

# THE WEEK IN REVIEW

February 16 - February 22, 2 (4), 2015

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# I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

## A. South Asia

### Afghanistan

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **No more investment in Afghanistan; No compromise on national interest; Pakistan's Army and ISI Chiefs visit; Taliban delegation in Qatar for peace process; Drastic rise in civilian casualties in Afghanistan; Not gambling with rights of people; Pak, US agree to align support for Afghan-Led reconciliation.**

India has refused to invest more in a trilateral transport infrastructure project with Iran and Afghanistan catering for the transportation of Afghan mineral goods by the Iranian port Chabahar. *The Indian Express* quoted government sources as saying that India has rejected an Iranian demand to increase investment on the project during a visit by Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval to Teheran last week. New Delhi is worried that situation in Afghanistan is unfavourable for continuing the project after the pull-out of U.S.- led NATO troops taking into account a sharp escalation in fighting across Afghanistan, said the report. India also fears a 10 billion U.S. dollar project being invested by India in an iron-ore and steel project in Hajigak of Afghanistan would be scuttled. Relations with Kabul have seen renewed strains following a dropping of requests by the Afghan government for Indian arms. India considers this as an apparent effort by Kabul to soothe the feeling of Pakistan, said the newspaper. In 2003, a trilateral agreement was signed by India, Iran and Afghanistan to build a highway from Chabahar, a port city of Iran, up to Afghanistan border. India financed 100 million U.S. dollars for the construction of a 200 km road between Delaram to Zaranj in Afghanistan up to the Iranian border by 2008.<sup>1</sup>

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah on February 17 said the unity government would not compromise on Afghanistan's national interest under any circumstances. He was speaking at a three-day conference involving police commanders from different provinces in Kabul. NATO and senior Afghan intelligence, defence and interior ministries' officials were present on the occasion, a statement from the CEO office said. It quoted Abdullah as saying that the Afghan National Police (ANP) with the support of government and the people of Afghanistan had been able to bravely face the challenges. He assured the conference participants of Afghanistan's continued cooperation with the international community but said no compromise would be made on the country's national interest. Interior Minister Noorul Haq Ulumi briefed the participants about his priorities, security challenges and plans how to overcome the challenges. He said improved law and order situation in provinces, professionalising the police, ensuring respect to human rights, enhanced border security and elimination of poppy crops topped his priorities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "India Refuses to Invest More in Infrastructure Project", *Outlook Afghanistan*, February 17, 2015, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11680](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11680)

<sup>2</sup> "No Compromise on National Interest: Abdullah", *Outlook Afghanistan*, February 18, 2015, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11690](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11690)

Pakistan's Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif and the Director Gen. of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Rizwan Akhtar, the country's intelligence agency chief, arrived in Kabul on February 17. The two top security authorities are in Kabul on a one-day visit to discuss security issues between both countries. In his meeting with CEO Abdullah Abdullah, Sharif stressed the need for a joint combat against terrorism and improving ties between the countries. "Those who conduct insurgent attacks are not only the enemies of Pakistan, but they are the enemies of both countries," Sharif said. "The menace of insurgency has led us to work together and fight this phenomenon jointly as the people of both the countries are affected." Appreciating Pakistan's recent cooperation with Afghanistan, Abdullah said that insurgency was a common challenge for both countries, calling the joint cooperation vital for both nations. "We must use these opportunities," Abdullah said. "We must fight against terrorism for our welfare and prosperity of our countries." On the other hand, Afghan political and military experts urge the Afghan government to tread the waters lightly with Pakistan's promises. "Afghanistan should never believe in Pakistan's promises, instead they should await their actions," military expert Atiqullah Amarkhail said. "Afghanistan should act carefully and consider the national interests. If Pakistan's efforts are based on honesty, then it will be in favour of the country."<sup>3</sup>

Zabihullah Mujahid, who has been in contact with media on behalf of Afghan Taliban has confirmed that a delegation of Afghan Taliban has gone to Qatar but he has said that further details will be provided later. Earlier reports from *Reuter* news agency suggested that Afghan Taliban leadership has shown willingness to peace talks with quoting sources from Pakistan officials and Taliban. *Reuter* news agency quotes senior Pakistani officials as saying that Afghan Taliban leadership has shown willingness to peace talks. *Reuters* has also quoted an Afghan Taliban source from Qatar as saying that the 1st round of negotiation between Taliban and US officials is scheduled for on February 19 while a 2nd round will take place on February 20. *Reuters* has also quoted sources close to Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff as telling Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani during his recent visit in Kabul that Taliban are willing to peace talks "They have expressed their willingness [to meet] and there will be progress in March. But these things are not so quick and easy," the unnamed officials has told *Reuters* on condition not to be named.<sup>4</sup>

An annual report released by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) shows 22 percent increase in the civilian casualties by the end of 2014 mainly because of ground engagements. The report which is named 2014 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict is documenting 10, 548 civilian casualties in the year 2014. This figure is the highest recorded by the United Nations since 2009, the report adds. According to the report the death toll of the civilians recorded was 3, 699 and the number of the civilians wounded in this year was 6,849 people. The report also shows the death toll since 2009. 47,745 civilian casualties have been documented in the report which includes 17,774 and 29,971 wounded. According to UNAMA the increase of suicide attacks and Improvised Explosive Devices has significantly added up to the civilian casualties increase. United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for

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<sup>3</sup> "Pakistan's Army and ISI Chiefs Arrive to Kabul", *Outlook Afghanistan*, February 18, 2014, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11689](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11689)

<sup>4</sup> "Afghanistan Peace Process: Taliban Delegation in Qatar, Taliban Spokesman Confirms to BBC", *Khaama Press*, February 19, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-delegation-in-qatar-taliban-spokesman-confirms-to-bbc-29090>

Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Nicholas Haysom says. "In communities across Afghanistan, increased ground fighting among parties to the conflict and more IED attacks exacted a heavy toll on Afghan civilians," adding that "Rising civilian deaths and injuries in 2014 attests to a failure to fulfil commitments to protect Afghan civilians from harm. Parties to the conflict should understand the impact of their actions and take responsibility for them, uphold the values they claim to defend, and make protecting civilians their first priority. We need to see concrete steps and a real drop in civilian casualties in 2015."<sup>5</sup>

Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah at a peace seminar on February 22 declared that the peace talks with the Taliban will not be impeding on the rights of people, which many have feared. Abdullah stressed at the event, which was also attended by former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, that peace should be achieved in a way that respects the rights of citizens and should not jeopardize the past achievements made in the country. "Peace doesn't mean to make a deal on honour, prestige and rights of the people," Abdullah said. "If these efforts are taken place in respect to these points, then they are based on people's demands." Many have supported the talks of peace with the Taliban, but have stressed on different points. Deputy leader of Mahaz Milli Islami Party Sayed Hamid Gailani said that peace talks with the Taliban will begin in two to three weeks, emphasizing that the government should not let such an opportunity slip. Gailani warned that if this opportunity is not taken and acted upon properly, then Afghanistan will never get another chance in the future.<sup>6</sup>

Susan Rice, the US national security advisor, and Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, the Pakistani minister of interior, on February 20 agreed on the need to align support for Afghan-led reconciliation efforts, the White House said. "They discussed ways to mutually support regional stability in the near term, highlighting the need to align support for Afghan-led reconciliation efforts and continue regular US-Pakistani engagement," said Bernadette Meehan, Spokesperson of the National Security Council. During the meeting at the White House, the two officials discussed way to mutually support regional stability in the near term and work together as partners against the threat of terrorism, she said.<sup>7</sup>

## Pakistan

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **PPP against poll rigging; Afghan-Pakistan ties 'never better', Nisar tells Kerry; Pakistan, Turkey vow to boost trade upto \$3 billion, welcomes reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan; Nuclear Deal with Sri Lanka.**

PPP has termed the government's decision to appoint a federal minister as the governor of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) an instance of pre-poll rigging and warned PML-N against "its plan to rig the

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<sup>5</sup> "UNAMA Report Shows 22 Percent Rise In Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan", *Khaama Press*, February 19, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/46007-29086>

<sup>6</sup> "Peace Doesn't Mean Gambling with Rights of People: Abdullah", *Outlook Afghanistan*, February 23, 2015, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11720](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11720)

<sup>7</sup> "Pak, US Agree to Align Support for Afghan-Led Reconciliation", *Outlook Afghanistan*, February 22, 2015, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11709](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11709)

upcoming elections in the territory". Talking to reporters at his Parliament House chamber on February 18, senior PPP legislator and Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah said he had written a letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to lodge a complaint about "pre-poll rigging" in the elections of the GB Council. The prime minister, he said, had not given any response. Mr Shah said he was surprised at the "government's move to rig" Gilgit-Baltistan polls despite the fact that it had still not come clean about allegations of rigging in the 2013 general elections.<sup>8</sup>

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have never been better, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said on February 19, adding there had also been "a quantum leap in trust" between Islamabad and Washington. "I think Afghanistan and Pakistan, working in close hands and in close cooperation, it will do wonders for the cooperation in the field of counterterrorism," Nisar said as he met with top US diplomat John Kerry. "Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have never been better, and that is a very, very positive development." Pakistan's army chief General Raheel Sharif held talks in Kabul on February 17 with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on boosting security and continuing operations against Taliban militants, the Pakistani military said.<sup>9</sup>

Pakistan and Turkey on February 17 agreed to work towards a Free Trade Agreement to enhance bilateral trade to \$3 billion in two years. Addressing a joint press conference on February 18, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu also vowed to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion dollars in the next few years. Both sides have agreed to give a central thrust to bilateral trade and investment cooperation, Prime Minister Sharif said in his remarks to the press. During the Turkish PM's visit to Islamabad, the two countries also signed 11 documents of mutual cooperation and Memoranda of Understandings in the field of oil and gas, commerce, communications and scientific cooperation. The Turkish Prime Minister announced an additional support of \$20 million for internally displaced persons and the flood affected people of Pakistan.<sup>10</sup>

The Pakistani military has welcomed reconciliation efforts between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban but also warned of "detractors of peace". "They have expressed their willingness and there will be progress in March. But these things are not so quick and easy," the official, who is close to the army chief and sought anonymity, was quoted as saying by *Reuters*.<sup>11</sup>

Sri Lanka will ink civilian nuclear cooperation deal with Pakistan next month as the new president Maithripala Sirisena will visit Pakistan in the last week of March. The details ... would be worked out in due process before the visit takes place. Highly-placed diplomatic sources told *The News* that Islamabad had received the schedule proposed by Colombo for the visit of their president to Pakistan and President Sirisena could be here on 31st of March. The Sri Lankan president also

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<sup>8</sup> "PPP Warns Govt Against 'Plan To Rig' Polls", *Dawn*, February 19, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1164530/ppp-warns-govt-against-plan-to-rig-polls>

<sup>9</sup> "Afghan-Pakistan ties 'Never Better', Nisar Tells Kerry", *Dawn*, February 20, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1164837/afghan-pakistan-ties-never-better-nisar-tells-kerry>

<sup>10</sup> "Pakistan, Turkey Vow To Boost Trade Upto \$3 Billion", *The News*, February 18, 2015, at [http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-175408-Pakistan,-Turkey-vow-to-boost-trade-upto-\\$3-billion](http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-175408-Pakistan,-Turkey-vow-to-boost-trade-upto-$3-billion)

<sup>11</sup> "Pak Army Welcomes Reconciliation Efforts In Afghanistan", *The News*, February 20, 2015, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-35986-Pak-Army-welcomes-reconciliation-efforts-in-Afghanistan>

plans to proceed to China soon after visiting Pakistan as he has already visited New Delhi where he signed an agreement with the Indian government for civil nuclear cooperation.<sup>12</sup>

## Bangladesh

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **The Chittagong Hill Tracts International Commission expresses concern over the home ministry order banning meeting with the Adivasis; Canada calls for efforts to end the violence; US Ambassador to Dhaka meets Prime Minister Hasina; Delegation from the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights meets Khaleda Zia; Mamata Banerjee visits Bangladesh.**

The Chittagong Hill Tracts International Commission has expressed grave concern over the home ministry order banning any unsupervised meeting or talking with the Adivasis and restricting foreigners' access to the hill districts. Terming it unconstitutional, discriminatory and contradictory to the CHT Peace Accord, the commission demanded an immediate cancellation of the ministry order. Based on the decisions taken at a home ministry meeting on January 7, the fourth and fifth directives of the 11-point order state if anyone with a foreign passport wants to visit Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban, she/he will have to submit an application to the home ministry at least a month before the intended visit. Besides, any interaction between the adivasis and local or foreign individual or organisation has to be supervised by members of the armed forces and local administration. The commission also slammed the ninth directive stipulating that BGB sector/battalion/border outposts (BOP) can operate on acquired land.<sup>13</sup>

Canada has called for efforts to end the violence spewing from the ongoing political crisis as it has been costing lives and hurting businesses. "We are seeing the terrible impact of this violence on the Bangladeshi people and the country. This is truly unacceptable," Benoit Pierre Laramée, high commissioner of Canada, told reporters on February 15, while speaking on the concluding day of Showcase Canada, a trade show, at Sonargaon Hotel.<sup>14</sup>

The United States assured the government of helping Bangladesh protect and continue with the democratic process in the country. Newly appointed US Ambassador to Dhaka Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat made the assurance during her first call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the latter's Jatiya Sangsad office on February 15.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Pakistan, Sri Lanka To Ink Civil Nuclear Deal Next Month", *The News*, February 21, 2015, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-36006-Pakistan-Sri-Lanka-to-ink-civil-nuclear-deal-next-month>

<sup>13</sup> "Withdraw Hill Restrictions: CHT Int'l Commission Asks Govt, Terms Home Directives Contradictory To Peace Treaty", *The Daily Star*, February 16, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/withdraw-hill-restrictions-65104>.

<sup>14</sup> "Canadian Envoy Calls for End to Violence", *The Daily Star*, February 16, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/canadian-envoy-calls-for-end-to-violence-65069>.

<sup>15</sup> "US To Help Protect Democracy In Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, February 16, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/us-to-help-protect-democracy-in-bangladesh-65068>.

The six member delegation of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights led by vice-chair of the subcommittee Christian Dan Preda, met with Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office on February 17. The BNP told the visiting delegation that it was ready for dialogue with the government to bring an end to the ongoing political crisis. The party also said all the subversive activities during the crisis are being carried out by the government and it is doing so only to malign "the opposition's justified movement".<sup>16</sup>

India is understood to have assured Bangladesh that fugitives wanted in the neighbouring country would be deported to it as early as possible. The assurance came at a home secretary-level meeting between the two countries at the Taj Palace Hotel on February 17. Bangladesh has been pressing India to trace and hand over wanted persons including two killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman — Risaldar Mosleuddin and Captain Majed — and a number of other criminals. Dhaka has also been asking New Delhi to hand over wanted Bangladeshi criminals Subrata Bain and Sajjad Hossain who were arrested in 2012. Both have been handed down death sentence in Bangladesh for murder and grenade attack on an Awami League rally in Dhaka.<sup>17</sup>

Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal chief minister, went to Bangladesh on a three-day visit. She was invited by Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali on the occasion of "Bhasa Divas" on February 21, pitched for stronger trade and cultural linkages between Bangladesh and West Bengal. This was her first visit to Bangladesh since taking office in 2011. Ahead of her arrival, Mamata Banerjee has expressed hope to reporters in Kolkata that her visit to Bangladesh would further strengthen ties between Bangladesh and her state and promote business between the two sides.<sup>18</sup>

## Sri Lanka

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **India-Sri Lanka sign four agreements; India to release five Sri Lankan fishing boats; UNHRC agrees to defer report on Sri Lanka; Sri Lanka terminates lobbying contracts; US supports the consensus decision taken by the UNHRC on the report on Sri Lanka; US welcomes nuclear deal between India and Sri Lanka; Major General A. W. J. C. De Silva has been appointed as the 21st Commander of the Sri Lanka Army.**

India and Sri Lanka signed four agreements during the four day visit of President Maithripala Sirisena to India. The agreements were signed on February 16 following the bilateral talks between President Sirisena and Prime Minister Modi. The agreements include: Agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, Programme of cultural cooperation between Sri Lanka and India for the years 2015 – 18, MoU on the establishment of Nalanda University, and the Work

<sup>16</sup> "Ready For Dialogue: BNP tells European Parliament Delegation", *The Daily Star*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/ready-for-dialogue-65355>.

<sup>17</sup> "Bangladeshi Fugitives Would Be Returned: New Delhi Assures Dhaka", *The Daily Star*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/bangladeshi-fugitives-would-be-returned-65435>.

<sup>18</sup> "Teesta Hope Rises With Mamata's Trip", *The Daily Star*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/teesta-hope-rises-with-mamatas-trip-65571>.

Plan 2014 – 2015 under the MoU on cooperation the field of agriculture between India and Sri Lanka.<sup>19</sup>

The Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Court in Ramanathapuram, India has given approval for the release of five Sri Lankan fishing boats. They were impounded by the Marine Police after the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) had apprehended 26 Lankan fishermen with their boats in May and September in 2014.<sup>20</sup>

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has agreed to defer a report on Sri Lanka which was to be submitted to the Council during its 28<sup>th</sup> session next month, to September. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein and the team appointed to compile the report after investigating the war in Sri Lanka, had recommended that the report be delayed. The High Commissioner stressed that the deferral of the report was "for one time only," and guaranteed that the report would be published by September. The High Commissioner noted that the three distinguished experts, who were appointed by his predecessor Navi Pillay to advise the investigation, had informed him that, in their unanimous view, a one-off temporary deferral would be the best option to allow space for the new Government to show its willingness to cooperate on human rights issues.<sup>21</sup>

In a sign of improving relations with the U S, Sri Lanka has terminated lobbying contracts worth tens of thousands of dollars a month that the previous government had signed to help it win friends in Washington amid war crimes allegations.<sup>22</sup>

The United States commended the pledges made – and initial steps taken – by the new Sri Lankan government to revive Sri Lanka's democracy, improve governance, support credible justice and accountability mechanisms, enhance the protection of human rights, and facilitate reconciliation after nearly 30 years of war. Keith Harper, the U.S. representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva said that the US supports the consensus decision taken by the Human Rights Council on the report on Sri Lanka.<sup>23</sup>

The United States has welcomed the signing of civil nuclear cooperation agreement between India and Sri Lanka, saying it is consistent with IAEA safeguards and other international standards and practices.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Sri Lanka – India Sign Four Agreements", *News Line*, February 16, 2015 at [http://www.priu.gov.lk/news\\_update/Current\\_Affairs/ca201502/20150216sl\\_india\\_sign\\_four\\_agreements.htm](http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca201502/20150216sl_india_sign_four_agreements.htm).

<sup>20</sup> "Indian Court Frees 5 Lankan Boats", *Colombo Gazette*, February 19, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/19/indian-court-frees-5-lankan-boats/>.

<sup>21</sup> "UN Report Put Off Till September", *Colombo Gazette*, February 16, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/16/un-report-put-off-till-september/>.

<sup>22</sup> "Lanka Cancels Lobbying Contracts", *Colombo Gazette*, February 21, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/21/lanka-cancels-lobbying-contracts/>.

<sup>23</sup> "US Commends Lanka's Pledges", *Colombo Gazette*, February 18, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/18/us-commends-lankas-pledges/>.

<sup>24</sup> "US Backs Indo-Lanka Nuke Pact", *Colombo Gazette*, February 18, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/18/us-backs-indo-lanka-nuke-pact/>.

Major General A. W. J. C. De Silva has been appointed as the 21st Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, effective from February 22, 2015. The Ministry of Defence said that the new Army Chief has been appointed on the directions of the President Maithripala Sirisena as the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Major General A.W.J.C De Silva replaces Lieutenant General Daya Ratnayake as the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army.<sup>25</sup>

## Maldives

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Former President Mohamed Nasheed has been arrested; Maldivian government does not support the Islamic State; Minister of Islamic Affairs; Decline in number of tourists in Maldives; Relief assistance to the Gaza War's Victims by Maldives.**

Former President Mohamed Nasheed has been apprehended on terrorism charges following arrest of Chief Judge of Criminal Court Abdulla Mohamed against law. Nasheed was taken to Dhoonidhoo after arrest. Criminal Court has said that in addition to Nasheed, former Defence Minister Tholhath Ibrahim Kaleyfaan, Defence Minister Moosa Ali Jaleel, Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) former Brigadier General and Hithadhoo-Medhu MP Ibrahim Mohamed Didi, and Colonel (Retired) Mohamed Ziyad have also been charged with terrorism.<sup>26</sup>

Minister of Islamic Affairs Dr. Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed has said that the Maldivian government does not support the terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS). This follows allegations by opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) members, former Foreign Minister Ahmed Naseem and former parliamentarian Hamid Abdul Ghafoor, in an interview to Indian paper *The New Indian Express* that the Maldivian Islamic Affairs Minister was behind sending some Maldivians to Syria – and funding these operations.<sup>27</sup>

Number of tourists visited the Maldives this January went down by 7.8 percent compared to the corresponding period last year. An analysis conducted by the Ministry of Tourism shows 105,296 tourists visited the country in January of 2014. This number has gone down to 97,073 this year. The number of Chinese tourists who visited Maldives has depleted to new lows according to records. Tourist arrivals from China went down from 30,912 last year to 20,469 this year, but China is still the biggest market in the industry.

Since the tourist numbers have gone from China, tourist arrivals are highest now from the European market. The number of Italian, British and German tourists has gone up.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "A New Army Commander Named", *Colombo Gazette*, February 20, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/20/a-new-army-commander-named/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Former President Nasheed Apprehended On Terrorism Charges", *SunOnline*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27909>.

<sup>27</sup> "Islamic Affairs Minister: Maldives Does Not Support IS", *SunOnline*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27908>.

<sup>28</sup> "Tourist Arrivals Declines By 7.8 Percent", *SunOnline*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27898>.

Shelter units have been constructed for displaced families in Gaza using the donations provided by the Maldives. Qatar Red Crescent (QRC) said in a progress report titled Relief of Gaza War's Victims by Maldives, dated January 2015, that out of the 100 shelter units to be established under the aid provided by Maldives, 27 have been completed.<sup>29</sup>

## B. East Asia

### China

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **China expresses 'unhappiness' over Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh; China, Japan and ROK in discussion to restart the foreign ministers' meeting.**

As a response to the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin called the Indian Ambassador to China in order to lodge a strong complain on February 21. In addition to this the Chinese Foreign Minister Spokesperson Hua Chunying also commented in a press release that, "the Chinese government has never recognized the so-called 'Arunachal Pradesh'".<sup>30</sup>

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said on February 17<sup>th</sup> that China, Republic of Korea and Japan were looking at a possibility of meeting of foreign ministers in later March. Hua said that, "Currently, the three countries are in discussion on the topic".<sup>31</sup>

### South Korea

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Lee Wan Koo elected as the new Prime Minister of South Korea, South Korean President urges North Korea to bring about reform.**

While putting an end to the three weeks long anxiety over the Prime Ministerial post, on February 16, the National Assembly of South Korea elected Lee wan-koo as the new Prime Minister. In the Assembly while 148 members voted in favour of him, 128 voted against him. Lee is the second prime minister under the current Park Geun-hye administration.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Shelter Units Established in Gaza Using Donations from Maldives", *SunOnline*, February 17, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27798>.

<sup>30</sup> "China 'Unhappy' On Modi's Visit To Disputed Territory", *China Daily*, February 21, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/21/content\\_19630982.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/21/content_19630982.htm), accessed on February 23, 2015

<sup>31</sup> "China-ROK-Japan Discuss Restarting FM Meeting In Late March", *China Daily*, February 17, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/17/content\\_19614640.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/17/content_19614640.htm), accessed on February 23, 2015

<sup>32</sup> "Lee Confirmed As Prime Minister", *Korea Joongang Daily*, February 17, 2015, at <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3001007>

On February 16, South Korean President Park Geun-hye has recently urged North Korea to embrace reform and dialogue. She averred that just like countries like Mongolia, Vietnam and Myanmar, North Korea too should start focusing on development and growth. While citing the US' recent move to normalize its ties with Cuba, Park argues that North Korea could follow similar models.<sup>33</sup>

## North Korea

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Indonesia invites Kim Jong-un to attend the Bandung Conference in April.**

Indonesia has officially invited North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to the Bandung conference scheduled to be held in Jakarta in April this year. For this conference, along with Kim Jong-un, North Korea's nominal head of state and the president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly-Kim Yong-nam-have also been invited. Kim Jong-un is yet to accept the invitation. However, if he does accept it, it would be his first visit to a foreign country since assuming office in December 2011.<sup>34</sup>

## C. Southeast Asia

### ASEAN

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **ASEAN Peacekeeping Force being contemplated by Defence Minister of Malaysia; India willing to open wider market for ASEAN: Commerce Ministry official; India extends deadline for ASEAN Connectivity project from 2016 to 2019; Debate over chair for ASEAN Human Rights Intergovernmental Committee; ASEAN News Federation being sought by Vietnamese news agency; ASEAN chairmanship to spur Malaysia's economy: Finance Minister of Malaysia.**

In an address to the Ministry of Defence on February 18, Honourable Defence Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin said that Malaysia would look forward to establishing an ASEAN Peacekeeping Force for the region to safeguard the region from security threats<sup>35</sup>. He has commented, "Malaysia has been put in the privileged position of chairing of ASEAN in 2015 and being returned to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)".<sup>36</sup> "We should use this to focus on promoting better cooperation and sharing of information to help ensure global and regional

<sup>33</sup> "Park Urges N. Korea To Embrace Reform, Dialogue", *The Korea Herald*, February 16, 2015, at [http://www.koreaherald.com/common\\_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150216001298&dt=2](http://www.koreaherald.com/common_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150216001298&dt=2)

<sup>34</sup> "N. Korean Leader Invited To Bandung Meeting In Indonesia In April", *The Korea Herald*, February 22, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150222000074>

<sup>35</sup> "Hisham: Malaysia Looking To Establish ASEAN Peacekeeping Force", *The Star Online*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/02/18/Hisham-on-Asean-peacekeeping-force/>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

security”,<sup>37</sup> he said. He also commented, “I am visiting every ASEAN country and one of the things which will be discussed is the forming of this peacekeeping force.”<sup>38</sup>

It was reported this week that an official from Ministry of Commerce, Government of India said during the recent RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) in Bangkok, the government expressed their will to go ahead for tariff cuts on 70 per cent traded items with ASEAN member countries.<sup>39</sup> The official said, “Since India has free-trade agreements (FTAs) with not only ASEAN but also a number of members of the bloc independently, it will not be too difficult to commit to wider market access for the region<sup>40</sup>.” It has been reported this week that India extended deadline for two projects under its responsibility: Kaladan Multi Modal project and India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway that would be finished in 2019 instead of 2016<sup>41</sup>.

Opposition party members in Malaysia have asked Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah step down as chairman of an ASEAN intergovernmental committee. Evoking concerns of Government’s record in upholding of human rights.<sup>42</sup> One MP said, “With our government’s appalling record in upholding human rights and human dignity in the country, I have zero expectations that Muhammad Shafee will perform”.<sup>43</sup>

*The Vietnam News Agency (VNA)* has started seeking help from other ASEAN countries to form an ASEAN news confederation to give the media agencies a stronger voice in the region. The VNA Director of Secretariat and Editorial Department Vu Viet Trang said this was in line with the establishment of the ASEAN Community and commented, “All news agencies in the region should strengthen cooperation so that they can make their voice bigger and widespread in the ASEAN region<sup>44</sup>.”

Deputy Finance minister of Malaysia has said that Malaysia’s chairmanship of ASEAN this year could be positive for the economy of the nation and would spur economic growth. He said to reporters at a public event, “As the ASEAN chair, we can focus on ASEAN traders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and people. This is a good opportunity for Malaysia to

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<sup>37</sup> “Hisham: Malaysia Looking To Establish ASEAN Peacekeeping Force”, *The Star Online*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/02/18/Hisham-on-Asean-peacekeeping-force/>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “India Willing To Open Wider Market For ASEAN Nations” ,*The Hindu*, February 17, 2015 at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-willing-to-open-market-wider-for-asean-nations/article6905821.ece>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “India Fails To Walk The Act East Talk”, *The Times of India*, February 15, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-fails-to-walk-the-Act-East-talk/articleshow/46248292.cms>

<sup>42</sup> “Citing Umno Link, Pakatan Says Shafee Should Not Chair ASEAN Human Rights Committee”, *Malaymail online*, February 16, 2015 at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/citing-umno-link-pakatan-says-shafee-shouldnt-chair-asean-human-rights-comm>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Vietnam News Agency Seeks Support On Formation Of ASEAN News Confederation”, *Bernama.com*, February 14 2015 at <http://www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v8/ge/newsgeneral.php?id=1109277>

showcase our products not only to the 30 million Malaysians but also to the wider ASEAN community of more than 600 million people".<sup>45</sup>

## Southeast Asia

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Royal Brunei Armed Forces Commander attends Aero show in India; Cambodia set to bolster trade with Turkey; Prime Minister of East Timor looks forward to revamp relations with Australia; Ambassador of Indonesia to Brazil recalled by Indonesian Government over execution row; Laos's president to visit Cambodia; Opposition MP of Malaysia urges Malaysia to quit UN seat; Myanmar army says 130 people dead in clash with rebels on region bordering China; Filipino rebels from Moro Islamic Liberation Front claims 'self-defence' for clashes with police commandos; Singapore Armed Forces mark 'Total Defence Day' in 50 years of formation; Thailand hosts Cobra Gold 2015 military exercise; ASEAN Defence Conference attended by Vietnam.**

The Commander of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF), Yang Dimuliakan Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Major General Dato Paduka Seri Mohd Tawih bin Abdullah had attended the 10th International Aerospace Exposition 'Aero India-2015'<sup>46</sup> which has held at the Air Force station in Bengaluru from February 18 to 22, 2015. The Commander gave a courtesy call to the Chief of Air staff of Indian Air Force Arup Raha to strengthen cooperation in defence relations between India and Brunei Darussalam<sup>47</sup>.

The Ambassador of Turkey to Cambodia, IIHAN Tug, told the Anadolu News Agency that bilateral trade between Cambodia and Turkey has grown to \$119 million over the past 10 years and would increase to \$500 million over a period of next five years, an event which the Embassy of Turkey in Phnom Penh described "as a new era in terms of Cambodia-Turkish relations"<sup>48</sup> which would include a visit by Foreign Minister of Turkey, Mevlut Cavusoglu very soon<sup>49</sup>. He said that there would be hopes for a prime ministerial visit by the end of year and also added, "The foreign minister will come to officially open up the embassy and to pay the first official visit ever by a Turkish foreign minister"<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> "ASEAN Chairmanship To Spur Malaysia's Economy: Ahmad Husni", *My SINCHEW.COM*, January 24, 2015 at <https://www.mysinthew.com/node/105410>

<sup>46</sup> For more information, please look at: <https://www.aeroindia.in/Default.aspx>

<sup>47</sup> "RBAF Commander Attended the 10<sup>th</sup> INT'L Aerospace Exposition Aero India 2015", *Ministry of Defence, Brunei Darussalam press release*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.mindef.gov.bn/Lists/News/DispForm.aspx?ID=3340>

<sup>48</sup> "Cambodia Set To Bolster Turkey Trade To \$500 Million", *World bulletin.net*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/155280/cambodia-set-to-bolster-turkey-trade-to-500-million>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "Cambodia Set To Bolster Turkey Trade To \$500 Million", *World bulletin.net*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/155280/cambodia-set-to-bolster-turkey-trade-to-500-million>

Rui Araujo, newly appointed Prime Minister of East Timor, he would negotiate oil and gas fields that would require to be shared “in an honest and friendly way<sup>51</sup>” and also declared that his country did not require charity from Australia but required protection of sovereign rights<sup>52</sup>. Relations between Indonesia and Brazil reached a new low last week amid debate over a Brazilian national was hanged by Indonesian government on charges of drug related offences.<sup>53</sup>

Indonesia has recalled its Ambassador Designate to Brazil, Toto Riyanto, after the ambassador who was invited for an official ceremony of presentation of credentials to the President of Brazil found his ceremony postponed at a short notice by the Foreign Ministry of Brazil. The Foreign Ministry of Indonesia said in their official press release, “The manner in which the foreign minister of Brazil suddenly informed (us of) the postponement ... when the ambassador designate was already at the palace, is unacceptable to Indonesia<sup>54</sup>.” Before recalling Ambassador Designate Riyanto, the foreign ministry Of Indonesia summoned the Ambassador of Brazil to Indonesia<sup>55</sup>. The statement further added, “As a democratic sovereign state with its own sovereign, independent and impartial justice system, no foreign country nor party can and may interfere with the implementation of Indonesia’s prevailing laws within its jurisdiction, including in the enforcement of laws to address drug trafficking”.<sup>56</sup>

It was reported last week that President of Laos Choummaly Sayasone would be visiting Cambodia from February 26 to February 27 to promote bilateral ties and cooperation, a news statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cambodia said on its release. The visit would be at the invitation of King of Cambodia, Norodom Sihamoni and during this visit, the President of Laos would meet with the Cambodian authorities which include President of the National Assembly Heng Samrin, Prime Minister Hun Sen, and first Vice-President of the Senate Say Chhum.<sup>57</sup>

Opposition MP of Malaysia, Nurul Izzah Anwar<sup>58</sup> of Pakatan Rakyat and daughter of Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim<sup>59</sup> said that Malaysian government would require to stop its selective prosecution if it had to continue as a non-permanent member of UN Security Council. In

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<sup>51</sup> “East Timor’s New Leader Rui Araujo Doesn’t Want Australian ‘Charity’”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.smh.com.au/world/east-timors-new-leader-rui-araujo-doesnt-want-australian-charity-20150219-13j60y.html>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “Indonesia Executes 6 Drug Convicts, Including 5 Foreigners”, *Mail online*, January 18, 2015 at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2914263/Indonesia-prepares-execute-6-drug-smugglers.html>

<sup>54</sup> “Indonesia Recalls New Envoy To Brazil Amid Death Penalty Row”, *Deutsche Welle*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.dw.de/indonesia-recalls-new-envoy-to-brazil-amid-death-penalty-row/a-18272197>

<sup>55</sup> “Indonesia Recalls Envoy To Brazil Amid Row Over Execution”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.smh.com.au/world/indonesia-recalls-envoy-to-brazil-amid-row-over-execution-20150221-13l7pr.html>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> “Laos President To Visit Cambodia Next Week,” *Xinhuanet.com*, February 20, 2015 at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-02/20/c\\_134008314.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-02/20/c_134008314.htm)

<sup>58</sup> For more information, please look at : <http://www.nurulizzah.com/site/>

<sup>59</sup> For more information, please look at : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nurul\\_Izzah\\_Anwar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nurul_Izzah_Anwar)

her statement, she said, "There seems to be no end to the authorities' penchant in creating a culture of fear and oppression by going on a 'sedition witch hunt' and closely policing public debate, even on social media"<sup>60</sup>. The MP pointed to the arrest of cartoonist Zulfikar Anwar Ulhaque on February 11 and the recent detention of Parti Sosialis Malaysia secretary-general S. Arutchelvan as examples in her statement<sup>61</sup>.

On February 21, Myanmar Army declared more than 130 people have died in a battle between the army and rebels on the north-eastern part of the country in the remote Kokang region of Shan state where conflict erupted on February 9 when insurgent attacks on soldiers resulted in a military response, prompting at least 30,000 civilians to escape into bordering China.<sup>62</sup>

There had been civil displacement and the army had expressed its commitment to the operations until stability would be fully restored on the border region. In a press conference, Myanmar's Chief of Military Affairs Security, Lt Gen Mya Tun Oo said that the clashes have claimed lives of 61 military and police officers, and around 72 insurgents but more than 100 military members have been injured since fighting broke out.<sup>63</sup> No figures on civilian casualties were given by the Army. Rebels in Philippines affiliated to Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) claimed 'self-defence'<sup>64</sup> for their last month clashes with police commandos that resulted in casualties of 44 commandos,<sup>65</sup> despite claims from the police that they were ambushed by rebels. It was the biggest figure of casualties among security forces in the recent times and the way the events unfolded resulted in firing of a top police commander,<sup>66</sup> including claims of a botched operation<sup>67</sup> and also demands for resignation of President Aquino.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> "Stop Alleged Selective Prosecution Or Quit UN Seat, MP Tells Malaysia", *Malaymail online*, February 20, 2015 at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/stop-alleged-selective-prosecution-or-quit-un-seat-mp-tells-malaysia>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> "Myanmar: More Than 130 Dead As Fighting Rages On Near China Border," *Malaymail online*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/world/article/myanmar-more-than-130-dead-as-fighting-rages-near-china-border>

<sup>63</sup> "Myanmar Says More Than 130 Dead In Fighting Near China Border", *Channel Newsasia*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/myanmar-says-more-than/1672408.html>

<sup>64</sup> "MILF Claims Self-Defence In Clash", *Tempo*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.tempo.com.ph/2015/02/21/milf-claims-self-defense-in-clash/>

<sup>65</sup> "Zamboanga City Mourns Death Of 44 Police Commandos", *Philstar.com*, January 28, 2015 at <http://www.philstar.com/nation/2015/01/28/1417712/zamboanga-city-mourns-death-44-police-commandos>

<sup>66</sup> "Philippines Police Commander Fired After 44 Commandos Were Killed In Clashes With Rebels," *cp24.com*, January 27, 2015 at <http://www.cp24.com/world/philippine-police-commander-fired-after-44-commandos-were-killed-in-clash-with-rebels-1.2207519>

<sup>67</sup> "Video Showing Killing Of Commando In Botched Raid Stokes Outrage In Philippines," *The Straits Times*, February 11, 2015 at <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/video-showing-killing-commando-botched-raid-stokes-outrage-philippin>

<sup>68</sup> "Philippine President Accepts Police Chief's Resignation After Deadly Raid," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2015 at [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/07/world/asia/philippines-president-aquino-accepts-police-chiefs-resignation.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/07/world/asia/philippines-president-aquino-accepts-police-chiefs-resignation.html?_r=0)

The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) commemorated Total Defence Day on February 15 to mark 50 years of formation. An official ceremony was held in Landing Ship Tank (LST) RSS Endurance during which Second Minister for Defence Mr Chan Chun Sing, Chief of Defence Force Lieutenant-General Ng Chee Meng, Chief of Air Force Major-General (MG) Hoo Cher Mou, Chief of Navy Rear-Admiral Lai Chung Han, Chief of Army MG Perry Lim and other senior SAF officers were present<sup>69</sup>. The Army of Thailand hosted Cobra Gold 2015 military exercise last week which witnessed international participation.

During the concluding ceremony which was held in Army Base in Lop Buri, in the district of Chai Badan, the Thai Defence Forces Chief Gen Worapong Sanganetra said he was satisfied with the 'Cobra Gold 2015' joint military exercise as it met the programme's planned expectations, and that every other participating country was also satisfied<sup>70</sup>. About 10,600 soldiers from seven countries including the United States, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and Thailand participated in the exercise<sup>71</sup>. Six countries including Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei and Pakistan sent observers while personnel from China and India also joined the drills involving providing humanitarian and disaster assistance.<sup>72</sup> It was reported last week Vietnam attended the *ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Plus 2015 (ADSOM-Plus) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, an event which also drew participation of other ASEAN member states*<sup>73</sup>.

## Oceania

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Australia visited by Chairman of NATO military committee; ISIS talks in Saudi Arabia attended by Defence Chief of New Zealand; Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) commander visits UAE (United Arab Emirates).**

Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, General Knud Bartels visited Australia from February 15<sup>th</sup> to February 18<sup>th</sup> on a three day state visit. He thanked Australia for its contribution to military operations of NATO and discussed future avenues of Australia-NATO military operation. During his visit, he met Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin, Chief of the Australian Defence Force and Mr. Dennis Richardson, the Secretary of Defence of Australia and said in his statement, "for substantial and practical cooperation, to learn from each other, share best practices and develop common

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<sup>69</sup> "SAF Marks Total Defence Day In 50<sup>th</sup> Year Of Formation," *Ministry of Defence, Singapore press release*, February 15, 2015 at [http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press\\_room/official\\_releases/nr/2015/feb/15feb15\\_nr.html#VO1eInnnMh8](http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2015/feb/15feb15_nr.html#VO1eInnnMh8)

<sup>70</sup> " 'Cobra Gold' 2015 Joint Military Exercise Ends ", *Pattaya Mail*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.pattayamail.com/news/cobra-gold-2015-joint-military-exercise-ends-45175>

<sup>71</sup> "Cobra Gold 2015 Joint Military Exercises End In Lop Buri", February 21, 2015 at <http://www.chiangraitimes.com/cobra-gold-2015-joint-military-exercises-end-in-lop-buri.html>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Vietnam Attends ASEAN Defence Conference In Malaysia," *Vietnamnet.Bridge*, February 17, 2015 at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/123803/vietnam-attends-asean-defence-conference-in-malaysia.html>

standards because NATO and Australia have a strong partnership and are committed to enhancing their abilities of working together in order to better tackle future global challenges<sup>74</sup>.

Chief of Defence Staff of New Zealand, Lieutenant General Time Keating participated in a meeting in Saudi Arabia to discuss military strategy against ISIS<sup>75</sup> after Iraq recently requested New Zealand for military aid.<sup>76</sup> He expressed his will to attend meetings by other defence forces focusing on military strategy against ISIS even though New Zealand did not participated in military coalition against ISIS till then.<sup>77</sup> Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Brigadier-General Mosese Tikoitoga visited UAE on February 18 to attend International Defence Exhibition and Conference (2015)<sup>78</sup> in Abu Dhabi at the invitation of UAE Government.<sup>79</sup> He was accompanied by Deputy Commander Brigadier-General Mohammed Aziz.<sup>80</sup>

## D. Russia

### Russia

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Russia criticises European Union's call to India to mediate in the Ukrainian crisis; Russia ready to offer India Su-30MKI and MiG-35 fighter jets to replace French Rafales; India and Russia sort out their differences on fighter jet project; Around 1,700 Russian citizens are fighting alongside militants in Iraq; Moscow to deliver Yak-130 fighter training jets and Mi-171SH helicopters to Bangladesh; Duma's speaker calls Mongolia strategic partner; Russia ready to cooperate with Egypt to counter terrorist threat; Russia and South Ossetia sign state border treaty; Moscow to respond to Canadian sanctions against it; Rosatom to start building two units of Hungary's Pak nuclear power plant in the spring of 2015.**

The Russian embassy in New Delhi, in a statement released on February 21, has criticised European Union's (EU) call to India for mediation in the Ukraine crisis and claimed that the EU envoy's

<sup>74</sup> "Chairman of NATO Military Committee Visits Australia To Discuss Maritime Security, the Resolute Support Mission In Afghanistan and Global Threats", *NATO News*, February 19, 2015 at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_117502.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_117502.htm)

<sup>75</sup> "New Zealand Defence Chief Attends ISIS talks in Saudi Arabia After Iraqi Invitation To Send Military Aid," *International Business Times*, February 18, 2015 at <http://au.ibtimes.com/new-zealand-defence-chief-attends-isis-talks-saudi-arabia-after-iraqi-invitation-send-military-aid>

<sup>76</sup> "Iraq Asks NZ Troops For Support In Plea To International Community," *The New Zealand Herald*, February 13, 2015 at [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11401555](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11401555)

<sup>77</sup> "New Zealand Defence Chief Attends ISIS Talks In Saudi Arabia After Iraqi Invitation To Send Military Aid," *International Business Times*, February 18, 2015 at <http://au.ibtimes.com/new-zealand-defence-chief-attends-isis-talks-saudi-arabia-after-iraqi-invitation-send-military-aid>

<sup>78</sup> For more information, please look at: <http://www.idexuae.ae/>

<sup>79</sup> "Tikoitoga, Aziz head for UAE", *Fiji Sun online*, February 19, 2015 at <http://fijisun.com.fj/2015/02/19/tikoitoga-aziz-head-for-uae/>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

recent remarks in this regard “is a case of sheer duplicity and sly distortion of the core reasons which led to the intra-Ukrainian conflict”. It added that Russia highly value’s India’s balanced and independent approach to this issue.<sup>81</sup>

Russian Aircraft Corporation MIG has offered India, on February 19, its MiG-35 fighter jets in case New Delhi decides to scrap the procurement of French Rafales. Russia’s arms exporter Rosoboronexport has also offered the Su-30MKI (Flanker-H) long-range fighter jets. The total value of weapons and military hardware delivered by Russia to India in 2014 totalled US\$ 4.7 billion.<sup>82</sup>

The president and chairman of Russia’s United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) Yuli Slyusa has said, on February 22 in Bengaluru, that India and Russia have generally agreed upon the amount and division of work during the research and development (R&D) stage of the fifth generation fighter aircraft (FGFA) project. He added that a contract for the R&D phase is being prepared and is expected to be signed in 2015. The work share of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has been a contentious issue as the project will have equal investment between India and Russia and is likely to cost over US\$ 30 billion for about 400 aircraft. India plans to induct 144 of them. But HAL’s share in the work has been limited to a meagre 13 per cent so far which will not build any critical technological gains.<sup>83</sup>

The Director of Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) has said, during his visit to Washington on February 20 that around 1,700 Russian citizens are fighting alongside militants in Iraq with a majority of them being from North Caucasus.<sup>84</sup>

The Senior Vice President of “Irkut” Corporation Vitalyi Borodich has confirmed, on February 18, that Russia will start delivering Yak-130 fighter training jets to Bangladesh from May 2015 onwards. A total of 16 such jets will be supplied. Meanwhile, the Head of Russian Helicopters Corporation Alexander Mikhiev has stated that the manufacturing of Mi- 171SH helicopters for Bangladesh has also commenced.<sup>85</sup>

The speaker of Russia’s lower house of parliament -Duma, Sergey Naryshkin has said, during his visit to Ulan Bator on February 16, that ‘he sees no obstacles for developing cooperation between Russia and Mongolia and called the latter Moscow’s key strategic partner.’ He added that the two

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<sup>81</sup> “Russia Slams European Union’s Call To India For Mediation In Ukraine Crisis”, *The Economic Times*, February 21, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/russia-slams-european-unions-call-to-india-for-mediation-in-ukraine-crisis/articleshow/46326306.cms>

<sup>82</sup> “Russia Ready to Offer India Su-30MKI, MiG-35 Fighter Jets to Replace French Rafales”, *Sputnik News*, February 19, 2015 at [http://hindi.sputniknews.com/south\\_asia/20150219/1013496145.html#ixzz3SXn0bhZs](http://hindi.sputniknews.com/south_asia/20150219/1013496145.html#ixzz3SXn0bhZs)

<sup>83</sup> “India, Russia Sort Out Differences On Fighter Jet Project”, *The Hindu*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-russia-sort-out-differences-on-project/article6920466.ece>

<sup>84</sup> “Around 1,700 Russian Citizens Fight Alongside Militants In Iraq — Russian Security Chief”, *Itar-Tass*, February 20, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/778834>

<sup>85</sup> “Russia Delivers To Bangladesh Yak-130 Fighter Training Jets And Mi-171SH Helicopters”, *Sputnik News*, February 18, 2015 at <http://hindi.sputniknews.com/russia/20150218/1013489621.html#ixzz3SXoQh2uT>

countries share similar or close views on most matters of international concern. They will also be holding the joint annual military exercises Selenga-2015 in August.<sup>86</sup>

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, during a telephone conversation with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry held on February 16, has confirmed Moscow's readiness to act in concert with Cairo in order to tackle emerging terrorist threats. Mr. Lavrov extended his condolences for the murder of 21 Egyptians by the ISIS.<sup>87</sup>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his South Ossetian counterpart David Sanakoyev have signed a treaty on state border in Moscow on February 18. Mr. Lavrov stated that Russia's relations with South Ossetia will continue to be developed on an equitable and mutually respectful basis.<sup>88</sup>

The spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry Alexander Lukashevich has said, on February 18, that Moscow 'will respond to Canadian sanctions and hopes that Ottawa will think about the consequences of the sanctions, which in fact fuel the Ukrainian conflict'. Canada had on February 17 announced new sanctions against Russia in relation to the situation in Ukraine. The list includes names of 37 individuals and 17 entities from Russia and Ukraine.<sup>89</sup>

Russia's civilian nuclear power corporation Rosatom will start the construction of two units of Hungary's Paks nuclear power plant in the spring of 2015. The two countries had agreed in January 2014 to build the two units. Paks project is a 2 GW nuclear power plant and meets 42 per cent of electricity generated in Hungary.<sup>90</sup>

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Russia ratifies the BRICS development bank; Beijing sees no obstacles in developing existing relations between China and Crimea; Russia remains Ukraine's major trading partner in 2014; Kiev forces and pro-Russian separatists exchange prisoners in eastern Ukraine; Russia has delivered Pantsir-S1 surface-to-air missile systems to Iraq; Moscow sees no reasons to denounce New START Treaty; Russia starts deployment of new radar systems capable of detecting hypersonic targets; New hypersonic fuel formula created in Russia; Poll suggests two thirds of Russians think external military threat is real; Russian government to benchmark US\$ 50 oil forecast to amend budget; Pro-Kremlin demonstration vows 'no Maidan' for Russia;**

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<sup>86</sup> "Russia's Parliament Speaker Calls Mongolia Strategic Partner", *Itar-Tass*, February 16, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/777785>

<sup>87</sup> "Russia Ready To Act In Concert With Egypt In Counteracting Terrorism Threat — Lavrov", *Itar-Tass*, February 16, 2015, at <http://tass.ru/en/world/777839>

<sup>88</sup> "Russia, South Ossetia Sign State Border Treaty", *Itar-Tass*, February 18, 2015, at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778385>

<sup>89</sup> "Moscow To Respond To Canadian Sanctions Against Russia — Diplomat", *Itar-Tass*, February 18, 2015, at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778441>

<sup>90</sup> "Russia To Help Hungary Train New-Generation Nuclear Power Specialists — Rosatom", *Itar-Tass*, February 18, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778411>

**Russia's Eastern Command to take part in 5 international exercises in 2015.**

The Russian State Duma has ratified, on February 20, the US\$ 100 billion BRICS bank that'll serve as a pool of money for infrastructure projects in Russia, Brazil, India, China and South Africa, and challenge the dominance of the Western-led World Bank and the IMF. Moscow will provide US\$ 2 billion from the federal budget for the bank over the next seven years.<sup>91</sup>

*Itar-Tass* has quoted Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Cheng Guoping saying, in Beijing on February 17, that China 'believes that politics should not hinder the development of economic ties and private exchanges between China and Crimea'. He added that some Chinese enterprises are considering development of trade, economic and investment cooperation with the region including taking part in the construction of a transport corridor to Crimea via the Kerch Strait.<sup>92</sup>

*Itar-Tass* has quoted the figures released by State Statistics Service of Ukraine on February 17 that puts Russia as the country's principal trading partner in 2014 with bilateral trade being US\$ 22.4 billion as compared to US\$ 38.2 billion in 2013. China comes second with trade volume of US\$ 8.1 billion while Germany came third with trade volume of US\$ 6.9 billion. The United States is in the 10th place with a trade volume of US\$ 2.59 billion.<sup>93</sup>

Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists have exchanged dozens of prisoners in eastern Ukraine on February 22 as part of the February 12 Minsk peace deal that was brokered by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France.<sup>94</sup>

The press service of High-Precision Systems Company has said that Russia has started the delivery of Pantsir-S1 surface-to-air missile systems to Iraq and military specialists are undergoing training to operate them.<sup>95</sup>

Russian Ambassador-at-Large Grigory Berdennikov has said that despite the overall deterioration of US-Russia relations, Moscow has no plans to give up the fulfilment of obligations under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). He added that Moscow and Washington had conducted 18 inspections each and exchanged telemetric information on the launch of intercontinental ballistic missiles in 2014. Under the New START, signed between Russia and the United States in 2010, the countries must limit the number of deployed ballistic missiles and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments to 700 and deployed nuclear warheads to 1,550. The treaty is valid until 2021 but can be extended for an additional period of up to five years. In

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<sup>91</sup> "Russia Ratifies \$100bn BRICS New Development Bank", *RT*, February 20, 2015 at <http://rt.com/business/234027-russia-ratifies-brics-bank/>

<sup>92</sup> "Beijing Sees No Obstacles To Developing Existing Relations Between China and Crimea", *Itar-Tass*, February 17, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778043>

<sup>93</sup> "Russia Remains Ukraine's Major Trading Partner In 2014 — Ukrainian Statistics Service", *Itar-Tass*, February 17, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/778036>

<sup>94</sup> "Kiev Forces, Pro-Russian Rebels Exchange Prisoners in Eastern Ukraine", *The Moscow Times*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/pro-russian-separatists-and-ukrainian-forces-have-exchanged-prisoners-in-east-ukraine/516318.html>

<sup>95</sup> "Russia Delivers Pantsir-S1 Surface-To-Air Missile Systems To Iraq Without Delay", *Itar-Tass*, February 20, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778844>

January 2015, the head of the Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control of the Russian Foreign Ministry had said that Russia can revise its commitment to the New START in response to “unfriendly actions” by the United States.<sup>96</sup>

The spokesman of Russian Aerospace Defence Forces (ADF) Colonel Alexey Zolotukhin has said that the organisation launched the deployment of the new Nebo-M radar system that is capable of detecting small aerodynamic and hypersonic targets. He added that four radar systems- Nebo-M and Nebo-UM will become operational in the Eastern Military District’s regions of Zabaykalsky, Khabarovsk and Primorsky Krai in 2015.<sup>97</sup>

Deputy Defence Minister and Army General Dmitry Bulgakov has said, in Moscow on February 17, that Russia has created a fuel formula that will help aircraft exceed a speed of Mach 5.<sup>98</sup>

The results of an opinion poll conducted by the Russia Public Opinion Research Centre (WCIOM) suggest that Russians believe that external military threat is now more real than in the last 15 years. Some 68 per cent of those polled say the threat is real against 52 per cent in 2014. Around 28 per cent of respondents are unsure about the threat (this is 1.5 times less than a year ago at 42 per cent). At the same time, Russians have a more positive assessment of their army’s condition. The poll was conducted on February 14-15.<sup>99</sup>

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has said, on February 16 in Gorki, that the Russian government will use an oil price forecast of US\$ 50 per barrel to amend its 2015 budget.<sup>100</sup>

On the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Ukrainian uprising, around 35,000 pro-Kremlin activists took to the streets of Moscow on February 22 vowing to prevent a Ukraine-style uprising in Russia. Established early this year, the umbrella movement includes several groups representing bikers, Cossacks, athletes and Russian veterans of the Afghan and Chechen wars, some of whom have fought alongside rebels in eastern Ukraine.<sup>101</sup>

The Commander of Russian troops Col. Gen. Sergei Surovikin has said, in Moscow February 18 that Russian military units will participate in five international exercises in 2015. These include the motorized and air units that will participate in Russia-Mongolia exercise ‘Selenga’ in the Zabaikalsky Territory and in Russia-China drills in China while the Pacific Fleet will be involved

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<sup>96</sup> “Moscow Sees No Reasons to Denounce New START Treaty – Diplomat”, *Sputnik news*, February 18, 2015 at <http://hindi.sputniknews.com/russia/20150218/1013492256.html#ixzz3SY8aKT4A>

<sup>97</sup> “Russia Starts Deployment Of New Radar Systems Capable Of Detecting Hypersonic Targets”, *Itar-Tass*, February 19, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778605>

<sup>98</sup> “New Hypersonic Fuel Formula Created In Russia — Defence Ministry”, *Itar-Tass*, February 17, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778026>

<sup>99</sup> “Poll Suggests Two Thirds Of Russians Think External Military Threat Is Real”, *Itar-Tass*, February 20, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/778868>

<sup>100</sup> “Russian Government To Use \$50 Oil Forecast To Amend Budget — PM Medvedev”, *Itar-Tass*, February 16, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/777837>

<sup>101</sup> “Pro-Kremlin Demo Vows ‘No Maidan’ For Russia”, *The Times of India*, February 22, 2015, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/Pro-Kremlin-demo-vows-no-Maidan-for-Russia/articleshow/46328708.cms>

in the Russian-Chinese manoeuvres 'Naval Interaction' in the waters of the Mediterranean and the Sea of Japan, in the Russian-Indian drills 'Indra' and in the Russian-Japanese naval exercise 'SAREX'.<sup>102</sup>

## E. The United State of America

### National

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Ash Carter takes office as 25th Defence Secretary; Carter greets workforce, outlines priorities at all-hands meeting; Dempsey: Russia, terrorists, cyber among top threats; US Navy corruption scandal deepens; Obama: 'ugly lie' that West is at war with Islam.**

Ash Carter becomes the 25th secretary of defence on February 17 after having served previously as deputy defence secretary, defence acquisition chief and assistant secretary for global strategic affairs. When President Barack Obama nominated Carter for the position — calling Carter an innovator and a reformer who knows the Defence Department inside and out -- the president said, "On Day One, he's going to hit the ground running."<sup>103</sup>

During a standing-room-only all-hands gathering in the Pentagon's auditorium on February 19, Defence Secretary Ash Carter enthusiastically greeted those he will lead and discussed his priorities as the 25th secretary. Deputy Defence Secretary Bob Work introduced Carter, citing the defence secretary's "deep understanding of our business, of our shared enterprise, of organizing and training and equipping an organization [and] a fighting force that is ready for war and operating forward to preserve the peace." To those he will lead, Carter explained how he sees the job and what he'll be doing, and detailed his commitments and priorities. Carter said a critical responsibility for him as defence secretary is "to make sure we never put anyone and their family in [harm's way] without the greatest care and reflection about why we're doing it and what its purpose is and what the benefit is for our nation and for the future." A primary role in the job, the secretary said, is to assist the president and the national leadership in making decisions that will keep the nation safe and protect the country and its friends and allies now and into the future.<sup>104</sup>

The global security environment contains a host of threats, including Russian aggression that threatens NATO allies, and the violent extremists network from western Pakistan to north Africa, said the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey spoke on February 19 at a student conference on national affairs at Texas A&M University, rounding out a two-day visit to the campus. The two networks Dempsey talked about in his speech are the violent extremist

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<sup>102</sup> "Russia's Eastern Command to Take Part in 5 International Exercises in 2015", *Sputnik News*, February 18, 2015 at <http://hindi.sputniknews.com/russia/20150218/1013486997.html#ixzz3SYAAUgbF>

<sup>103</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter Takes Office Today as 25th Defence Secretary", *DoD News*, February 17, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128157>

<sup>104</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter Greets Workforce, Outlines Priorities at All-hands Meeting", *DoD News*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128206>

network from western Pakistan to northern Africa, and the transnational criminal network that runs north and south in the Western Hemisphere. The domain is cyber.<sup>105</sup>

The massive U.S. Navy scandal involving an East-Asia Pacific ship supply contractor and its convicted chief executive has now reached up into the admiral's ranks. And the probe is far from over. Three admirals were censured this month by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, effectively ending their careers, in the wake of the Glenn Defence Marine Asia "bribes-for-business" scandal. The scandal, primarily involving the U.S. Seventh Fleet, has spread like an oil stain through the admiral's ranks.<sup>106</sup>

U.S. President Barack Obama declared on February 19 that any contention by terrorist groups that Western nations are fighting a war against Islam is an "ugly lie." In a wide-ranging speech at a White House-sponsored anti-terrorism summit in Washington, Obama vowed a relentless fight against the Islamic State and other terrorist groups. He rejected the idea that mostly Christian and Jewish Western nations are waging a war on Muslims. "The notion that the West is at war with Islam is an ugly lie," he said. "And all of us, regardless of our faith, have a responsibility to reject it."<sup>107</sup>

## International: Asia

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **US, Afghan Taliban deny peace talk reports; Ash Carter discusses progress with leaders during Afghanistan visit; Carter greets troops in Kandahar, praises progress; Centcom Official: Mosul fight could begin within weeks; ISIL 'a very complex threat,' Dempsey says in Marshall Islands; U.S. and coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL in Syria, Iraq; US diplomat: North Korean regime lacks legitimacy; Vietnam plays up US invitation to communist party chief.**

The U.S. and Afghanistan's Taliban have denied media reports that they plan to hold peace talks in Qatar's capital Doha. "The United States currently has no meetings with the Taliban scheduled in Doha," said a White House official on February 19. "We remain supportive of an Afghan-led reconciliation process whereby the Taliban and the Afghans engage in talks toward a settlement to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan," added Bernadette Meehan, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council. A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, contacted VOA by phone to say there is no change in its policy with regards to holding peace talks with any party because foreign forces are still "occupying" Afghanistan. He rejected the reports as "fabricated and not true."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ferdinando, Lisa, "Dempsey: Russia, Terrorists, Cyber Among Top Threats", *DoD News*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128209>

<sup>106</sup> Young, Jeffrey, "US Navy Corruption Scandal Deepens", *VOA News*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-navy-corruption-scandal-deepens/2648741.html>

<sup>107</sup> "Obama: 'Ugly Lie' That West Is at War With Islam", *VOA News*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/president-obama-to-conclude-anti-extremist-summit/2650187.html>

<sup>108</sup> Gul, Ayaz, "US, Afghan Taliban Deny Peace Talk Reports", *VOA News*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghan-taliban-denies-any-peace-talks-with-us/2650132.html>

U.S. and coalition troops have a new mission in Afghanistan but the same strong commitment to sustaining an enduring partnership, Defence Secretary Ash Carter said on February 21 during a joint press conference with Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani in Kabul. This is Carter's first official trip to Afghanistan as defence secretary but his 10th trip there over the years. Approximately 10,000 U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan, working with their partners in the Afghan National Security Forces, or ANSF. Carter said he and U.S. President Barack Obama agreed during their first meeting this week that their priority is to make sure that progress in Afghanistan lasts. To that end, the secretary said, Obama is considering options that will reinforce U.S. support for Ghani's security strategy, including possible changes to the timeline for the drawdown of U.S. troops from Afghanistan.<sup>109</sup>

As part of his first official trip to Afghanistan as defence secretary, Ash Carter made a stop in Kandahar on February 22 to thank U.S. troops there for their dedication to the mission and the progress they and their NATO and Afghan allies have achieved. His visit was to the Train Advise and Assist Command South, or TAAC South, formerly Regional Command South. The command's area of responsibility includes the provinces of Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul and Daykundi. The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division is what is called the TAAC South framework element, and contributing countries include Romania, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Australia, Jordan and Georgia. At TAAC South's Kandahar Airfield headquarters, Carter told the troops that they are his priority.<sup>110</sup>

Preparations are underway by coalition and Iraqi forces to retake Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists, an operation that could begin as early as April and will require an Iraqi-led military force of at least 20,000 troops, a U.S. Central Command official said on February 19. The official, who briefed Pentagon reporters on background, said military planners would like to see the battle for Mosul begin in the April or May time frame, but said the timing will be dependent upon Iraqi and Kurdish forces being adequately prepared for the fight. Later than that, he said, the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the onset of hot weather in the region could complicate matters.<sup>111</sup>

Regional governments must take the lead in solving the "very complex threat" posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said on February 21. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey made the comments in a town hall meeting in Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands, in his first visit to this tiny atoll in the Pacific, the site of a World War II battle and the home of the U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll/Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defence Test Site. Following the town hall that featured about 200 attendees, Dempsey noted how crises in the Middle East continue to demand significant attention even as he travels to discuss U.S. security interests in the Pacific.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter Discusses Progress With Leaders During Afghanistan Visit", *DoD News*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128218>

<sup>110</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter Greets Troops in Kandahar, Praises Progress", *DoD News*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128224>

<sup>111</sup> Simeone, Nick, "Centcom Official: Mosul Fight Could Begin Within Weeks", *DoD News*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128208>

<sup>112</sup> Ferdinando, Lisa, "ISIL 'a Very Complex Threat,' Dempsey Says in Marshall Islands", *DoD News*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128216>

Meanwhile, the U.S. and coalition military forces continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria, using bomber aircraft to conduct an airstrike, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on February 21. Separately, U.S. and coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists in Iraq.<sup>113</sup>

U.S. experts have expressed mixed opinions about a congressional proposal that would broaden sanctions against North Korea. The legislation, co-sponsored by members of both major parties in the House of Representatives, was proposed this month in response to the North's alleged cyberattack on Sony Pictures and the country's apparent unwillingness to abandon its nuclear weapons programme. The bill calls for tightening sanctions against Pyongyang by denying it access to hard currency. The legislation also targets countries and companies that help the communist country in development of nuclear weapons.<sup>114</sup>

A senior U.S. diplomat says the North Korean regime lacks legitimacy because of the hardship it causes to its citizens. At a conference on North Korea this week, Robert King, the U.S. Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues, said the communist country continues to make human rights violations despite international concerns. "When you look at North Korea, what it has done, and the lack of support it has in the international community, there is no question it does not have the legitimacy it seeks and claims that it has," King said.<sup>115</sup>

Vietnam's state-run media this week featured articles touting an invitation for Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong to visit the United States and China this year. The reports said U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made the invitation during a Saturday phone call with his Vietnamese counterpart, Pham Binh Minh. The news came after Trong received a similar invitation from China's President Xi Jinping. In a statement, a U.S. State Department spokesperson confirmed the invitation but said Kerry was only repeating a long-standing offer to host Trong for a visit.<sup>116</sup>

## India-US Relations

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Biden praises Carter for deepening defence ties with India; India now among US' most important strategic partners: Richard Verma; Hope Govt. will look afresh at US foundational pacts: Kohler; US says Modi catalysed defence ties; India and US move forward to advance bilateral relations.**

Ashton Carter has taken over as President Barack Obama's fourth defence secretary in six years

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<sup>113</sup> "Airstrikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq", From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, *DoD News*, February 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128217>

<sup>114</sup> Lee, Jee Abbey, "Views Mixed on Broadening US Sanctions Against N Korea", *VOA News*, February 20, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/views-mixed-broadening-sanctions-north-korea/2652998.html>

<sup>115</sup> Lee, Yeon Cheol, "US Diplomat: North Korean Regime Lacks Legitimacy", *VOA News*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-diplomat-says-north-korean-regime-lacks-legitimacy/2649166.html>

<sup>116</sup> Mi, Tra, "Vietnam Plays Up US Invitation to Communist Party Chief", *VOA News*, February 17, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/vietnam-united-states-invitation-communist-party-chief/2648251.html>

with Vice President Joe Biden praising him for implementing the Asia-Pacific rebalance, including deepening defence cooperation with India. He was sworn in by Biden as the 25th US defence secretary in a ceremony at the White House on February 16. Calling Carter a “physicist and a genuine expert on the acquisition and technical capabilities that are going to help guarantee the US military is second to none in the world,” Biden also described him as “a driving intellectual force” behind what the administration has been doing. These included strengthening America’s cyber capabilities, improving the way the Pentagon does business, and implementing the Asia-Pacific rebalance, including deepening defence cooperation with India, he said.<sup>117</sup>

In addition, Carter’s significant role in deepening Indo-US defence relationship in particular the path breaking Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) came for praise during his swearing in ceremony at the White House. “This man has a driving intellectual force behind all that he does and all this administration has been doing, strengthening our nation’s cyber capabilities, improving the way the Pentagon does business and implementing the Asian-Pacific rebalance, including deepening defence cooperation with India,” Biden said.<sup>118</sup>

US Ambassador to India Richard Verma on February 18 said the strategic relationship of the US with India is “one of our most important” and events like ‘Aero India’ “allow us to demonstrate our commitment to” the partnership. Inaugurating the US Pavilion at the ‘Aero India’ show in Bangalore, Verma termed the exhibit as “the best of US aviation and defence technology”. “Air shows like ‘Aero India’ allow us to demonstrate our commitment to the strategic relationship with key international partners,” he said, adding that “and in 2015, the strategic relationship the United States has with India is one of our most important.” As many as 64 US companies including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Honeywell, Esterline, Bell, GE Aviation, and Sikorsky are participating in the air show which began on February 18.<sup>119</sup>

US companies are hopeful that the Narendra Modi government will take a fresh look at the issue of signing US foundational agreements for transfer of military technology and weapons, according to a top Boeing official. “I hope the new government will take a fresh look at it. I think it is India’s advantage to do so. It will really ease a lot of government to government transactions,” said retired US Air Force Lt General and Boeing’s vice president for International Business Development Defence Space and Security. The UPA government had refused to sign the agreements. “It will also build more trust on the US side that India does recognise and take more seriously some security issues around very sensitive technology,” Kohler, in Bangalore for the ongoing five-day Aero India air show, told *PTI*.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> “New US Defence Chief Praised For Deepening Defence Ties With India”, *IANS*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.oneindia.com/international/new-us-defence-chief-praised-for-deepening-defence-ties-with-india-1657413.html>

<sup>118</sup> “Biden Praises Carter For Deepening Defence Ties With India”, *Press Trust of India*, February 18, 2015 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/printer-friendly-version?article\\_id=115021800093\\_1](http://www.business-standard.com/article/printer-friendly-version?article_id=115021800093_1)

<sup>119</sup> “India Now Among US’ Most Important Strategic Partners: Richard Verma”, *PTI*, February 18, 2015 at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-18/news/59269066\\_1\\_aero-india-air-show-india-richard-verma](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-18/news/59269066_1_aero-india-air-show-india-richard-verma)

<sup>120</sup> “Hope Govt. Will Look Afresh at US Foundational Pacts: Kohler”, *The Outlook*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.outlookindia.com/news/printitem.aspx?881874>

Alan Shaffer, principal deputy assistant secretary of defence for research and engineering in the US department of defence, said the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) would catalyse interaction between India and the US and bolster the country's defence industrial base. Shaffer said DTTI's efforts were aimed at defence cooperation and it had accelerated in the last two months. "The personal relationship that Prime Minister Modi has developed with President Obama has led to a very serious and significant push at the very highest level between our two nations," he said in Bengaluru on February 19.<sup>121</sup>

US National Security Advisor Susan Rice and Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar has agreed to sustain the momentum of bilateral relationship between the two countries, generated after the recent visit to India by President Barack Obama, the White House has said. Rice congratulated Jaishankar on his recent promotion and affirmed that she looks forward to working with him to further advance the Indo-US relationship, the White House said on February 20. This was Jaishankar's first meeting with Rice after he was elevated to the post of Foreign Secretary from the Indian Ambassador to the US.<sup>122</sup>

## II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

### National

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Indian Army and State Bank of India on the Defence Salary Package; Eighth India-Nepal combined military training exercise Surya Kiran-VIII commences.**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Indian Army and State Bank of India (SBI) on the Defence Salary Package on February 23. The first MoU between SBI and the Indian Army was signed in 2011 and was valid for a period of three years. The revised MoU is expected to meet the requirements of serving soldiers, pensioners and families. A number of additional facilities have been incorporated in the revised MoU after concerted efforts spanning over a year. The basic features of the MoU include a number of free / concessional services like free drafts, free cheque books, free funds transfers to any bank in India through RTGS / NEFT, free ATM cards etc. The provision also includes the Nepal Express Remittance Scheme which enables instant fund transfers to Nepal for the benefit of the Nepali Domicile Gorkha Soldiers serving in the Indian Army. The revised MoU will benefit almost 19.5 lakh pensioners and 10

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<sup>121</sup> "US Says Modi catalysed Defence Ties", *TNN*, February 20, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/US-says-Modi-catalyzed-defence-ties/pmarticleshow/46307285.cms?prtpage=1>

<sup>122</sup> "India and US Move Forward To Advance Bilateral Relations", *PTI*, February 21, 2015 at [http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-21/news/59363169\\_1\\_indian-ambassador-bilateral-relations-civil-nuclear-cooperation](http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-21/news/59363169_1_indian-ambassador-bilateral-relations-civil-nuclear-cooperation)

lakh serving personnel who hold Pay or Pension accounts with SBI and also provide them an opportunity to access modern banking facilities.<sup>123</sup>

The Eighth India-Nepal Battalion level Combined Military Training named exercise Surya Kiran-VIII, commenced on February 23 at Integrated Army Training Centre, Saljhandi, Nepal with an aim to achieve optimum cohesion and interoperability between the two armies. The Nepalese Contingent was represented by a Battalion from an Infantry Division of Nepalese Army while Indian side was represented by an equivalent strength from a Mountain Brigade. The focus of the ongoing exercise is to carry out Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorist Operations in mountainous and jungle terrain and to practice facets of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief including actions to be taken during Pandemic, Epidemic and various other humanitarian assistance situations. Aviation aspects and environmental conservation are also included in the scope of this exercise. The two week long exercise will see the contingents hone their tactical and technical skills in countering insurgency and terrorism. State of the art equipment for surveillance and tracking, specialist weapons for close quarter battle with terrorists, explosives and IED detectors, as well as the latest communication equipment are being fielded by both sides.<sup>124</sup>

## International

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Israel to purchase 14 F-35 stealth fighters from Lockheed Martin; Turkish indigenous laser weapon system programme advances.**

Reports say that Israel will purchase 14 F-35 stealth fighters from US aerospace giant Lockheed Martin at a cost of around \$110 million each with an estimated total cost of around \$3 billion. The \$2.82 billion deal includes technological and training elements too. It includes the purchase of 14 stealth fighters as well as the option to buy another 17. It is the continuation of an agreement signed in 2010 to purchase 19 F-35 planes. The first batch of aircraft is expected to arrive in Israel by the end of 2016.<sup>125</sup>

Meanwhile, according to reports Turkish engineers recently successfully tested the first prototype of a laser weapon similar to a US-developed system. The country eventually aims to develop and manufacture an indigenous high-power laser weapon system that will detect, track and neutralize land, sea and aerial targets. The system will be primarily used against enemy drones, cruise missiles and mortar ammunition.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> "MoU Signed Between Indian Army and State Bank of India," *PIB*, February 03, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115684>

<sup>124</sup> "Exercise Surya Kiran VIII Commences in Nepal," *PIB*, February 23, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115683>

<sup>125</sup> "Israel to Buy 14 F-35 Fighters From US," *Defence News*, February 22, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/mideast-africa/2015/02/22/israel-buy-f35-fighters-us/23840089/>

<sup>126</sup> "Turkish Indigenous Laser Weapon Advances," *Defence News*, February 14, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/warfare/2015/02/14/turkey-laser-weapon-indigenous-tubitak-test/23291513/>