-range Missile Launch, *MOFA*, February 7, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/press/pressreleases/index.jsp?menu=m_10_20

South Korea will not be helpful to peace and security in Northeast Asia nor to the resolution of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.”³⁶

South Korea trade and industry minister, Joo Hyung-hwan pledged to intensify efforts to increase exports which are important for economic growth following its outbound shipments plunged 18.5 percent year-on-year to US\$36.7 billion in January. He stressed that international slowdown and dropping crude prices are having a negative influence on South Korea.³⁷

C. Southeast Asia and Oceania

ASEAN

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **ASEAN-India partnership to boost Asian voice: Hamid Ansari.**

A stronger partnership between the ASEAN countries and India will boost Asia's voice in global governance, Vice President Hamid Ansari said on February 4. “It is evident that a stronger ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)-India partnership would give us a stronger voice on global governance issues,” Mr Ansari said while delivering a lecture on “India, Thailand and ASEAN: Contours of a Rejuvenated Relationship” at Chulalongkorn University. “The time is ripe for our common engagement for bringing greater equity into the international order,” he said. “ASEAN members and India have similar aspirations to have an open trading system through global organisations like the WTO. We have also shown a strong commitment, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, as we take up our own role to address issues related to climate change”. “India places ASEAN at the core of the Act East policy and at the centre of our dream of an Asian century,” he said. “There is a special emphasis on India-ASEAN cooperation in our domestic agenda on infrastructure, manufacturing, trade, skills, urban renewal, smart cities and Make in India programmes,” he stated. “Connectivity projects, cooperation in science and technology development and people-to-people exchanges are to be the springboard for regional integration and co-prosperity.” The vice president said that the three Cs of commerce, culture and connectivity defined the future focus areas of cooperation between ASEAN member states and India. “With mutual trade and investment opportunities arising from the realisation of the ASEAN Economic Community and India’s emphasis on ‘Make in India’, ‘Digital India’, ‘Skill India’ and ‘Smart Cities’ initiatives, we are confident that India-ASEAN commercial partnership will flourish”. Mr Ansari said that India was open to offer ASEAN its indigenously developed GPS Aided Geo Augmented Navigation (GAGAN) services, which provide advanced navigation and location assistance and information facilities. Regarding connectivity, the vice president said that special efforts were being made to develop a coherent strategy, particularly for linking ASEAN with northeast India. “This is reflected in the finalisation of negotiations on the India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicles Agreement and ASEAN-India Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement. ASEAN-India Civil Aviation Task Force is expected

³⁶ “Russia Alarmed by S. Korea-U.S. Contacts Over THAAD: Ambassador,” *Yonhap*, February 2, 2016 at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/03/205_197084.html

³⁷ “South Korea Vows All-Out Efforts To Boost Exports”, *The Korea Times*, February 3, 2016 at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/03/120_197159.html

to oversee optimisation of air connectivity. Other major projects on connectivity include the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project and Rhi-Tiddim road," he said.³⁸

Southeast Asia

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Suu Kyi allies form Myanmar ruling party after decades of struggle; Myanmar new parliament elects speaker of House of Representatives; Indonesia deploys vessel on first ever overseas voyage; Biggest US-Malaysia arms deal in 20 Years: Kuala Lumpur to receive new attack helicopters; Thailand, Malaysia to increase military cooperation; Fifth Russian-made Kilo submarine arrives in Vietnam.**

Hundreds of lawmakers from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy were sworn into Myanmar's parliament on February 1, with enough seats to choose the country's first democratically elected government since the military took power in 1962. The NLD won some 80 percent of elected seats in November's historic vote, catapulting it to power as Myanmar's ruling party after decades of struggle that saw many of its members imprisoned. The first sitting of the NLD-dominated parliament is another step in Myanmar's drawn-out transition, which started with the election and will go on until the NLD government officially begins its term in April after parliament has picked a president.³⁹

Myanmar's new parliament February 1 elected U Win Myint of the National League for Democracy (NLD) as Speaker of the House of Representatives (Lower House) and U Ti Khun Myat of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) as Deputy Speaker of the House. The election took place at the first session of the parliament that began a new five-year term from 2016. U Win Myint, an NLD MP to the House of Representatives from Patheingyi constituency in the last term of the parliament, was re-elected to the same House from Tammwe constituency in the 2015 general election. U Ti Khun Myat is a Kachin ethnic parliament representative elected from Kutkai constituency representing the USDP. Speaking at the session after being sworn in as the House's Speaker, U Win Myint said that the day was an honourable day for democratic transition in the political history of Myanmar, vowing to strive for gaining basic human rights for the people of the country. He urged all stakeholders to cooperate in thriving democracy system, promoting people's right, and building a genuine democratic federal union.⁴⁰

The Indonesian navy (Tentera Nasional Indonesia – Angkatan Laut, or TNI-AL) deployed the multipurpose hospital ship KRI *Dr Soeharso* (990) on a week-long medical care mission to neighbouring Timor-Leste. Indonesia's Eastern Fleet (KOARMATIM) Command spokesman Lt. Col. Maman Sulaeman said that the trip was the first overseas mission carried out by the vessel. "This health mission is the first carried out by KRI SHS-990 abroad in cooperation with the ministry of defence," he said. The ship arrived in the port of Dili on January 29 and will complete its mission on February 4. The ship, which has a crew of a few hundred medical mission personnel from all three branches of the Indonesian armed forces, is equipped a helicopter, five operation

³⁸ "ASEAN-India Partnership To Boost Asian Voice: Ansari", *The Statesman*, February 4, 2016, at <http://www.thestatesman.com/news/india/ASEAN-india-partnership-to-boost-asian-voice-ansari/121221.html>

³⁹ McLaughlin, Timothy and Zaw, Hnin, "Suu Kyi Allies Form Myanmar Ruling Party After Decades of Struggle", *Reuters*, February 1, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/myanmar-politics-parliament-idUSKCN0V909U>

⁴⁰ "Myanmar new parliament elects speaker of House of Representatives", *Xinhuanet*, February 1, 2016, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-02/01/c_135063981.htm

rooms, six polyclinics, and 51 specialists ready to serve more than 2,000 patients. The ship is prepared to provide a range of medical services including cataract removal and dental treatment. Upon arrival in Timor-Leste, the ship was greeted with a welcome ceremony, including a dance of Checuvo from the Los Palos district in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste's defence minister Serilio also offered some remarks before he and his wife toured the facilities to be used in the mission.⁴¹

Malaysia's Ministry of Defence selected U.S.-based aircraft maker MD Helicopters to supply six MD 530G scout attack helicopters to the Army Aviation branch, Pasukan Udara Tentera Darat (PUTD), of the Malaysian Army. Delivery of the helicopters is slated to begin at the end of 2016 with the full fleet scheduled for delivery in the first quarter of 2017. The contract is the biggest U.S.-Malaysian arms deal since Kuala Lumpur placed an order for eight F/A-18DS fighter aircraft in June 1993. The new helicopters will be deployed in the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM), an area that covers 1,400 kilometres of coastline in Malaysia's easternmost state of Sabah between the towns of Kudat and Tawau, where it will perform attack, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and security missions in support of the Malaysian Army's operations.⁴²

Malaysia and Thailand agreed to increase military cooperation, especially in countering terrorism, Thai Defence Ministry spokesman Maj Gen Kongcheep Tantrawanich said. Malaysian navy chief Adm Kamarulzaman Ahmad Badaruddin paid a call on Deputy Defence Minister Gen Udomdej Sitabutr at the Defence Ministry on February 3. He said that Gen Udomdej welcomed the increased cooperation, which would be through exchanges of visits of military leaders, training and education programmes, and joint sea and air reconnaissance. Gen Udomdej stressed the need for ASEAN member countries to work together to solve the problems of illegal fishing, human trafficking, illegal migration and terrorism. Malaysia had already set up a cyber team to create awareness and understanding of terrorism within its military, and was ready to share its experience with Thailand and exchange information.⁴³

A freighter carrying the fifth Kilo-class submarine made by Russia for Vietnam arrived at Cam Ranh gulf in Vietnam's south central coastal Khanh Hoa province, some 1,040 km south of capital Hanoi on February 2. The submarine, which was made under the contract between Vietnam and Russia to build six of its kind, would be released into the sea after several days. The submarine was nearly 74 meters in length with displacement of 3,000-3,950 tons. It was able to operate at a maximum depth of 300 meters and at a speed of 20 nautical miles per hour with 52 crew members on board. The Kilo-class submarines are named after major cities and provinces of Vietnam. Earlier, the country received four of them, namely HQ-182 Hanoi, HQ-183 Ho Chi Minh City, HQ-184 Hai Phong and HQ-185 Khanh Hoa. The four submarines were handed over to Submarine Brigade 189 under the Vietnamese Navy.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Parameswaran, Prashanth, "Indonesia Deploys Vessel on First Ever Overseas Voyage", *The Diplomat*, February 2, 2016, at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/indonesia-deploys-vessel-on-first-ever-overseas-voyage/>

⁴² Gady, Franz-Stefan, "Biggest US-Malaysia Arms Deal in 20 Years: Kuala Lumpur to Receive New Attack Helicopters", *The Diplomat*, February 2, 2016, at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/biggest-us-malaysia-arms-deal-in-20-years-kuala-lumpur-to-receive-new-attack-helicopters/>

⁴³ Nanuam, Wassana, "Thailand, Malaysia To Increase Military Cooperation", *Bangkok Post*, February 3, 2016, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/850540/thailand-malaysia-to-increase-military-cooperation>

⁴⁴ "5th Russian-made Kilo Submarine Arrives in Vietnam", *ShanghaiDaily*, February 3, 2016, at http://www.shanghaidaily.com/article/article_xinhua.aspx?id=318687

Oceania

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **TPP officially signed, promising benefits for Asia Pacific citizens.**

Trade and economy ministers from 12 countries signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the biggest trade deal in history, in Auckland, New Zealand on February 4. Pacific Rim nations joining the pact are Canada, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Australia, the United States, Japan and Viet Nam. The TPP aims to slash tariffs and trade barriers for 40 per cent of the global economy. It is set to create a free trade area with 800 million consumers and 30 per cent of global trade revenue. Besides regulating trade of goods and services and investment, the 6,000-page deal also provide rules related to issues such as intellectual property, labour, e-commerce and State utility enterprises. Addressing the event, New Zealand Prime Minister John Key affirmed that the agreement, by liberalising and facilitating trades across Asia Pacific, would bring about the best benefits for all member countries and their citizens. In a joint statement, the ministers said that the conclusion of the TPP was an important milestone, which opened up a new phase in implementing a pact that is considered a "historic achievement" for the region. The countries will have the next two years to complete domestic procedures, including the ratification by their parliaments, before the agreement enters into force. The agreement can take effect only with the approval of at least six countries, which account for at least 85 per cent of the combined gross domestic product of all member nations. This means that it needs to be adopted by the parliaments of the two largest TPP economies, the US and Japan.⁴⁵

India and Southeast Asia

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **India offers its retired soldiers to guard Brunei; 'Tremendous potential for India, Brunei in hydrocarbon sector': Hamid Ansari; India, Thailand have laid Roadmap for boosting ties: Hamid Ansari; India, Thailand firm up maritime cooperation.**

With Sultanate of Brunei's territorial dispute with China showing no signs of ending, India offered the services of its retired soldiers to the tiny island nation to augment its armed forces. Brunei, so far, has been dependent on British military support, especially in the form of soldiers. If accepted, Indian hands could replace British forces in Brunei. On February 2, an agreement on defence cooperation was inked between Vice-President Mohammad Hamid Ansari and senior representatives of the Sultanate. While the agreement only talked about boosting defence ties by conducting joint military exercises and bilateral cooperation through exchange of visits, experience, information, training and cooperation between the defence industries, India offered to provide the services of retired officers and soldiers, particularly of the Gurkha Regiment, to Brunei. However, no final decision was taken on February 2 on the matter. Defence cooperation between India and Brunei already exists in the form of naval ship visits, training of senior military officers in staff colleges and exchange of experience. The framework agreement seeks to institutionalize this cooperation. Brunei is a British protectorate, with British forces stationed here at the request of the Sultan. Last year, the agreement between the UK and Brunei was renewed for

⁴⁵ "TPP Officially Signed, Promising Benefits for Asia Pacific Citizens", *Viet Nam News*, February 5, 2016, at <http://vietnamnews.vn/economy/282141/tpp-officially-signed-promising-benefits-for-asia-pacific-citizens.html>

another five years. Meanwhile, other MoUs signed during Ansari's visit included an agreement on health cooperation that will involve exchange of doctors, other professionals and experts, besides regulation of pharmaceuticals, medical devices and cosmetics. Ansari has also talked about setting up a fertiliser plant in Brunei.⁴⁶

India and Brunei also discussed Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea which has the potential to affect free maritime traffic in Southeast Asia. "Brunei briefed us on the negotiation under way for the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. India supports a negotiated settlement of Brunei's maritime dispute with China," said Mr. Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs. Brunei's main port, Muara — one of the main ports in Southeast Asia through which the bulk of the country's oil and gas exports to India take place — is in the South China Sea region and will become a major component of India's growing maritime partnership with Brunei. Mr Wadhwa said that the part of South China Sea that Brunei claims is largely "unexplored" and might contain hydrocarbon reserves vital for the country's economy.⁴⁷

Vice President Hamid Ansari on February 3 said that as India embarked on a sustained high growth trajectory, its increasing energy requirements offered Brunei an opportunity to enhance export of hydrocarbons to New Delhi. India, he said, was also keen to work with Brunei in setting up a fertilizer plant that would make use of the hydrocarbon resources available in Brunei. Delivering a speech at the University of Brunei on the topic 'India-Brunei: Partners in Peace and Prosperity', Mr. Ansari said, "The growing Indian economy also provides us with an opportunity to move beyond the typical energy seller-buyer relationship. There is tremendous potential to diversify and do value-addition in the hydrocarbon export chain". Mr Ansari said that the historical and cultural linkages between Brunei and India dating back to the third century had "given us the confidence to forge a strong and abiding relationship in modern times". He thanked Brunei for its assistance to and cooperation with India's space programmes through the Telemetry Tracking and Tele command Station of ISRO in Brunei. "The station was a crucial component in India's spectacular success in deploying the Mangalyaan in orbit around Mars," he said. He appreciated the support extended by Brunei in making India a full dialogue partner of ASEAN. Ansari noted the government's policy towards South-East and East Asia from 'Look East' to 'Act East' which indicated India's resolve to move with a great sense of priority to intensify cooperation in security, trade, investment, connectivity and strengthening people-to-people linkages with ASEAN countries. "Enhancing connectivity between India and ASEAN in all its aspects - physical, institutional and people-to-people, is a key strategic priority for us. Our North-Eastern region is our land-bridge to the ASEAN," he said. "Our excellent bilateral ties with our ASEAN partners, which are largely sans irritants, have laid a strong foundation for our Act East Policy," he said. India is working on drafting the ASEAN-India Plan of Action for the period 2016-2021, to translate the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership Vision into concrete action for greater progress and prosperity. The Vice President thanked Brunei for playing a constructive role in deepening of India's engagement with ASEAN. "As Brunei prepares for greater integration into the ASEAN

⁴⁶ Chhibber, Maneesh, "India Offers Its Retired Soldiers To Guard Brunei", *The Indian Express*, February 3, 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-offers-its-retired-soldiers-to-guard-brunei/>; and, "Economic and geo-political centre of gravity of the world has shifted towards the Asia-Pacific: Vice President Addresses Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok", *PIB*, February 4, 2016, Release ID :136080, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx>

⁴⁷ Bhattacharjee, Kallol, "India, Brunei Discuss South China Sea Dispute", *The Hindu*, February 3, 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/india-brunei-discuss-south-china-sea-dispute/article8185345.ece>

community, India will continue to steadfastly support Brunei in assuming its rightful place in the comity of nation, as a dependable friend and partner".⁴⁸

On defence issues, he said that Indian naval ships had visited Brunei and naval ships from Brunei had participated in joint exercises. "This has laid the grounds for deepening our cooperation in the defence sector, including by training of defence personnel in various fields," he said. Talking about the growing threat from militancy, Mr Ansari said that the scourge of terrorism was a challenge for all peace loving countries of the world. "We are determined to combat this menace with strong cooperation from like-minded countries. We would be keen to expand our cooperation with Brunei in combating global terrorism, particularly preventing financing of terrorism through sharing of information," he said. He added that India would be open to explore closer ties with Brunei in coastal security and disaster preparedness. India and Brunei cooperate on many issues in international bodies, including in the UN and the Commonwealth. On climate change, he said that India had a long tradition of harmonious co-existence between man and nature. "We represent a culture that calls our planet Mother Earth. It is therefore natural for India to be at the forefront of dealing with managing the adverse impact of climate change in the spirit of common but differentiated responsibilities," the Vice President said.⁴⁹

India and Thailand on February 3 laid a roadmap for further strengthening bilateral ties including in defence as the two countries expressed their shared interest in securing international sea lanes, amid flexing of muscles by China in the South China Sea. Vice President Hamid Ansari held talks with Thai Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha and said that he saw a "very promising future for our bilateral relation". Mr Ansari said that there was much untapped potential in the bilateral relationship and much to rediscover and learn from each other's culture, industry and society. "With its unique geographic location, Thailand can be a bridge linking South East Asia to East Asia; while India can act as your springboard to West and Central Asia and to Europe". "Our talks earlier today have put in place a roadmap for further strengthening our economic cooperation and intensification of our collaborations in all areas," he said. In a speech at a banquet hosted by premier Prayut in his honour in Bangkok, Mr Ansari termed challenges of this century as "enormous" which merit common understanding and joint efforts as he pointed out that "globalisation of terrorism, impact of climate change on humanity and the health hazards which know no borders require global action". "The international community is grappling with issues related to migration and integration of people," he said, adding: "Our cultures with a civilisational heritage of peace, pluralism and co-existence in can offer lessons and lasting solutions." "People-to-people contacts at various levels are the lifeblood of our friendship. I am pleased that our two countries have taken important steps in the pursuit of closer cooperation, stronger connectivity and greater commerce," he said.

Terming India and Thailand as natural partners, linked by history, geography and the close contacts between our two peoples, he said that his visit was a manifestation of the desire "we had to deepen the flow of ideas, people to people contacts and bilateral trade between our lands".

⁴⁸ "Tremendous Potential for India, Brunei in Hydrocarbon Sector", *Business Standard*, February 3, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/tremendous-potential-for-india-brunei-in-hydrocarbon-sector-116020300181_1.html

⁴⁹ "India, Brunei have Equal Stakes in Asian Neighbourhood: Hamid Ansari", *The Economic Times*, February 3, 2016, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-02-03/news/70314189_1_india-and-brunei-bandar-seri-shared-asian-neighbourhood

Appreciating the Thai government's commitment to imparting greater momentum to the relations between the two countries, he said, "My visit is taking place at a time when our bilateral relations can be described as excellent. We greatly appreciate the role of His Majesty the King in nurturing these relations; just as the idea of Buddhism, though germinating in India, has been nurtured in this land". He said that Thailand was an important pillar of India's 'Act East' policy and a valued partner and New Delhi admired the way Thailand had brought progress to its industrious people by making great strides in socio economic development. "We are both engaged in transforming our ancient lands in to modern knowledge economies. India is a bright spot with the highest economic growth amongst the larger emerging countries". "There is growing interest from across the world in building partnerships of trade, investment and innovation with India. I would urge the government and business community in Thailand to avail of the opportunities provided by a growing India," he said. Mr Ansari added that Mr Prayut's scheduled visit to India this year will further enhance this "vibrant and mutually beneficial" cooperation. "Next year, India and ASEAN will mark the 25th anniversary of their Dialogue Relations. We look forward to working with you under the framework of ASEAN. We shall strive to strengthen the India-ASEAN partnership, as also the BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation," he said.⁵⁰

India's Vice-President Hamid Ansari on February 3 told the leadership of Thailand that India-Thailand collaboration was necessary to ensure freedom of navigation and connectivity in the Southeast Asian region. "As maritime neighbours, we have a shared interest in the security of international sea lanes of communication and commerce. Our resolve to strengthen our bilateral engagement in the areas of security and defence will help the region as a whole and promote regional economic integration and connectivity," Mr. Ansari said while addressing the state banquet hosted in his honour by the Thai Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha. During the ongoing tour of Southeast Asia, the Indian delegation led by Mr. Ansari expressed Indian concerns about freedom of navigation in the region due to growing maritime disputes between China and several other regional countries over South China Sea. "Our position on resolving the South China Sea dispute is well known and we want it to be settled peacefully. Thailand has been the country coordinator of ASEAN-China relations and took useful steps towards solving the dispute. We hope Singapore, too, [the current coordinator] will take similar steps," said Mr. Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs. Mr. Wadhwa further added, "We confirmed that India will participate in Cobra Gold 2016 [multilateral amphibious exercise] and Operation Maitri [counter-insurgency] operations". India and Thailand recently held a joint task force meeting in Delhi to deepen maritime and defence cooperation which covers a range of issues, including ocean safety, disaster management and anti-terror drills. The delegations also confirmed that India and Thailand will soon hold naval exercises in the Andaman Seas. That apart, both sides agreed to fast track the ongoing trilateral land corridor project connecting Thailand-Myanmar and India. These bilateral and multilateral infrastructure and security projects will receive further boost in the coming months when the entire top brass of the Thai leadership, including Prime Minister Gen. Chan-o-cha, is expected to visit New Delhi.⁵¹

⁵⁰ "India, Thailand Have Laid Roadmap For Boosting Ties: Hamid Ansari", *NDTV*, February 3, 2016, at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-thailand-have-laid-roadmap-for-boosting-ties-hamid-ansari-1273377>

⁵¹ Bhattacharjee, Kallol, "India, Thailand Firm Up Maritime Cooperation", *The Hindu*, February 4, 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/india-thailand-firm-up-maritime-cooperation/article8189936.ece>

D. Russia

National

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Bank of Russia expects recession in the Russian economy to continue; Russia's oil export down by 0.7 per cent in January 2016 to 20.7 million tonnes; Flu epidemic hits 90 per cent of Russia's regions; Russia's Economic Development Minister urges privatisation to tackle the ongoing economic crisis; Most Russian regions see population decrease in 2015; Economic Development Minister says Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement is a challenge for the Russian economy.**

The Bank of Russia has said, on February 3, that the recession in the Russian economy is likely to continue in the near future. It stated 'industrial production statistics for December 2015 shows that production decline continues on the whole across main kinds of economic activity. This evidences concerns that the decline in the Russian economy will last longer than assumed earlier. The primary reason is the decline in oil prices in the coming months'. It added that Russia's budget deficit amid US\$ 35 per barrel oil price will grow to 4.8 per cent of GDP.⁵²

Russia's crude oil export equalled 20.71 million tonnes in January 2016 - a 0.7 per cent or 903,400 tonnes decrease year-on-year, according to the documents published by the Central Dispatching Department of Fuel Energy Complex. Meanwhile, local crude oil refining totalled 23.515 million tonnes in January - a 3.7 per cent decrease year-on-year. Also, crude oil production rose by 1.5 per cent or 693,300 tonnes in January 2016 to 46 million tonnes. Bashneft kept its leading position among Russian oil majors in terms of crude output (10.2 per cent increase year-on-year to 1.753 million tonnes), followed by Gazprom Neft (4.9 per cent increase to 4.714 million tonnes) and Tatneft (4.4 per cent increase to 2.357 million tonnes). Rosneft and Lukoil cut production by 0.9 per cent and 2.9 per cent - to 16.912 million tonnes and 7.173 million tonnes, respectively.⁵³

Approximately 90 per cent of Russia's regions have been hit by a flu epidemic that has so far killed over 120 people. The Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights has said, on February 2, that the epidemic threshold has exceeded the red lines in 74 out of 85 Russian regions.⁵⁴

Economic Development Minister Alexey Ulyukayev has, on February 2, called for privatisation of state enterprises in order to cover the growing budgetary deficit. He stated 'in 2014-2015, the market fell and continued to fall, while we were waiting for the situation to change. Now we realized that there is nothing else to wait for. The budget situation is very critical, the general turbulence of the financial markets does not give reason to expect some rebound, recovery. Now, the challenge is to hold effective and transparent privatization deals in the extremely unfavourable market'.⁵⁵

⁵² "Recession in Russian Economy To Continue — Bank of Russia", *Itar-Tass*, February 3, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/854326>

⁵³ "Russia's Oil Export Down 0.7% in Jan to 20.7 mln Tonnes — Statistics", *Itar-Tass*, February 2, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/853981>

⁵⁴ "Flu Epidemic Affects 90% of Russia", *Itar-Tass*, February 2, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/society/853877>

⁵⁵ "Russian Minister Urges Privatization Due To Crisis", *Itar-Tass*, February 2, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/853828>

Fifty-three out of Russia's 85 federal subjects saw their populations drop in 2015. In 2015, the number of regions with a shrinking population increased from 46 to 53 — the biggest jump since 2000, when Vladimir Putin first became President. Russia's population of Russia as of Jan. 1, 2016 stands at 146.52 million people, which is 0.17 per cent more than a year ago but less than in January of 2000, when the number of Russian residents was estimated at 146.89 million. In 2014, Russia added two new regions to its list of federal subjects — Crimea and Sevastopol — with a total population of 2 million people.⁵⁶

Economic Development Minister Alexey Ulyukayev has said, on February 2, that the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement presents a challenge to the Russian economy. He stated 'this is a strong challenge from the United States - the Trans-Pacific. It is a revolution in not only the global trade, but in the general system of world coordinates. We either walk fast, run in that direction, or will be left on the side-lines. The choice is very simple and close attention should be paid to the issue'.⁵⁷

Russia: International

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Russia to train another 1,000 specialists for Tajik army at 201st military base; Russian Foreign Minister lays emphasis on single Syrian opposition delegation; Russia content with cooperation with Israel over military operation in Syria; Austria says Nord Stream 2 will ensure more stable gas supplies to Europe; Putin and Merkel discuss Ukraine; Russia to counter U.S. military build-up in Europe; European Union says the return of Crimea necessary for lifting of Russian sanctions; Foreign Minister Lavrov says Russia will not forget Turkey 'aiding terrorists'; Russia sees 'no sense in modernising arms control deal due to NATO military activity'; Russia, Iraq, Iran and Syria agree to choke the finances of the Islamic State (IS); Foreign Minister Lavrov visits UAE.**

Russian Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov has said, on February 3, that another thousand junior specialists of the Tajik army will undergo training at Russia's 201st military base in Tajikistan. He added that about 560 Tajik servicemen are currently studying at Russian Defence Ministry institutes for free. He had earlier stated that Russia will provide maximum assistance to Tajikistan with military hardware and equipment deliveries.⁵⁸

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has, on February 4, laid emphasis on the need to have a single Syrian opposition delegation. He stated 'without the list of terrorists and forming a unified platform by the Syrian opposition the Syria Support Group may turn from a working body into a discussion club'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "Most Russian Regions See Population Decrease in 2015", *The Moscow Times*, February 3, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/most-russian-regions-see-population-decrease-in-2015/558364.html>

⁵⁷ "Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement Challenges Russian Economy — Minister", *Itar-Tass*, February 2, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/853841>

⁵⁸ Russia to Train Another 1,000 Specialists for Tajik Army at 201st Military Base", *Itar-Tass*, February 3, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/854298>

⁵⁹ "Lavrov Stresses Importance of Single Syrian Opposition Delegation", *Itar-Tass*, February 4, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/854431>

Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko has said, on February 3, that Russia is content with the level of cooperation with Israel over the military operations in Syria. Ms. Matviyenko made these statements after a meeting with Israel's parliamentary speaker Yuli-Yoel Edelstein.⁶⁰

Austrian Vice-Chancellor Reinhold Mitterlehner has said, during a meeting with Russia Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev held on February 3 in Moscow, that the Nord Stream 2 project will ensure more stable gas supplies to Europe. He stated 'we should ask ourselves whether we can jointly implement the Nord Stream 2 project in order to ensure more stable gas supplies to Europe and deepen our contacts'. Meanwhile, Russian Economic Development Minister Alexey Ulyukayev and Vice-Chancellor of Austria Reinhold Mitterlehner have agreed to jointly promote the Nord Stream 2 project.⁶¹

Russian President Vladimir Putin has discussed the situation in Ukraine with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in a telephone conversation held on February 2. The Kremlin press service stated that the two leaders 'continue active joint work in the framework of the Normandy format including holding a meeting of foreign ministers in the nearest days'. It also stated that 'the problems of settling the crisis situation in Ukraine was discussed. The sides expressed mutual interest in ensuring sustainable peace on the contact line, and the lack of alternatives to full-scale implementation of the Minsk Agreements from 12 February 2015 was stressed'.⁶²

The Russian Foreign Ministry has said, on February 4, that Russia will take "compensatory measures" in response to U.S. plans to expand its military presence in Europe. The U.S. is planning to allocate US\$ 3.4 billion in 2017 to strengthen European security amid fresh calls in Washington to bolster NATO defences against a possible Russian invasion of the three Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. A recent report by RAND Corporation claimed that numerous war games and studies looking into NATO's current ability to defend the Baltics against a Russian assault found that Moscow could take the region in just three days, leaving NATO unable to respond without sparking a nuclear war.⁶³

The European parliament has, in a resolution passed on February 4, said that the return of the Crimean Peninsula to Ukraine is one of the necessary conditions for lifting sanctions against Russia. Previously, EU leaders had said that the lifting of sanctions depended only on the complete fulfilment of the Minsk agreements, aimed at eliminating conflict in eastern Ukraine. The document also said that an "unprecedented level" of human rights violations had been perpetrated against Crimean residents, especially against Crimean Tatars. The resolution was supported by 472 EU deputies, while 79 deputies voted against it.⁶⁴

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said, on February 4, that Russia will not forget Turkey's role in 'aiding terrorists'. He stated 'Russia has repeatedly expressed concerns about the terrorist threat in

⁶⁰ "Russia Content With Cooperation With Israel Over Military Operation in Syria", *Itar-Tass*, February 3, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/854280>

⁶¹ "Austrian Vice-Chancellor: Nord Stream 2 will Ensure More Stable Gas Supplies To Europe", *itar-tass*, february 3, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/854213>

⁶² "Putin and Merkel Discuss Ukraine — Kremlin", *Itar-Tass*, February 2, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/853916>

⁶³ "Russia Vows To Compensate For U.S. Military Buildup in Europe", *The Moscow Times*, February 4, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-vows-to-compensate-for-us-military-buildup-in-europe/558686.html>

⁶⁴ "EU Says Crimea Return Necessary for Lifting Russia Sanctions", *The Moscow Times*, February 4, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/eu-says-crimea-return-necessary-for-lifting-russia-sanctions/558693.html>

Turkey and the unwillingness of the Turkish authorities to cooperate in the fight against terrorists. However, Turkey has refused to detain and hand over Russian citizens traveling through Turkey to the Middle East and North Africa to join extremist groups'.⁶⁵

Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov has said, on February 5, that Russia does not see sense in modernising the Vienna document on arms control due to the anti-Russian direction of the NATO drills and due to the curbed military contacts between NATO and Russia. He added that if the dialogue on arms control in Europe resumes, the control mechanism should be different from the one used under CFE (Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe).⁶⁶

Heads of financial intelligence services of Russia, Iraq, Iran and Syria have, on February 4 in Moscow, agreed to fight together against financing the Islamic State (IS) terrorist organization.⁶⁷

Russian Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov has visited the UAE wherein he met Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and held talks with UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. They discussed developments in Syria, bilateral cooperation and the situation in the global oil market.⁶⁸

India-Russia Relations

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Russia completes delivery of military helicopters to India; NIIF and Rusnano sign MoU to invest in high technology projects.**

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has received the remaining helicopters purchased from Russia. A total of 151 military transport Mi-17V-5 helicopters were delivered as a part of the contract. This was stated by the CEO of Russian Helicopters Alexander Mikheev on February 2.⁶⁹

India's maiden sovereign wealth fund NIIF has, on February 3, signed an agreement with Russia's Rusnano OJSC to set up a fund that will invest in high technology projects in India. Both NIIF and Rusnano will establish a joint working group with a view to further develop cooperation and work on the development of the definitive agreements. The High Technology Private Equity Fund will invest in projects in India. The MoU follows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia on December 23-24, 2015, during which discussions were held between NIIF and Rusnano. Rusnano is a Russian development institute with interest in projects in the field of high technologies and defence including the projects aimed at establishment of manufacturing industrial enterprises in India.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ "Russia Won't Forget Turkey 'Aiding Terrorists' – Lavrov", *The Moscow Times*, February 4, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-wont-forget-turkey-aiding-terrorists--lavrov/558683.html>

⁶⁶ "Moscow Sees No Sense In Modernising Arms Control Deal Due To NATO Military Activity", *Itar-Tass*, February 5, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/854725>

⁶⁷ "Financial Intelligence of Russia, Iraq, Iran, Syria Agree To Fight Financing IS Together", *Itar-Tass*, February 5, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/854495>

⁶⁸ "Russia's Lavrov, UAE Leadership To Discuss Situation in Syria, Oil Market", *Itar-Tass*, February 5, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/853811>

⁶⁹ "Russia Completes Delivery of Military Helicopters To India", *RT*, February 2, 2016 at <https://www.rt.com/business/330996-india-russia-helicopters-deals/>

⁷⁰ "NIIF, Rusnano Sign MoU to Invest in High Technology Projects", *Live Mint*, February 3, 2016 at <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/2yCORuYkyWEPwE1xXXtonJ/NIIF-Rusnano-sign-MoU-to-invest-in-high-technology-projects.html>

E. West Asia

Iran

(January 18-31, 2016)

- **US to pay Iran \$1.7 billion in debt and interest: Kerry; Iran, China to increase trade ties to \$600 billion in ten years and Iran to establish tourism offices in China.**

The United States is to repay Iran a \$400 million debt and \$1.3 billion in interest dating to the Islamic revolution, Secretary of State John Kerry. The repayment, which settles a suit brought under an international legal tribunal, is separate from the tens of billions of dollars in frozen foreign accounts that Iran can now access after the end of nuclear sanctions. But the timing of the announcement, one day after the implementation of the Iran nuclear accord, will be seen as pointing to a broader clearing of the decks between the old foes. US President Barack Obama defended the settlement in a televised statement from the White House, saying it was for “much less than the amount Iran sought.”⁷¹

Iran will establish three tourism offices in China by the end of 2016, Iran’s tourism chief Masoud Soltanifar said in an interview with the China Central Television, *CCTV*. The offices will introduce Iranian tourist attractions to Chinese people and offer vacation packages to those who want to travel to the country, he explained. Alongside, the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that a new chapter has been opened in relations with China, predicting that the value of trade ties between the two countries would reach 600 billion dollars in 10 years. The remarks by Rouhani came as he held high-profile talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Tehran.⁷²

Iraq and Syria

(January 18-31, 2016)

- **Iran calls Iraq to implement the “border treaty”; Sajjan: Canada to withdraw from international coalition’s operations; Syria, DPRK to enhance bilateral cooperation; Syria supports the One- China principle.**

The Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran Ali Shamkhani called Iraq to implement the “border treaty,” while pointed out that the treaty will work on the development of the economy in the border areas of the two countries. The *Fars news* agency quoted Shamkhani as saying: “The ongoing Iraqi success in the face of terrorism is the fruit of political and national cohesion and wisdom of the leadership as well as the steadfastness of the resistance of the people,” noting that, “The implementation of the nuclear deal and ending some restrictions on

⁷¹ “U.S. To Pay Iran \$1.7 Billion in Debt and Interest: Kerry”, *Tehran Times*, January 20, 2016 at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=252340. Accessed on February 15, 2016

⁷² “Iran, China to Increase Trade Ties to \$600 billion in Ten Years”, *Tehran Times*, January 24, 2016 at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=252417. Accessed on February 15, 2016 and “Iran to Establish Tourism Offices in China”, *Tehran Times*, January 23, 2016 at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=252409. Accessed on February 15, 2016

foreign relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran would pave the way for new steps at the level of regional and international cooperation."⁷³

The Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan said that the international coalition should stop its air strikes against ISIS and start to rely on ground operations to eliminate the presence of the ISIS organization. Sajjan said in a statement followed by *IraqiNews.com*, "A ground campaign – not airstrikes – should be regarded as the priority right now," asserting that, "It has to be the Iraqi boots on the ground ... if you don't have the boots on the ground, you cannot win."⁷⁴

Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi discussed with Jang Myong Hu, the ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in Damascus ways of enhancing cooperation between the two countries and the latest developments in the region. Reviewing the developments of the situation in Syria, al-Zoubi said that the Syrian Army is progressing in the war against terrorism, adding that the coming days "will witness military achievements", *SANA* reported. For his part, DPRK Ambassador said that Syria is a friendly country of DPRK, affirming that his country will spare no effort to support Syria in all domains.⁷⁵

Syria renewed its commitment to the One-China principle, stressing its firm position against any attempts at interference in China's internal affairs, a Foreign and Expatriates Ministry official source said. In a statement, published by *SANA*, the source added that commenting on the local elections held lately in Taiwan, the Syrian government affirms that Taiwan authorities should respect and abide by their commitments to the 1992 Consensus. It is important that the officials of Taiwan "avoid provocative attitudes and statements that are not in the interest of the Chinese citizens in this region and do harm to the friendly relations with the motherland," added the statement. It noted that attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of the People's Republic of China contravene the objectives and principles of the UN Charter.⁷⁶

Israel and Palestine

(January 18-31, 2016)

- **Sudan says willing to consider normalizing ties with Israel; IDF deploys artillery battery on Gaza Border.**

In a new sign of shifting allegiances in the WANA region, Sudan's foreign minister said recently his country is prepared to discuss ending decades of hostility with Israel and to consider normalising ties. Speaking on January 14 about an American move to demand Sudanese normalization of ties with Tel Aviv as a precondition for lifting sanctions on Khartoum, Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour said Sudan was open to the idea. "We don't mind to study any such

⁷³ "Iran Calls Iraq To Implement The "Border Treaty"", *Iraqi News*, January 18, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/iran-calls-iraq-implement-border-treaty/>. Accessed on February 13, 2016

⁷⁴ "Sajjan: Canada To Withdraw from International Coalition's Operations", *Iraqi News*, January 18, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/canada-to-withdraw-from-coalitions-operations/>. Accessed on February 13, 2016

⁷⁵ "Syria, DPRK to Enhance Bilateral Cooperation", *Syria Times*, January 21, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/21790-syria-dprk-to-enhance-bilateral-cooperation>. Accessed on February 15, 2016

⁷⁶ "Syria Supports the One- China Principle", *Syria Times*, January 19, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/21760-syria-supports-the-one-china-principle>. Accessed on February 16, 2016

proposal," he said, according to Sudanese reports. But, he added, relations with the US were separate from relations with Israel and other countries.⁷⁷

The Israeli army recently deployed an artillery battery on the border with the besieged Gaza Strip, an Israeli army spokesperson confirmed. The spokesperson told Ma'an that the battery arrived on the border on January 18, although she was unable to specify where it had been deployed. Israeli media reported the deployment to be an unusual move, suggesting that in recent years, artillery battery have typically been deployed near Gaza ahead of escalating hostilities. Earlier this month, a Gazan was killed and three seriously wounded when Israeli artillery bombarded an alleged "terrorist cell" east of Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip.⁷⁸

The Gulf

(January 18-31, 2016)

- **Exports from Kuwait- Saudi Oil fields 'to resume'; Kerry says US-Saudi friendship stronger than ever.**

Kuwait's emir has said operations and exports from oil fields jointly operated with Saudi Arabia will resume soon, local media reported. "The will soon be a resumption of operations and exports in joint oil fields. No matter what happens, we don't have a disagreement with Saudi Arabia and even if there is one, it will be resolved," Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah was quoted as saying by Al Rai newspaper. The Al Khafji oilfield has been shut since October 2014 for non-compliance with new Saudi environmental standards. It is operated by Al Khafji Joint Operations Co, a joint venture between AGOC, a subsidiary of state oil firm Saudi Aramco, and Kuwait Gulf Oil Co.⁷⁹

US Secretary of State John Kerry reassured Saudi Arabia of the "solid relationship" between both countries, even after the lifting of sanctions on the kingdom's regional rival Iran. "We have as solid a relationship, as clear an alliance, and as strong a friendship with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia as we've ever had," Kerry said before departing Riyadh for Laos at the end of a 24-hour visit. "Nothing has changed because we worked to eliminate a nuclear weapon with a country in the region," he added. "We will continue to work in the region with our friends and our allies." Kerry has long sought to calm concerns among Washington's Gulf allies about the overtures to Iran, whose relations with Saudi Arabia have worsened this month.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ "Sudan Says Willing to Consider Normalizing Ties with Israel", *Times of Israel*, January 21, 2016 at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/sudan-said-willing-to-consider-normalizing-ties-with-israel/>. Accessed on February 16, 2016

⁷⁸ "IDF Deploys Artillery Battery on Gaza Border", *The Palestine Chronicle*, January 21, 2016 at <http://www.palestinechronicle.com/idf-deploys-artillery-battery-on-gaza-border/>. Accessed on 1 March 2016

⁷⁹ "Exports from Kuwait- Saudi Oil Fields 'To Resume'", *Gulf News*, January 21, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/exports-from-kuwait-saudi-oil-field-to-resume-1.1657716>. Accessed on March 1, 2016

⁸⁰ "Kerry Says US- Saudi Friendship Stronger Than Ever", *Gulf News*, January 24, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/kerry-says-us-saudi-friendship-stronger-than-ever-1.1658725>. Accessed on March 1, 2016

India and West Asia

(January 18-31, 2016)

- **After West Asia, the extended neighb'd calls! EAM @SushmaSwaraj leaves for 1st India Arab Ministerial in Bahrain; India must consider troops for West Asia: Ex NSA.**

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on January 23, 2016, left to attend the first ever Ministerial meeting between India and the League of Arab States Foreign Ministers in Bahrain. Ministry of External Affairs official spokesperson Vikas Swarup tweeted: After West Asia, the extended neighb'd calls! EAM @SushmaSwaraj leaves for the 1st India Arab Ministerial in Bahrain.⁸¹

With much at stake in West Asia, India must rethink its strategy and extend military support for peace in that region, even as it cannot have a single firm policy on Pakistan, former national security advisor Shiv Shankar Menon has said. "Our approach and behaviour should change in defence of our interests in West Asia," Menon said in a lecture hosted by the Society for Policy Studies (SPS) at the India Habitat Centre, listing the compelling reasons as its seven million citizens working there, the \$35 billion inward remittances and large oil imports, among others.⁸²

F. The United State of America

National

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Department intent to realign the Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Agency under the Defence Threat Reduction Agency; University teams present innovative campaigns to challenge extremism; Keeping war fighters safe from infectious diseases and chemical agents; U.S. economy had a net gain of 151,000 jobs in January; Marines are the beating heart of readiness; Civilian and military personnel will begin receiving Internal Revenue Service. Democratic presidential candidates Clinton and Sanders held a tense and angry debate; Republican candidates talked tough on foreign policy and launched fierce attacks on their rivals.**

The Office of the Undersecretary of Defence for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics has notified Congress of the department's intent to realign the Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Agency under the Defence Threat Reduction Agency. This move is in response to the fiscal year 2016 National Defence Authorization Act, which prohibited JIDA from standing up as a separate agency and directed the capabilities of JIDA be transitioned to a military department or an existing defence agency. DTRA Director Ken Myers said the counter improvised-threat and the counter weapons of mass destruction missions will be preserved and enhanced under this transition. "Both

⁸¹ "After West Asia, the Extended Neighb'd Calls! EAM @SushmaSwaraj Leaves for 1st India Arab Ministerial in Bahrain", *The Hans India*, January 23, 2016 at <http://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/National/2016-01-23/After-West-Asia-the-extended-neighbd-calls-EAM-SushmaSwaraj-leaves-for-1st-India-Arab-Ministerial-in-Bahrain/202073>. Accessed on March 1, 2016

⁸² "India Must Consider Troops for West Asia: Ex NSA", *Zee News India*, January 21, 2016 at http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/india-must-consider-troops-for-west-asia-ex-nsa_1847532.html. Accessed on March 1, 2016

these missions are critical for the safety of the nation's war fighters and to the national security of our country and that of our allies," he added.⁸³

On February 2, the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs will host the finalists for the "Peer to Peer [P2P]: Challenging Extremism" initiative. The initiative, an innovative partnership between the U.S. government and universities around the world, empowers students to design and pilot new digital products and tools that counter violent extremist narratives and reach those susceptible to violent extremism messaging. The final presentations and judging will take place at the State Department in the George C. Marshall Centre at 2:30 p.m. The following university finalists, selected by an expert panel from among 45 U.S. and international schools, will present their work:

- Lahore University of Management Sciences - Pakistan: FATE: From Apathy to Empathy
- Università della Svizzera Italiana - Lugano, Switzerland: #faces4heritage
- West Point Military Academy - United States

Prior to the event, non-finalist teams will host a "marketplace of ideas" to showcase their P2P projects as well.⁸⁴

Keeping war fighters safe from infectious diseases and chemical agents is a Defence Department effort that requires a range of capabilities, from global bio surveillance and quick response to medical countermeasures and interagency and international collaboration. At the Pentagon, the Chemical and Biological Defence Programme, or CBDP, is an early and critical part of the effort. Dr. D. Christian Hassell, deputy assistant secretary of defence for chemical and biological defence, leads the programme. Hassell, an analytic chemist and former director of the FBI Laboratory, oversees the department's chem-bio programme. One of his jobs is to coordinate the development of tools and capabilities that help war fighters prevent, protect against, respond to and recover from chem-bio threats and effects.⁸⁵

The U.S. economy had a net gain of 151,000 jobs in January, which is lower than the previous couple of months and less than most economists had predicted. A report from the Labour Department also said the unemployment rate fell slightly to 4.9 percent, its lowest level in nearly eight years. "The United States of America right now has the strongest, most durable economy in the world," said President Barack Obama, commenting on the report. In remarks at the White House, he said businesses have added 14 million new jobs in just under six years. The new data show U.S. wages rose 2.5 percent over the past year, and Mr. Obama said that over the past six months, "wages have grown at the fastest rate since the (2007 – 2008 financial) crisis."⁸⁶

On February 3, 2016, Defence Secretary Ash Carter said at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in California that Marines are the beating heart of readiness, and the Defence Department's fiscal

⁸³ "Department Realigns Counter Improvised Threat Capabilities", *DoD News*, February 2, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/648404/department-realigns-counter-improvised-threat-capabilities>

⁸⁴ "University Teams Present Innovative Campaigns to Challenge Extremism", *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 1, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/251973.htm>

⁸⁵ Pellerin, Cheryl, "DoD Chemical-Biological Program has a Global Mission", *DoD News*, February 3, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/649239/dod-chemical-biological-program-has-a-global-mission>

⁸⁶ Randle, Jim, "US Economy Gains 151,000 Jobs, Unemployment Declines Slightly", *VOA News*, February 05, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-unemployment-rate-falls/3178190.html>

year 2017 defence budget request would invest in assisting the Marine Corps as it faces potential broad-spectrum threats. Defence Secretary Carter introduced the highlights of his budget investment priorities for the Corps in a troop talk at Miramar, which is home to the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, the aviation element of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. The military is making a strategic transition with determination and with a budget request designed to meet global threats today and into the future, including the “relatively low-end, but still necessary-to-win conflicts, right up to higher end,” Carter said.⁸⁷

DoD’s principal deputy assistant secretary of defence for health affairs recently told *DoD News* that Defence Department civilian and military personnel will begin receiving Internal Revenue Service Form 1095 to help them complete health coverage questions on their 2015 federal tax returns. While taxpayers self-attested their health coverage to the IRS in 2015 as part of the Affordable Care Act, Dr. Karen Guice said, this is the first year DoD is responsible for notifying the IRS of its military and civilian employees’ health care insurance participation through Form 1095.⁸⁸

The two remaining Democratic presidential candidates -- former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders -- held a tense and angry debate on February 4th night in New Hampshire, days before the northeastern state holds the nation's first presidential primary. Clinton trails Sanders by 20 points in the polls after barely beating him in the Iowa caucus. This is the first one-on-one debate between the two candidates; former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley dropped out of the race after a poor showing in Iowa. Now that voter preference actually starts to count toward who gets nominated, the cordial campaign is becoming heated and tense, with Clinton and Sanders bickering over who is the true progressive in the race, who is beholden to big money interests, and what is the biggest threat facing America.⁸⁹

U.S. Republican presidential candidates talked tough on foreign policy and launched fierce attacks on their rivals as they faced off at a debate in New Hampshire on February 6. The debate took place just three days before New Hampshire’s presidential primary – a crucial election that could make or break several of the candidates’ presidential bids. Apparently sensing that pressure, several of the lesser-polling candidates came out swinging at their opponents as soon as the debate began. None was more aggressive than New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who took aim at Florida Senator Marco Rubio early in the debate. “He simply does not have the experience to be president of the United States and make these decisions,” said Christie of Rubio, a first-term senator.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Cronk, Terri Moon, “Carter Lays Out Proposed Marine Corps Budget Investments”, *DoD News*, February 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/650421/carter-lays-out-proposed-marine-corps-budget-investments>

⁸⁸ Cronk, Terri Moon, “DoD Official: New Form Provided for 2015 Federal Taxes”, *DoD News*, February 3, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/649122/dod-official-new-form-provided-for-2015-federal-taxes>

⁸⁹ “Clinton, Sanders Combative in 1st One-on-one Presidential Debate”, *VOA News*, February 05, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/democrats-clinton-sanders-combative-in-first-one-on-one-presidential-debate/3177957.html>; and, Schwartz, Ken, “Clinton, Sanders Locked in Heated, Angry Debate”, *VOA News*, February 04, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/clinton-sanders-locked-heated-angry-debate/3177922.html>

⁹⁰ Gallo, William, “Republican Hopefuls Tussle at Debate Ahead of NH Primary”, *VOA News*, February 06, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/gop-hopefuls-debate-in-new-hampshire/3180304.html>

International: Asia

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Yarghal became the fourth member of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to earn the title of Ranger; Situation is extremely complex in Afghanistan: Campbell; Ambassador Richard Olson travels to Islamabad to participate in the third meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group; representatives of United States, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan adopted a road map to facilitate direct peace talks between the Afghan government and Afghan Taliban; Success against the ISIL attracting local tribal forces to their ranks; US and coalition military forces have continued to attack the ISIL; US supports a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis; Carter says Saudi Arabian government willing to do more in the fight against the ISIL; US detected and assessed North Korean missile launch; Work performed at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake signifies “the critical importance”; USS Mustin (DDG 89) and USS McCampbell (DDG 85) completed Guam Exercise 2016 (GUAMEX) with the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF).**

With help from the Security Assistance Office-Afghanistan, 1st Lt. Mohammad Yarghal became the fourth member of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to earn the title of Ranger. The 27-year-old Afghan soldier recently returned to Afghanistan following a year of training in the United States. He first attended the four-month American Language Course at the Defence Language Institute in San Antonio. Then, he completed the 17-week Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course followed by a two-week Ranger Training Assessment Course, two months at Ranger School and three weeks of Basic Airborne Course, all at Fort Benning, Ga. Yarghal, who is from Khost province, was inspired to join the Afghan National Army at a young age by a general who hailed from his village.⁹¹

On February 4, 2016, Army Gen. John Campbell told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the situation is extremely complex in Afghanistan, but one simple truth is that 2016 cannot be a repeat of 2015. Campbell, the commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, said the Taliban were emboldened by the U.S. withdrawal and the concomitant reduction in close air support. The Taliban “have fought the Afghan security forces very tough, and we can’t let that happen as we move forward,” he said. Campbell told the committee that the current plan, which calls for a reduction in U.S. service members in the country to 5,500 by January 1, 2017 – would limit the train, advise and assist mission in Afghanistan. “The 5,500 plan was developed primarily around counterterrorism,” he said. “There is very limited train, advise and assist [funding] in ... those numbers.”⁹²

The State Department reported on February 7 that Ambassador Richard Olson, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, travelled to Islamabad on February 6 to participate in the third meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG). The QCG is a partnership between Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the United States that seeks to promote a conducive environment for the commencement of Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace talks aimed at reducing

⁹¹ Edgar, Charity, “Afghan officer Travels Long Road To Complete U.S. Army Ranger School”, *US CENTCOM*, February 1, 2016 at <http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/articles/afghan-officer-travels-long-road-to-complete-u.s.-army-ranger-school>

⁹² Garamone, Jim, “Campbell to SASC: Afghanistan Not a Short-Term Problem”, *DoD News*, February 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/650370/campbell-to-sasc-afghanistan-not-a-short-term-problem>

violence and establishing lasting peace in Afghanistan and the region. Ambassador Olson also met with senior Pakistani government officials to discuss a range of bilateral and regional issues.⁹³

On February 6, representatives of United States, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan adopted a road map in Islamabad to facilitate direct peace talks between the Afghan government and Afghan Taliban. A joint press release, issued after a meeting of the QCG, announced that the four countries were trying to set a date for the talks, which were expected before the end of the month, and called on “all Taliban groups” to join the talks. The statement indicated that the roadmap has stipulated “the stages and steps in the process.” The group of four countries stressed that the process should lead to a political settlement and an end to violence in Afghanistan.⁹⁴

U.S. Central Command spokesman, Air Force Col. Patrick Ryder briefed the Pentagon press corps by telephone from MacDill Air Force Base in Florida about several small operations that are playing a role in the counter-ISIL fight in Iraq and Syria. Ryder said that for Iraqis in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), success against the terrorist group is attracting local tribal forces to their ranks. Over the past few months the coalition has enabled small joint Iraqi operations in provinces such as Anbar, Kirkuk, Diyala and Ninawa. Carrying out these critical joint operations are indigenous ground forces made up of, for example, Iraqi forces that include fighters from the counterterrorism service and federal police, Kurdish forces like the Peshmerga, and tribal forces that include Sunnis, Turkmen and others fighting ISIL, Ryder said.⁹⁵

Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on February 7, 2016 that U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack the ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. Attack and fighter aircraft conducted seven strikes in Syria and ten strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq’s government.⁹⁶

On February 3, the US said that “The continued assault by Syrian regime forces – enabled by Russian airstrikes – against opposition-held areas, as well as regime and allied militias’ continued besiegement of hundreds of thousands of civilians, have clearly signalled the intention to seek a military solution rather than enable a political one”. US Secretary of State, John Kerry in a press statement said, “We call upon the regime and its supporters to halt their bombardment of opposition-held areas, especially in Aleppo, and to lift their besiegement of civilians in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 2165, 2254 and 2258. It is past time for them to meet existing obligations and restore the international community’s confidence in their intentions of supporting a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis”.⁹⁷

⁹³ “Ambassador Richard Olson Travel to Pakistan”, *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 7, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/252239.htm>

⁹⁴ Tanzeem, Ayesha, “4-Party Talks Agree on Afghan Peace ‘Roadmap’”, *VOA News*, February 06, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghan-talks/3179577.html>

⁹⁵ Pellerin, Cheryl, “Centcom Spokesman: Counter-ISIL Momentum Attracts New Tribal Forces”, *DoD News*, February 5, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/651319/centcom-spokesman-counter-isil-momentum-attracts-new-tribal-forces>

⁹⁶ “Military Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq”, *DoD News*, February 7, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/651680/military-strikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq>; and, “Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL Terrorists in Syria and Iraq”, *US CENTCOM*, February 07, 2016, Release # 20160207-01 at <http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/articles/feb.-7-military-airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-and-ir>

⁹⁷ “Supporting a Peaceful Resolution to the Syrian Crisis”, Press Statement by John Kerry, Secretary of State *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 3, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/252110.htm>; and, Remarks by John Kerry, Secretary of State, at the Syria Donors Conference, London, United

Defence Secretary Carter said at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada on February 4 that the Saudi Arabian government has indicated its willingness to do more with the coalition in the fight against the ISIL. Carter said he looks forward to discussing contributions to the accelerated anti-ISIL fight with the Saudis and 25 other nations next week in Brussels. Saudi Arabia also has said it's willing to take the lead in marshaling some Muslim-majority countries, he added, noting that the local population in Syria and Iraq will sustain the defeat of ISIL.⁹⁸

Detected and assessed as a North Korean launch, U.S. Strategic Command systems tracked a missile on February 6 on a southerly route over the Yellow Sea. Stratcom officials said in a news release that the launch into space occurred at 7:29 p.m., EST, with North American Aerospace Defence Command determining that at no time was the missile a threat to North America. The press release stated "The men and women of Stratcom, NORAD, Northcom and Pacom remain vigilant in the face of North Korean provocations and are fully committed to working closely with our Republic of Korea and Japanese allies to maintain security".⁹⁹ John Kerry also said that this is the second time in just over a month that the D.P.R.K. has chosen to conduct a major provocation, threatening not only the security of the Korean peninsula, but that of the region and the United States as well. Kerry added, "We reaffirm our ironclad commitment to the defence of our allies, including the Republic of Korea and Japan. We will continue to work with our partners and members of the UN Security Council on significant measures to hold the D.P.R.K. to account."¹⁰⁰

Defence Secretary Ash Carter told reporters at the California base on February 2 that the work performed at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake signifies "the critical importance" the Defence Department places on science and technology for high-end and high-tech innovation. Carter briefed the media on the \$582.7 billion defence budget request to be released next week as part of the White House's overall fiscal year 2017 budget request. China Lake is in the sweet spot of DoD's strategic transition, and with heavy emphasis on research and development, some of its high-end, innovative capabilities are reflected in his budget request, Carter said. "R&D spending [is] consistent with our determination to remain innovative." The budget request reflects a major inflection point for DoD, and investments made today will keep the nation ahead of its principal potential antagonists who have high-end capability, he said, noting that the U.S. edge will be retained.¹⁰¹

The forward-deployed Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Mustin (DDG 89) and USS McCampbell (DDG 85) completed Guam Exercise 2016 (GUAMEX) with the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) January 23. This annual training exercise allows JMSDF and U.S. Navy

Kingdom, *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 4, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/252121.htm>

⁹⁸ Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter: Saudis to Contribute More in Counter-ISIL Fight", *DoD News*, February 5, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/650905/carter-saudis-to-contribute-more-in-counter-isil-fight>

⁹⁹ "Stratcom Assessment: North Korea Launches Missile", *DoD News*, February 6, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/651577/stratcom-assessment-north-korea-launches-missile>

¹⁰⁰ "D.P.R.K. Missile Launch", Press Statement by John Kerry, Secretary of State, *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 6, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/252236.htm>

¹⁰¹ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Carter Tours Defence-Budget Innovation Programmes of China Lake", *DoD News*, February 3, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/649666/carter-tours-defense-budget-innovation-programs-of-china-lake>

to work alongside each other in the international waters near Guam. The helicopter destroyer JS Ise (DDH 182) served as the JMSDF flagship for Rear Adm. Hiroshi Ito, commander, Escort Flotilla 4, during the exercise and was accompanied by six ships of various classes of JMSDF Escort Divisions 4 and 8. The training events spanned the anti-submarine, anti-surface and anti-aircraft warfare areas, in some cases involving the protection of the flagship Ise. The crews of both Mustin and McCampbell enjoyed a brief visit to Guam, where they were joined by their Japanese counterparts from the JMSDF ships. Additionally, both countries exchanged liaison officers for the duration of the exercise.¹⁰²

India-US Relations

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. John Richardson will visit India; Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Antietam (CG 54) and the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS McCampbell (DDG 85) arrives India.**

The US PACOM reported that Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. John Richardson will visit India on February 2 through February 6 to help deepen maritime partnerships between the two countries. In his first stop to New Delhi, CNO will meet with key national security officials from across the government of India to discuss Navy-to-Navy relations and opportunities for further technical and security cooperation. CNO will then travel to Visakhapatnam to participate in the Indian Navy-hosted International Fleet Review, which will have participation from 50 countries with visiting warships, tall-masted ships, and Heads of navies. As such, the International Fleet Review is being promoted as the Indian Navy's premier international engagement event for 2016. While in Visakhapatnam, CNO will meet with Sailors from USS Antietam (CG 54), a Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser, and USS McCampbell (DDG 85), an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer. PACOM stated that a central line of effort for CNO's is to "expand and strengthen our network of partners." The visit to India and interactions with Indian and other Navy leaders helps to deepen relationships and expand shared maritime interests.¹⁰³

The Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Antietam (CG 54) and the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS McCampbell (DDG 85) arrived February 4 in India to participate in the nation's International Fleet Review (IFR) 2016. This is an international military exercise hosted by the Indian Navy to help enhance mutual trust and confidence with navies around the world. From February 4 through February 8, more than 50 countries will participate in the event, according to the Indian Navy's website. Some of the IFR 2016 events include: the Fleet Review and Fly-By attended by the Honourable President of India, and the International City Parade attended by the Honourable Prime Minister of India. The Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson will also be present at the IFR 2016 to help deepen maritime partnerships between India and the United States.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Senyk, Christian and Michael, Ensign "US, Japan Complete Guam Exercise 2016", *US PACOM*, February 01, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/647901/us-japan-complete-guam-exercise-2016.aspx>

¹⁰³ "Chief of Naval Operations to Expand Partnerships in India", *US PACOM*, February 02, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/648672/chief-of-naval-operations-to-expand-partnerships-in-india.aspx>

¹⁰⁴ Flewellyn, David and Kwon, Ensign Soon "U.S. Navy Builds International Relationships in India Fleet Review", *US PACOM*, February 04, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/650352/us-navy-builds-international-relationships-in-india-fleet-review.aspx>

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Ninth Indo-Nepal Combined Battalion level Military Training Exercise SURYA KIRAN to be conducted at Pithoragarh; Detailed instructions along with OROP Tables issued by the govt.**

The 9th Indo-Nepal Combined Battalion level Military Training Exercise SURYA KIRAN will be conducted at Pithoragarh from February 08 to February 21, 2016. The exercise will be held under the aegis of Panchshul Brigade of Central Command. During the exercise, an Infantry battalion each from Indian Army and the Nepalese Army would be training together and sharing their experiences of Counter Terrorism operations and Jungle Warfare in mountain terrain. The Surya Kiran series of exercises is a bi-annual event which is conducted alternatively in Nepal and India. The aim of this combined training exercise is to enhance interoperability between the Indian and the Nepalese Army units in Jungle Warfare and Counter Terrorism operations in mountainous terrain. Apart from, Jungle Warfare and Counter Terrorism operations, the training will also focus on Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief including medical and aviation support.¹⁰⁵

The Government of India had taken the decision to implement OROP in November, 2015. In pursuance of the order issued on 07/11/2015, detailed instructions along with OROP Tables have been issued by the govt. on February 03, 2016. The highlights of the government initiative are:

- The annual recurring financial implication on account of implementation of OROP at the current rate will be approximately Rs. 7500 crore.
- The arrears from 01/07/2014 to 31/12/2015 would be approximately Rs. 10,900 crore.
- 86 percent of the total expenditure on account of OROP will benefit the JCOs/ORs.

Significantly, as a result of this govt. decision, the total increase in the Defence Budget for pensions is estimated to go up from Rs. 54,000 crore (BE 2015-16) to around Rs. 65,000 crore (proposed BE 2016-17), thereby increasing the Defence Pension Outlay by about 20 percent.¹⁰⁶

International

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Iran claims to have conducted strike missions over Syria and Iraq using its Shahed-129 unmanned aerial vehicle; France orders four more Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules transport aircraft from the United States.**

Reports say that Iran appears to have conducted strike missions over Syria and Iraq using its Shahed-129 unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). According to footage released by national media on 2nd February at least two armed Shahed-129 UAVs are seen striking vehicles and other targets in

¹⁰⁵ "Indo-Nepal Battalion Level Combined Exercise Surya Kiran to Commence from 08 Feb," *PIB*, February 5, 2016, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=136130>

¹⁰⁶ "One Rank One Pension (OROP) Implementation Tables Issued," *PIB*, February 3, 2016, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=136068>

Syria and on Iran's western borders. Both UAVs are shown in the footage equipped with twin underwing hard points.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, according to reports, France has ordered four more Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules transport aircraft from the United States. The first two aircraft will be C-130J Super Hercules transports, and the second two in the KC-130J tanker/transport version - to support French helicopter operations. France currently operates 14 C-130H transport aircraft. The latest procurements appear to be necessitated as a result of the current high level of French military deployments and in order to fill a void created by the age of its C160 Transall aircraft and delays to the A400M Atlas programme. According to the French defence procurement agency (DGA), the first C-130J will be delivered at the end of 2017, with the second following in early 2018. The two tankers will be delivered in 2019. The DGA added that the contract also includes support, training, and other add-ons.¹⁰⁸

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **JeM module busted in North Kashmir; Three militants killed in Bandipora gunfight: Army; Hizbul Mujahedeen militant killed in J&K encounter.**

Jammu and Kashmir Police busted a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) module by arresting three alleged Over Ground Workers (OGWs) in the frontier district of Kupwara in north Kashmir. This was the second major success for security forces, which had nabbed four Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) militants in Baramulla on January 23. Official sources identified the three arrested OGWs of JeM as Ghulam Ahmad Parray, Umar Mushtaq and Ghulam Nabi Lone. The preliminary investigation reveals that they were planning to attack security installations in north Kashmir, the sources claimed.¹⁰⁹

Three unidentified militants were killed in a day-long gun-battle between ultras and security forces in Bandipora district of Jammu and Kashmir on February 4, said army officials. Three rifles and one Under Barrel Grenade Launcher (UBGL) have been recovered from them.¹¹⁰

A local militant of Hizbul Mujahedeen faction was killed in an encounter with security forces in South Kashmir's Gundipora village on February 6. An AK 47 rifle was recovered from the possession of the militant. Meanwhile, a Special Police Officer, who was identified as Riyaz Ahmad, decamped with an AK-47 rifle of a police constable from Rainwari police station.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ "Iranian UAV Shown Striking Targets in Syria and Iraq," *IHS Jane's*, February 05, 2016, at <http://www.janes.com/article/57777/iranian-uav-shown-striking-targets-in-syria-and-iraq>

¹⁰⁸ "France Orders Four New C-130 Hercules Aircraft," *IHS Jane's*, February 04, 2016, at <http://www.janes.com/article/57698/france-orders-four-new-c-130-hercules-aircraft>

¹⁰⁹ "JeM Module Busted in N Kashmir, 3 OGWs Arrested", *Daily Excelsior*, February 3, 2016 at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/jem-module-busted-in-n-kashmir-3-ogws-arrested/>

¹¹⁰ "Gunbattle Ends in Bandipora, Three Militants Killed", *Business Standard*, February 5 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/gunbattle-ends-in-bandipora-three-militants-killed-116020500006_1.html

¹¹¹ Ehsan, Mir, "Hizbul Mujahedeen Militant Killed In J&K Encounter", *The Indian Express*, February 7, 2016 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/kashmir-one-hizbul-mujahedeen-militant-killed-in-encounter/>

Northeast India

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **ULFA (I) pledges support to South Asian Games; GNLA ultra killed in encounter; Army, cops nab NDFB(S) militant in Assam.**

The proscribed ULFA that had called for a boycott of the 33rd National Games in Assam in 2007 has pledged its support to the 12th South Asian Games commencing in Assam and Meghalaya from February 5. "It is heartening to appreciate that our much loved Guwahati and Shillong have been chosen to host the games this time," Dr Abhizeet Asom, chairman of anti-talk faction ULFA (Independent) said in a statement. "I, on behalf of my organisation, heartily welcome the South Asian nations to this sporting event with open arms," Asom said. The ULFA had opposed holding of the National Games in 2007 claiming that it reflected the colonial attitude of New Delhi.¹¹²

A wanted Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) militant was shot dead while many others were suspected to have sustained injuries in an encounter with special police teams in Santogre village in Meghalaya's South West Garo Hills district, police said on February 4. The militant who received fatal bullet wounds was identified as M Sangma, IG (Operations) GHP Raju said. A 7.65 mm pistol with one magazine and two live rounds, two 7.65 shells and seven empty cases of 7.62 and ammunition for AK rifles were recovered from the encounter site, he added.¹¹³

A self-styled section commander of NDFB (S), identified as Lothen Basumatary @ Birai (42), was arrested in a joint operation by the Army and the Assam Police in Gorebil village in Kokrajhar district of Assam on February 4. A 7.65mm pistol and some ammunition have been seized from his possession. He was wanted in many cases.¹¹⁴

Left-wing Extremism

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **Police start survey of Maoist-affected villages in Balaghat; Chhattisgarh: Two SSB jawans hurt in IED Blast by Naxals; Nineteen Naxals held in Chhattisgarh; Maharashtra extends Naxal surrender policy; Maoist camp busted in Kandhamal; CPI (Maoist) warns against revival of Salwa Judum in Bastar.**

Madhya Pradesh police have started a house-to-house survey of 40 Naxalite-hit villages in Balaghat district to ensure sympathisers in the area are unable to hide rebel leaders who use them as hideouts, an official said on January 31. The survey will also give police a fair idea about the requirements and needs of villagers so that they could benefit through various government initiatives to bridge the existing trust deficit, said Gaurav Tiwari, Balaghat superintendent of

¹¹² "ULFA Anti-Talk Faction Gives Support To South Asian Games", *The Economic Times*, February 1, 2016 at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-02-01/news/70252457_1_south-asian-games-ulfa-33rd-national-games

¹¹³ "GNLA Ultra Killed in Encounter", *The Assam Tribune*, February 5, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb0516/oth054>

¹¹⁴ "Army, Cops Nab NDFB(S) Militant", *The Times of India*, February 5, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Armycops-nab-NDFBS-militant/articleshow/50860969.cms>

police. Asked how the surveys were being conducted, he said police were taking the help of sarpanchs and other officials in the villages to ensure it was "as accurate as possible".¹¹⁵

Two Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) jawans were injured in an IED explosion triggered by Naxals in Chhattisgarh's insurgency-hit Kanker district on February 1, police said. The blast occurred when the security forces were patrolling to ensure security to the under-construction railway track between Kacche and Bhaismudi villages in Bhanupratappur region. The track is being laid as part of the under-construction Dallirajhara-Rowghat rail project, Kanker Superintendent of Police Jitendra Singh Meena told *PTI*. Notably, the construction of 235 km long Dallirajhara-Rowghat-Jagdapur broad-gauge railway project is underway. It would facilitate evacuation of rich iron-ore from the pocket considered to be under the influence of Naxalites in north Bastar region.¹¹⁶

As many as 19 Naxals, including three women, were arrested from separate places in insurgency-hit Sukma district of Chhattisgarh on February 1. "While 12 cadres were apprehended from Chintagufa police station area, six were held from Gadiras and one from Kukanar," Sukma Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Santosh Singh said. A muzzle loading gun, 11 iron rods, loudspeaker, wireless receiver, electric wire and other material were recovered from them, ASP Singh added.¹¹⁷

Upbeat at the success of its surrender policy for left-wing extremism, Maharashtra government has extended the same up to August 28, 2017. The government has been claiming that Naxal-violence had ebbed in 2015 as a result of its lucrative surrender policy. The latest surrender policy, which carries a cash reward of Rs 5, 00,000, resulted in 51 extremists giving up arms last year, Maharashtra claims. Violence also came down substantially, even as before the new policy came into effect, 40 extremists had surrendered in 2014, and 48 in 2013. Maharashtra has claimed that in the last ten years, 502 extremists had given up arms. However, recent data and demands by Finance Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar to count more areas as Naxal-affected, indicates an increasing trend in left violence.¹¹⁸

Odisha Police have busted a Maoist camp in Dungurijara forest in Kandhamal district and seized explosives after an exchange of fire between the Red rebels and security forces on February 6. At least eight packets of IEDs, six detonators, two solar plates, batteries, uniforms of the ultras, blanket and polythene sheets were seized from the spot, said assistant superintendent of police (Kandhamal) Ashok Kumar Sahu. The cross firing went on for about half-an-hour in the forest, where the special operations group (SOG) and district volunteer forces (DVF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel took part in anti-Maoist operation.¹¹⁹

Outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) has claimed the police was trying to revive a "Salwa Judum" like movement in tribal Bastar region of Chhattisgarh by backing few people to organise

¹¹⁵ Santoshi, Neeraj, "Police Start Survey of 40 Maoist-Affected Villages in Balaghat", *Hindustan Times*, February 1, 2016 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/bhopal/police-start-survey-of-40-maoist-affected-villages-in-balaghat/story-dfLEJxsXDg6WwZgOkwHOTJ.html>

¹¹⁶ "2 SSB Jawans Hurt in IED Blast by Naxals", *The Hindu*, February 1, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/2-ssb-jawans-hurt-in-ied-blast-by-naxals/article8178868.ece>

¹¹⁷ "Nineteen Naxals Held in Chhattisgarh", *PTI*, February 1, 2016 at http://www.ptinews.com/news/7046940_Nineteen-Naxals-held-in-Chhattisgarh.html

¹¹⁸ "Buoyed by Success, Maharashtra Extends Surrender Policy", *The Hindu*, February 4, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/news/buoyed-by-success-maharashtra-extends-surrender-policy/article8191384.ece>

¹¹⁹ "Maoist Camp Busted in Kandhamal", *The Times of India*, February 7, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/Maoist-camp-busted-in-Kandhamal/articleshow/50885688.cms>

rallies and protests against the Maoists in the region. The rebels have warned retaliatory peoples' action against what they described as "Salwa Judum-II". In pamphlets circulated in different parts of tribal Bastar region, the state and the police had floated different outfits in the name of Bastar Vikas Sangharsh Samiti and Samajik Ekta Manch to organise rallies and protests against the revolutionary movement. It said the police has unleashed a propaganda that it would observe this year as "Mission 2016" to eliminate the Maoists. The Maoists maintained that those who were now in the forefront of such rallies and protests were also part of controversial Salwa Judum, an anti-Naxalite movement that took place in Bastar between 2005 and 2008. The Maoist pamphlet said, the security forces have unleashed terror in the tribal region and were committing atrocities on the poor tribals in the name of anti-Naxal operations. The Maoists reiterated that the actions by the security forces were in fact aimed at parting Bastar's vast natural resources to the corporates.¹²⁰

IV. UNITED NATIONS REVIEWS

India and the UN

(February 1-7, 2016)

- **India gives \$900,000 to UNICEF in 2015; Two Indians get prominent appointments in the UN system; India ratifies supplementary convention on compensation for nuclear damage.**

Participating in the first meeting of the UNICEF in 2016, First Secretary Noor Rehman Sheikh said the UNICEF will benefit from regular funding and that India had contributed \$900,000 to the UNICEF fund in 2015. He also highlighted recent government initiatives such as 'Beti Bachao and Beti Pado' (Save Daughters Educate Daughters) and 'Sukanya Samridhi Account', for the empowerment of the girl child.¹²¹

Saroj Kumar Jha, regional director for Central Asia at the World Bank since 2012, has been appointed as the Senior Director for the Fragility, Conflict and Violence Group at the World Bank.¹²² Major General Jai Shankar Menon was appointed head of the UN Disengagement Force (UNDOF) in Golan Heights.¹²³

On February 4, India ratified the Instrument of Ratification of the Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC) for Nuclear Damage. The ratification was submitted to the International Atomic Energy Agency by India's PR to the UN in Vienna, Rajiva Misra.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ John, Joseph, "Maoist Rebels Warn Against Revival of Salwa Judum in Bastar", *The Times of India*, February 7, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/Maoist-rebels-warn-against-revival-of-Salwa-Judum-in-Bastar/articleshow/50890698.cms>

¹²¹ "Statement Made by Shri Md. Noor Rahman Sheikh, First Secretary, at the 1st Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board, February 2, 2016, at <https://www.pminewyork.org/pages.php?id=2371>

¹²² "World Bank Appoints Indian in Key Strategic Leadership Position", February 2, 2016, at <http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report-world-bank-appoints-indian-for-key-strategic-leadership-position-2173019>

¹²³ "United Nations Appoint Major General Menon as UNDOF Head", February 2, 2016, at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/United-Nations-Appoint-Major-General-Menon-as-UNDOF-Head/2016/02/02/article3257980.ece>

¹²⁴ See "India submits the Instrument of Ratification of the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC), 1997", February 4, 2016, at <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/26324/India+submits+the+Instrument+of+Ratification+of+the+Convention+on+Supplementary+Compensation+for+Nuclear+Damage+CSC+1997>. Also see "India Ratifies Key International Convention on Nuclear Accident Compensation", February 6, 2016, at <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/G0Pz7NFRwZlp1C4pDAbGDJ/India-ratifies-key-international-convention-on-nuclear-accid.html>.