

# THE WEEK IN REVIEW

February 23 – March 1, 3 (1), 2015

**Editor: Saroj Bishoyi**

## Contributors

**Yaqoob-ul Hassan**

**Gulbin Sultana**

**Gunjan Singh**

**Pranamita Baruah**

**Rajorshi Roy**

**Saroj Bishoyi**

**Amit Kumar**

**Rajbala Rana**

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1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg, New Delhi-110010  
Telephone: 91-26717983; Fax: 91-11-26154191 Website: [www.idsa.in](http://www.idsa.in); Email: [twir@idsa.in](mailto:twir@idsa.in)

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# I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

## A. South Asia

### Afghanistan

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Taliban's peace negotiators; Children are used in drugs smuggling, selling; Sectarianism targets afghans; Sectarian violence on rise; Japan donates \$20m for development programmes.**

After showing a green signal for peace talks, the Taliban have likely selected their seven representatives residing in Qatar to attend peace negotiations with the Afghan government, according to a former Taliban leader. According to the former leader of Taliban's Jaish-ul-Muslimeen wing, Syed Akbar Agha, five recently released Gitmo prisoners would possibly join the group of Taliban negotiators. "The Taliban have allowed their representatives in Qatar to lead these [peace] talks, and the talks are expected to be commenced soon in coming days," Agha said. Syed Tayyab Agha and Mawlawi Shahabuddin Dilawar, who were the chief justice and the ambassador to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in the Taliban regime, and also Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai and Qari Din Mohammad, are among the negotiators representing the Taliban. "Taliban have already selected their representatives for the peace talks and they are from seven to eight people," the former Taliban leader revealed.<sup>1</sup>

Millions of dollars were spent to overcome poppy cultivation and drugs trafficking in the country, but the struggles brought Afghanistan to the point that it was placed among highest poppy cultivators and drugs producers in the world. Media reports said the other day that thousands of children are used in drugs smuggling and selling packets of the heroin, hashish and other drugs in parts of the capital city, Kabul. Radio Azadi reports that Hassan, a nine-year-old boy who lives in western parts of the city, works in selling and distributing drugs to addicts for the past three months. According to the source, Hassan's brother has also joined him in this illicit business. Hassan says that his father has died and there is no one at home to afford their daily life thus he is obliged to do this illegal business. The source added that Hassan might have no idea about the legality or illegality of the business; the most important thing for him is to gain some money for financing his vulnerable family. "This is my brother. We work together in selling heroin to buy a slice of bread. Shopkeeper tells us to distribute drugs to drug addicts. I know this is a bad work. But what should I do?" said Hassan.<sup>2</sup>

A number of Afghan refugees returned from Iran with ardent desire to breathe a sigh of relief in their own country. They dreamt of alleviating the burden of nomadic life beside their family

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<sup>1</sup> "Taliban Finalize Peace Negotiators: Akbar Agha", *Out Look Afghanistan*, February 25, 2015 at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11728](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11728)

<sup>2</sup> "Children are Used in Drugs Smuggling, Selling: Officials", *Afghanistan Times*, February 27, 2015 at <http://afghanistantimes.af/children-are-used-in-drugs-smuggling-selling-officials/>

members. Afghans' nascent democracy seemed to them a panacea for all challenges. The ferment of election in 2014 may have compounded their sense of patriotism. The ostensible discourse of liberty, human rights, reconciliation, etc. was cogent enough for them to return their homes. To their unmitigated chagrin, their dream did not come true and their burning hopes were crumbled on the way to their domiciles. Reports say that masked gunmen abducted 30 Afghan men, Hazaras, who were travelling by bus through southern Afghanistan after returning from Iran – on February 23 evening on Herat-Kabul highway. Nasir Ahmad, an official with the Ghazni Paima bus company, is quoted as, "Our driver saw a group of masked men in Afghan army uniform signalling him and he thought they were soldiers so he stopped .... The gunmen took 30 Hazaras away with them." Moreover, a female passenger is quoted as saying, "They were standing on the highway with their faces covered .... They only took Hazaras, including my cousins. After they took the people, the police arrived but they refused to go after the kidnappers, saying they needed orders from Kabul."<sup>3</sup>

The US President Barack Obama would soon make his decision on troop adjustment, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, told lawmakers on February 24 ahead of the US visit of the Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. Kerry told lawmakers during a Congressional hearing that "the President is on the right track (on his withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan). The evaluation that is going on now with respect to the adjustment on the troop is appropriate. And the president will make his decision shortly." "Do you support a conditions-based withdrawal in Afghanistan, of our military forces?" Kerry was asked by Senator Thad Cochran. Such a statement from the US Secretary of State comes in the wake of repeated requests from the new Afghan President Ghani, that the US should reconsider its decision on complete withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2016. During his maiden trip to Afghanistan, the new US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter said that he would consider on the pace of drawdown of troops from Afghanistan based on conditions on the ground. A day earlier, the White House had indicated that the US President could tailor his Afghan Policy in particular the drawdown of troops following recommendations from the commanders on the ground.<sup>4</sup>

The government of Japan would provide a total amount of \$20,000,000 of grant assistance to Afghanistan through UN-Habitat for its Community-Led Urban Infrastructure Programme in five cities including Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad. A statement from the Japan Embassy said on March 2 the programme responds to the urgent needs of recently displaced people, demobilized combatants and returnees through further empowering communities, enhancing their access to basic services and improving their livelihoods.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Sectarianism Targets Afghans", *Out Look Afghanistan*, February 26, 2015 at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post\\_id=11741](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/topics.php?post_id=11741)

<sup>4</sup> "Decision on Troop Adjustment Soon: John Kerry", *Out Look Afghanistan*, February 26, 2015 at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11738](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11738)

<sup>5</sup> "Japan will Donate \$20m for Urban Infrastructure Programme", *Out Look Afghanistan*, March 3, 2015 at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=11757](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=11757)

## Pakistan

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Pakistan Army chief warns India; Kashmir will be on the agenda of talks; Madrasah reform in Punjab; PM Nawaz Sharif leaves for Saudi Arabia.**

Army Chief General Raheel Sharif has warned India that Pakistan would give a “befitting response” to any provocation along the Line of Control (LoC) and working boundary. He made this statement during his visit to the areas affected by Indian firing along the working boundary near Sialkot. “Let there be no doubt that any provocation along the LoC and Working Boundary will meet a befitting response,” the army chief was quoted as saying by DG ISPR Major General Asim Bajwa. He said repeated Indian ceasefire violations on the LoC and Working Boundary in recent past was an attempt to distract Pakistan’s campaign against terrorists and had negative impact on regional stability.<sup>6</sup>

The civilian and military governments are on the same page when it comes to foreign policy and the security policy said Advisor to the prime minister on foreign affairs Sartaj Aziz on March 1st. Addressing a ceremony in Lahore, Aziz said, the era of blame games with Afghanistan has come to an end, now the relationship is one of mutual cooperation. On Pakistan’s relationship with India the advisor said that whenever discussions resume, the agenda will be Kashmir. He said, Pakistan wishes to hold composite dialogue with India and does not wish to engage in an arms race with its neighbour. Sartaj Aziz made it clear that for Pakistan there is no difference between good and bad Taliban, adding that Pakistan and Afghanistan will not allow their respective territories to be used against the other country.<sup>7</sup>

Stepping up its efforts against terrorism, the Punjab government has decided to reform syllabi of seminaries and schools/colleges, a much-needed but hitherto ignored measure, map seminaries and Afghan refugees and introduce a ‘safe city’ project. The decisions were announced by Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif at a press conference on February 25. The province has already introduced laws against hate — particularly takfiri — speech, wall chalking and misuse of loudspeakers in mosques, and booked thousands of prayer leaders. Mr Sharif said that articles on religious tolerance and restraint would be made part of the syllabi of schools and seminaries. Most of the groundwork had been completed in this regard. Besides, he said, writing of plays and songs promoting harmony and tolerance would be encouraged as part of efforts to change the mind-set of the society.<sup>8</sup>

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on March 4 left for Saudi Arabia on the invitation of King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. In his pre-departure statement, Prime Minister Sharif said that Pakistan

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<sup>6</sup> “Army Chief Warns India On Provocation Along Border”, *The Express Tribune*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/844649/army-chief-warns-india-on-provocation-along-border/>

<sup>7</sup> “Whenever Talks Resume, Agenda Will Be Kashmir: Aziz”, *The News*, March 1, 2015 at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-176777-Whenever-talks-resume,-agenda-will-be-Kashmir:-Aziz>

<sup>8</sup> “Punjab To Reform Syllabus, Map Seminaries, Says CM”, *Dawn*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1165991/punjab-to-reform-syllabus-map-seminaries-says-cm>

and Saudi Arabia are brotherly countries which are tied in bonds of shared faith and values. He added that the relationship between the two countries has grown stronger with the passage of time. This is the premier's first official visit to the Kingdom since King Salman bin Abdul Aziz assumed the throne. During his three-day visit, he will also perform Umrah and visit the tomb of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in addition to meeting members of the Pakistani community in Saudi Arabia. The premier will be accompanied by a high-level delegation which includes Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Chief Minister Punjab Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Affairs Irfan Siddiqui and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Syed Tariq Fatemi.<sup>9</sup>

## Bangladesh

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **RAB seized a huge cache of explosives and bombs in Chittagong; Killing of blogger condemned; The AL and the BNP have replied to the letter of UN Secretary General; Mamta visits Bangladesh.**

In an overnight raid on February 28, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) seized a huge cache of explosives and bombs from a militant hideout at Haliashahar in Chittagong. The haul includes 150 kilograms of explosives, 76 "powerful bombs" including 22 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), 30 kinds of bomb-making materials and 24 shotgun shells. Four people, including a woman, were arrested at the house. The elite force personnel also recovered a number of books and documents on jihad and a copy of the constitution of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student front of Jamaat-e-Islami which is a key member of the BNP-led 20-party alliance. The drive was a sequel to a February 21 raid in which the RAB busted a militant training camp camouflaged as a poultry and livestock farm in Chittagong's Banskhal, arrested five people and seized some firearms, including AK-47 assault rifles, and training equipment.<sup>10</sup>

The founder of Mukto-Mona (Free-mind) blog site, Avijit Roy's killing on February 26 in the TSC area of Dhaka University triggered strong condemnations from his fellow writers and publishers at home and abroad. Different political, social and cultural organisations including the ruling Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) strongly condemned the heinous killing and demanded bringing the perpetrators to the book. The United Nations and the USA have strongly condemned the killing of blogger Avijit Roy and expressed the hope that the perpetrators will be quickly brought to justice through a transparent process of law. The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has also condemned the killing saying the attack on Avijit is part of a deadly cycle of violence as a culture of impunity, following such incidents, prevails in Bangladesh. The US was ready to assist the investigation into the brutal killing, if sought, said US Department of State Spokesperson Jen Psaki in a statement issued on February 27.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "PM Nawaz Sharif Leaves For Saudi Arabia", *Dawn*, March 4, 2015 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1167300/pm-nawaz-sharif-leaves-for-saudi-arabia>

<sup>10</sup> "Militant Den Busted in Ctg", *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/scary-recovery-67161>.

<sup>11</sup> "UN, US shocked", *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/un-us-shocked-67164>.

Both the ruling AL and the BNP have replied to the letter of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon calling for a dialogue to resolve the current political crisis and an end to violence that already claimed about a hundred lives. BNP insiders said the party in its letter said it was ready to sit for a dialogue with the government to resolve the current political impasse. The letter also mentioned the government's "repression" on the party leaders and workers. The AL sources said the foreign ministry in its letter to the UN chief termed BNP-Jamaat's activities "acts of terrorism" and said the government cannot sit with "terrorists".<sup>12</sup>

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has termed her Bangladesh visit "very successful". During her three-day visit to Bangladesh, Mamata met President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and discussed the Teesta water-sharing deal and the land boundary agreement, among other issues. The chief minister headed a 39-member delegation to Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup>

## Sri Lanka

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Sri Lanka seeks assistance from India, the US and Britain to investigate financial fraud; United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs visits Sri Lanka; 40 refugees return back from India; Sri Lankan Navy arrests 86 Indian fishermen; Minister of Foreign Affairs visits China; Sri Lanka expresses concerns about the developments in Maldives; The US sends demining equipment to Sri Lanka; India-Sri Lanka fishermen talk postponed; The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law of Singapore visits Sri Lanka; Petition filed against Colombo Port City Project.**

The Government of Sri Lanka has sought assistance from India, the United States and Britain to investigate large scale financial fraud committed by the former Government. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said that Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Justice Minister Wijeydasa Rajapaksa have visited these countries to seek assistance from institutions there for the investigation.<sup>14</sup>

United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, arrived in Sri Lanka on February 28 on a four day visit.<sup>15</sup> Tamil National Alliance (TNA) had talks with Feltman, on several issues, including on the proposed domestic investigation on the war in Sri Lanka and informed the top UN official that they had no faith in a domestic probe. Feltman however had told the TNA that the Government had given an assurance the domestic probe will meet international standards. He had said that the UN is willing to work with the new Government on

<sup>12</sup> Hasan, Rashidul and Tusher, Hasan Jahid, "AL, BNP Reply to UN Letter", *The Daily Star*, February 28, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/al-bnp-reply-to-un-letter-67047>.

<sup>13</sup> "Bangladesh Visit 'Very Successful': Says Mamata on Return from Dhaka", *The Daily Star*, February 23, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh-visit-very-successful-66178>.

<sup>14</sup> "Lanka Seeks US, India, UK Help", *Colombo Gazette*, March 1, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/01/lanka-seeks-us-india-uk-help/>.

<sup>15</sup> "UN Official Begins Four Day Visit", *Colombo Gazette*, February 28, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/28/top-un-official-begins-lanka-visit/>.

the investigation and other issues. Feltman also had separate talks with President Maithripala Sirisena and Deputy Foreign Minister Ajith Perera.<sup>16</sup>

About 40 refugees from various camps in Tamil Nadu voluntarily returned to Sri Lanka with the assistance of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>17</sup>

Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 86 Indian fishermen for poaching in Sri Lankan waters and they are now being brought ashore, a navy spokesman said. Navy spokesman Indika Silva said that the fishermen were arrested east of Mullaitivu and their boats were also seized.<sup>18</sup>

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera left for a two day visit to China on February 25.<sup>19</sup> During the visit, Samaraweera paid a courtesy call on the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and also held extensive bilateral discussions with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, as well as met with the Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Wang Jiarui and the Minister of Commerce, Gao Hucheng. Minister Samaraweera had informed the Chinese side that it was the desire of the new Government of Sri Lanka to further strengthen the warm and robust bilateral relations and the cooperative partnership which would be the key objective of the upcoming State Visit to China by President Maithripala Sirisena.<sup>20</sup>

Lanka, as a friendly neighbouring country is concerned about the recent developments in Maldives, the External Affairs Ministry of Sri Lanka said on February 25. The Ministry said that Sri Lanka hopes that all stakeholders in Maldives will resolve their differences in a peaceful manner, within the legal provisions in Maldives.<sup>21</sup>

The United States (US) has sent demining equipment worth nearly 300 million Sri Lankan rupees, according to the US Embassy in Colombo. Lieutenant Dave Chesson from the U.S. Embassy delivered the donated equipment to assist with demining efforts in the former war-affected areas of Sri Lanka on February 24. The shipment is a part of continuing US assistance with demining efforts across the country since 2009, the US Embassy in Colombo added. Major General Lasantha Wickramasuriya, Chief Field Engineer, and Brigadier Jagath Gunawardane, Commander Engineer Brigade, received the donated equipment from the U.S. Embassy.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "TNA Raises Its Concerns with UN", *Colombo Gazette*, February 28, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/28/tna-raises-its-concerns-with-un/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Lankan Refugees in India Return", *Colombo Gazette*, February 27, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/27/lankan-refugees-in-india-return/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Navy Arrests 86 Indian Fishermen", *Colombo Gazette*, February 27, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/27/navy-arrests-86-indian-fishermen/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Foreign Minister is Off to China", *Colombo Gazette*, February 25, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/25/foreign-minister-is-off-to-china/>.

<sup>20</sup> "Sri Lanka, China Talks Successful", *Colombo Gazette*, February 28, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/28/lanka-says-china-talks-successful/>.

<sup>21</sup> "Lanka Concerned Over Maldives", *Colombo Gazette*, February 25, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/25/lanka-concerned-over-maldives-2/>.

<sup>22</sup> "U.S. Sends Demining Equipment", *Colombo Gazette*, February 24, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/24/us-sends-demining-equipment/>.

Talks between India and Sri Lanka on fishing in the Palk Bay and Palk Strait, which were to be held in Chennai on March 5, have been postponed indefinitely because the Sri Lankan government is busy with other more pressing issues, according to the Director General of Fisheries, Nimal Hettiarachchi.<sup>23</sup>

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law of Singapore, K. Shanmugam, who was on a two day visit to Sri Lanka, met with Foreign Affairs Minister Mangala Samaraweera on February 23 at the Ministry. The visit, marking the first high-level interaction of the Singapore Government with the new Sri Lankan Government, since it assumed office last month, demonstrates the keenness of Singapore to reinforce and reaffirm the continuity of the close and robust bilateral relations between the two countries.<sup>24</sup> Shanmugam met President Maithripala Sirisena on February 2 and praised the new Sri Lankan government's efforts for development and reconciliation. President Sirisena said Sri Lanka, as a middle-income country is keen to study the success story of Singapore and take lessons from that country to speed up the development in Sri Lanka. He asked the visiting Singapore Foreign Affairs to encourage Singaporean industrialists to invest in Sri Lanka. He thanked Singapore for the support given for English teacher training programme in North and East Provinces and technical training projects in different parts of the country.<sup>25</sup>

A petition was filed at the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) on February 23 against the Colombo Port City project by environmental groups. The environmental groups said that the human rights of the public, including fishermen, had been violated as a result of the Chinese funded project. They also alleged that an initial environment assessment report issued by a leading Sri Lankan university, which had cleared the project, was issued with the involvement of the Chinese. The environmental groups said that they will stage a protest in Colombo against the project with the participation of fishermen and others. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said that there have been several concerns and allegations over the project, including allegations of corruption and a special committee is still investigating those concerns. Making a statement in Parliament the Prime Minister had said that he had recently informed the Special Envoy of the Government of China, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Liu Jianchao, that Sri Lanka will not allow any corrupt deals to proceed. He said that China also stands firmly against corruption. Wickremesinghe however noted that the Government wants to further strengthen its ties with China and will not allow the Port City project issue to come in the way.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Indo-Lanka Fishing Talks Put Off", *Colombo Gazette*, February 23, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/23/indo-lanka-fishing-talks-put-off/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Singapore Hails Lanka's Efforts", *Colombo Gazette*, February 23, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/23/singapore-hails-lankas-efforts/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Singapore Says It Will Back Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, February 24, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/24/singapore-says-will-back-lanka/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Petition over Port City at HRCSL", *Colombo Gazette*, February 23, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/02/23/petition-over-port-city-at-hrcsl/>.

## Maldives

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Arrest of former President Mohamed Nasheed; The Commonwealth and the Transparency Maldives express concern about the arrest of Nasheed; MDP-JP alliance organises protest rally demanding the release of Nasheed; Minister of Foreign Affairs asks international community not to comment on the arrest; Qasim Ibrahim meets the President of Sri Lanka; Special envoys left for Japan and China; President Yameen postpones the visit to Pakistan.**

The Government of the Maldives has pressed terrorism charges against president Nasheed following the arrest of Criminal Court Judge Abdulla Mohamed and taking him to Kaafu Girifushi forcefully when Nasheed was serving as the Head of Defence.<sup>27</sup>

In light of recent developments in the Maldives, the Commonwealth has called on the government to ensure that the rule of law is respected, with adherence to due process and in accordance with the Commonwealth Charter. This came in a statement by Commonwealth Spokesperson Victoria Holdsworth on February 23. Holdsworth noted the arrest of former President Mohamed Nasheed on charges of terrorism, and said that the Commonwealth Secretary-General was concerned to note reports that Nasheed was denied the right to legal representation at the court hearing that took place on 23 February.<sup>28</sup>

Transparency Maldives has issued a statement calling for fair and transparent legal proceedings, free from politicisation and in accordance with the principles of justice, for former President Mohamed Nasheed and former Defence Minister Mohamed Nazim. The organisation noted with concern the escalating political tensions in the Maldives, and appealed to all actors to uphold the rule of law and the constitution, and to engage in dialogue to resolve political disputes.<sup>29</sup>

In the big protest rally organised by the MDP-JP alliance, held on February 27 demanding the immediate release of the former president Mohamed Nasheed who is charged with terrorism and the former Defence Minister Colonel-retired Mohamed Nazim who is charged with possession of a firearm, an additional 13 demands were made to the government. About the MDP-JP protest, the spokesperson for the President's Office Ibrahim Muaz said that the main demands were not something that the government can subject to and the demands were baseless.<sup>30</sup>

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon has said that the international community should not comment on activities that take place in the Maldives that follow the country's constitution and laws. Dunya's remarks came in relation to statements issued by some countries and

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<sup>27</sup> "Order to Detain Nasheed until the End of Trial Appealed", *SunOnline*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28004>.

<sup>28</sup> "Commonwealth Calls to Respect Rule of Law", *SunOnline*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27943>.

<sup>29</sup> "Transparency Maldives Calls for Fair Legal Proceedings for Nasheed, Nazim", *SunOnline*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27976>.

<sup>30</sup> "Government: The Opposition Demands Have No Basis", *SunOnline*, February 28, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28047..>

international organisations, regarding the arrest of former President Mohamed Nasheed.<sup>31</sup>

MP for the Maamigili constituents and leader of Jumhooree Party (JP) Qasim Ibrahim has met the President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena to share the state of Maldivian democracy. Qasim left the country to discuss the state of the democracy in Maldives with foreign leaders on February 26. The JP leader left the country after organizing a joint MDP-JP rally to defend the constitutions.<sup>32</sup>

Economic Minister Mohamed Saeed, State Minister of Finance, Ahmed Munawar and Foreign Secretary Ali Naseer left for China and Japan as Special envoys to hasten the development of Ibrahim Nasir International Airport.<sup>33</sup>

The state visit by President Abdulla Yameen to Pakistan has been postponed for the second time indefinitely. The President's visit to Pakistan scheduled for June 2014 was postponed for security reasons, following a terror attack in the country. President Yameen's Spokesperson Ibrahim Muaz said back then that the visit was postponed as advised by security officials in both countries. No reason has been given for the second postponement.<sup>34</sup>

## B. East Asia

### China

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Sri Lanka calls for increasing Chinese investments; People's Liberation Army calls for increase in fight against corruption; New Environmental minister appointed by China; China asserts its respect towards Myanmar's sovereignty; China upset over the charges of United States with regard to the South China Sea; Xi Jinping "Four Comprehensives" essential for Chinese rejuvenation".**

Sri Lankan foreign minister Mangala Samaraweera met with the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on March 2. During the meeting the foreign minister said that, "We encourage Chinese investors to capitalize on the new investment opportunities that have opened up in Sri Lanka".<sup>35</sup>

After the Central Military Commission's Vice Chairman, Xu Caihou's graft case, the Chinese People's Liberation Army has reaffirmed its pledge to fight corruption in its education campaign.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Dunya: International Community Should Not Comment On Things Done According To Constitution", *SunOnline*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27947>.

<sup>32</sup> "Qasim Meets Sirisena", *SunOnline*, February 28, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28041>.

<sup>33</sup> "Special Envoys Have Left for China and Japan to Hasten the Airport Development", *SunOnline*, February 28, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28037>.

<sup>34</sup> "President's Pakistan Visit Delayed Again", *SunOnline*, March 1, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28063>.

<sup>35</sup> Shengnan, Zhao, "Sri Lanka Welcomes Chinese Investment, Says Minister", *China Daily*, February 28, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/28/content\\_19681550.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/28/content_19681550.htm), accessed on March 2, 2015

<sup>36</sup> "Chinese Military Vows Continuous Anti-Corruption Efforts", *China Daily*, February 28, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/28/content\\_19681358.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/28/content_19681358.htm), accessed on March 2, 2015

Chen Jining who is an environmental scientist has been appointed as the new environmental protection minister. He replaced Zhou Shengxian.<sup>37</sup>

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said on February 27<sup>th</sup> that, "China respects Myanmar's sovereignty, territorial integrity and is opposed to any acts hurting bilateral ties". He further added that China is opposed to the idea of any organization or person trying to use the Chinese territory in order to hamper the existing China-Myanmar relations.<sup>38</sup>

As a response to the US assertions that China has expanded its outposts in the South China Sea, the Chinese Foreign Minister Hong Lei asserted that, "China has shown restraint and a responsible attitude in the South China Sea. Outsiders have no right to make groundless accusations".<sup>39</sup>

The "Four Comprehensives" was first mentioned by President Xi Jinping in December 2012. These include a moderately prosperous society, reform, rule of law and Party discipline. It is being asserted that the "moderately comprehensive society" is a "crucial step towards the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation".<sup>40</sup>

## Japan

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Japanese Government proposes to allow SDF in rescue operations involving Japanese citizens.**

On February 27, the Japanese Government proposed to allow Japanese Self Defence Forces (SDF) in rescue operations involving Japanese nationals embroiled in terrorist attacks overseas. It needs to be noted that in July last year itself, the government decided on the conditions under which the SDF could participate in such missions. It has been agreed that Japan must have consent from the territorial state's government to involve in rescue operations.<sup>41</sup>

## South Korea

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **South Korea Prime Minister insists on inter-Korean talks; China and South Korea are to officially sign the bilateral FTA within the first half of 2015; South Korean top nuclear envoy**

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<sup>37</sup> "China Appoints New Environmental Protection Minister", *China Daily*, February 28, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/28/content\\_19678257.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/28/content_19678257.htm). accessed on March 2, 2015

<sup>38</sup> "China Respects Myanmar's Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity", *China Daily*, February 27, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/27/content\\_19673674.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/27/content_19673674.htm), accessed on March 2, 2015

<sup>39</sup> "China Rejects US Charges On South China Sea" *China Daily*, February 27, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/27/content\\_19673612.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/27/content_19673612.htm), accessed on March 2, 2015

<sup>40</sup> "Xi's 'Four Comprehensives' a Strategic Blueprint For China's Future", *China Daily*, February 26, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/26/content\\_19655506.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-02/26/content_19655506.htm), accessed on March 2, 2015

<sup>41</sup> "Government Proposes SDF Rescue Of Japanese", *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 27, 2015 at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001967514>

## **meets with his Russian counterpart in Moscow; South Korea begins its joint naval exercise with the US.**

While citing South Korea's recent willingness to improve ties with North Korea, on February 26, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo stated that if the North comes forward to hold an inter-Korea talks, Seoul is ready to discuss regarding the removal of the economic sanctions against Pyongyang. A few weeks ago, South Korean Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae reiterated similar stance on sanctions. It needs to be noted that South Korea imposed economic sanctions against North Korea after the Cheonan incident in March 2010.<sup>42</sup>

China and South Korea have recently agreed to work together towards the formal signing of the bilateral FTA within the first half of this year. While the negotiation for the said FTA has already been concluded on November 10, both sides have added some new and positive elements in it. However both the countries will need to acquire approval from their respective legislatures in order to implement the FTA.<sup>43</sup>

South Korea's top nuclear envoy Hwang Joon-kook recently visited Moscow and held talks with his Russian counterpart and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mogulov Igor. During his meeting on February 24, both sides talked about exploring ways to resume the Six party Talks (SPT) that has been suspended since 2008.<sup>44</sup>

On February 27, both South Korea and the US kicked off their joint naval exercise in the waters off the Korean peninsula. The drills will continue till mid-March. The exercise is to boost joint operations, capabilities and to strengthen the joint defence posture.<sup>45</sup>

## **C. Russia**

### **Russia**

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Russia interested in lifting of Iranian sanctions; Foreign Minister Lavrov says that Russia and China 'advance new global order'; Russia offers Iran the option of replacing S-300's with Antey-2500; Cyprus signs military deal with Russia; Russia to strive for India's full-fledged SCO membership; Russia and Abu Dhabi discuss joint project to develop an airport in Cuba; Russia to support International Space Station till 2024; Russian gas supplies to**

<sup>42</sup> "PM Says Sanctions Removal Can Be Discussed If Koreas Held Talks", *The Korea Herald*, February 26, 2014 at [http://www.koreaherald.com/common\\_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150226001007&dt=2](http://www.koreaherald.com/common_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150226001007&dt=2)

<sup>43</sup> "S. Korea, China Initial Bilateral Free Trade Pact", *The Korea Herald*, February 25, 2015 at [http://www.koreaherald.com/common\\_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150225000670&dt=2](http://www.koreaherald.com/common_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150225000670&dt=2)

<sup>44</sup> "S. Korea, Russia hold talks on North Korea's Nuke Issue", *The Korea Herald*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150225000175>

<sup>45</sup> "S. Korea, US Kick Off Joint Naval Drills", *The Korea Herald*, February 27, 2015 at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150227000399>

**Asia-Pacific can rise nine-fold by 2035; Russia calls on Kiev to retain non-bloc status in order to preserve Ukraine's unity; Egypt hopes for a closer anti-terrorist cooperation with Russia.**

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov has said, in Moscow on February 27, that 'Russia is interested in successful completion of talks on the Iranian nuclear programme and its role in these talks stems from Moscow's national interests'. He was responding to reports that Russia may not be keen on the success of ongoing negotiations.<sup>46</sup>

Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov has said, in Moscow on February 27, that 'joint action by Russia and China on the world stage reflects common positions and the need for a more democratic and fairer global order'. He added that cooperation with China on foreign policy issues - joint assessment of the impermissibility of meddling in other countries' affairs and organizing so-called 'colour revolutions' - is a major stabilizing factor in the current complicated international situation'.<sup>47</sup>

The head of state conglomerate Rostec has said, in Abu Dhabi on February 23 that Russia has offered Iran its latest Antey-2500 anti-ballistic missiles to replace less powerful S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems, adding that Tehran was now considering the offer.<sup>48</sup>

Russia has signed a military cooperation agreement with Cyprus during the visit of Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades to Moscow on February 25. The deal allows Russian navy ships that are taking part in the fight against terrorism and piracy to make regular port of calls on the island. The two countries also discussed the possibility of Russian planes using an air base near Paphos for humanitarian relief missions. Mr. Anastasiades stated that Cyprus is against the EU sanctions on Russia. During his visit he met Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the speakers of Russia's lower and upper houses of parliament, Sergey Naryshkin and Valentina Matviyenko, and St. Petersburg Governor Georgy Poltavchenko. In the run up to the visit, the Kremlin had noted that Cyprus remained one of the leading channels to attract foreign investments into the Russian economy. The volume of Cypriot accumulated investments in Russia totals US\$ 65 billion, while Cyprus has accumulated US\$ 33 billion of Russian investments.<sup>49</sup>

The Speaker of State Duma Sergey Naryshkin, during his visit to New Delhi on February 27, has said that 'Russia will do its best for India to become a full-fledged member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) during the next summit in Bashkortostan in July, 2015'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Russia Interested In Lifting Anti-Iranian Sanctions — Russian Diplomat", *Itar-Tass*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/780113>

<sup>47</sup> "Russia and China Advance New Global Order — Russian Foreign Minister", *Itar-Tass*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/780045>

<sup>48</sup> "Russia Offers Iran To Replace S-300 With Antey-2500 — Rostec Head", *Itar-Tass*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/779194>

<sup>49</sup> "Russia, Cyprus Presidents To Discuss Financial, Military Cooperation, Ukraine Crisis", *Itar-Tass*, February 25, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/779447>

<sup>50</sup> "Russia to Strive For India's Full-Fledged SCO Membership — Parliament Speaker", *Itar-Tass*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/779953>

The National Newspaper has reported that Russia is ready to invest at least US\$ 200 million in a joint project with investors from Abu Dhabi in order to build a major airport in Cuba that will serve as a hub for Latin America. The project may also include redeveloping a port and building a railway line.<sup>51</sup>

After months of uncertainty surrounding the long-term fate of the International Space Station, Russia's federal space agency Roscosmos has announced its desire to remain in the 15-nation programme until 2024. It will then move onto a moon mission around 2030.

Energy Minister Alexander Novak has projected in Krasnoyarsk on February 27 that Russia's gas supplies to the Asia-Pacific Region can rise nine-fold from 14 to 130 billion cubic meters by 2035 while oil and coal supplies will double in volume.<sup>52</sup>

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on February 27, that 'Ukraine needs to maintain its non-bloc status for the country to remain united'. This statement was in response to Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko signing into law a bill cancelling Ukraine's non-bloc status in December 2014. Poroshenko had said that Ukraine will hold a referendum on accession to NATO within the next 5-6 years.<sup>53</sup>

In the run up to his visit to Moscow, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry has said, on February 24, that Egypt hopes to develop close cooperation with Russia in the fight against terrorism. He added that Egypt will also 'welcome the participation of Russian warships in a naval blockade of Libya to prevent arms supplies for terrorists in the Arab country if Moscow made such decision'.<sup>54</sup>

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **France warns Russia of more sanctions if Mariupol is attacked; Russian-Ukrainian An-70 transport plane excluded from Russia's state defence programme; Russia's arms exports touch US\$ 13 billion in 2014; Prototype of Russia's new 100-ton ballistic missile to be built in May-June; Putin's approval ratings touch 86 per cent; Official unemployment rate in Russia grow by 20,000 people in February 2015; Russia's anti-corruption social network to be launched in March; Russia's 2025 Energy Strategy will be approved in the fall of 2015.**

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has said, on February 25, that Moscow will face more EU sanctions if pro-Russia separatists attack the Ukrainian port of Mariupol. However, latest reports suggest that both the Kiev government and separatist forces of south-eastern Ukraine have started

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<sup>51</sup> "Russia, Abu Dhabi Discuss Joint Project To Develop Major Airport In Cuba — Reports", *Itar-Tass*, February 25, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/779451>

<sup>52</sup> "Russian Gas Supplies To Asia-Pacific Can Rise Ninefold By 2035 — Energy Minister", *Itar-Tass*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/779947>

<sup>53</sup> "Kiev Has To Keep Non-Bloc Status To Preserve Ukraine's Unity — Russian FM", *Itar-Tass*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/779958>

<sup>54</sup> "Cairo Counts On Close Anti-Terror Cooperation With Russia — Egyptian Foreign Minister", *Itar-Tass*, February 24, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/779300>

withdrawal of heavy weapons and the fragile ceasefire has shown signs of being maintained.<sup>55</sup>

Russia's Defence Ministry has excluded the Antonov An-70 transport aircraft developed jointly by Russia and Ukraine from the state defence programme. The ministry was to purchase 60 An-70 by 2020 but Ukraine has suspended the joint development project. Instead, the Kiev based Antonov design group has completed the development and testing of the plane on its own, and Ukraine is to induct the aircraft for service in 2015. The two countries had started the project in 2010 and Russia is considering the possibility of claiming damages.<sup>56</sup>

The head of Rostec has said, in Abu Dhabi on February 23 that Russia had sold weapons worth US\$ 13 billion in 2014 and the current portfolio stood at US\$ 38.5 billion.<sup>57</sup>

*Itar-Tass* has reported that a prototype of the Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile will be built in May/June 2015. It added that flight tests are expected to start by 2016. The new-generation liquid propellant ICBM Sarmat is being designed to replace strategic missile R-36M2 Voyevoda, which is close to the life cycle expiration date.<sup>58</sup>

A poll conducted by independent Moscow-based pollster the Levada Centre in February 2015 has revealed that eighty-six percent of respondents approve of President Putin's actions. The poll also revealed strong support for the path Russia is currently on. While 29 per cent of respondents said Russia was generally headed down the wrong path, 54 per cent said Russia is moving in the right direction.<sup>59</sup>

The press service of Russia's Labour Ministry has said, on February 24, that the number of unemployed citizens officially registered at Russia's bodies of the Federal Service for Employment and Labour Relations has grown by 2.2 per cent in February. This amounts to an increase of twenty thousand unemployed personnel.<sup>60</sup>

A member of the State Duma anti-corruption expert council Anatoly Smirnov has said, in Sochi on February 25, that an all-Russia anti-corruption social network "Vzyatke-NET" (Say 'No' to Bribe) will be established in March 2015. The network will be launched to help ordinary Russians

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<sup>55</sup> "France: Russia Will Face More EU Sanctions If Mariupol Attacked", *Itar-Tass*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/france-russia-will-face-more-eu-sanctions-if-mariupol-attacked/516482.html>

<sup>56</sup> "Russian-Ukrainian An-70 Transport Plane Excluded From Russia's State Defence Programme", *Itar-Tass*, March 1, 2015, at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/780349>

<sup>57</sup> "Russia's Arms Exports Top \$13 Billion In 2014 — Rostec Head", *Itar-Tass*, February 23, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/779187>

<sup>58</sup> "Prototype of Russia's New 100-Ton Ballistic Missile To Be Built In May-June — Source", *Itar-Tass*, February 24, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/779301>

<sup>59</sup> "Putin's Approval Rating Creeps Up to 86%, Poll Shows", *The Moscow Times*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-s-approval-rating-creeps-up-again-poll-shows/516580.html>

<sup>60</sup> "Official Unemployment Rates In Russia Grow By 20,000 People Weekly", *Itar-Tass*, February 24, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/779278>

maintain contacts with anti-corruption officials and will be initially available to lawyers and representatives of anti-corruption structures.<sup>61</sup>

Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich has said, on February 27, that Russia's 2025 Energy Strategy will be discussed in March 2015 at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and its final approval is scheduled for the fall of 2015.<sup>62</sup>

## D. The United State of America

### National

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **US economic growth slower than first thought; DoD seeks novel ideas to shape its technological future; Capabilities must match future threats, army leader says; Missile defence system performs successful flight test; High seas must remain open to all, Navy leader says; Army Secretary details sequestration dangers; Sequestration harms air force readiness, James says; DoD CIO details information technology priorities; Welsh: sequestration harms aging, shrinking air force; McKeon: budget request provides 'robust' nuclear deterrent.**

U.S. economic growth was slower than first thought in the last few months of 2014. The recent report from the Commerce Department says the gross domestic product expanded at a 2.2 percent annual rate in the fourth quarter. That is a bit slower than a previous estimate, and half the rate of the third quarter's expansion. Commerce officials say GDP growth slowed because of less federal government spending and rising imports. For all of 2014 the new analysis puts growth at 2.4 percent, which is a bit faster than the prior year. White House economic advisor Jason Furman said the slower growth rate is due to temporary issues, and that the labour market and energy security continue to improve.<sup>63</sup>

The Defence Department is seeking novel ideas to shape its future, and officials are looking to industry, small business, academia, start-ups, the public -- anyone, really -- to boost its ability to prevail against adversaries whose access to technology grows daily. The programme, called the Long-Range Research and Development Plan, or LRRDP, began with an October 29 memo by DoD acquisition chief Frank Kendall. The memo said the LRRDP will identify high-payoff enabling technology investments that could help shape future U.S. materiel investments and the trajectory of future competition for technical superiority. The plan will focus on technology that can be moved into development programmes within the next five years.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> "Russia's Anti-Corruption Social Network To Be Launched In March", *Itar-Tass*, February 25, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/779636>

<sup>62</sup> "Russia's 2025 Energy Strategy Will Be Approved In Fall 2015 — Deputy PM", *Itar-Tass*, February 27, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/780030>

<sup>63</sup> "US Economic Growth Slower Than First Thought", *VOA News*, February 27, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-economic-growth-slower-than-first-thought/2661613.html>

<sup>64</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "DoD Seeks Novel Ideas to Shape its Technological Future", *DoD News*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128234>

Success in future armed conflict boils down to ensuring the capabilities put in place today can match the threats of the future, deputy commanding general for futures, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, said in Washington on February 24. Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who also serves as director of Army Capabilities Integration Centre, told the audience at International Security's "Future of War" conference that because threats have changed, American responses must change as well. Nations were the source of threats in the past, he said. Today, they also come from non-state actors and the confluence of networked insurgent and terrorist organizations bridging over into transnational organized crime networks and having access to capabilities they didn't have in the past. The capabilities include communications, mobilized resources and access to destructive technologies.<sup>65</sup>

The Missile Defence Agency and sailors aboard the USS Carney, USS Gonzalez, and USS Barry successfully completed a flight test involving the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defence weapon system, according to a Defence Department news release. At approximately 2:30 a.m. EST on February 24, three short-range ballistic missile targets were launched nearly simultaneously from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility, Virginia, the release said. Two Aegis BMD destroyers acquired and tracked the targets. Using this data, the Aegis BMD ships conducted simulated Standard Missile-3 Block IB guided missile engagements with the distributed weighted engagement scheme capability enabled, according to the release. The DWES provides an automated engagement coordination scheme between multiple Aegis BMD ships that determines which ship is the preferred shooter, reducing duplication of BMD engagements and missile expenditures while ensuring BMD threat coverage.<sup>66</sup>

The world's ocean trade routes must remain open to all to maintain global commerce, the vice chief of naval operations said in Washington on February 24. "The world [economy] depends on those high seas staying free," Navy Adm. Michelle J. Howard told CNN's Jim Sciutto during the NewAmerica Future of War Project conference. Noting that China is building its blue-water navy, Sciutto asked Howard how that could affect the maritime situation. China, she replied, "refers to itself as maturing and is starting to stretch its muscles in terms of who they are and how they see themselves as a world power." Countries ask themselves if it is possible to be a world power without military power, and "China has taken the path that in order to be a global power, they have to have military strength," the admiral said.<sup>67</sup>

If sequestration spending cuts trigger this year, it will affect every person and mission the U.S. Army has, Army Secretary John M. McHugh said at a Defence Writer's Group breakfast in Washington on February 25. McHugh said his top three priorities at the moment are the budget, anything dealing with deployed or forward-deployed forces, and combating sexual assault and sexual harassment. The Budget Control Act of 2011 is still the law of the land, he noted, and it imposes caps on military spending. For fiscal years 2014 and 2015, Congress provided relief, but

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<sup>65</sup> Garamone, Jim, "Capabilities Must Match Future Threats, Army Leader Says", *DoD News*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128237>

<sup>66</sup> "Missile Defence System Performs Successful Flight Test", *DoD News*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128239>

<sup>67</sup> Garamone, Jim, "High Seas Must Remain Open to All, Navy Leader Says", *DoD News*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128241>

the caps are due to come back in full force in fiscal 2016. If that happens, the active duty Army would drop to 420,000 soldiers. Today, the force is just under 500,000.<sup>68</sup>

The Air Force's readiness edge could slip away if sequestration is not lifted permanently, Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James told members of a Senate panel at a fiscal year 2016 defence appropriations hearing in Washington on February 25. Appearing with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III, James said sequestration "threatens everything" if the law to force budget cuts is not lifted. The Air Force is under duress, James told the panel. The Air Force secretary said her priorities are taking care of people, striking the right balance in preparing for today's and tomorrow's national security challenges, and making every dollar count.<sup>69</sup>

Acting Defence Department Chief Information Officer Terry Halvorsen discussed the joint information environment, the cloud, detailed technology investments and the threat of sequestration on February 25 in testimony before a House panel. During the hearing, on information technology investments and programmes in the current cyber threat environment, Halvorsen told members of the House Armed Services Committee subcommittee on emerging threats and capabilities that one of his priorities is to implement a foundational element of the joint information environment.<sup>70</sup>

The capability gap separating the U.S. Air Force from others is narrowing and requires modernization to help the service maintain its asymmetric advantage, the service's chief of staff testified before the House Appropriations Committee's defence subcommittee on February 27. Air Force Gen. Mark A. Welsh III made the case to modernize and remain a capable and ready force as the service requests \$10 billion above current sequestration funding levels. "We know it won't be easy and it will require accepting prudent operational risk in some mission areas for a period of time," the general said. But, Welsh asserted, the option of not modernizing isn't an option, for if the Air Force remains at Budget Control Act funding levels, it will no longer be able to execute the strategic guidance, which will stall short-term readiness recovery, threaten long-term infrastructure and further delay modernization.<sup>71</sup>

The president's proposed fiscal 2016 budget proposal contains funding to provide a "stable and robust" nuclear deterrent capability for the nation, Brian P. McKeon, principal deputy undersecretary of defence for policy, told the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces on February 26. McKeon and Navy Adm. Cecil D. Haney, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, testified before the panel on strategic force needs in the fiscal year 2016 president's budget request. Both officials said the budget request funding protects vital U.S. interests.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Garamone, Jim, "Army Secretary Details Sequestration Dangers", *DoD News*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128245>

<sup>69</sup> Cronk, Terri Moon, "Sequestration Harms Air Force Readiness, James Says", *DoD News*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128247>

<sup>70</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "DoD CIO Details Information Technology Priorities", *DoD News*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128258>

<sup>71</sup> Lyle, Amaani, "Welsh: Sequestration Harms Aging, Shrinking Air Force", *DoD News*, February 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128269>

<sup>72</sup> Cronk, Terri Moon, "McKeon: Budget Request Provides 'Robust' Nuclear Deterrent", *DoD News*, February 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128267>

## International: Asia

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Netanyahu on 'Historic Mission' to stop Iran nuclear deal; Iran nuclear talks, IS among key issues for Kerry trip; Pentagon expedites \$17.9 million in equipment to aid Iraqis; Kirby: Iraqi leaders, troops will be force against ISIL; Defeating ISIL takes diplomatic, military effort, Carter says; Dempsey: coalition gains put ISIL in 'difficult position'; Operation inherent resolve airstrikes continue in Syria, Iraq; Carter thanks Kuwait's leaders for strategic partnership; The Chairman of the JCS Dempsey, Australian defence Chief discuss security issues; Diplomat: US committed to ending abuses in N. Korea; Advanced US surveillance plane patrols S. China Sea.**

Two days ahead of a controversial speech in Washington by Israel's prime minister, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is attempting to shore up the countries' relationship amid diplomatic friction. "The prime minister of Israel (Benjamin Netanyahu) is welcome to speak in the United States, obviously, and we have a closer relationship with Israel right now in terms of security than in any time in history," Kerry told ABC television's *This Week* programme. Netanyahu arrived in Washington on March 8. Earlier in the day Netanyahu said he was on a "historic mission" to try to stop a nuclear deal with Iran. He is expected to address lawmakers in Washington on March 3.<sup>73</sup>

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry begins a trip on March 2 to Europe and Saudi Arabia, where he will hold talks on issues including efforts to combat the Islamic State group, rising tensions between the U.S. and Russia over separatist unrest in Ukraine, and Iran nuclear negotiations. The secretary will be away from Washington when the Israeli prime minister speaks to Congress, opposing the Iranian nuclear talks. Kerry's first stop is Geneva, where he will address the United Nations Human Rights Council.<sup>74</sup>

The Defence Department has expedited \$17.9 million in equipment and supplies -- some which have already been delivered -- to the Iraqi government, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters on February 24. Warren provided a general update on equipment and supplies authorized for delivery to the Iraqis. "This was a \$17.9 million [Foreign Military Sales Programme] case," he said. "It was an expedited delivery, which took 22 days from the time of signature — a letter of authorization — until delivery. This is less than a quarter of the time it normally takes to execute these types of deliveries."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "Netanyahu on 'Historic Mission' to Stop Iran Nuclear Deal", *VOA News*, March 01, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/netanyahu-on-historic-mission-to-stop-iran-nuclear-deal/2663379.html>

<sup>74</sup> Dockins, Pamela, "Iran Nuclear Talks, IS Among Key Issues for Kerry Trip", *VOA News*, March 01, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/iran-nuclear-talks-is-among-key-issues-for-secretary-of-state-john-kerry-trip/2663384.html>

<sup>75</sup> Marshall Jr., Tyrone C., "Pentagon Expedites \$17.9 Million in Equipment to Aid Iraqis", *DoD News*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128236>

Any operation in Iraq against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant “is going to be and must be” an Iraqi-led and Iraqi-manned operation, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby told reporters on February 27. Any operation against ISIL will be dependent on the Iraqi military being able to perform the mission, the admiral said during a Pentagon press briefing. Kirby was speaking about reports that Iraqi forces would take back the city of Mosul from ISIL in April.<sup>76</sup>

Dealing a lasting defeat to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) will require “a combined diplomatic and military effort,” Defence Secretary Ash Carter told reporters on February 23 at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, after he concluded a conference there with ambassadors and senior U.S. and regional military leaders. Earlier in the day during a troop talk at Camp Arifjan, Carter said he convened the conference to “begin to make my own assessment of the campaign to counter ISIL.” Coalition anti-ISIL efforts to date “have already been having some important impacts,” Carter said. He added, “Our global coalition is up to the task, and so is American leadership, which has shone through — throughout the course of this campaign.”<sup>77</sup>

Strategic and tactical gains by coalition partners have made a difference in the fight against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said on February 24. “I think that ISIL is in a difficult position; we just have to make sure it stays that way,” Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said at a media roundtable. Dempsey spoke as he wrapped up a visit that focused on the U.S. rebalance to the Pacific and strengthening military cooperation with Australia, which has been a key partner in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, the U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists in Syria and Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on February 28.<sup>79</sup>

In Kuwait, Defence Secretary Ash Carter expressed U.S. appreciation for the strategic partnership between the United States and Kuwait during his meetings with His Highness Amir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Sheikh Khalid al-Jarrah al-Sabah, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a statement issued on February 23. Carter also expressed his thanks for Kuwait’s willingness to host U.S. and coalition forces in support of military operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Kirby said in the statement.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Garamone, Jim, “Kirby: Iraqi Leaders, Troops Will be Force Against ISIL”, *DoD News*, February 27, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128270>

<sup>77</sup> “Defeating ISIL Takes Diplomatic, Military Effort, Carter Says”, *DoD News*, February 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128231>

<sup>78</sup> Ferdinando, Lisa, “Dempsey: Coalition Gains Put ISIL in ‘Difficult Position’”, *DoD News*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128232>

<sup>79</sup> “Operation Inherent Resolve Airstrikes Continue in Syria, Iraq”, From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, *DoD News*, February 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128202>

<sup>80</sup> “Carter Thanks Kuwait’s Leaders for Strategic Partnership”, *DoD News*, February 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128226>

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and his Australian counterpart met in Sydney on February 23 to examine security challenges and find ways to further strengthen ties as the U.S. military rebalances to the Pacific. The day-long meeting between Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey and the Australian chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin, was the second Defence Chiefs Strategic Dialogue held between the United States and Australia. The first DCSD was held in Washington in 2013. Dempsey said the meeting was an important opportunity for both nations to discuss today's complex global security environment. He cited diverse challenges including Iran, Russian aggression in Ukraine, and the campaign against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists.<sup>81</sup>

A senior U.S. official said the United States is dedicated to improving human rights conditions in North Korea. Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said in a recent meeting with North Korean defectors at U.N. headquarters in New York that "President [Barack] Obama, I, and his entire administration are committed to doing everything we can to end the suffering that we know is occurring in your country." The comments came amid heightened tensions between Washington and Pyongyang over the communist country's human rights record.<sup>82</sup>

The United States has begun flying its most advanced surveillance aircraft, the P-8A Poseidon, out of the Philippines for patrols over the South China Sea, the U.S. Navy said on Thursday, acknowledging the flights for the first time. The United States, the Philippines' oldest and closest ally, has promised to share "real time" information on what is happening in Philippine waters as China steps up its activities in the South China Sea. China claims most of the potentially energy-rich South China Sea, through which \$5 trillion in shipborne trade passes every year. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims.<sup>83</sup>

## Indo-US Relations

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Great opportunity for India-US relationship: Bobby Jindal; US, India collaboration in defence exciting: Richard Verma; US asks India to remove obstacles in bilateral trade; US Ambassador Richard Verma meets Telangana Chief Minister; Kendall: DTTI promises enhanced prosperity and security for both the nations; Indo-US merchandise, services trade may touch \$525 billion by 2025; T.P. Sreenivasan: strategic patience on nuclear liability; Need to take advantage of Indo-US relationship: Congressmen.**

Emerging out of the White House immediately after a meeting with President Barack Obama, along with other members of the National Governors Association, Louisiana Governor Bobby

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<sup>81</sup> Ferdinando, Lisa, "Dempsey, Australian Defence Chief Discuss Security Issues", *DoD News*, February 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128225>

<sup>82</sup> Lee, Yeon Cheol, "Diplomat: US Committed to Ending Abuses in N. Korea", *VOA News*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/diplomat-united-states-ending-abuses-north-korea/2661223.html>

<sup>83</sup> "Advanced US Surveillance Plane Patrols S. China Sea", *Reuters*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-flies-most-advanced-surveillance-plane-from-philippines/2660230.html>

Jindal said India-US relationship is one area on the foreign policy front where there is a bipartisan support and the two countries would benefit both economically and politically — from strengthening of this ties. “I think, it is a great opportunity for both countries (India and the US),” Jindal, who is the first Indian American Governor of an US State told *PTI* on February 23. Highly critical of Obama’s foreign policy, Jindal appeared to be supportive of the president’s efforts to strengthen ties with India, which he noted is in America’s interest. Responding to questions, Jindal supported joint effort between India and the US in the fight against terrorism, in particular Islamic extremism.<sup>84</sup>

US Ambassador to India Richard Verma has termed as “exciting” the joint research and development and co-production by the US and India in the defence sector. Delivering a talk at the Indian School of Business (ISB) in Hyderabad on February 23, he said lot of smaller deals and collaborations were happening in the sector. On his first visit to Hyderabad after taking over as the ambassador in January 2015, Verma said US companies in Hyderabad were employing several hundred thousand workers, and were involved in every sector of the economy. He said the joint ventures including the cutting-edge defence projects were particularly exciting. “Who would have thought part of the US president’s helicopter would be assembled here,” he asked referring to US helicopter manufacturer Sikorsky’s joint venture with Tata Advanced Systems for manufacture of cabins for the company’s helicopters.<sup>85</sup>

The US wants India to remove obstacles in the way of boosting two-way trade with reforms, more openness of economy, ease of doing business and by giving confidence to investors. Ambassador Verma said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made rationalisation of bureaucratic procedure a high priority on his list of reforms and that the US eagerly anticipates substantial progress in this direction. He said, “India continues to be perceived as a tough place to do business. It ranks 142 in the World Bank ranking measuring ease of doing business. Investor confidence is still shaky. Intellectual property enforcement is perceived as weak and many sectors still remain closed to outside investors and businesses”.<sup>86</sup>

US Ambassador to India Richard Verma discussed several issues of mutual interest with Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao during a meeting in Hyderabad on February 24 as both leaders sought to deepen bilateral ties. The two leaders reviewed the progress of construction of new the US Consulate building in Hyderabad, a release from Chief Minister’s Office said. Responding to Mr Rao’s observations that many students from Telangana are studying in American Universities and many Telangana natives are employed in the US, the release quoted the Ambassador as saying that America and Telangana has good relations in several areas.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> “Great Opportunity for India-US Relationship: Bobby Jindal”, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-great-opportunity-for-india-us-relationship-bobby-jindal-2063633>

<sup>85</sup> “US, India Collaboration In Defence Exciting: Richard Verma”, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.oneindia.com/india/us-india-collaboration-in-defence-exciting-richard-verma-1664162.html>

<sup>86</sup> “US Asks India To Remove Obstacles In Bilateral Trade”, *IANS*, Hyderabad, February 23, 2015 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/us-asks-india-to-remove-obstacles-in-bilateral-trade-115022301309\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/us-asks-india-to-remove-obstacles-in-bilateral-trade-115022301309_1.html)

<sup>87</sup> “US Ambassador Richard Verma Meets Telangana Chief Minister”, *Press Trust of India (PTI)*, February 24, 2015 at <http://www.ndtv.com/telangana-news/us-ambassador-richard-verma-meets-telangana-chief-minister-742072>

U.S. Under Secretary of Defence, Frank Kendall in an editorial published in *The Hindu* on February 25 stated that India-U.S. Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) promises enhanced prosperity and security for both the nations. He wrote that “For approximately three years, I have been involved in the India-U.S. DTTI. Originally called “the Carter Initiative,” when Secretary Ashton Carter was the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defence, DTTI aims to strengthen defence cooperation between India and the United States by elevating defence cooperation to the most senior levels of our governments. I can proudly state that today the U.S. commitment to this initiative has never been stronger. We are delighted that DTTI is moving forward with strong support from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team. DTTI is real, it is important to the U.S., it is important to India, and it promises enhanced prosperity and security for both our nations.”<sup>88</sup>

Indo-US bilateral trade in merchandise and services sector is likely to touch USD 525 billion by 2025, according to a report. The report titled India-USA Economic Relations, which was jointly released in New Delhi on February 25 by Washington State Department of Commerce and PHD Chamber, said: “Indo-US merchandise trade has potential to accelerate to a level of \$325 billion in next ten years whereas...two nations services trade are estimated at \$200 billion for 2025”.<sup>89</sup>

T.P. Sreenivasan, former governor for India of the IAEA, in an article in *The Hindu* stated that a month after the “breakthrough understanding” on the nuclear liability issue was announced by U.S. President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, its practical value now looks diminished, while its symbolic importance as indicating the willingness of the two sides — India and the U.S. — to start a new chapter in the relationship comes to light. It was a willing suspension of disbelief on both sides to move on to new areas of cooperation, which have revitalised a defining relationship of the 21st century. He stated that the breakthrough in the nuclear liability issue is not a solution but a declaration of intent to resolve difficult issues. The final settlement may come at a different time under different leaderships. For the present, it is important to keep the dialogue going for the greater good of India and the U.S., and it may have value which goes beyond nuclear trade.<sup>90</sup>

The current momentum in India-US relationship, resulting after two high profile meetings between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, needs to be tapped and taken advantage of, according to top American lawmakers. “To take advantage of the momentum and move forward especially in our economic partnership,” said Congressman Ami Bera, Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans at a luncheon organised jointly by the Indian embassy and the Confederation of Indian Industry. “We need to harness the energy and success of the Indian American community and recognise the increasing significance of investments by Indian companies in the US,” Bera said.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Frank Kendall, U.S. Under Secretary of Defence, “More than just an idea”, Special Arrangement, *The Hindu*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/more-than-just-an-idea/article6929810.ece>

<sup>89</sup> “Indo-US Merchandise, Services Trade May Touch \$525 Billion By 2025”, *PTI*, February 25, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/indo-us-merchandise-services-trade-may-touch-525-billion-by-2025/articleshow/46372580.cms>

<sup>90</sup> Sreenivasan, T. P., “Strategic Patience On Nuclear Liability”, *The Hindu*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/strategic-patience-on-nuclear-liability/article6933675.ece>

<sup>91</sup> “Need To Take Advantage Of Indo-US Relationship: Congressmen”, February 28, 2015 at [http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/need-to-take-advantage-of-indo-us-relationship-congressmen\\_1553963.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/need-to-take-advantage-of-indo-us-relationship-congressmen_1553963.html)

## II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

### National

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Indian Navy's annual exercise TROPEX concludes; Defence export strategy formulated to promote export of defence products.**

The Indian Navy concluded its annual Theatre Level Readiness and Operational Exercise (TROPEX) on February 27, 2015. This month long war drill encompassed all dimensions of maritime warfare, and witnessed participation of around 50 ships and submarines, along with over 70 aircraft from the three Naval Commands. The exercise also saw participation of units from the Indian Air Force and the Indian Coast Guard. The area of operations spanned the Arabian Sea and Northern Indian Ocean and was aimed at validating the Indian Navy's Concept of Operations. During TROPEX-2015, the Navy had deployed two Carrier Task Forces simultaneously at sea, with both Viraat and Vikramaditya operating with their integral flights in an operational scenario. This assumes significance as it makes the Indian Navy, besides the US Navy, capable of deploying more than one Carrier Task Force at sea, at present. TROPEX also saw extensive deployment of the nuclear submarine Chakra, the recently inducted P8I Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft, the recently commissioned guided missile destroyer Kolkata and Anti-Submarine Warfare corvette Kamorta. The exercise provided the right opportunity for the Navy to integrate these acquisitions into its war-fighting concepts. TROPEX-15 also served to reinforce the Indian Navy's offensive capabilities across all dimensions, including Network Centric Operations, wherein, the indigenous satellite Rukmani was extensively utilized. The Navy also tested its Operation Logistics capability to effectively sustain Fleet Operations for extended periods at large distances for Out of Area Contingency Operations (OOAC). Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) mission was also part of the exercise. Overall, the exercise reiterated the Indian Navy's preparedness and capability to meet various roles mandated for it, in support of national objectives.<sup>92</sup>

Minister of State for Defence Rao Inderjit Singh in a written reply in the Lok Sabha informed the house about steps taken for export of defence products. Among the major steps outlined by the government are; a defence export strategy which has been formulated and put in public domain. The strategy outlines the need for promotional measures and simplification of regulatory processes for facilitating / promoting the export of defence products. Significantly, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for issue of No Objection Certificate (NOC) for export of military stores has been finalized and put in public domain. During the last three years and the current year, NOCs for export of military stores have been given to a significant number of countries. The minister also informed that the Government has not fixed any target for export of military stores to other countries.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> "Indian Navy Concludes Its Annual Exercise," *PIB*, February 27, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=116141>

<sup>93</sup> "Export of Defence Products," *PIB*, February 27, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=116117>

## International

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Russian paratroopers conduct exercise on border with Estonia, Latvia; Iran's Revolutionary Guards conduct naval exercises in the Strait of Hormuz.**

Reports say that up to 2,000 Russian soldiers took part in drills in the country's west on recently as Russia conducted an inspection of its paratrooper units in the latest show of strength. Since the start of the Ukraine crisis, Russia has staged a series of drills that have alarmed its post-Soviet neighbours and the West. Russia's neighbours Latvia and Estonia have expressed their displeasure over the exercise.<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, according to reports, Iran's Revolutionary Guards began naval exercises on February 25 in the Strait of Hormuz, just a few hundred kilometres away from Western vessels engaged in the fight against the Islamic State group. The three branches of the elite army of the Iranian regime are participating in the regular military exercises named "Great Prophet." Fast attack craft were also involved in the military exercises, which aim to demonstrate the power of the Iranian Navy in the Gulf. The exercises began two days after French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle launched operations in the Gulf as part of the international coalition fighting the Islamic State group (IS) in Iraq and Syria.<sup>95</sup>

## III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

### Jammu & Kashmir

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **PDP submits 11-point proposal ahead of Government formation in J & K; Cross-LoC bus service resumes back; RSS raises questions on Article 370 and AFSPA as PDP and BJP grapple over CMP.**

In yet another political development in Jammu & Kashmir, the PDP has now issued a fresh 11-point proposal to BJP for government formation in the state. The proposal includes several demands like – dialogue with Pakistan and Kashmiri separatists and citizenship rights for displaced Hindus from Pakistan settled in Jammu since 1947. BJP's victory in Jammu and PDP's victory in Kashmir has polarized the two areas of the state. Keeping the current political situation in mind, PDP patron Mufti Mohammad Sayeed has demanded assurance from BJP government

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<sup>94</sup> "Russian Paratroopers in Drills on Border with Estonia, Latvia," *Defence News*, February 25, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/02/25/russian-paratroopers-drills-border-estonia-latvia/24026565/>

<sup>95</sup> "Iran Stages Military Exercises in Strait of Hormuz," *Defence News*, February 25, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/mideast-africa/2015/02/25/iran-stages-military-exercises-strait-hormuz/24025383/>

to engage both separatists and Pakistan in the dialogue process and also deny citizenship to the Pakistani refugees in Jammu.<sup>96</sup>

The cross-Line of Control bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad resumed back on February 16 after remaining suspended for a week over the arrest of a truck driver from Pakistan occupied Kashmir following recovery of drugs from his vehicle. The cross-LoC bus service was started in April 2005 as part of confidence building measures between India and Pakistan to allow the divided families living on either sides of Line of Control to meet each other.<sup>97</sup>

As BJP and PDP grapple over a common minimum programme (CMP) for government formation in Jammu and Kashmir, the RSS on February 16, raised questions over Article 370 that grants special status for the state causing unease in the Kashmir-based party. While both parties maintain that "talks are on" for "securing a comprehensive common minimum programme (CMP)" for an alliance government in J&K, RSS's national executive member Indaresh's comments prompted the PDP camp to reiterate that they will not budge an inch on its position on issues like Article 370.<sup>98</sup> Also, in case of AFSPA, RSS leaders have argued that the Army's views should be respected in view of their operational requirements and the sacrifices "they have made".<sup>99</sup>

## Northeast Insurgency

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **Top KPLT leaders arrested in Karbi Anglong; 5 hurt in Imphal blast; India and Myanmar agree to boost connectivity and trade; Tension prevails along Assam-Nagaland border.**

Five top leaders of the KPLT militant outfit were apprehended by the troops of the Army's Red Horns Division in a joint operation conducted with the Assam Police in West Karbi Anglong on February 17 taking the number of KPLT leaders nabbed so far to 15 in the last three days. A huge cache of arms and ammunition were recovered during this operation, including a Universal Machine Gun, six AK rifles, seven pistols, a grenade launcher, besides AK magazines and ammunition, among others.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> "J&K Govt Formation: PDP Submits 11-Point Proposal To BJP", *Kashmir Watch*, February 16, 2015 at <http://kashmirwatch.com/news.php/2015/02/16/j-k-govt-formation-pdp-submits-11-point-proposal-to-bjp.html>

<sup>97</sup> "J&K: Cross-LoC Bus Service Resumes After A Week's Hiatus", *IBN Live*, February 16, 2015 at [https://news.google.com/news/story?ncl=d2LM7hg-hAxLvBM6\\_MbXb6WBNZKbM&q=J%26K:+Cross-LoC+bus+service+resumes&lr=English&hl=en&sa=X&ei=RzDzVKGHNJSOuASW-IKwBw&ved=0CCEQqglwAA](https://news.google.com/news/story?ncl=d2LM7hg-hAxLvBM6_MbXb6WBNZKbM&q=J%26K:+Cross-LoC+bus+service+resumes&lr=English&hl=en&sa=X&ei=RzDzVKGHNJSOuASW-IKwBw&ved=0CCEQqglwAA)

<sup>98</sup> "PDP Pact in J&K: BJP 'Under Pressure' as RSS Raises Questions on Article 370", *The New Indian Express*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/PDP-Pact-in-JK-BJP-Under-Pressure-as-RSS-Raises-Questions-on-Article-370/2015/02/17/article2673360.ece>

<sup>99</sup> Pandit, M Saleem, "J&K Govt Formation: BJP-PDP Pact Held up as Sangh Rules out Any Deal on AFSPA", *The Times of India*, February 18, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/specials/2014-assembly-elections/jammu-kashmir-news/JK-govt-formation-BJP-PDP-pact-held-up-as-Sangh-rules-out-any-deal-on-AFSPA/articleshow/46279977.cms?>

<sup>100</sup> "5 Top KPLT Ultras Nabbed In Karbi Anglong", *The Assam Tribune*, February 18, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb1815/at051>

At least five persons including three policemen and two women were injured in a bomb explosion at Masjid Road betel nut leaves vendors junction on February 18. The injured persons have been sent to Rims hospital at Lamphelpat for treatment, report added. Hospital sources said the condition of one of the police constable is serious.<sup>101</sup>

India and Myanmar have agreed to work together to remove the bottlenecks hampering bilateral trade and investment, such as lack of good connectivity and banking arrangements both for regular and border trade. In this context, India offered to support Myanmar in developing infrastructure at the border trade points, upgrading trade training institutes in Yangon and also in providing training to Myanmar officials on WTO and international trade-related issues, besides supporting subsidised direct shipping links between India and Myanmar to promote bilateral trade. This was decided at the Fifth India-Myanmar Joint Trade Committee (JTC) meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw on February 17. The meeting was co-chaired by Minister of Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman and Myanmar Union Minister of Commerce U Win Myint.<sup>102</sup>

The Assam-Nagaland border area is tense once again following alleged attempts by Naga people to occupy disputed land at Merapani. According to information available, over 200 Naga people came to Indrapur Tarani at Merapani under D-sector of the Assam-Nagaland border area, which is under possession of Assamese villagers on February 21 and allegedly cleared some land by cutting down the trees of the adjacent areas belonging to the families of Bhuban Saikia, Naduk Chutia, Gopal Bodo, Arun Bora and others. The Naga people who came from Wokha, Kankan Basti and Borhola along with people from nearby areas like Bargang, Mikirang and Changpang, attempted to clear the site. The Assam villagers opposed the move and this led to a tense situation. The villagers informed the CRPF camp in the area, but the latter showed no interest in the matter. The border magistrate and the CRPF Sector Commandant rushed to the spot, but due to the indifferent role of the CRPF personnel, the villagers gheraoed the Naga people at Kolajan field and tried to attack them with daos, lathis, etc. Some people fled the scene, while about 50 Naga people were detained at Merapani Police Station.<sup>103</sup>

## Left-wing Extremism

(February 16-22, 2015)

- **CAF constable killed, another injured in alleged Maoist blast in Chhattisgarh; Odisha CM urges Centre to waive off charges on account of deployment of Central Police Forces; Maoists threatens to stop girls' dance in UP village school; Hardcore Maoist arrested in a joint**

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<sup>101</sup> "5 Hurt In Imphal Blast", *The Assam Tribune*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb1915/oth054>

<sup>102</sup> "India, Myanmar To Boost Connectivity, Trade", *The Assam Tribune*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb1915/at054>

<sup>103</sup> "Merapani Tense As Nagas Try To Occupy Land", *The Assam Tribune*, February 22, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2215/at053>

**operation in Jharkhand's Palamu District; Maoists call Dandakaranya bandh; Forces raid Red arsenal dumps, seize explosives.**

A Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) constable was killed, while another was injured when a pressure bomb went off allegedly set by Maoists in the state's insurgency-hit Sukma district on February 16. The incident occurred near Temelwada village under Jagargunda police station limits when a road opening patrol (ROP) of security forces was returning after carrying out an operation in the region, a senior police official told PTI. The ROP was deployed on the densely forested Dornapal- Jagargunda route, around 400 km from Raipur, to ensure security to goods vehicles which supply rations to Jagargunda from Dornapal.<sup>104</sup>

Disapproving the Union Government's move to ask Maoist-hit states to foot the bill for deployment of central forces, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has asked the Centre to wave the charges. "The claim of Rs 1,450.29 crore by the Union Government towards deployment of central forces appears to be quite unreasonable," Patnaik said in a strongly worded letter to Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh.<sup>105</sup>

Panic prevailed in Madpa village under Machi police station in Sonebhadra district of Uttar Pradesh on February 15 after armed Maoist ultras issued threat to stop dance performance of girls during the annual function of a school. Police and paramilitary forces swung into action but the Maoists managed to escape towards Bihar. The anti-terror squad (ATS) is considering it to be handiwork of newly formed group of Maoists- Tertiary Sammelan Prastutikaran Committee (TSPC). ATS officials said that TSPC movement has been noticed just 15 kilometres from UP border in Bihar. This newly formed outfit is trying to consolidate its presence in remote areas of Chandauli, Sonbhadra and Mirzapur districts, where the organizational structure of Maoist extremists has become defunct in the past one decade.<sup>106</sup>

The State police in Jharkhand's Palamu District have confirmed the arrest of a hardcore Maoist, who was allegedly involved in several anti-government operations. A joint operation was launched by the state police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to arrest him. "We have arrested an active Maoist named Nanhuram alias Panchua. He is accused of landmine blast on the car of Additional Superintendent of Police, Ronald Hansda, and firing on him in 2012. He was absconding since then," said Superintendent of Police Mayur Patel.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> "CAF Constable Killed, Another Injured In Alleged Maoist Blast In Sukma", *Zee News*, February 16, 2015 at [http://zeenews.india.com/news/chhattisgarh/caf-constable-killed-another-injured-in-alleged-maoist-blast-in-sukma\\_1547638.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/chhattisgarh/caf-constable-killed-another-injured-in-alleged-maoist-blast-in-sukma_1547638.html)

<sup>105</sup> "'Charging States For Maoist Menace Not Logical'", *Deccan Herald*, February 16, 2015 at <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/459951/charging-states-maoist-menace-not.html>

<sup>106</sup> Dikshit, Rajeev, "Maoists Threat To Stop Girls' Dance In UP Village School", *The Times of India*, February 17, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/Maoists-threat-to-stop-girls-dance-in-UP-village-school/articleshow/46268282.cms>

<sup>107</sup> "Hardcore Maoist Arrested In Jharkhand's Palamu District", *Business Standard*, February 17, 2015 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/hardcore-maoist-arrested-in-jharkhand-s-palamu-district-115021700310\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/hardcore-maoist-arrested-in-jharkhand-s-palamu-district-115021700310_1.html)

The outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) damaged a railway track near Kamalpur station in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh on February 19, leading to the derailment of a goods train engine. Reportedly, the Maoists have called for a 'Dandakaranya Bandh' on February 20 in protest against the Polavaram Dam project and the "All-out war" by the Government of India to "flush out Maoists from Bastar."<sup>108</sup>

In what may be regarded as a major success for the forces engaged in anti-Maoist operations, particularly the CRPF, a huge cache of explosives and other items of destruction were seized from a Red dumping pit in Chakarbandha forest under Dumaria police station area of Gaya district. The recovery was made during an operation against the Red on February 17.

As per available details, the recoveries include more than 100 IEDs of different dominations including can bombs and suitcase bombs, hand grenades and chemicals used for making explosive devices. The chemical has been identified as ammonium nitrate also used as a fertilizer in agriculture. Confirming the recovery of weapons and explosives from the Maoists dumping pit, CRPF DIG Chiranjeet Prasad said that a couple of IEDs weighed as much as 40kg.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Dahat, Pavan, "Maoists Call Dandakaranya Bandh", *The Hindu*, February 19, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/engine-derails-as-maoists-damage-railway-track-in-chhattisgarh/article6912850.ece>

<sup>109</sup> Qadir, "Forces Raid Red Arsenal Dumps, Seize Explosives", *The Times of India*, February 19, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/Forces-raid-Red-arsenal-dumps-seize-explosives/articleshow/46293299.cms>