

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Afghanistan, China preparing to sign Silk Road accord; Former NSA warns political stability under threat.**

China Ambassador to Afghanistan Yao Jing on March 23 asked the Afghan government to finalise the draft agreement on the Silk Road project and hand it over to his country for a review. The agreement after being finalised by both the countries would be signed during Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah's visit to China. A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said the Chinese envoy met with Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani. The envoy assured his country was ready to host CEO Abdullah on his official visit and hoped the agreement would be signed soon between the two countries.

Jing also extended invitation to Rabbani to attend the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) scheduled for late April, 2016. Rabbani assured that work on finalizing the Silk Road project agreement was underway in coordination with the ministries concerned and it would be completed and shared with China in the near future. He also said an Afghan delegation would participate in the CICA foreign ministerial conference. Afghanistan and China share an 85-km border in Wakhan area of northeastern Badakhshan province. Both Zebak and Wakhan districts border Pakistan, Tajikistan and China.¹

Former national security advisor Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta has said inappropriate policies of the incumbent government had raised concerns about political instability and fear of escalation in war. Also a former foreign minister, Spanta said he would render all possible sacrifices but would not allow the Pakistani establishment to influence Afghanistan's foreign policy or meddle in its internal affairs. Speaking at the residence of Mohammad Ismail Khan, former jihadi leader and minister on March 28 night, he alleged most achievements of the past decades had been reversed over the last two years by the unity government.

Ismail Khan had invited key members of the Karzai administration to dinner at his home in Herat City, the capital of western Herat province. Spanta assailed the Ghani-led government and countries such as the United States for following weak and ambiguous policies. As a consequence, he said the sitting government had weakened and there were concerns about political instability. He said the nation had rendered scarifies for liberating the country from Soviet and British occupation. In case of need, he added, the Afghans would defend their motherland and frustrate Islamabad's meddling.²

¹ "Afghanistan, China Preparing To Sign Silk Road Accord", *Pajhwok*, March 24, 2016, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/24/afghanistan-china-preparing-sign-silk-road-accord>

² "Spanta Warns Political Stability Under Threat", *Pajhwok*, March 29, 2016, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/29/spanta-warns-political-stability-under-threat>

Pakistan

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Development projects unacceptable if Baloch do not benefit, military diverge over Punjab operation authority; Iran criticises ‘undignified’ remarks.**

Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M) chief Sardar Akhtar Jan Mengal said on March 20 that his party would not accept development projects in Balochistan if they failed to benefit people of the province. Addressing a public meeting in Lasbela, he claimed that outsiders were the main beneficiaries of projects being initiated in the name of development of Balochistan. He said that if people of Balochistan remained deprived of their legitimate rights such development projects would be seen as contributing to their misery. Mr Mengal said it was painful to see that those who had violated the constitution of the country were free, but those demanding their rights were treated as traitors. Criticising the government for letting former military ruler Pervez Musharraf leave the country, he said the champions of democracy should tell the nation why a dictator who was facing a treason case had been allowed to go abroad.³

Laying bare their differences over the army’s involvement in a crackdown on extremist and militant organisations in Punjab, the government and military spokesmen, at a joint press conference on March 29, diverged over who could decide about engaging the army. Although the press conference was convened to release a video recording of confessional statement made by captured Indian spy Kulbhushan Yadav, the very first question about the government permitting a military operation in Punjab exposed the gap in the positions of the civilian and military leadership on the issue. Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid, who is also federal government’s spokesman, said it was the provincial government’s prerogative to decide “which force and how much of the force” would be required to act against a group or a person found by intelligence agencies to be involved in terrorism. He said the provincial administration took decision on the basis of intelligence available to it about the nature and extent of threat. “If they think necessary they can get the job done through police ... at other places Rangers may have to be involved while in more difficult situations services of the Pakistan Army can also be requisitioned,” he maintained.⁴

Iran on March 31 criticized elements in Pakistan for spreading undignified and offensive remarks attributed to President Hassan Rouhani regarding arrest of RAW agent. Abbas Badrifar, a spokesman for Iran’s Embassy in Islamabad, said spreading of such remarks and news items were product of thinking which does not like further expansion of ties between the two countries. “Elements unhappy over promotion of ties between the two Islamic countries of Iran and Pakistan are trying in various ways, including the spreading of undignified and sometimes offensive contents, to fade out the significant achievements during the visit of President Rouhani to Pakistan,” he said. “Iran wants a stable Pakistan. Iran has never felt danger from Pakistan at its border,” the spokesman said. Badrifar further said such tactics would not impact the positive views of the two countries regarding each other.” Pakistan has written a letter to Iran and sought Tehran’s assistance to help investigate the activities of Indian spy Kulbhushan Yadav, detained by Pakistani authorities

³ Development Projects Unacceptable If Baloch Do Not Benefit: Mengal, *Dawn*, March 21, 2016, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1246969/development-projects-unacceptable-if-baloch-do-not-benefit-mengal>

⁴ Govt, Military Diverge Over Punjab Operation Authority, *Dawn*, March 30, 2016, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1248772/govt-military-diverge-over-punjab-operation-authority>

from Balochistan. According to the letter written by Pakistan's interior ministry, Islamabad requested the Iranian government to help them investigate other RAW network operating in the region.⁵

Bangladesh

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Dhaka and New Delhi officially inaugurated the supply of 10GBps broadband internet from Bangladesh to India; Dhaka condemns Brussels attacks; Bhutanese envoy meets president; India extended greetings to Bangladesh on its 46th Independence and National Day; World Bank to help BB recover stolen money.**

Dhaka and New Delhi officially inaugurated the supply of 10GBps broadband internet from Bangladesh to India and 100MW power from India to Bangladesh on March 23, 2016. The launch was done through a video conference. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi termed it a significant day, and said relations between the two neighbours have reached a new height to promote each other's development.⁶

Bangladesh has strongly condemned terrorist attacks at the Brussels Airport and Metro Station that took away so many innocent lives.⁷

Bhutanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Pema Choden made a farewell call on President Abdul Hamid at Bangabhaban on March 21, 2016. During the meeting, the president said the scope to expand trade and investment of the region will be increased when the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicle Agreement will be implemented, President's Press Secretary Joyal Abedin told the news agency. He said Bhutan can use Mongla and Payra ports for raising its trade. Pema Choden said Bhutan attaches highest importance to strengthening its relations with Bangladesh.⁸

India extended greetings marking Bangladesh's 46th Independence and National Day on March 26 and expressed confidence that relations would scale new heights. President Pranab Mukherjee in a message to his Bangladeshi counterpart, Abdul Hamid, said, "on behalf of the government, the people of India and on my own behalf, it gives me immense pleasure to extend warm felicitations and best wishes to you and to the people of Bangladesh on the occasion of your National Day." In a *Twitter* post, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Independence Day greetings to the people of Bangladesh. We cherish our long-standing ties & am sure our relations will grow even further", reports our New Delhi correspondent.⁹

The World Bank has proposed to help the Bangladesh Bank recover the stolen money and enhance cyber security, according to a WB letter sent to the central bank of Bangladesh on March 20, 2016. If

⁵ Iran Criticises 'Undignified' Remarks on Arrest of RAW Agent, *The News*, March 31, 2016, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/109339-Iran-criticises-undignified-remarks-on-arrest-of-RAW-agent>

⁶ "Power for bandwidth", *The Daily Star*, March 24, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/power-bandwidth-1198816>.

⁷ "Dhaka Condemns Brussels Attacks", *The Daily Star*, March 24, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/dhaka-condemns-brussels-attacks-1198729>.

⁸ "Bhutanese Envoy Meets President", *The Daily Star*, March 22, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/bhutanese-envoy-makes-farewell-call-president-1197682>.

⁹ "Foreign Friends Celebrate Too", *The Daily Star*, March 27, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/foreign-friends-celebrate-too-1200175>.

needed, the multilateral lender said, it is ready to extend support to the BB in resolving any issues with the US Federal Reserve. The WB offer came following the hacking of around \$101 million from the BB's foreign currency account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. However, prompt actions helped the BB recover some \$20 million from Sri Lanka. The rest \$81 million, which was taken through the Philippines banking system, could not be recovered yet.¹⁰

Sri Lanka

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Two Japanese naval ships arrive at Sri Lanka's Colombo Port; Sri Lankan PM condemns terrorist attacks in Belgium; Kuwait lends Sri Lanka US\$ 34 million to uplift Eastern University; Deputy FM of Sri Lanka Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan; Sri Lanka demonstrates commitment to combat maritime piracy and armed robbery; Sri Lanka nationwide inflation rises to 1.7 percent in February 2016.**

Sri Lanka Navy, in accordance with naval traditions, welcomed two Japanese naval ships arrived at the Port of Colombo on March 24, 2016. The two Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force ships, "Yuudachi" and "Yuugiri", arrived at the Port of Colombo on a goodwill and replenishment visit.¹¹

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe expressing his condolences to the family members of those who died in the terrorist attacks in Belgium on March 22 has strongly condemned the atrocities. In a letter to the Prime Minister of Belgium Charles Michel, Wickremesinghe said he was deeply saddened to hear about the terrorist attack unleashed in Brussels. Expressing his condolences to family members of those who died in the terrorist attack, the Prime Minister said the entire Sri Lankan nation was with the Belgian Government at this juncture. At the same time the Sri Lankan Prime Minister said that taking necessary initiatives to wipe out terrorists is the need of the hour.¹²

The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) signed a loan agreement with Sri Lanka on March 24 for approx. US\$34 million to contribute to financing construction of a complex for the Faculty of Healthcare Sciences, Eastern University. Secretary to the Ministry of Finance, Dr. R.H.S. Samarasinghe signed the loan agreement on behalf Sri Lanka. Deputy Director-General of the KFAED, Hesham Al-Waqayan in the presence of the Ambassador of Kuwait to Sri Lanka, Khalaf Bu Dhair, and the Regional Manager for East South Asian and Pacific Countries of Kuwait Fund, Waleed Al-Bahar signed on behalf of the Fund. The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2019. The total cost of the project including prices, taxes and interest reserves during implementation, is estimated at Rs. 7.1 billion. The Fund covers 69 per cent of the total project costs while the Government of Sri Lanka has pledged to cover the remaining costs. The 25-year loan, at an interest rate of 1 per cent plus 0.5 per cent per annum to meet the costs of administration and implementation of the Loan Agreement, will have a grace period of 5 years and is repayable in 40 semi-annual instalments. KAFED has previously extended 13 loans to Sri Lanka, totalling about US\$ 213 million. The fund has also extended technical assistance to Sri Lanka, valued at US\$ 1.52 million,

¹⁰ Rahman, Sajjadur, "World Bank To Help BB Recover Stolen Money", *The Daily Star*, March 21, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/world-bank-help-bb-recover-stolen-money-1197160>.

¹¹ "Two Japanese Naval Ships Arrive at Sri Lanka's Colombo Port", *ColomboPage*, March 24, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar24_1458836071CH.php.

¹² "Sri Lankan PM Condemns Terrorist Attacks in Belgium", *ColomboPage*, March 24, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar24_1458827175CH.php.

to finance technical and economic feasibility studies for projects in the agricultural and energy sectors.¹³

Following a meeting with the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan Hitoshi Kikawada on March 22, Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Harsha de Silva said he had a long discussion with his Japanese counterpart and discussed the "proposed G7 meeting and a host of issues relating to trade, investment, development cooperation and maritime security and defence cooperation between our two countries."¹⁴

Demonstrating strong commitment to combat maritime piracy and armed robbery at sea in the region, Sri Lanka along with twenty other countries took part in a symposium and a high level meeting held to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) in Singapore on March 18th, 2016. The Sri Lankan delegation, led by State Minister of Defence Ruwan Wijewardene, included the Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy Vice Admiral Ravindra C Wijegunaratne, senior naval officers, and officials from the Ministry of Defence.¹⁵

Sri Lanka's nationwide inflation in February 2016 determined under the new National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) rose to 1.7 percent from -0.7 percent recorded in January 2016, on a year-on-year basis, the Department of Census and Statistics reported on March 21. Inflation on an annual average basis in February 2016 was 2.6 per cent.¹⁶

Maldives

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **WHO donates six ambulances and medical equipment; Opposition leaders in London discuss major political move; President Yameen sends Pakistan Day felicitations to the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan; President Yameen sends message of sympathy to the Belgian Prime Minister; President ratifies first amendment to the act on prevention of terrorism.**

World Health Organization (WHO) has donated six ambulances and essential medical equipment needed at the atolls to the Health Ministry. At a special ceremony held at the STO Head Office on March 27, the symbolic gesture of the donations were presented to the Health Minister, Iruthisham Adam by the WHO representative to the Maldives, Dr. Arvind Mathur. The ambulances received have been given to Kulhudhuffushi Regional Hospital, Sh. Milandhoo Health Centre, Hulhumalé Hospital, Dr. Abdul Samad Memorial Hospital, G.Dh. Faresmaathoda Health Centre and Hithadhoo Regional Hospital, Addu City. The medical equipment among the donation include emergency health kit, vaccine carrier, vaccine storage, colposcope and genesis blood collection monitor are set to be sent to hospitals and health centres.¹⁷

¹³ "Kuwait Lends Sri Lanka US\$ 34 Million To Uplift Eastern University", *ColomboPage*, March 24, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar24_1458824292CH.php.

¹⁴ "Japan is Happy with 'New' Sri Lanka - Deputy FM", *ColomboPage*, March 22, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar22_1458665389CH.php.

¹⁵ "Sri Lanka Demonstrates Commitment to Combat Maritime Piracy and Armed Robbery", *ColomboPage*, March 21, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar21_1458532978CH.php.

¹⁶ "Sri Lanka Nationwide Inflation Rises To 1.7 Percent In February 2016", *ColomboPage*, March 21, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar21_1458566005CH.php.

¹⁷ "WHO Donates Six Ambulances and Medical Equipment", *SunOnline*, March 27, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36847>.

Maldivian opposition leaders in London have discussed a number of major political moves. Among the attendees of the discussion include former President Mohamed Nasheed, former Vice President Dr. Mohamed Jameel Ahmed, former Foreign Secretary and the UN special rapporteur to Iran, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Deputy Leader of Jumhooree Party, Ameen Ibrahim and the MDP Chairper, Ali Waheed.

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed tweeted a picture at the meeting along with some points of discussion. Dr. Shaheed said that a decision was made at the meeting to raise concern against the death sentence for political motives. He also said that a campaign to bring government officials to a human Rights committee and a campaign to gain special attention to the Maldives at a corruption summit in the UK this May was initiated.¹⁸

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom sent messages of greetings to President Mamnoon Hussain, and Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan, on the occasion of Pakistan Day.¹⁹

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom sent a message of sympathy to the Prime Minister of Belgium, Charles Michel, following the bomb attacks at the Zaventem Airport, Schuman and Maalbeek metro stations.²⁰

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has ratified the first amendment to the “Act on Prevention of Terrorism” (Act No. 32/2015). The amendment was passed by the Parliament at the 14th sitting of its first session, on March 16, 2016. Following ratification, the Act has been published in the Government Gazette. The amendment states that the President will constitute a list of suspected terrorist organisations, which will be monitored by the Maldives National Defence Force, as per instruction from the National Security Council.²¹

B. East Asia

China

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Chinese navy to participate in joint disaster relief drill; China urges to change the way G20 functions; China participates in joint evacuation drill; Xi to visit Czech Republic and also the United States; Xi urges to follow the development model of the 13th Five Year Plan; Xi meets the Prime Minister of Nepal; Xi meets the President of Germany.**

A Chinese navy flotilla left the east China’s Shandong Province on March 26 to conduct blue water exercises in Indonesia. It comprised of missile frigate Weifang and rescue vessel Changxingdao.

¹⁸ “Opposition Leaders in London Discuss Major Political Move”, *SunOnline*, March 25, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36820>.

¹⁹ “President Yameen Sends Pakistan Day Felicitations To the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan”, *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, March 23, 2016, at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=16583>.

²⁰ “President Yameen Sends Message of Sympathy to the Belgian Prime Minister”, *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, March 22, 2016, at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=16580>.

²¹ “President Ratifies First Amendment to the Act on Prevention of Terrorism”, *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, March 21, 2016, at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=16576>.

This exercise will be held from April 12 to April 15. Russia, the United States, France and China with other countries are participating in these exercises.²²

According to the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, China which holds the presidency of the G20 for this year, is planning to transform the forum from a “talking shop” to a “doing shop”. Wang Yi further added that, “all countries have agreed that monetary easing and fiscal stimulus is not a long-term strategy. Instead, innovation and structural reform should be the “key to unleashing long-term growth potential”.²³

China and the United Kingdom conducted their first joint simulated evacuation exercises in Nanjing, China. This was called the Joint Evacuation-2016 table top drill. According to Rear Admiral Lu Ming, “China and the UK have rich experience accumulated over the years in evacuation missions, and the latest exercise will help deepen the practical cooperation in non-combatant military operations”.²⁴

Chinese President Xi Jinping is scheduled to visit the Czech Republic from March 28 to 30, 2016 and is scheduled to attend the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington from March 31 to April 1. This was announced by the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson on March 23.²⁵

Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged the people to implement the innovative coordinated, green, open and shared development which is mandated in the 13th Five Year Plan. Xi asserted that, “Authorities must coordinate their efforts to put these concepts into practice, as they are key to the country meeting its target of forming a moderately prosperous society”.²⁶

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with the Prime Minister of Nepal K P Sharma Oli on March 21 in Beijing. During the meeting Xi said that, “As developing countries, China and Nepal are facing the historic missions of reform and development”. Both sides discussed ways to improve the relationship. They discussed tourism, free trade agreement, industrial capacity and China’s Belt and Road Initiative.²⁷

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with the President of Germany Joachim Gauck on March 21 in Beijing. This was the first state visit of Gauck to China. During the meeting Xi said that, “China and Germany are seeing closer exchanges and cooperation than ever before and bilateral ties are moving toward a higher level”.²⁸

²² “Chinese Navy Fleet Departs for Joint Disaster Relief Drill”, *China Daily*, March 26, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/26/content_24113656.htm, accessed on March 28, 2016

²³ “Nation to Pave Way for Change in G20, Foreign Minister Says”, By Zheng Yangpeng in Boao, Hainan, *China Daily*, March 25, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/25/content_24089240.htm, accessed on March 28, 2016

²⁴ “Drill Simulates Joint Evacuation”, By Zhao Lei, *China Daily*, March 25, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn_eu/2016-03/25/content_24082587.htm, accessed on March 28, 2016

²⁵ “Chinese President To Visit Czech Republic, Attend Nuclear Security Summit in US”, *China Daily*, March 23, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016xivisitczech/2016-03/23/content_24037031.htm, accessed on March 28, 2016

²⁶ “Xi Urges Implementation Of New Development Concepts”, *China Daily*, March 22, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/22/content_24025558.htm, accessed on March 28, 2016

²⁷ “Xi Calls For China-Nepal Community of Common Destiny”, *China Daily*, March 22, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/22/content_24002664.htm, accessed on March 28, 2016

²⁸ “President Xi Meets German Counterpart on Stronger Ties”, *China Daily*, March 21, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/21/content_24002643.htm, accessed on March 28, 2016

Japan

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Japan deepens cooperation with Paraguay during Foreign Ministers' Meeting; Kishida visits Italy, Vatican and France ahead of the G7 Hiroshima Foreign Ministers' Meeting; Japan and South Korea held Director-General level talks.**

On March 24, Japan-Paraguay Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held where Japanese foreign minister Fumio Kishida met his counterpart Eladio Loizaga and decided to collaborate in further developing friendly ties between the two countries this year, which marks the 80th year of Japanese immigration. There was the signing of an Exchange of Notes on General Cultural Grant Assistance for the "Project for Improvement of Equipment of the National Training Centre, National Secretary of Sports. Moreover, Japan agreed to accept a visa exemption measure for Paraguay diplomatic and official passport holders while responding to an appeal from Paraguay. They also agreed to cooperate on the United Nations Security Council reform.²⁹

From March 19 to March 21, Foreign Minister Kishida visited Italy, Vatican and France. On March 19, Kishida held a meeting with Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni in Rome where both sides valued the present bilateral relationship and shared the assessment that they would boost the Japan-Italy relations in a wide array of fields in this landmark year of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Regarding the economic relations, Minister Gentiloni specified that, given the economic scale of both nations, there remains the potential to further progressing the bilateral economic relations. Kishida further stressed that, at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit, Japan plans to offer the best way toward global peace. The G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting is expected to deliver a tough message by deliberating countermeasures against terrorism and violent extremism, the refugee problem, the Middle East, Ukraine and Russia, maritime security, challenges in Asia and non-proliferation and disarmament.³⁰ Additionally, on March 19, Kishida held a meeting with Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher in Vatican during which he hoped that His Holiness Pope Francis could visit Japan to encourage the reconstruction efforts as five years had passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake.³¹ On March 20, Fumio Kishida held a meeting with Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault in Paris. Both sided decided to reinforce cooperation in the areas of security and defence, including peace-building initiatives, and to support Japan-France collaboration in Africa via the TICAD VI slated to happen in Kenya in August 2016.³²

On March 22, Japan and South Korea held Director-General level talks to discuss numerous issues between both nations, including follow-up on the agreement. Director-General of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau of MOFA Japan, Kimihiro Ishikane met with the Director-General for the Northeast Asian Affairs Bureau of the MOFA of the South Korea, Chung Byung-won. This is the

²⁹ "Japan-Paraguay Foreign Ministers' Meeting", *MOFA Japan*, March 24, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001096.html

³⁰ "Japan-Italy Foreign Ministers' Meeting", *MOFA Japan*, March 20, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/it/page4e_000399.html

³¹ "Japan-Vatican Foreign Ministers' Meeting", *MOFA Japan*, March 20, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/va/page4e_000402.html

³² "Japan-France Foreign Ministers' Meeting", *MOFA Japan*, March 21, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/fr/page4e_000403.html

first Director-General level dialogue following the settlement concluded between Japan and South Korea in December.³³

C. Southeast Asia & Oceania

Southeast Asia

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **China offered New Loans to SE Asia; ASEAN Information Ministers Talked about ASEAN Community; Solomon Islands Ambassador to ASEAN; Czech Republic Ambassador Met Secretary General Minh; Indonesia- China Spat on Fishing on Natuna; 100 Chinese Fishing Boats Spotted in Malaysian Part of South China Sea; China Condemned US for Instigating Manila; Malaysian Police Arrested 15 Suspects Involved with ISIS; Mahathir Sued Najib Razak; Armed Forces Parade Day Celebrated in Myanmar; New Government in Power in Vietnam.**

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met leaders from Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam in the southern Chinese resort town of Sanya on Hainan Island on March 23 and he pledged to give \$11.5 billion in loans and credit lines to these five Southeast Asian countries. However, it should be noticed that such offers from China to ASEAN countries are usually made in official gatherings and no time frame was mentioned by Premier Li. China shares territorial disputes with Vietnam over their claims on South China Sea and with Myanmar, the twists and turns in relations came as Myanmar suspended few Chinese projects in the recent years. With new governments both in Vietnam and Myanmar, it is now time to watch the future trends in China-Southeast Asia relations.³⁴

The ASEAN Information Ministers reiterated their commitment to work together to elevate awareness about ASEAN among the people and make a sense of community through information and media. The 13th Conference of AMRI was happened along with the 4th Meeting of AMRI Plus Three, 14th Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials Responsible for Information (SOMRI), 4th Meeting of SOMRI Plus Three and 1st Meeting of SOMRI Plus Japan. The meeting was themed ‘One ASEAN: Connectivity, Community, Opportunity’. The representatives approved the Strategic Plan for Information and Media 2016-2025 to enable the information sector so that it can contribute towards ASEAN community building exercises. They also discussed preparations to celebrate the 50th Founding Anniversary of ASEAN in 2017.³⁵

Ambassador Salana Kalu of Solomon Islands took charge as the Ambassador of his country to ASEAN. Mr. Le Luong Minh expressed that ASEAN and Solomon Islands could further exploit opportunities to uphold cooperation. He also mentioned about the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) through which Solomon Islands and ASEAN can work together. He identified few areas like tourism, fisheries, trade and investment for future cooperation. Both sides also deliberated on potential ways to encourage connectivity and people-to-people

³³ “Press Conference by Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida”, March 22, 2016, *MOFA Japan*, March 22, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e_000251.html

³⁴ “China Offers \$11.5B in Loans, Credit to Southeast Asia”, *VOA News*, March 23, 2016, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/ap-china-southeast-asian-leaders-seek-greater-cooperation/3250705.html>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

³⁵ “ASEAN Information Ministers Reaffirm Commitment to Raise ASEAN Awareness”, *ASEAN.org*, March 21, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/asean-information-ministers-reaffirm-commitment-to-raise-asean-awareness/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

contacts between ASEAN and Solomon Islands. Other issues that were discussed included regional and international issues of common interests including ASEAN community building initiative.³⁶

ASEAN and Czech Republic will work together to utilise the vast potential both sides have in common, mentioned H.E. Ivan Hotěk, the new Czech Ambassador to ASEAN. Ambassador Hotěk further said that the Czech Republic will also encourage collaboration between ASEAN and the European Union as well as within ASEAN. Secretary-General Minh elaborated that ASEAN and the Czech Republic could further work on areas including trade and investment. Secretary-General Minh and Ambassador Hotěk also deliberated on promising ways to further stimulate business-to-business cooperation. Few regional and international issues were also covered in their discussion.³⁷

Indonesia seems to be angry with China's actions on Natuna Islands and declared that it may approach the international court to prevent China from being more assertive in its territorial claims. This happened as Indonesia tried to block a Chinese fishing boat that was illegally (according to Indonesian officials) in Natuna Islands and detained eight Chinese fishermen. China, however, objected to it and later claimed that the Chinese fishermen be released as they were fishing in 'traditional Chinese water'.³⁸

More than 100 Chinese fishing boats and ships were found traversing in Malaysian waters illegally. The Royal Malaysian Navy and Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency were looking into the matter and sent bombardier aircraft to fly that area in order to examine whether the Chinese boats and ships encroached into Malaysian Exclusive Economic Zone. The Prime Minister's office mentioned that, proper actions will be taken if those boats and ships were found guilty by having trespassed into Malaysian territory.³⁹

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying mentioned that Philippines' action to go against China in the international court is illegal and unlawful. She continued, "Its (Philippines') stubbornness is clearly the result of behind-the-scenes instigation and political manoeuvring. China is surely not going to humour such a political farce." Clearly she was referring to the US while mentioning about instigating Manila. This came as a response against US diplomat Daniel Russel's comment that the forthcoming decision by the international tribunal on the arbitration case brought by the Philippines would bring "rules-based" future in the region. Hua Chunying further mentioned that US itself is not a part of the UNCLOS, but speaks about stability in South China Sea through international law and order.⁴⁰

The Malaysian Police have arrested 15 people allegedly involved with the ISIS in the week when the Brussels attack happened. Khalid Abu Bakar, Malaysia's national police chief, released a statement showing that the suspects, aged between 22 and 49, include a mosque cleric, a student, a

³⁶ "Solomon Islands to Forge Close Cooperation with ASEAN", *ASEAN.org*, March 22, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/solomon-islands-to-forge-close-cooperation-with-asean/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

³⁷ Czech Republic to Strengthen Relationship with ASEAN", *ASEAN.org*, March 25, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/54184-2/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

³⁸ Jensen, Fergus and Munthe, Bernadette Christina, "Indonesia Says It Feels Peace Efforts On South China Sea 'Sabotaged'", *Reuters*, March 21, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-southchinasea-idUSKCN0WN0B6>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

³⁹ "More than 100 China Vessels Spotted in Malaysian Waters", *The New Straits Times Online* and *Bernama*, March 24, 2016, at <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/03/134965/more-100-china-vessels-spotted-malaysian-waters>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

⁴⁰ "China Accuses US of Instigating Philippines To Go to UN on SCS", *Press Trust of India* and *Business Standard*, March 23, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/china-accuses-us-of-instigating-philippines-to-go-to-un-on-scs-116032300903_1.html, accessed on April 21, 2016.

police officer and a technician. There were 4 women in the 15 people group. This has added to the number of 160 people already arrested by the Malaysian authority in connection with ISIS linked terrorism. Followed by the Jakarta attack in January 2016, Malaysia is on high alert too. The police suspects that these 15 people were working on the instruction given by a Malaysian who is fighting for the ISIS from Syria now and they group was trying to sabotage the country by one attack.⁴¹

Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad has sued the present PM Najib Razak for his alleged involvement in the state fund 1MDB. Mahathir Mohammad has accused Mr. Razak of stealing \$681m from the 1MDB and prevented the law and judiciary from taking appropriate action against him. The attorney general of Malaysia has already given a clean chit to Mr. Razak and the prime minister also has denied all allegations. His office maintains that the money in question in Najib's personal accounts came as a gift from the Royal Saudi family and not from 1MDB. During his tenure, Mr. Mahathir Mohammad was accused of arbitrary arrests and restrictions on media; allegations that are now troubling the Najib government as well. However, Mahathir Mohammad is now trying to unseat the present government and is involved in anti-Najib movement. He was part of a rally which was organised in protest of Najib's government in downtown Kuala Lumpur. He has also resigned from his post in UMNO, a political body that was made extremely powerful during his tenure and which still enjoys an extra-ordinary role in Malaysian politics. In response, Najib side-lined Mahathir from the politics and the police have questioned him over one defamation case brought by the present prime minister. In between Mahathir has also tried to topple the present government in the parliament by a zero-confidence vote.⁴²

Amid political transition towards democracy led by National League for Democracy and Daw Aung Saan Suu Kyi, the Myanmar military has celebrated the Armed Forces Parade Day to celebrate Myanmar's war against imperialist Japan during the World War II. The commander-in-chief of Myanmar Armed Forces, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing said that the *Tatmadaw* has ensured the stability of the country which, in turn, has helped in democratic transition. He further said, "The *Tatmadaw* has to be present in a leading role in national politics". He also reiterated that the military will be the upholder of the constitution.⁴³

Vietnam National Assembly is going to have a new government in power, three months ahead of its scheduled election where the common people were to elect new representatives. The Communist Party in Vietnam had already side-lined Premier Nguyen Tan Dung in January 2016 from active political role in the Politburo and selected three candidates to be the premier, president and party's general secretary. The assembly's general secretary, Nguyen Hanh Phuc, said the change in plan was held in order to boost efficiency in the government. The party has nominated Nguyen Xuan Phuc (who was earlier Dung's deputy) as the new premier, Minister of Public Security Tran Dai

⁴¹ Lewis, Simon, "15 Suspected ISIS Members Planning Terror Attacks Have Been Arrested in Malaysia", *Time*, March 24, 2016, at <http://time.com/4271704/malaysia-arrested-15-isis-members-terror/>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

⁴² Holmes, Oliver, "Former Malaysian Premier Mahathir Sues PM Najib Over 'Abuse Of Power'", *The Guardian*, March 23, 2016, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/23/former-malaysian-premier-mahathir-sues-pm-najib-over-abuse-of-power>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

⁴³ Mahtani, Shibani, "Myanmar Military Display Highlights Army's Continuing Power", *The Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 2016, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/myanmar-military-display-highlights-armys-continuing-power-1459057726>, accessed on April 19, 2016.

Quang as president and Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan as the speaker of the House. Nguyen Phu Trong was re-elected as the chief of the party for a second term at the January congress.⁴⁴

D. West Asia

National

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Poll says majority of Russians support troop withdrawal from Syria; Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov gets Putin's support and will run for elections; Russian investigators say Khodorkovsky's Yukos acquired illegally; Poll says majority of Russians will support Putin's re-election; Rosneft seeking access to exporting gas to consumers not tied with Gazprom; Russian military satellite successfully delivered into orbit; New motorized infantry division to be created in southern Russia by the end of 2016; 29 companies with projects worth US\$ 1.2 billion granted 'free port of Vladivostok resident status'; Large-scale command and staff paratrooper drills take place in Russia; Russia to deliver world's first LNG-fuelled icebreaker to Finland in April.**

A poll conducted by state-run VTsIOM has sated, on March 25, that the majority of Russians support President Vladimir Putin's decision to withdraw "the main part" of the military from Syria. Only 7 per cent of respondents do not agree with the president's decision to withdraw, while 84 percent were in support of the military agenda in Syria. More than three quarters of respondents – 78 percent – agree that Russian forces achieved their objectives in Syria. The survey was conducted during March 19-20 – 1,600 respondents were interviewed at 130 sampling points in 46 Russian regions and republics. The statistical error does not exceed 3.5 percent.⁴⁵

President Vladimir Putin has shown his support for Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov by appointing him acting head of Chechnya until the September 2016 elections, by a decree signed on March 25. Earlier, the head of the Committee for Prevention of Torture Igor Kalyapin had said that 'Kadyrov, unfortunately, can't be replaced now. The system needs to be rebuilt first, which would take two or three years at least – that is if someone even wants to do it, which does not look to be the case'.⁴⁶

The Russian Investigative Committee is close to proving that the Yukos oil company was acquired illegally by its shareholders. This was stated by Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin on March 25. Markin added that the 1995 privatization of Yukos violated anti-trust and competition law and that Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former co-owner and CEO of Yukos, acquired the company through shell companies JSC Laguna and JSC Reagent that were declared to be independent legal entities, but in fact belonged to Khodorkovsky. The Yukos shares were paid for using the funds of joint-stock bank Menatep – founded by Khodorkovsky – which belonged to the customers and investors of Menatep. The money was not returned and, a few years later, the bank was declared bankrupt,

⁴⁴ "Vietnam Parliament to Put New Leadership to Work Early", *Reuters*, March 21, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-politics-idUSKCN0WN0MV>, accessed on April 21, 2016.

⁴⁵ "Majority of Russians Support Troop Withdrawal From Syria – Poll", *The Moscow Times*, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/majority-of-russians-support-troop-withdrawal-from-syria--poll/563701.html>

⁴⁶ "Kadyrov Gets Putin's Support, Will Run in Elections", *The Moscow Times*, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/kadyrov-gets-putins-support-will-run-in-elections/563731.html>

therefore the funds were actually stolen. The shares were subsequently transferred between companies, all of which were controlled by Khodorkovsky. In July 2014, Yukos shareholders were awarded an unprecedented \$50 billion in damages by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, after a ruling that Russian authorities had subjected Yukos to politically motivated attacks. Russia has not paid the compensation and refuses to recognize the court's authority.⁴⁷

According to a poll conducted by independent Levada Centre, sixty-five percent of Russians would like to see President Vladimir Putin elected for another term. This compares to fifty seven percent of respondents who said last year they would like Putin to win the 2018 election. The number of Russians who would like to see another person succeed Putin as president in 2018 stood at 22 percent this year, compared to 25 percent in February 2015. The poll was conducted during March 11-14 among 1,600 people in 137 Russian cities and towns, via personal interviews in respondents' homes. The poll gave a margin of error of 3.4 percentage points or less.⁴⁸

Rosneft's Vice President Mikhail Leontyev has said, on March 24, that the company hopes to be backed by the Energy Minister in receiving access to gas exports via a single export channel. He stated 'we want to be allowed to sell gas to our consumers, which are not identical to Gazprom customers. They are ready to buy our gas, which contradicts nothing but Gazprom's position'.⁴⁹

A Soyuz-2.1a carrier rocket that took off from the Plesetsk space centre on March 24 has successfully delivered a military satellite into orbit. This is the second launch of the Soyuz-2 carrier rocket from the Plesetsk cosmodrome this year. Last year, Soyuz-2a carrier rockets were launched from the Plesetsk space centre five times while Rokot rockets blasted off from the cosmodrome on two occasions.⁵⁰

A new fully armed and equipped motorized infantry division will be deployed in Russia's southern Rostov Region by the end of this year. As such, three military garrisons are to be built in the Rostov region to accommodate the personnel. The division's strength will total about 10,000 officers. Its headquarters will be stationed in the Rostov-on-Don. The unit will boast the newest weaponry, armour, trucks and special vehicles. The cost of accommodating the newly-formed mechanized infantry division will total at least five billion roubles - US\$ 700 million. Earlier, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu had unveiled plans to create three West-oriented divisions.⁵¹

29 companies with projects worth 85 billion roubles, or roughly US\$ 1.23 billion, have been granted the status of residents of the Free Port of Vladivostok. Russian Deputy Prime Minister and presidential envoy in the Far Eastern Federal District Yuri Trutnev has said, on March 24, that the free port of Vladivostok should be open for investors. We have just approved 29 projects, but this is only the beginning of a long road. The Primorsky Territory can boast unique business climate and

⁴⁷ "Russian Investigators Say Khodorkovsky's Yukos Acquired Illegally", *The Moscow Times*, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-investigators-say-khodorkovskys-yukos-acquired-illegally/563725.html>

⁴⁸ "Majority of Russians Would Support Putin Re-election - Poll", *The Moscow Times*, March 22, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/majority-of-russians-would-support-putin-re-election-poll/563138.html>

⁴⁹ "Russia's Rosneft Seeking Access To Exporting Gas To Consumers Not Tied with Gazprom", *Itar-Tass*, March 24, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/864862>

⁵⁰ "Russian Military Satellite Successfully Delivered Into Orbit – Defence Ministry", *Itar-Tass*, March 24, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/science/864805>

⁵¹ "New Motorized Infantry Division To Emerge In Russia's South By Year-End – Source", *Itar-Tass*, March 24, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/864752>

we hope investors will see it. We, on our part, will offer them all-round support'. A spokesman for the Far East Development Corporation said that the projects include the establishment of a coal terminal to export Russian mineral resources to Asia Pacific countries, and companies turning out elevators, electricals, bicycles, reinforced concrete slabs, plastics, etc. These projects are expected to help create up to 3,000 new jobs. The free port zone was established in Vladivostok on October 12, 2015 and embraces 15 municipalities in the Primorye Territory, including their coastal waters, with an overall area of 28,400 square kilometres. The area's population is 1.4 million, or 75 percent of people living in the entire Primorye Territory. A free port zone implies a tax-free imports and exports regime.⁵²

Strategic command and staff exercises involving about 30,000 personnel and over 3,800 pieces of military hardware have started in Russia, from March 22, to practice troop control. The Defence Ministry stated 'training exercise involves a surprise combat readiness check of the Airborne Forces by decision of the supreme commander-in-chief. The check will assess the capabilities of the Airborne Force Command for exercising command and control of a joint force grouping upon the accomplishment of assigned missions'.⁵³

Russia's United Shipbuilding Corporation (USC) plans to deliver the world's first liquefied natural gas-fired icebreaker under construction at a shipyard in Helsinki to Finland in April 2016. The current package of shipyard orders consists of five vessels under construction for Russian customers and one vessel for the Finnish customer. It was reported earlier the United Shipbuilding Corporation acquired the Helsinki-based Artech Helsinki Shipyard specializing in building ice-rated ships.⁵⁴

International

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **President Putin meets U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in Moscow; Foreign Minister Lavrov says Europe must set aside geo-political games; Russia says Minsk-2 agreements should not be revised; Russia calls on Turkey to give up the idea of creating security zones in Syria; Foreign Minister Lavrov says Russia ready to resume anti-terror cooperation with NATO; Russia calls upon Syrian Kurds to recognize Syria's indivisibility; Russia says western donors prohibit Afghanistan from purchasing Russian weapons; President Putin meets with his Finnish counterpart in Moscow; Russia's Chief of Presidential Staff Sergei Ivanov visits China; Putin meets Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi in Moscow.**

President Putin has meet with the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in Moscow on March 25. Putin pointed to the constructive stance of American President Barack Obama on establishing truce in Syria. He also expressed hope that the visit of Secretary Kerry will help the United States and Russia to narrow their differences over Syria and Ukraine. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that the two countries remain divided over global security matters. This includes missile defence, treaty on the elimination of intermediate and shorter-range missiles (INF Treaty) and NATO expansion. He also mentioned the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, including Libya, Yemen, and

⁵² "29 Companies With Projects Worth \$1.2 Bln Granted Free Port Of Vladivostok Resident Status", *Itar-Tass*, March 24, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/864683>

⁵³ "Large-Scale Command and Staff Paratrooper Drills Start in Russia", *Itar-Tass*, March 22, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/864209>

⁵⁴ "Russia's USC Plans To Deliver World's First LNG-Fired Icebreaker To Finland in April", *Itar-Tass*, March 22, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/864252>

stressed on the need to break the deadlock in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. He stated ‘the main thing is that we have agreed to intensify the dialogue and make it more substantive in nature and make it stable so that to try to settle these questions, we agreed to continue contacts on all these and other issues on our common agenda’.

U.S. Secretary of State Kerry stated that ‘Washington is keen to get back to normal in its dialogue with Moscow and sees progress here. President Putin has been very gracious to spend time with me when I’ve come here and to work at trying to find a solution to very complicated issues. I think that Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and I have had a very productive relationship and we’ve been able to separate differences and work together in a very effective way’. He added that their joint efforts on the ceasefire in Syria have had an impact – ‘it’s been very positive, and that’s the way we can build back to a much stronger, more effective relationship’. Kerry rounded off the interactions by stating ‘we’re actually very pleased that Russia is concerned about that extremism and wants to fight against Daesh and other extremists. So the key here is to find clarity in our definitions, make sure we’re really working effectively together without hidden agenda in a way that can rapidly destroy Daesh, push back against the violent extremism, restore peace and stability to the region’.⁵⁵

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said, on March 23, that Europe must set aside “geopolitical games” in the face of terrorism. He stated ‘I hope that all Europeans in the wake of this terrible threat of terrorism in light of the terrorist attacks in Brussels can put aside geopolitical games and come together, to prevent terrorists from controlling affairs on the continent’.⁵⁶

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on March 23, that any attempts to undermine the Minsk agreements on Ukraine’s conflict settlement should be prevented. He stated ‘France and Germany, when we met in Paris not long ago in the Normandy four format at the level of foreign ministers, called for indicating a tentative date for holding those local elections in Donbass that are viewed by many as a key at this point element of the fulfilment of Minsk-2. We were ready to support this proposal. Germany proposed June-July for holding such elections, but the proposal was not supported by the Ukrainian side. And just recently I’ve read a statement by the leadership of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine that says that it will be possible to begin the discussion on holding such elections no earlier than in two years. It’s an interesting signal. I fully agree that the Minsk-2 accords cannot be revised and attempts at their undermining should be prevented. We actively support the efforts exerted by Germany together with France for preserving the ‘Normandy format. We are also in favour of this’.⁵⁷

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has said, on March 24, that Turkey should abandon its attempts to push for establishment of the so-called security zones in Syria. She stated ‘speaking about the Syrian process, we are proceeding from the necessity for all members of the international community to comply with the key agreements on that issue, including UN Security Council Resolution 2254, statements by the International Syria Support Group, and of course the Geneva Communique of 2012. As well as to give up any steps going beyond the frames of settlement parameters approved by the UN Security Council. The prime minister of Turkey, while

⁵⁵ “US Keen To Get Back To Normal in Dialogue with Russia – John Kerry”, *India-Russia Report*, March 25, 2016 at https://in.rbth.com/news/2016/03/25/us-keen-to-get-back-to-normal-in-dialogue-with-russia-john-kerry_579015

⁵⁶ “Russian Foreign Minister: Europe Must Set Aside ‘Geopolitical Games’”, *The Moscow Times*, March 23, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-foreign-minister-europe-must-set-aside-geopolitical-games/563473.html>

⁵⁷ “Lavrov: Minsk-2 Accords Should Not Be Revised”, *Itar-Tass*, March 23, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/864584>

commenting on the results of the EU-Russia summit, tried to promote Ankara's controversial initiatives to establish in the territory of the sovereign Syrian state the so-called security zones'.⁵⁸

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on March 25, that Russia will be ready to resume counterterrorism cooperation with NATO if the organization takes such a decision. He made these statements after holding talks with his Italian counterpart Paolo Gentiloni in Moscow. Lavrov said 'we have discussed the troubled situation in the counter-terrorism sphere in the framework of the Russia-NATO Council. This work, as well as many other areas of cooperation between Russia and NATO, has been suspended, which does not help the situation'. He also pointed out that Russia and the United States have finally managed to reach real coordination in their anti-terrorist efforts in Syria and added that 'I think it inexcusable to keep cooperation in the Russia-European Union and Russia-NATO Council formats frozen'.⁵⁹

Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov has said, on March 25, that Russia is explaining in its contacts with Kurds that Syria is an indivisible country that should not be broken into parts. He stated 'our task is to help Kurds, to find common ground, common approaches. National Syrian interests should prevail over all others. They should proceed from the fact that Syria should not be broken apart as it will be bad for Syrians themselves'. The diplomat noted that Russia maintains good relations and contacts with Kurds. He said, 'we maintain good contacts with Kurds. We keep in touch not only with Democratic Union Party and several other parties and organizations'.⁶⁰

Russian presidential envoy for Afghanistan, director of the Foreign Ministry's Asia Department, Zamir Kabulov has said, on March 25, that Western financial donors have prohibited the Afghan government from spending the funds they provide to purchase Russian weapons. He stated 'the Afghans are interested in cooperation with Russia in the military-technical sphere. Russia is prepared to provide such assistance, but in practice this runs against a number of obstacles. One of the main ones is the actual ban by Afghanistan's foreign financial donors, the US in the first place, on spending the funds provided to Kabul to purchase the necessary weapons and other military gear from Russia. In a situation like this Afghanistan may get military-technical assistance from Russia only if it agrees to provide it on the disinterested basis'.⁶¹

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with the President of Finland Sauli Niinistö in Moscow on March 22. During the meeting the two presidents discussed various aspects of bilateral relations as well as anti-terrorism efforts following terrorist attacks in Brussels. During the talks, representatives of Russia's Federal Migration Service and Finland's Ministry of the Interior signed a memorandum of understanding in the sphere of migration. During an interaction with the press, it was pointed out that bilateral trade has declined by 40 per cent in 2015 while tourism has decreased by 19 percent. The volume of Russian investments accumulated in Finland amounts to US\$ 2.3 billion while Finnish investments in Russia are over US\$ 12 billion. Putin added a 'small amount of people' crossed the Russian-Finnish border in March, comparing to some 1,700 people in January-February. The sides

⁵⁸ "Moscow calls on Turkey to Give Up Idea of Creating "Security Zones" in Syria", *Itar-Tass*, March 23, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/864903>

⁵⁹ "Russia Ready To Resume Anti-Terror Cooperation with NATO – FM", *Itar-Tass*, March 25, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/865191>

⁶⁰ "Moscow Stresses Syrian Kurds Should Understand Syria is Indivisible", *Itar-Tass*, March 25, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/865164>

⁶¹ "Financial Donors Prohibit Afghanistan From Buying Russian Weapons", *Itar-Tass*, March 25, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/865229>

agreed on temporal constraints at two border checkpoints and the measures proved itself to be useful.⁶²

Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office Sergei Ivanov met with Director of the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Li Zhanshu during his two-day visit to China on March 24. The talks addressed a broad range of issues related to interaction between the Russian Presidential Executive Office and the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The discussion also focused on the further development of bilateral relations, as well as preparations for the Russian President's visit to China later this year. Meanwhile, Mr Ivanov also met with the Head of the Central Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Liu Qibao and Head of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China Wang Qishan, apart from a separate meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping.⁶³

President Putin received Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces Mohammed Al Nahyan at the Kremlin on March 24. He stated 'we consider it very important that we have developed such good relations, which we continuously maintain at the top level and promote. Regrettably, our trade has decreased for certain reasons, but our Intergovernmental Commission focuses on four major areas, and I hope that our colleagues will make a positive contribution to our cooperation. Naturally, investment cooperation is extremely important. I know that specific plans already exist, and we will, of course, welcome and support them. It goes without saying that we think your visit is very well timed, considering the need to discuss regional developments. The Crown Prince stated that 'indeed, as you said, trade has fallen, but that is why we came to Moscow. We are in Moscow because Moscow plays a serious role in the Middle East. We attach great importance to continuous dialogue both on the further development of our bilateral relations and on the ways of enhancing stability in the Middle East. We strongly believe in the development of our relations and are striving to make them a firm foundation for our future cooperation'.⁶⁴

India-Russia Relations

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Russia approves ONGC's purchase of 15 percent stake in Vankorneft; Russia to display 800 military exhibits at Defence Expo arms show; Russia and India discuss the lease of a second nuclear submarine.**

The Russian government has, on March 24, approved ONGC's purchase of 15 percent stake in Vankorneft – a subsidiary of Rosneft.⁶⁵ Earlier, the head of the Federal Antimonopoly Service (FAS) Igor Artemyev had said that ONGC will pay US\$ 1.3 billion for the acquisition. Vankorskoe field (developed by Vankorneft) has reserves of about 500 million tonnes of oil and 182 billion cubic meters of gas. Vankorneft was founded in 2004 to carry out the project of the Vankor field

⁶² "Finland's Investments in Russia Stand at \$12 Billion – Putin", *Itar-Tass*, March 22, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/864355>

⁶³ "Sergei Ivanov Met with Director of General Office of Chinese Communist Party Li Zhanshu", *President of Russia*, March 24, 2016 at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/administration/51558>

⁶⁴ "Meeting with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed Al Nahyan", *President of Russia*, March 24, 2016 at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51561>

⁶⁵ "Russian Government Approves Purchase of 15% Stake in Vankorneft by India's ONGC – Watchdog", *Itar-Tass*, March 25, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/864846>

development, the largest field to have been discovered and brought into production in Russia in the last 25 years. It is located in the northern part of Eastern Siberia.⁶⁶

A Russian delegation comprising 500 people and representing about 800 pieces of military hardware, will be among the most representative group at the international arms show Defence Expo in India. The Defence Expo will be held in Goa during March 28-31. The largest delegations will come from the United States (93 companies) and Russia (71) followed by the delegations from Great Britain (46), Germany (39), France (28) and Israel (28). Russian participants include the Almaz-Antey anti-aircraft missile system manufacturer, the Tula Arms Factory, Russia's Burevestnik key artillery weaponry producer, multiple launch rocket system manufacturer Splav and land forces weaponry and ammunition manufacturer Bazalt. Schwabe - Defence and Protection, the manufacturer of optical and laser gear and air and space monitoring systems, will unveil its latest products. Russia's shipbuilding industry will be represented by the Rubin and Malakhit design bureaus and Zvyozdochka, Admiralteiskiye Verfi, Severnaya Verf and Yantar shipyards.⁶⁷

Russian and Indian Defence Ministers, Sergey Shoigu and Manohar Parrikar respectively, have discussed the lease of a second nuclear submarine to India. While discussing military-technical cooperation between the two countries during a telephone conversation on March 23, the two ministers agreed to work out details for the transfer, on a leasing agreement, of a second nuclear-powered submarine (NPS) to the Indian Navy. The next round of talks is scheduled for April, when an Indian military delegation is expected to come to Moscow and meet with representatives of Rosoboronexport and the United Shipbuilding Corporation (USC).⁶⁸

E. West Asia

Iran

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Iran, Pakistan resolved to boost security ties: Rouhani.**

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says Iran and Pakistan are determined to step up their cooperation and consultation in the fight against terrorism and on regional security. During a press conference with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, Rouhani said that the two countries are resolved not to allow extremist and terrorist groups threaten their shared border security. The Iranian president said the two countries' security is intertwined and interdependent, adding that more efforts are needed to boost security along Iran's eastern and Pakistan's western border.

He added that the two countries are "close to each other culturally," and must also focus on cultural cooperation. Rouhani said issues of mutual interest, the economic sector and potentialities that exist for the development of economic relations, including in the energy issue, gas as well as electricity exports were discussed during the meeting with the Pakistani premier. The two countries also held

⁶⁶ "India's ONGC To Pay \$1.3 bln for Stake in Rosneft's Subsidiary – Watchdog", *Itar-Tass*, March 24, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/864847>

⁶⁷ "Russia to Display 800 Military Exhibits At India's Defence Expo Arms Show", *Itar-Tass*, March 25, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/865132>

⁶⁸ "Russia, India Discuss Second Nuclear Submarine", *Russia and India Report*, March 25, 2016 at https://in.rbth.com/economics/defence/2016/03/25/russia-india-discuss-second-nuclear-submarine_578969

talks for the expansion of trade cooperation in light of the facilitation of regulations like preferential trade tariffs by paving the ground for free trade between the two countries, he added.⁶⁹

Iraq and Syria

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Ki-moon expresses his surprise at victories achieved by Iraqi security forces; Sadr protests against government in Baghdad's Green Zone; Wide rejection of proposed federalism in north of Syria; Al-Jaafari: We had in-depth discussions with de Mistura on issues that constitute priorities for Syria.**

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed his surprise at the victories achieved by the Iraqi security forces, while offered his condolences to the families of al-Iskandariya Stadium bombing's victims. Ki-moon also called the international and regional partners to provide support and assistance to Iraq in its war against terrorism. Ban Ki-moon said during a joint press conference with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim and the President of the Islamic Development Bank Ahmed Mohammed Ali in Baghdad and followed by IraqiNews.com, "It was a pleasure to visit Baghdad for the eighth time as Secretary-General of the United Nations," indicating that, "In the past ten years, I have seen Iraqis endure very difficult times, and throughout these ten years, I have witnessed first-hand the indomitable spirit and resilience of the Iraqi people."⁷⁰

The Iraqi Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr entered the Green Zone in the centre of Baghdad, which includes many government offices, as well as the parliament, American and British embassies. Sadr said in a statement, "Today we are at the entrance of the Green Zone and tomorrow we will be within it." Iraqi Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr revealed his intention to protest inside the Green Zone as a show of discontent with the government's slow pace of carrying out reforms. Sadr's office ensured the sit-ins will remain peaceful and called the supporters of the Sadrist movement to abide by the rules and order.⁷¹

There has been wide rejection of the proposal of putting in place a federal system in north of Syria over the past few days as it impinges on the Syrian state's unity and it has nothing to do with the destiny of the Kurds. The national unity gathering in Qameshli city, which includes hundreds of intellectuals and representatives of civil society and popular organizations, stressed that the plan of federalism in Syria's north serves the ISIS, the al-Nusra Front and the world Zionism. It denounced the plan declared by what it described as some persons representing themselves only, adding that the Syrian Arab army is the only guarantee for eliminating terrorism. The gathering called on clergymen, popular organizations and clans in Hasaka province to confront the plan that poses a

⁶⁹ "Iran, Pakistan Resolved To Boost Security Ties: Rouhani", *Iran Daily*, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.iran-daily.com/News/138673.html>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁷⁰ "Ki-Moon Expresses His Surprise at Victories Achieved by Iraqi Security Forces", *Iraqi News*, March 27, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/ki-moon-expresses-surprise-big-victories-iraqi-security-forces/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁷¹ "Sadr Protests against Government in Baghdad's Green Zone", *Iraqi News*, March 27, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/sadr-protests-government-baghdads-green-zone/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

threat to the unity of Syria and to hold symposiums for explaining the danger of federalism and its negative impacts on the homeland and on the citizen.⁷²

The head of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation to the intra-Syrian dialogue in Geneva, Bashar al-Jaafari, said that the session held by the delegation with UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura discussed in an in-depth manner issues that constitute priorities for Syria and the whole world, like the issue of combating terrorism. In a statement to journalists following the talks session, al-Jaafari said that the delegation explained to de Mistura the dangers that arise from the actions of certain states, some of them members of the Security Council, who support and train terrorism and export to Syria through Turkey under various nomenclatures, SANA reported. Al-Jaafari also voiced surprise over the irresponsible discourse of some sides regarding the legislative elections in which Syrians elect their representatives at the People's Assembly.⁷³

Israel and Palestine

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Netanyahu: Bizarre gas ruling will greatly damage economy; PA Bans Imports from 5 Major Israeli Food Companies.**

Government officials castigated the High Court of Justice decision that put the brakes on a controversial natural gas deal, even as opposition lawmakers – who led the petition against the accord – celebrated the development as a victory for the public. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had spearheaded efforts to seal the deal between the state and gas companies, said the ruling “threatens the development of Israel’s gas reserves. Israel is regarded as a state with excessive judicial intervention, which makes it difficult to do business.” In its decision, the High Court declared that the deal to extract offshore natural gas would be cancelled within a year unless a central tenet of the agreement, preventing future governments from altering the terms, is significantly changed or cancelled.⁷⁴

The Palestinian Authority decided to halt imports from five major Israeli food production companies into the occupied Palestinian territory. In a statement released after the weekly cabinet meeting, the Palestinian government said the decision came in response to an Israeli ban on products from five Palestinian companies earlier this month. According to the statement, products from the Tnuva, Strauss, Tara, Soglowek and Tapuzina companies will be banned from entering the Palestinian territory. It added that the relevant authorities have been instructed “to put the decision into effect after giving Palestinian merchants enough time to sell the products stocked in their stores.”⁷⁵

⁷² “Wide rejection of Proposed Federalism in North of Syria”, *Syrian Times*, March 23, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/22902-wide-rejection-of-proposed-federalism-in-north-of-syria>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁷³ “Al-Jaafari: We had in-Depth Discussions With De Mistura on Issues That Constitute Priorities for Syria”, *Syria Times*, March 21, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/22886-al-jaafari-we-had-in-depth-discussions-with-de-mistura-on-issues-that-constitute-priorities-for-syria>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁷⁴ “Netanyahu: Bizarre Gas Ruling Will Greatly Damage Economy”, *Times of Israel*, March 27, 2016 at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-bizarre-gas-ruling-will-greatly-damage-economy/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁷⁵ “PA Bans Imports from 5 Major Israeli Food Companies”, *Palestine Chronicles*, March 22, 2016 at <http://www.palestinechronicle.com/pa-bans-imports-from-5-major-israeli-food-companies/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

The Gulf

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Kuwait upgrades nuclear safety measures; Kuwait will not mediate between GCC, Iran.**

Kuwait is free from radioactive waste, a test of samples of soil, air and water taken from various parts of the country indicates. “These radiation detectors, which operate around the clock at dozens of observatories and the 12 early warning stations across the country, produced no data of abnormal radiation levels,” Fadhel Ali Ghuloum, director of the Health Ministry’s department on radiation prevention said. “The daily readings of particle detectors showed no indication of radioactive pollution or harmful substances in the areas allocated for residential or agricultural purposes,” Ghuloum told Kuwait News Agency (Kuna). Ghuloum said the laboratories of the department on radiation prevention regularly analyse the air, soil and water samples on daily and weekly bases to verify that they are free from any pollutants.⁷⁶

A Kuwaiti official has denied any mediation role by his country in the standoff between Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Iran. Earlier this month, a Kuwaiti daily reported that Mahmoud Alavi, the Iranian minister of intelligence, visited Kuwait and handed over to leaders there a written message from President Hassan Rouhani pertaining to relations with the GCC countries and an earnest desire to reach a settlement on regional issues without any foreign interference. The GCC, established in 1981, is made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Kuwait has conveyed to the GCC leaders the purported wish expressed by Iran’s leaders to start a new chapter in its relations with the Gulf countries based on the principle of “settling pending issues through a quiet dialogue, Gulf diplomats said. However, Nasser Al Mezyen, Kuwait’s Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs, said that Kuwait was not assuming any mediation role.⁷⁷

India-West Asia

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **India steps in to assist unpaid workers in Oman; West Asia to dominate oil imports into India: IEA; Indian priest in Yemen still untraced.**

India’s Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, has said on her Twitter account that the Indian Embassy in Muscat has received reports that some companies have not paid salaries to workers from the South Asian country. Sushma added that she will handle the matter at the diplomatic level and the Indian Embassy provided financial help to unpaid workers and repatriated 80 of them to India. Local media reported that more than 60 workers went on strike as a company did not pay their salaries or provide them with food as required under the contracts they have signed. An official at the Oman’s Ministry of Manpower said that it is investigating the issue and will take all necessary action to guarantee the rights of the workers. “Not paying the salary to the worker and not

⁷⁶ “Kuwait Upgrades Nuclear Safety Measures”, *Gulf News*, March 27, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-upgrades-nuclear-safety-measures-1.1698682>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁷⁷ “Kuwait will not Mediate between GCC, Iran”, *Gulf News*, March 24, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-will-not-mediate-between-gcc-iran-1.1696961>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

providing food to him as it offered in the contract is violating the labour law in the country and the employer can face legal charges," said the official.⁷⁸

West Asia will continue to be a big source of crude oil imports for India with the US being another potential source as country's oil demand is set to increase to five million barrels per day by 2021, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has said. "India is most definitely a growth hotspot country in the period (through to 2021). We are looking at an extra million barrel to be added by 2021 on the back of a very strong economic growth," Neil Atkinson, Head, Oil Industry and Markets Division at IEA, said here yesterday. India used almost four million barrels per day of oil in 2015, backed by the strong fuel demand from the transportation sector, especially the ever increasing number of vehicles and trucks.⁷⁹

The Missionaries of Charity told *The Hindu* that Father Tom Uzhunnalil who was kidnapped by the Islamic State in Aden, Yemen, on March 4 following an attack, remains untraced, though concerns mounted last week about a reported plan by the terror outfit to crucify him around Easter. "We, at the Missionaries of Charity, are concerned but we have not been contacted by anybody giving information about Fr. Tom Uzhunnalil's whereabouts in the West Asian region. We have seen online reports informing that the IS has been planning to crucify him on Good Friday. But neither our headquarters in Kolkata, nor our regional centres in West Asia have received message from any of the outlawed groups in the region," Sunita Kumar told *The Hindu*.⁸⁰

F. The United State of America

National

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Defence Department's health care budget request aligns with DoD's global commitments and strategic objectives; DoD's special envoy for Guantanamo detention closure; Army officers of tomorrow likely will face complex challenges in protecting the nation; F-35 programme making progress, executing 'fairly well,' programme Chief tells Congress; CIO priorities include cybersecurity, innovation, retaining IT workforce.**

Navy Vice Adm. (Dr.) Raquel C. Bono, Defence Health Agency director, said in a House budget panel hearing on March 22 that the Defence Department's health care budget request for fiscal year 2017 fully aligns with DoD's global commitments and strategic objectives. Bono, appearing with the services' surgeons general, outlined the military health care system's priorities for 2017 before the House Appropriations Committee's defence subcommittee. DHA is an integrated Army, Navy and Air Force combat support agency that brings together a medically ready force and ready medical force for combatant commands during peacetime and wartime. It also supports integrated, affordable and high-quality health care services to military beneficiaries, according to its website.

⁷⁸ "India Steps in to Assist Unpaid Workers in Oman", *Gulf News*, March 23, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/india-steps-in-to-assist-unpaid-workers-in-oman-1.1696083>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁷⁹ "West Asia To Dominate Oil Imports Into India: IEA", *Business Standards*, March 24, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/middle-east-to-dominate-oil-imports-into-india-iea-116032400237_1.html. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁸⁰ "Indian Priest in Yemen Still Untraced", *The Hindu*, March 26, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indian-priest-kidnapped-by-islamic-state-terrorists-in-yemen-still-untraced/article8397155.ece>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

Bono pointed out that DoD's \$33.5 billion request for its fiscal 2017 defence health program is a 1.5 percent increase compared to fiscal 2016.⁸¹

DoD's special envoy for Guantanamo detention closure, Paul M. Lewis, said on Capitol Hill on March 23 that significant numbers of Defence Department and senior military leaders say closing the Naval Station Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba is the single most important action the United States can take to counter terrorism. Lewis and the State Department's special envoy for Guantanamo closure, Lee Wolosky, discussed in a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing the reasons President Barack Obama plans to close the detainee camp. The president and his national security team have determined closing the detention facility is a "bipartisan national security imperative," Lewis said. The president has repeatedly said that the continued operation of the detention facility at Guantanamo "weakens our national security by damaging our relationships with key allies and partners, draining resources and providing violent extremists with a propaganda tool," he said.⁸²

Defence Secretary Ash Carter said on March 23 at the United States Military Academy that the Army officers of tomorrow likely will face complex challenges in protecting the nation and staying one step ahead of adversaries. Carter spoke to the corps of cadets at West Point, New York, telling the approximately 4,400 men and women they soon will be responsible for defending the United States and helping to secure the world. He said terrorism is among the five biggest evolving security challenges the United States is facing now. In the wake of the terrorist attacks in Brussels, the resolve of the United States is only strengthened to defeat terrorism, he added. The other global security challenges of concern are Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, a China that is acting aggressively, North Korea and Iran.⁸³

Air Force Lt. Gen. Christopher C. Bogdan, the chief of the F-35 programme, detailed "the good, the bad and the ugly" aspects of the Joint Strike Fighter during testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces on March 22. Bogdan said that overall the once-troubled fighter is "executing fairly well across the entire spectrum of acquisition to include development and design, flight test, production, fielding, base stand-up, maintenance and support and building a global sustainment enterprise." The F-35 programme is at a pivot point and is changing and accelerating, the general said. The development portion of the aircraft will end late next year and will transition to a modernization program. Production will grow from 45 aircraft in 2015 to more than 100 aircraft in 2018 and up to 145 aircraft per year by 2020, Bogdan said.⁸⁴

Information technology and cyber programme priorities for the Defence Department's chief information officer include modernizing DoD networks, improving cybersecurity and building the IT workforce, Terry Halvorsen said on March 22. The DoD CIO testified on the IT budget request

⁸¹ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Defence Health Director: Budget Request Aligns with DoD Strategy", *DoD News*, March 22, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/700344/defense-health-director-budget-request-aligns-with-dod-strategy>

⁸² Cronk, Terri Moon, "Pentagon Envoy Says Closing Guantanamo is National Security Issue", *DoD News*, March 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/702963/pentagon-envoy-says-closing-guantanamo-is-national-security-issue>

⁸³ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Carter: Complex Challenges Likely for Tomorrow's Army Officers", *DoD News*, March 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/702915/carter-complex-challenges-likely-for-tomorrows-army-officers>

⁸⁴ Garamone, Jim, "F-35 Programme Making Progress, Executing 'Fairly Well,' Programme Chief Tells Congress", *DoD News*, March 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/702635/f-35-program-making-progress-executing-fairly-well-program-chief-tells-congress>

for fiscal year 2017 before the House Armed Services Emerging Threats and Capabilities subcommittee. He was joined by Peter Levine, the department's deputy chief management officer. Halvorsen gave an overview of the DoD IT and cyber programme budget, highlighted priorities and described some of the ways his office is moving forward in today's dynamic environment.⁸⁵

International: Asia

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **US military has not, and will not compromise training or equipping of any troops; Dunford; Momentum against the ISIL terror group is firmly in the hands of the coalition; U.S. military killed several key ISIL terrorists; Dunford: More U.S. troops may be needed in Iraq to support counter-ISIL forces; U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq; US-Saudi Arabia affirmed the importance of the defence relationship; U.S. 7th fleet, Indo-Asia-Pacific navies increase multilateral cooperation; Coast Guard and Navy completed a 33-day joint mission in the Central and South Pacific; U.S. Navy and Republic of Korea Navy ships commenced the maritime portion of exercise Foal Eagle 16.**

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joseph F. Dunford Jr., told the House Armed Services Committee on March 22 that the United States military has not, and will not compromise training or equipping of any troops going into harm's way. Dunford was asked if American troops were endangered by a lack of training. The question came in wake of the death of a Marine in Iraq over the weekend. "Have we compromised training or other critical capabilities because of the force gap? I can tell you we haven't done that," the chairman told the congressmen. He said he routinely engages with Operation Inherent Resolve leaders to ensure that they have everything they need to ensure success. Dunford will be meeting soon with Inherent Resolve commander Army Lt. Gen. Sean McFarland, he said.⁸⁶

While not complacent about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's capabilities, Defence Department leaders are confident that momentum against the terror group is firmly in the hands of the coalition arrayed against it. Defence Secretary Ash Carter told the House Armed Services Committee on March 22 that "As far as the campaign is ... concerned, I'm confident that we will defeat ISIL and that we have the momentum of the campaign in Iraq and Syria". ISIL claimed responsibility for yesterday's attacks in Brussels, Belgium, that killed 31 and wounded more than 190 people in the city's airport and the rapid transit system. An American airman and his family were among those hurt. Carter told the lawmakers that DoD will continue to look for opportunities to accelerate operations against ISIL.⁸⁷

Defence Secretary Carter said on March 25 that the U.S. military killed several key Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists this week, including a senior ISIL leader and finance minister who led certain external affairs and plots. During a Pentagon press briefing, joined by Dunford,

⁸⁵ Pellerin, Cheryl, "CIO Priorities Include Cybersecurity, Innovation, Retaining IT Workforce", *DoD News*, March 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/702488/cio-priorities-include-cybersecurity-innovation-retaining-it-workforce>

⁸⁶ Garamone, Jim, "Dunford: No Compromise on Training for Iraq, Afghanistan", *DoD News*, March 22, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/699869/dunford-no-compromise-on-training-for-iraq-afghanistan>

⁸⁷ Garamone, Jim, "Coalition Has Momentum in Fight Against ISIL, Carter, Dunford Say", *DoD News*, March 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/702339/coalition-has-momentum-in-fight-against-isil-carter-dunford-say>

Carter said the coalition is systematically eliminating ISIL's cabinet, including Haji Imam. Carter said Imam is the second senior ISIL leader the coalition has killed this month. Earlier this month defence officials confirmed the death of ISIL's so-called minister of war, Abu Omar al-Shishani, known as Omar the Chechen.⁸⁸

Dunford said on March 25 that to accelerate operations against the ISIL, it may be necessary to send more U.S. service members to Iraq. He told the Pentagon press corps that in the coming weeks DoD will present to President Barack Obama a series of recommendations to further enable support to the counter-ISIL forces. Dunford, who briefed the press alongside Defence Secretary Ash Carter, said they both “believe that there will be an increase to the U.S. forces in Iraq in the coming weeks, but that decision hasn’t been made.” Any decisions the president makes will be done in the broader context of what needs to happen to maintain momentum against ISIL, “and what specifically do we need to do to enable operations in Mosul,” the chairman said.⁸⁹

Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on March 27 that U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. Attack and ground-attack aircraft conducted two strikes in Syria and 19 strikes in Iraq.⁹⁰

Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook said that defence Secretary Carter and Saudi Arabia's defence minister, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, affirmed the importance of the defence relationship between their nations during a phone call on March 24. In a statement summarizing the call, Cook said they also discussed the security environment in the Middle East, including ways to work together to strengthen cooperation on counterterrorism efforts. Carter welcomed Saudi Arabia's contributions to the coalition campaign to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Cook said, and the pair discussed ways to expand their cooperation.⁹¹

Maritime leaders from U.S. 7th Fleet, Republic of Singapore Navy, Royal Malaysian Navy, Philippine Navy and Indonesian Navy met for a professional exchange of ideas to discuss operational topics aboard U.S. 7th Fleet flagship USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19), from March 19-20. The multilateral meetings were designed for the participating Indo-Asia-Pacific navies to share knowledge and discuss lessons learned within the region. During a 7th Fleet-hosted Southeast Asian Fleet Commander's Roundtable, senior navy leaders from the five nations had professional dialogues on various maritime issues such as multilateral exercises, freedom of navigation operations and maritime law, rules and norms. They also discussed ways to increase theatre security cooperation through multilateral military interactions.⁹²

The Coast Guard and Navy completed a 33-day joint mission in the Central and South Pacific under the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative to combat transnational crimes, enforce fisheries laws and

⁸⁸ Pellerin, Cheryl, “Carter: U.S. Military Targets Key ISIL Terrorists”, *DoD News*, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/705535/carter-us-military-targets-key-isil-terrorists>

⁸⁹ Garamone, Jim, “Dunford: More U.S. Troops May be Needed in Iraq to Support Counter-ISIL Forces”, *DoD News*, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/705517/dunford-more-us-troops-may-be-needed-in-iraq-to-support-counter-isil-forces>

⁹⁰ “Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq”, *DoD News*, March 27, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/705740/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-in-syria-iraq>

⁹¹ “Carter, Saudi Counterpart Affirm Defence Relationship's Importance”, *DoD News*, March 24, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/704110/carter-saudi-counterpart-affirm-defense-relationships-importance>

⁹² “U.S. 7th Fleet, Indo-Asia-Pacific Navies Increase Multilateral Cooperation”, *US PACOM*, March 22, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/700477/us-7th-fleet-indo-asia-pacific-navies-increase-multilateral-cooperation.aspx>

enhance regional security March 11. A Coast Guard law enforcement detachment, from Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Team South embarked the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS William P. Lawrence (DDG 110) and conducted eight fisheries enforcement boarding's with the assistance of the Navy's Visit, Board, Search and Seizure team and enforcement ship riders from the Republic of Marshall Islands and Nauru. Partnership between the Coast Guard and Navy supports OMSI, a Secretary of Defence program to use Department of Defence assets transiting the pacific region to build maritime domain awareness, ultimately supporting the Coast Guard's maritime law enforcement operations in Oceania.⁹³

U.S. Navy and Republic of Korea Navy ships commenced the maritime portion of exercise Foal Eagle 16, March 22. Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS McCampbell (DDG 85), USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62), and USS Benfold (DDG 65) operated with approximately 10 ROK Navy ships for seven days off the coast of the ROK peninsula. Foal Eagle is a series of joint and combined field training exercises conducted by Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command and United States Forces Korea component commands, to include ground, air, naval, and special operations. Nearly 10,600 U.S. forces will participate in FE16, with ROK forces from major ROK units representing all services also participating. The exercise ensures the ROK-U.S. alliance is prepared to defend the Republic of Korea.⁹⁴

India-US Relations

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **America's participation in the Defence Expo will be a boost to the 'Make in India' campaign; India-US have experienced a fascinating transformation in relations: Amb Singh.**

The US Consul General said on March 27 that America's participation in the Defence Expo will be a boost to the 'Make in India' campaign as several companies from that country are interested in setting up a base. "America has tremendous interest in cooperating with India," US Consul General in Mumbai Thomas L Vajda said ahead of the four-day DefExpo that begins tomorrow in Goa. Vajda said, "We want to work in India under the Make In India initiative. Various private sector companies in America are eager to work here". It is almost unprecedented the way the US was working with India to support its (India's) aspiration of being a regional and global leader, he said.⁹⁵

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third trip to Washington in less than two years, India's envoy to the US has said that the two countries have experienced a fascinating transformation in relations. "Our partnership did not always appear so destined. Indeed, just three decades ago, such an alignment of interests between the two countries was simply unthinkable. This makes the transformation of India-US relations in the last three decades so fascinating," said Arun K Singh, Indian Ambassador to the US, in his address at the 20th Wharton-India Economic Forum on

⁹³ "Coast Guard, Navy Complete Joint Fisheries Patrol in Oceania, Promote Regional Stability", By 14th District Public Affairs, U.S. Coast Guard, US PACOM, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/704726/coast-guard-navy-complete-joint-fisheries-patrol-in-oceania-promote-regional-st.aspx>

⁹⁴ "U.S. Navy, Republic of Korea Navy Reaffirm Strategic Alliance During Foal Eagle 16", By Lt. Courtney Keiser, US PACOM, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/704715/us-navy-republic-of-korea-navy-reaffirm-strategic-alliance-during-foal-eagle-16.aspx>

⁹⁵ "Defence Expo will Boost India-US Defence Ties: US Consul General Thomas L Vajda", *The Economic Times*, March 27, 2016 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/defence-expo-will-boost-india-us-defence-ties-us-consul-general-thomas-l-vajda/articleshow/51572942.cms>

'Evolving India-US Relations' over the weekend. Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to be in the American capital to attend the two-day Nuclear Security Summit hosted by Obama on March 31 and April 1.⁹⁶

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir]

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Centre extends Udaan Scheme till FY20; PoK becomes PoJK in MHA report; Two army jawans, civilian injured in grenade blast in Kashmir Valley.**

The Centre has decided to extend the Udaan Scheme, a Special Industry Initiative for Jammu & Kashmir which provides exposure to the state's youth to the country's corporate sector, till 2019-20. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 23. Udaan is a national integration scheme with the goal to mainstream J&K youth with rest of the country. The scheme not only provides skill enhancement and job opportunity but also leads to counter radicalisation and weaning away youth of J&K from militancy.⁹⁷

For the first time ever, an official document of the NDA government has referred to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) as Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK). The change is significant as it is in line with the Bharatiya Janata Party's narrative on unified Kashmir, although it was thus far restricted to party pamphlets and manifestos. The reference figures in the 2014-15 annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), which was tabled in Parliament. Under the sub-head "Cross LoC Trade between J&K and PoJK," the report says: Till December 2015, 45,486 trucks have crossed over to PoJK and 28,891 trucks have crossed over to India's side through these two routes – Srinagar-Muzaffarabad and Poonch-Rawalkote routes... Security clearance has been accorded for the visits of trade delegations from J&K to PoJK".⁹⁸

Two army jawans and a civilian were injured after unidentified militants lobbed a grenade on an army patrol party in south Kashmir's Anantnag district on March 26, police official said. Unidentified militants lobbed a grenade on an army patrol party at Goriwan in Bijbehara area of the district causing splinter injuries to two army jawans and a civilian, he said. Security forces have cordoned-off the area and a hunt has been launched to nab the militants, the official added.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "Fascinating Transformation in India-US Ties: Indian Envoy", *The Indian Express*, March 29, 2016 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/fascinating-transformation-in-india-us-ties-indian-envoy/>; and, "India Sees U.S. as 'an Indispensable Partner': Ambassador Arun K. Singh", *The American Bazar*, March 29, 2016 at <http://www.americanbazaaronline.com/2016/03/29/india-sees-u-s-indispensable-partner-ambassador-arun-k-singh/>

⁹⁷ "Govt Extends Udaan Scheme Till FY20", *The Financial Express*, March 23, 2016 at <http://www.financialexpress.com/article/economy/govt-extends-udaan-scheme-till-fy20-a-special-industry-initiative-for-jammu-kashmir/229096/>

⁹⁸ Singh, Vijaita, "In a First, PoK Becomes PoJK in MHA Document", *The Hindu*, March 25, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/in-a-first-pok-becomes-pojk-in-mha-document/article8393872.ece>

⁹⁹ "J&K: Two Army Jawans, One Civilian Injured in Grenade Blast", *Deccan Chronicle*, March 26, 2016 at <http://deccanchronicle.com/nation/crime/260316/j-k-two-army-jawans-one-civilian-injured-in-grenade-blast.html>

Northeast India

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **NSCN (R) cadre arrested in Arunachal Pradesh; Rajnath Singh rules out withdrawal of Assam Rifles from Indo-Myanmar border; Two ultras held in Manipur; Police recover explosives from Garo militants.**

A hardcore NSCN(R) cadre, identified as Rajapio Kamlong Socia, was arrested by security forces in Khonsa area of Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap district recently. An automatic pistol, live ammunition and extortion slips along with opium were recovered from his possession.¹⁰⁰

Home Minister Rajnath Singh, on March 22, ruled out withdrawal of Assam Rifles from Indo-Myanmar border and its replacement with another paramilitary force, saying no such decision has been taken yet. "We have not taken any decision yet. Whenever we take any such decision, we will let you know," he told reporters at Nongkrem in Shillong on the sidelines of a 'Sainik Sammelan' organised on the occasion of 181st Raising Day of Assam Rifles. There have been reports that the central government may entrust the task of guarding this border to another border guarding force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). Border Security Force was earlier being considered for the task and it had also prepared an assessment report in this regard.¹⁰¹

Assam Rifles troops along with police launched an operation in Sikibung Tangkhul area in Manipur's Ukhrul district and apprehended a cadre of the armed group MNRF on March 20, a press release said. The militant, identified as VS Yaruvingam, revealed that he had masterminded the IED blast at Ukhrul on February 14 this year along with another cadre of MNRF. He was handed over to Police, the release added. In another operation, an active cadre of UNLF was apprehended by Assam Rifles troops from Kakmayi in Thoubal district on March 21.¹⁰²

The West Khasi Hills Police recovered a huge cache of explosive materials after an encounter with militants, allegedly belonging to the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA), near Ringdigitam village under the Shallang PS in Tura district on March 24. The encounter was a part of the police action to end militancy in the Garo and Khasi Hills under 'Operation Hillstorm 3.' The police recovered 45 gelatin sticks, 71 detonators, one roll of 6 mm electric wire, etc., from the place of encounter.¹⁰³

Left-wing Extremism

(March 21-27, 2016)

- **Two Naxals gunned down on Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh border; Maoist sympathisers 'surrender' in Odisha; Maoist killed in explosion in Koraput, Odisha; Naxal 'commander' gunned down in Chhattisgarh.**

¹⁰⁰ "NSCN(R) Cadre Arrested in Arunachal", *The Assam Tribune*, March 21, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar2116/oth058>

¹⁰¹ "Rajnath Singh Rules Out Withdrawal of Assam Rifles From Myanmar Border", *The Economic Times*, March 22, 2016 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/rajnath-singh-rules-out-withdrawal-of-assam-rifles-from-myanmar-border/articleshow/51509428.cms>

¹⁰² "Two Ultras Held in Manipur", *The Assam Tribune*, March 22, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar2216/oth051>

¹⁰³ "Police Recover Explosives From Garo Ultras", *The Assam Tribune*, March 26, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar2616/oth056>

Two Naxals were “gunned down” by police in an encounter on the Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh border near Gadchiroli on March 20. Personnel from Anti-Naxal Squad of the district police were on a combing operation in the Kasansur area when a group of armed Maoists hiding in the forest suddenly opened fire at them around 5.30 p.m. The policemen immediately returned fire, killing two of them, an official release said. The other rebels, however fled, taking cover in the thick forest, it said, adding, two 303 rifles and Naxal material were recovered from the encounter site located on the Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh border.¹⁰⁴

In a setback to the Maoists in Odisha’s Malkangiri district on March 21, around 270 Naxal "sympathisers" had pledged before the police not to render any help to the ultras in the district. The "sympathisers" belonged to several villages under Mathili Police Station jurisdiction, Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Mitrabhanu Mohapatra said. They would be rehabilitated as per the surrender and rehabilitation policy of the state government, he added.¹⁰⁵

A wanted Maoist was killed after an explosive device he was planting to target security forces in a forest area went off near Kurailpadu village in Koraput district of Odisha, police said on March 22. Jayaram (27), while planting the explosive on the route used by the security men, was killed as the device went off on March 20, SP (Koraput) Charan Singh Meena said quoting a report. According to police, he was a resident of Chhattisgarh and was serving in the armed squad of 'Andhra-Odisha Border Special Zonal Committee' of the rebels.¹⁰⁶

A 30-year-old Naxal 'commander', carrying Rs one-lakh reward on his head, was shot dead in a police encounter in Kondagaon district of Chhattisgarh on March 25. The deceased, identified as Sudhram, a native of Sahpadarpara in Kudur, was a Jan Militia commander, police said. Following the encounter, a muzzle loading gun, a tiffin bomb, wires and Maoist related materials were seized from the spot.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ “2 Naxals Gunned Down on Maharashtra Border”, *The Hindu*, March 21, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/2-naxals-gunned-down-on-maharashtra-border/article8379282.ece>

¹⁰⁵ “Maoist Sympathisers 'Surrender' in Odisha”, *Business Standard*, March 21, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/maoist-sympathisers-surrender-in-odisha-116032100956_1.html

¹⁰⁶ “Maoist Killed in Explosion”, *Business Standard*, March 22, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/maoist-killed-in-explosion-116032200426_1.html

¹⁰⁷ “Naxal 'Commander' With Hefty Reward Gunned Down in Chhattisgarh”, *The Economic Times*, March 25, 2016 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/naxal-commander-with-hefty-reward-gunned-down-in-chhattisgarh/articleshow/51549926.cms>