

Weekly Media Updates **(31 July-6 August, 2017)**

Contents

Regions and Themes covered this Week

- **Africa**
- **Central Asia**
- **China**
- **European Union**
- **Latin America and Caribbean**
- **North America**
- **Russia**
- **South Asia**
- **Indian Ocean**
- **West Asia**
- **Cyber Security**
- **Terrorism and Counter Terrorism**
- **International Economic Issues**

Africa

- **Paul Kagame re-elected President¹**

Rwanda's incumbent leader Paul Kagame has won a landslide victory in presidential elections, granting him a third term in office and extending his 17 years in power. According to the National Electoral Commission's Executive secretary Charles Munyaneza, with 80 percent of votes accounted for, Kagame, the 59-year-old leader, secured 98.66 percent.

About seven million people were registered to vote in the polls. The electoral board expected turnout to top 90 percent. Kagame, who cast his vote in Kigali's Rugunga polling station on 4 August, Friday, said he would work to sustain economic growth.

Kagame won the last election in 2010 with 93 percent of the vote. Although he is believed to be widely popular, international rights observers have expressed concern over the political environment in which voting took place. Al Jazeera's Malcolm Webb, reporting from Kigali, said that "the ruling party claims that high turnout reflects its popularity", but "opposition says people don't have much choice and [the high turnout] reflects a climate of fear and oppression".

Kagame faced only two challengers: Frank Habineza from the small Democratic Green Party - the only registered opposition party - and Philippe Mpayimana, a little-known independent candidate and former journalist. Authorities excluded several independent candidates from running, arguing they did not enjoy enough support.

Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has governed the country since its armed wing defeated the country's ruling civilian and military authorities in 1994, ending the genocide of 800,000 Tutsis - Kagame's ethnic group - and moderate Hutus.

- **Kenya's Elections on August 8²**

On August 8, two political heavyweights will compete for power in a tightly fought presidential election in Kenya. President Uhuru Kenyatta, who came to power in 2013, is seeking a second and final term in office. Raila Odinga, who lost to Kenyatta in the last election, is his main challenger.

The results of the election, the sixth since the end of the one-party state in 1991, are significant not just for Kenya, but also for the wider region. Over the years, Kenyatta and Odinga have differed widely on important policy issues that affect security and cooperation in the region.

¹ Aljazeera, 5 August 2017,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201708050039.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Ainternal&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabafbt

² Aljazeera, 4 August 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/kenya-election-stake-region-170801092511651.html>

If Odinga wins then there could be some policy change towards the issue of withdrawal of troops from AMISOM. Odinga has often called for the withdrawal of Kenya's Defense Forces (KDF), despite being the prime minister of the government that sent Kenyan soldiers to Somalia for the first time. A regional diplomatic crisis may also be on the cards leading to severing ties with Somalia, as he has been "a strong supporter of the full recognition of Somaliland", a semi-autonomous region that declared independence from Somalia. With Odinga in office its likely that Kenya's relations with Tanzania will improve and the stalled EAC integration efforts will pick up steam, as Odinga and Magufuli enjoy a close personal relationship. Possibility of repeat of 2007's political violence cannot be ruled out, if Odinga loses and does not either concede defeat or seek judicial recourse.

- **Al-Qaeda Releases South African Hostage Held in Mali Since 2011³**

A South African who had been held hostage by al-Qaeda in Mali since 2011 has been released and is back home. The South African Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane confirmed about Stephen McGowan's release and added that no ransom was paid to secure his release

McGowan's return home comes just over a month after the release of his Swedish friend Johan Gustafsson, who was abducted alongside the South African from a Timbuktu restaurant. The kidnappers had demanded \$5 million dollars (4.2 million euros) for Gustafsson's release but it was rejected by the Swedish government. A third hostage, Sjaak Rijke of the Netherlands, was freed in 2015 in a raid by French special forces. During the initial kidnapping, a German man was shot when he refused to cooperate.

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have been responsible for dozens of kidnappings of Westerners and scores of attacks on security forces across West Africa.

North Africa

- **Egypt Economy is Performing Well: Moody**

According to the global credit ratings agency Moody, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) review of Egypt's economic reform programme has been found positive and the agency has given B 3 rating to Egypt in its latest review of the overall economic performance. ⁴ Last week, the IMF's executive board completed

³ Deutsche Welle, 3 August 2017,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201708040173.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Ainternal&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabafbt

⁴ Ahram online English, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/274048/Business/Economy/Moody-says-IMF-review-is-credit-positive-for-Egypt.aspx>

the first review of a US\$ 12 billion loan to Egypt, disbursing the final instalment of US\$ 1.25 billion from the first US\$4 billion tranche of the loan.

The IMF's review included an assessment of the implementation of Egypt's reform programme, which was adopted in since 2014 to curb the growing state budget deficit. The reforms include cutting subsidies and government expenditure while implementing new taxes. Moody in an email statement that the reforms are showing positive results, particularly the foreign exchange rate liberalization in November 2016, which helped reduce balance-of-payment pressures from large current-account deficits and support the sovereign's external liquidity position.

The global credit rating agency expects Egypt's budget deficit to shrink gradually to about 3 per cent of the GDP by the end of the 2020 fiscal, supported by a pickup in exports. In mid-August 2016, Egypt reached a staff-level agreement with the IMF over the three-year US\$ 12 billion loan to endorse the country's fiscal reform programme.

In November 2016, Egypt received the first instalment – an initial disbursement of US\$ 2.75 billion – of the first tranche following the floating of the Egyptian pound. According to Finance Minister Amr El-Garhy, the next review will either be in November or December adding that that Cairo expects to receive the second US\$ 4 billion transfer in two instalments in 2017-18 fiscal, which began last month. Egypt's economy has struggled since the January 2011 uprising that toppled long-time autocrat Hosni Mubarak, resulting in political and security upheavals.

Central Asia

- **India's Army Chief Visits Central Asia**

India's Chief of the Army Staff General Bipin Rawat visited Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan from 1 to 6 August 2017. He is accompanied by a high level military delegation. General Rawat was in Kazakhstan from 1 to 3 August and held meetings there with Kazakhstan's Defence Minister and high level authorities. Kazakhstan further sought India's support in capacity enhancement in the areas of counter insurgency operations, military education and training of cadets in India. General Rawat reportedly assured Kazakhstan army chief of all possible support in strengthening its counter-insurgency operations.⁵ The army chiefs of the two countries also discussed various aspects of defence cooperation, including the joint exercise to be held at Himachal Pradesh in November.⁶

⁵ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence, "Gen Bipin Rawat Meets C-in-C Land Forces, Kazakhstan," 3 August 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=169578>

⁶ Sputnik, "India Agrees to Enhance Military Capability of Kazakhstan" 5 August 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/military/201708051056203320-india-military-capability-kazakhstan/>

He along with the delegation also visited the National Defence University at Astana and inaugurated the Indian Military Art Room. The lecture hall is equipped with multimedia complex and offer students of the university new approach to teaching and learning, making it more intensive and creative both for students and teachers. He complimented the Kazakh Army for their professionalism as witnessed during the demonstration while visiting the Air Assault Brigade.⁷ It may be noted that the National Defense University also has lectures halls of China, the US and Turkey.⁸

The visit to Turkmenistan was from 4 to 5 August and it assumes significance because it was the first visit of Indian Army Chief to the country.⁹ During the visit, General Bipin Rawat held meetings with high level government and security officials of the country. The visit to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan is part of India's outreach initiative to engage the extended neighbourhood and strengthen its existing defence cooperation with the region.

China

- **China strengthens supervision of SOE overseas investments**

China has stepped up financial management of overseas investments made by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in efforts to improve returns and control risks, the Ministry of Finance said on August 2.

A guideline that took effect on August 2 will standardize the financial management of SOEs throughout the investment process, and tackle key issues including poor project feasibility and lack of risk management, the Ministry said in an online statement.

Specifically, the guideline clarified the financial management responsibilities of the types of investments, asking SOEs to assign a specific person from top management to be in charge. Also, the guideline requires SOEs to specify rules on feasibility and financial due diligence, making sure projects are financially viable before decisions are made.

⁷ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence, "Gen Bipin Rawat Meets C-in-C Land Forces, Kazakhstan," 3 August 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=169578>

⁸ Kazinform, "India unveils lecture hall at Kazakh Defense University," 7 Aug 2017, http://www.inform.kz/en/india-unveils-lecture-hall-at-kazakh-defense-university_a3052413

⁹ Indian Army, "Visit of COAS too Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan," 1 August 2017, <https://indianarmy.nic.in/site/pressrelease/frmpressReleaseDetail.aspx?n=bniEtbb09LN7kb4q3kupGg==&NewsID=PosdGGcQtXSIWXqrJEIh3g==>

The guideline applies to both central and local SOEs. Financial SOEs will follow separate rules to be released later.¹⁰

- **Chinese premier eyes China-U.S. sub-national cooperation**

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on 2 August encouraged Michigan and other U.S. states to enhance exchanges, two-way trade and investment with China's provinces to create more opportunities and jobs for both sides.

Li said at a meeting with visiting Michigan Governor Rick Snyder in Beijing that the more exchanges between the two countries at sub-national levels, the better the two sides can expand their common interests. The premier called on U.S. states to tap potential in manufacturing, innovation and other fields. China will create a more open environment for sub-national cooperation, according to Li.¹¹

- **Chinese Academics probe highlights of financial work conference**

Issues pertaining to the real economy, systemic risks, financial reform and the further opening of the financial sector were identified as highlights of the recent National Financial Work Conference. Convened every five years since 1997, the conference was held from July 14 to 15 in Beijing, setting the tone for financial reform in the next period...

Serving the real economy was prioritized among the three tasks designated in the meeting. "Finance is derived from the real economy and lives on it," said Lei Jiasu, Director of the Center for Enterprise Growth and National Economic Security Research under Tsinghua University, adding that the two are interdependent.

The conference proposed targeted measures to better serve the real economy, such as encouraging direct financing, improving indirect financing structures, and building an inclusive finance system.¹²

- **"Be ready to win wars," China's Xi orders reshaped PLA**

China must step up transforming its armed forces into a world-class military that is ready to fight and win wars as the country will never compromise on defending sovereignty, President Xi Jinping said on 1 August at an Army Day celebration.¹³

¹⁰ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/22085.htm>

¹¹ http://english.qstheory.cn/2017-08/02/c_1121418980.htm

¹² http://english.cssn.cn/topstories/201707/t20170731_3596305.shtml

¹³ http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2017-08/02/content_4787593.htm

- **CASS establishes academy for social sciences evaluation**

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) launched the Academy for Evaluation of Social Sciences in China. The decision to found the new academy conforms to the agenda and development strategies of CASS. It is also a response to the requirements President Xi Jinping put forward at a symposium last year on developing philosophy and social sciences in China as well as the expectations Xi presented in his congratulatory letter to CASS on the 40th anniversary of its establishment.¹⁴

- **China sacks senior Xinjiang official for not fighting extremism¹⁵**

China has sacked and will prosecute a senior official in its violence-prone far western region of Xinjiang after a probe found he wasn't doing enough to tackle extremism in one of the most sensitive parts of the country and had taken bribes. Anti-graft watchdog the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) said in a statement late on Saturday that Zhang Jinbiao, who was Communist Party chief for the Hotan region in Xinjiang's deep south, had broken party rules. Zhang "seriously violated political discipline and political rules and did not exert himself in carrying out his counter-terrorism and stability maintenance responsibilities, causing serious consequences", it said.

- **Commentary: Time for Vietnam to readjust attitude and promote peace in South China Sea¹⁶**

In a joint communiqué issued on 5th August, the foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) applauded the economic and security achievements China and ASEAN have made in the past year, yet Vietnam stood out in a wave of positive efforts. The ASEAN ministers commended the "growing role" of China in the region, saying the region continues to reap the fruits of China's strong economic growth.

On the South China Sea issue, the ministers said the progress made on a code of conduct showed that the two sides have the ability to control differences and manage disputes. Despite the shared expectation of and joint efforts made by China and most ASEAN members in calming the disputes in the South China Sea, Vietnam tried to force its own agenda into the draft communiqué, a source close to the meeting told Xinhua.

Vietnam, who started the land reclamation work on illegally occupied Chinese islands and reefs in the South China Sea as early as in the 1980s and 1990s,

¹⁴ http://casseng.cssn.cn/news_events/news_events_news_briefing/201708/t20170807_3603125.html

¹⁵ <https://in.reuters.com/article/china-corruption-xinjiang-idINKBN1AM01V>

¹⁶ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/07/c_136505508.htm

"expressed serious concerns over recent developments in the area and wanted to insert 'such as extended construction' into the draft communiqué." Such a trick of "thief crying stop thief" aimed at putting pressure on China was futile, and the phrase was finally dropped in the face of opposition from other ASEAN countries.

- **Turkey vows closer security ties with China, promises to target hostile media¹⁷**

"We take China's security as our security," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said during a joint news briefing with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing on August 3, state-run broadcaster TRT World reported. "We absolutely will not allow in Turkey any activities targeting or opposing China. We will take measures to eliminate any media reports targeting China," Cavusoglu added, without elaborating.

Turkey and China have strong and growing trade and business ties. The bilateral trade volume between the two countries stood at \$27.8bn last year, up from \$27.3bn in 2015 and \$24.2bn in 2011. In May, Erdogan visited China to attend the international summit on China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, the global project potentially involving hundreds of billions of dollars of financing to create infrastructure and trade networks across four continents. During his Beijing visit, Cavusoglu also praised "all the actions Beijing has taken in combating Islamic State as well as reaching a political settlement in the Syrian war."

- **China offers its support after South Korea holds out olive branch to the North¹⁸**

China's foreign minister has said his country supported initiatives put forward by South Korea to ease tensions on the peninsula and was ready to see contact made between the two sides. Wang Yi told reporters on the sidelines of a regional security meeting in Manila on 7 August that he hoped those countries could improve relations. He also noted that North Korea's foreign minister had not entirely rejected proposals voiced by his South Korean counterpart. "My feeling is that the North is not completely rejecting the positive proposals by the South. To China – as a neighbour to both North Korea and South Korea – we support the positive initiatives by the new South Korean government and we are willing to see such contacts happen as soon as possible.", Wang said.

¹⁷ <http://www.intellinews.com/turkey-vows-closer-security-ties-with-china-promises-to-target-hostile-media-126660/>

¹⁸ <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2105748/china-offers-its-support-after-south-korea-holds-out>

European Union

Poland

- **Poland is against Nord Stream II**

Polish Maritime Minister Marek Gróbarczyk said that Poland is against the Nord Stream II pipeline. The Nord Stream II pipeline between Russia and Germany through Baltic Sea would bypass Poland, Ukraine and other Central European countries. Polish Minister stated that it would further increase Russian Gazprom dominance. He also said that it would 'back-pedal' the European energy security and ultimately is against the European integration.¹⁹

- **Poland Welcomes Trump's Decision to Sanctions against Russia**

Poland has welcomed the US sanctions against Russia. Polish Foreign Ministry says that it is in 'strategic interests' of the country. The US sanctions would target important sectors of the Russian economy including weapons sales and energy exports. New sanctions can also hit crucial pipeline project Nord Stream II in which energy companies from Germany, France, Italy and elsewhere have invested. The Polish foreign ministry has said that slowing Nord Stream II "is consistent with the strategic interest of Poland and the Central and Eastern Europe region" and could mean "greater diversification of energy supplies to the European Union".²⁰

Germany

- **Germany Requests US to Talk to EU on Sanctions against Russia**

German Economy Minister Brigitte Zypries has appealed the US to talk to European countries on sanctions against Russia. The new US sanctions against Russia would likely to hit European energy companies, thus, European countries seem to be concerned. Economy Minister Brigitte Zypries stated, "The threat from the United States to also punish European companies by so-called extra-territorial sanctions is not acceptable." She added, "It would be very desirable for the U.S. government to sit down with us at the negotiating table and to work through an acceptable solution for all parties."²¹

- **Immigrants Population in Germany Increased**

According to statistics released from Federal Statistics Office, population with immigrant background has reached to 18.6 million in 2016. Their number has

¹⁹ "Poland Opposes Nord Stream II: Maritime Minister," Radio Poland, August 2, 2017, <http://www.thenews.pl/1/12/Artykul/319038,Poland-opposes-Nord-Stream-II-maritime-minister>

²⁰ "Poland Welcomes US Sanctions against Russia," Radio Poland, August 3, 2017, <http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/319200,Poland-welcomes-US-sanctions-against-Russia>

²¹ Germany urges United States to talk to EU about Russia sanctions, Reuters, August 1, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-russia-sanctions-germany-idUSKBN1AH3X1>

increased from 4.6 million in 2011. According to the Federal Statistical Office, people with an immigrant background are defined 'as those who either weren't born as German citizens or have at least one parent who wasn't.' In 2016, they constitute 22.5 of the total population of Germany.²²

- **European Reactions on Iran Satellite Launch**

Western countries have criticized satellite launched by Iran on 27 July 2017. They did not agree with Iranian argument that satellite launch was not a violation of the nuclear deal. In a letter to the United Nations, Germany, France, Britain and the US condemned it. The letter to the UN Security Council states, "*The Simorgh is a space launch vehicle that, if configured as a ballistic missile, would have a range of well over 300 kilometres (185 miles) and has enough payload capacity to carry a nuclear warhead.*"²³ Thus, as letter termed the Iranian step as 'threatening and provocative.'²⁴

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **China Presses North Korea to Halt Missile and Nuclear Tests**

China pressed North Korea on 06 August 2017, to halt its missile and nuclear tests, saying Pyongyang should not 'provoke international society's goodwill.' Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in a blunt show of support for new United Nations sanctions against North Korea, delivered Beijing's warning to his North Korean counterpart Ri Yong Ho on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ministerial meetings in Manila. The United States cautiously welcomed China's newfound support of sanctions against North Korea, but said that it would closely monitor China's compliance with the penalties intended to deprive North Korea of \$1 billion a year to fuel its illicit nuclear and ballistic missile program.²⁵

- **Seoul, Washington agree on early revision of missile guidelines**

The top diplomats of South Korea and the United States agreed to start early negotiations on revising a bilateral missile guidelines agreement to better cope with North Korea's missile threats, an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on

²² Germany's immigrant population hits new high in 2016, ABC News, August 1, 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/germanys-immigrant-population-hits-high-2016-48964880>

²³ Iran rocket launch condemned by Germany, France, UK and US, DW, August 3, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/iran-rocket-launch-condemned-by-germany-france-uk-and-us/a-39944936>

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ "China Presses North Korea to Halt Missile and Nuclear Tests", *North Korea Times*, 07 August 2017. <http://www.northkoreatimes.com/news/254254142/china-presses-north-korea-to-halt-missile-and-nuclear-tests> accessed on 07 August 2017.

06 August 2017. The agreement comes after Washington accepted Seoul's call in late July to rewrite the guidelines to extend the maximum allowable payload of a ballistic missile with an 800 kilometers range from 500 kilograms to 1 ton. Current missile guidelines ban South Korea from developing ballistic missiles with a range of over 800 kilometers and a payload exceeding 500 kilograms. The Moon Jae-in administration has sought to double the payload weight limit following North Korea's test-launches of two intercontinental ballistic missiles in July.²⁶

- **UNSC Adopts New Sanction on North Korea**

On August 5, United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a new Resolution on North Korean proposing a set of new sanction as a punishment for its ICBM tests conducted on July 4 and July 28. The Resolution 2371 aims to reduce North Korea's current annual export revenue of 3 billion USD by a third. The Resolution ban all exports of coal, iron, iron ore, lead, lead ore and seafood. It also calls for a limit of North Korea overseas workers and restrict new joint ventures and additional investment in ongoing projects. The US drafted Resolution was supported by China and Russia.²⁷

- **PM Abe Announced a New Cabinet**

On August 3, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced a new cabinet. The cabinet reshuffle followed the resignation of Defence Minister Tomomi Inada, who stood accused of misleading the parliament and in the midst of a corruption allegation against Prime Minister Abe. Abe appointed Itsunori Onodera as the new defence minister. Mr. Onodera, a longtime lawmaker who also was the first defence minister of Abe following his victory in 2012. Taro Kono is the new foreign minister to replace Fumio Kishida. Mr. Kano is one of the most liberal voices in the governing Liberal Democratic Party and is known for his anti-nuclear stance. Fumio Kisha is to become the chairman of LDP's policy research.²⁸

- **US Preparing for preventive War Against North Korea**

²⁶ Yi Whan-woo, "Seoul, Washington agree on early revision of missile guidelines", *The Korea Times*, 06 August 2017. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/08/120_234260.html accessed on 07 August 2017.

²⁷ "U.N. Security Council unanimously adopts new sanctions on N. Korea", *The Yonhap News*, August 6, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2017/08/06/0301000000AEN20170806000453315.html> (Accessed on August 7, 2017)

²⁸ Reiji Yoshida, "Struggling in polls, Abe puts premium on stability in Cabinet shake-up", *The Japan Times*, August 3, 2017, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/03/national/politics-diplomacy/struggling-polls-abe-puts-premium-stability-cabinet-shake/#.WYgB9oh96M9> (Accessed on August 7, 2017)

On August 5, President Trump's national Security Advisor, H.R. McMaster said that the US is preparing for all options including a "preventive war" to counter the growing threat from North Korea. In a TV interview Mr. McMaster said, "If they have nuclear weapons that can threaten the United States. It's intolerable from the president's perspective. So of course, we have to provide all options to do that. And that includes a military option". Prior to Mr. McMaster, Senator Lindsey Graham also mentioned President Trump's willingness to go to war with North Korea.²⁹

- **North Korea Rejects President Moon's engagement Approach**

On August 6, the foreign ministers of South Korea and North Korea met in Manila on the sidelines of ASEAN Regional Forum. During the meeting North Korea's foreign minister Ri Yong-ho, dismissed South Korea's recent offer for talks as "lacking sincerity".³⁰ Ri made the remarks in response to South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha's request for Pyongyang to respond to the offer "as soon as possible". The meeting was not previously arranged but a random encounter at the Forum party.

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines)

- **South China Sea 'Code of Conduct' endorsed by Southeast Foreign Ministers and China**

A two-page "framework" of a code of conduct (COC) meant to prevent conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea. The COC is not a legally-binding code and is not an instrument to settle territorial disputes or maritime delimitation issue, rather it is a rule-based document with a set of norms to guide the parties and promote maritime cooperation in the disputed waters. Thus, this document is a mere declaration that calls on claimants to exercise restraint and stop new occupation in the South China Sea.³¹ At the 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Manila on August 6, 2017, the framework of a code of conduct on the South China Sea was adopted by the Southeast Asia's Foreign ministers with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi stating that the negotiations would start this year. Mr

²⁹ "U.S. preparing for 'preventive war' with N. Korea: McMaster", The Yonhap News, August 6, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/08/06/26/0401000000AEN20170806000200315F.html> (Accessed on August 7, 2017)

³⁰ "N. Korea's foreign minister claims S. Korea's offer for talks lacks sincerity", The Yonhap News, August 7, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2017/08/07/0200000000AEN20170807004353315.html> (Accessed on August 7, 2017)

³¹ "Framework of South China Sea code skirts thorny issues with China", *The Straits Times*, August 3, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/framework-of-south-china-sea-code-skirts-thorny-issues-with-china>, accessed on August 3, 2017.

Wang emphasised that the framework is not an instrument to settle the territorial disputes but is being pursued with the objective to promote mutual trust, cooperation and confidence, prevent incidents, manage incidents should they occur and create a favourable environment for the peaceful resolution of disputes.³²

- **Military Build-up in the South China Sea, addressed despite impasse within ASEAN**

South East Asia foreign ministers ended an impasse on Sunday (August 6) over how to address the South China Sea military build up. The communiqué adopted by the ASEAN foreign ministers called for the avoidance of militarisation while also noting concern over the land reclamation in the area. The communiqué provided for a stronger position than the earlier unpublished draft which emphasised the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint.³³ The unpublished draft to the code of conduct framework did not find any reference to China's militarisation in the South China Sea. This was contrary to the ASEAN's states who were the most vocal critic of China's and have been keen on enforcing a legally binding COC since 2002; in order to ensure freedom of navigation and over flight and leave rocks and reefs uninhabited. One probable reason for this may well be the ASEAN ties with the US under President Trump which has still not indicated any strong commitment to maritime security and trade in the region.³⁴ This has resulted in many former critics of China's policy in SCS to begin engaging with Beijing in the midst of the evolving uncertainties. Further, ASEAN nation's like Malaysia has been developing its military ties with China very quickly, reaching an unprecedented level with ongoing mutual visits by top military officers, joint military exercises including naval, staff training, and the conduct of various defence exhibitions.³⁵

- **Action by ASEAN being pressed on the Recent North Korean Test**

The US is pressing ASEAN nations to downgrade diplomatic engagements and exchanges with North Korea ahead of the 24th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

³² "ASEAN, China adopt framework of code of conduct for South China Sea, *The Straits Times*, August 6, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/chinas-foreign-minister-says-maritime-code-negotiations-with-asean-to-start-this-year>, accessed on August 7, 2017.

³³ "ASEAN overcomes communiqué impasse, urges non-militarisation in South China Sea", *The Straits Times*, August 6, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/asean-overcomes-communique-impasse-urges-non-militarisation-in-south-china-sea>, accessed on August 7, 2017.

³⁴ "China set for easy ride from ASEAN", *The Star Online*, August 4, 2017, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2017/08/04/china-set-for-easy-ride-from-asean-leaders-to-avoid-south-china-sea-issues-to-prepare-code-of-conduc/>, accessed on August 4, 2017.

³⁵ "Malaysia, China enhance military collaboration to maintain peace in South China Sea", *The Jakarta Post*, August 2, 2017, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2017/08/02/malaysia-china-enhance-military-collaboration-to-maintain-peace-in-south-china-sea.html>, accessed on August 3, 2017.

meeting in Manila on August 7, 2017³⁶, which would bring to together 27 members, including the US and North Korea. The ARF meeting is part of the various other ministerial meetings being held in Manila in the run up to the grand celebration to the 50th ASEAN Day on August 8, 2017. Various other ASEAN nations have also condemned the inter-continental ballistic missile test by North Korea which is its second test on the same month. According to a press release by the Malaysian Foreign Affairs Ministry, “DPRK’s defiance in not halting its nuclear and ballistic missile programme has grave implications on international peace and security”.³⁷ The government of Thailand also shared its concern on the ballistic missile test undertaken by the DPRK and urged to halt any further nuclear and ballistic missiles tests, comply with the relevant UNSC resolution, and refrain from any provocative actions that may obstruct possible dialogues.³⁸ At the ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting on August 6, 2017, all 10 ASEAN foreign ministers raised concerns on North Korea’s missile test. However, all 10 members of ASEAN issued separate statements rather than include it in the ASEAN’s customary communiqué which was adopted on Sunday. There was also a push for North Korea, as a member, to comply with the ASEAN Regional Forum’s aim “to maintain the Asia-Pacific as a region of lasting peace, stability, friendship, and prosperity”.³⁹

Myanmar

- **Maungdaw Commission urges government to act fast on Rakhine issue**

The Maungdaw Investigation Commission on 6th August called on the government to take urgent actions and implement a long-term plan to address the Rakhine situation. The call was embodied in the commission’s final report submitted to the President’s Office after six months extension. The commission, led by Vice President U Myint Swe, enumerated 48 recommendations to the government,

³⁶ “US Pressing ASEAN to curb exchanges with North Korea”, *The Straits Times*, August 4, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-pressing-asean-to-curb-exchanges-with-north-korea>, accessed on August 4, 2017.

³⁷ “Ballistic Missile Launched by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 28 July 2017”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia*, July 30, 2017, http://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/press-release/-/asset_publisher/FCK0/content/press-release--ballistic-missile-launched-by-dprk-on-28-july-2017-siaran-akbar--pelancaran-peluru-berpandu-balistik-oleh-dprk?redirect=%2Fweb%2Fguest%2Fpress-release, accessed on August 4, 2017.

³⁸ “Statement of the Royal Thai Government on the Ballistic Missile Tests by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on 28 July”, *Ministry of Foreign affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand*, August 1, 2017, <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news3/6886/79788-Statement-of-the-Royal-Thai-Government-on-the-Ball.html>, accessed on August 4, 2017.

³⁹ “ASEAN delivers tough message to North Korea”, *The Straits Times*, August 6, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/asean-delivers-tough-message-to-north-korea>, accessed on August 7, 2017.

including the formation of a high-level committee to implement its suggested actions.⁴⁰

- **Indian army to provide UN peacekeeping training to Myanmar**

As part of training exchange program, the Indian Army has committed to send two Mobile Training Teams to train personnel of the Myanmar Army every year, for a total of five years. Towards this end, the UN Peacekeeping Course, a training cooperation between the Indian Armed Forces and Myanmar Armed Forces commenced on 4th August at Nay Pyi Taw. According to the Ministry of External Affairs press release, the program aims at training officers as well as troops in various UN peacekeeping roles and tasks. Two such programs have been conducted earlier by the Indian Army for the Myanmar armed forces.⁴¹

- **Peace Commission agrees to meet DPN officially in Yangon**

Government's Peace Commission has agreed to meet the Delegation for Peace Negotiation (DPN) of United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) officially for the sixth time in Yangon on August 10 and 11. Advisor of the Peace Commission Hla Maung Shwe said that the informal talks with DPN held in Chiang Mai, Thailand on August 4 had progressed more than the earlier informal meeting held on July 20 and then they agreed to have an official meeting in Yangon.

He added that he was satisfied with the result of this informal meeting as UNFC discussed and agreed to attend the next Third Panglong Conference and to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) as the main agenda of the meeting.⁴²

- **UN should insist on going ahead with fact-finding mission on Myanmar - HRW**

The United Nations needs to insist on its ability to carry out a mandated fact-finding mission on Myanmar, Human Rights Watch said. In March 2017, the UN Human Rights Council established a fact-finding mission to investigate alleged human rights abuses in Myanmar. Since then, however, various Myanmar government officials have publicly said the government plans to block these efforts by denying visas to mission members. The mission will officially begin its work in August. "Myanmar's threat to block the UN Fact-Finding Mission from entering

⁴⁰ "Maungdaw Commission urges government to act fast on Rakhine issue", 7th August 2017, <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/27129-maungdaw-commission-urges-govrnment-to-act-fast-on-rakhine-issue.html>

⁴¹ "Indian army to provide UN peacekeeping training to Myanmar", 4th August 2107, <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/27100-indian-army-to-provide-un-peacekeeping-training-to-myanmar.html>

⁴² "Peace Commission agrees to meet DPN officially in Yangon", 5th August 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/peace-commission-agrees-meet-dpn-officially-yangon>

the country will only end up harming the government's standing on human rights," said John Fisher, Geneva director at Human Rights Watch."⁴³

North America

Canada

- **National Defence reviewing limits on 'double-dipping' for retired soldiers**

The Canadian military is searching for ways to remove or modify restrictions prohibiting retired Canadian Armed Forces members from collecting their military pensions while serving full-time and receiving pay cheques in the reserves. The plan has the preliminary endorsement of the Liberal government, pending final details. Reference to the idea was buried deep in the latest defence policy released in June 2017. The proposal is still very much in the nascent stage, but if successful it would effectively reverse regulatory changes — made last year and in 2012 — that set strict limits on double-dipping by soldiers. It is an important tool in retaining experienced members and "top talent," Lt.-Gen. Chuck Lamarre, the chief of military personnel. Pressing policy issue today is rebuilding the reserve force, which the auditor general last year described as being in dire shape. A scathing report by Michael Ferguson's office found that after years of budget restrictions and neglect, only roughly 14,000 troops — out of an active enrolment of 21,000 — were fit to deploy. The Liberal defence policy, issued in June, calls for a total reserve strength of 30,000 members.⁴⁴

- **Canada braces for surge in Haitian migrants facing loss of 'temporary protected status' in U.S.**

The flow of migrants, mostly Haitians fearing expulsion from the United States, has surged in recent weeks on Canada's southern border, with requests for asylum tripling since mid-July 2017, officials say. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised that Canada would step up its efforts to handle the surge. But he also appealed to those seeking asylum to go through proper immigration channels rather than cross the border illegally.

The wave of Haitians coming into the country stems from their loss of "temporary protected status" in the United States, which was granted to 60,000 Haitians after the Caribbean nation, was devastated by a 2010 earthquake. The U.S. special status has been extended for six months, but is due to expire at the end of 2017.⁴⁵

⁴³ "UN should insist on going ahead with fact-finding mission on Myanmar – HRW", 3 August 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/un-should-insist-going-ahead-fact-finding-mission-myanmar-hrw>

⁴⁴ Murray Brewster, "National Defence reviewing limits on 'double-dipping' for retired soldiers," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/military-reserves-double-dipping-1.4234285>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

⁴⁵ AEP, "Canada braces for surge in Haitian migrants facing loss of 'temporary protected status' in U.S.," <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/07/world/social-issues-world/canada-braces-surge-haitian-migrants-facing-loss-temporary-protected-status-u-s/#.WYfrZoSGOyw>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

- **The TPP can fix Canadian farmers' beef with Japan's tariff**

Surging U.S. beef exports caused Japan to invoke an emergency tariff on frozen beef imports from all countries, including Canada. The Japanese tariff is not uniform to all exporters. While Canada and the United States face a significant 50-per-cent charge, countries such as Mexico and Australia are subject to drastically lower tariffs because they have trade agreements with Japan. While major competitors such as Australia, Mexico and Chile have trade pacts to protect their interests in Japan and the growing Asia-Pacific region, Canada remains woefully behind, with only one trade deal in effect with an Asian economy and none being negotiated. Despite the huge opportunity, Canada has remained flat-footed on TPP. It appears the government has been so busy worrying about developing a "progressive" trade agenda that it's forgotten about the "trade" part. The agreement is negotiated, signed and other countries are moving to ratify without the United States. But Canada remains silent....⁴⁶

The United States

- **Senate Confirms Christopher Wray As FBI Chief**

The U.S. Senate confirmed former Justice Department lawyer Christopher Wray as FBI chief, nearly three months after the agency's previous director, James Comey, was fired by President Donald Trump. Mr. Wray, who was confirmed by vote of 92-5, will take charge of the country's top domestic law enforcement agency during a federal probe into allegations of collusion between the Trump presidential campaign and Russia.⁴⁷

- **Trump signs bill approving new sanctions against Russia**

President Donald Trump signed into law legislation that levies new sanctions against Russia and restricts Trump's own ability to ease sanctions in place against Moscow. The bill is one of the first major pieces of legislation that was sent to President Trump's desk, and it represents a rebuke of the President by giving Congress new veto power to block him from removing Russia sanctions. The White House announced the signing shortly after 11 a.m. ET, saying the bill includes "a number of clearly unconstitutional provisions" that "purport to displace the President's exclusive constitutional authority to recognize foreign governments, including their territorial bounds." The new sanctions bill hits

⁴⁶ Eric Dalke, Carlo Dade And Daniel Pietikainen, "The TPP can fix Canadian farmers' beef with Japan's tariff," <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/the-tpp-can-fix-canadian-farmers-beef-with-japans-tariff/article35887975/>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

⁴⁷ Reuters, "Senate Confirms Christopher Wray As FBI Chief," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/senate-confirms-wray-fbi_us_5980f152e4b09d24e993b398?1fp&ncid=inblnkushpmg00000009, Accessed on 02 August 2017.

Russia's energy and defense sectors, and also includes fresh sanctions against Iran and North Korea.⁴⁸

- **Mueller Seeks White House Documents on Flynn**

Investigators working for the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, recently asked the White House for documents related to the former national security adviser Michael T. Flynn, and have questioned witnesses about whether he was secretly paid by the Turkish government during the final months of the presidential campaign, according to people close to the investigation. The line of questioning shows that Mr. Mueller's inquiry has expanded into a full-fledged examination of Mr. Flynn's financial dealings, beyond the relatively narrow question of whether he failed to register as a foreign agent or lied about his conversations and business arrangements with Russian officials. President Trump has publicly said Mr. Mueller should confine his investigation to the narrow issue of Russia's attempts to disrupt last year's presidential campaign, not conduct an expansive inquiry into the finances of Mr. Trump or his associates.⁴⁹

- **New Chief of Staff Reins in White House Aides-and Trump's Tweets**

Since his swearing General John Kelly has moved swiftly to bring order to a chaotic and unruly White House. After moving over from the Department of Homeland Security, Gen. Kelly fired communications director Anthony Scaramucci just ten days after President Trump had brought him in, and dismissed two National Security Council aides who were thought to be divisive or acting outside the chain of command. His influence was seen in President Trump's unusual late-night statement on Friday in support of his National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, with whom he's been at odds on and off for months.⁵⁰

Mexico

- **Will China be a Factor in the Upcoming NAFTA Negotiations?**

The first round of NAFTA renegotiations is set to take place in Washington, DC August 16–20 and one of the primary U.S. objectives is reducing its \$63 billion trade deficit with Mexico. Mexico is in a position to drive a harder bargain than many would think, however. Unlike thirty years ago, Mexico today can leverage China's growing foreign direct investment interest in the region. China, by increasing and diversifying its Latin American investments beyond resource

⁴⁸ Kaitlan Collins, Jeremy Herb and Daniella Diaz, "Trump signs bill approving new sanctions against Russia," <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/02/politics/donald-trump-russia-sanctions-bill/index.html>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

⁴⁹ Matthew Rosenberg, Matt Apuzzo and Michael S. Schmidt, "Mueller Seeks White House Documents on Flynn," <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/us/politics/robert-mueller-michael-flynn-turkey.html>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

⁵⁰ Jennifer Jacobs and Margaret Talev, "New Chief of Staff Reins in White House Aides-and Trump's Tweets," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-08-06/new-chief-of-staff-reins-in-white-house-aides-and-trump-s-tweets>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

extraction, is incentivizing Mexico and other Latin American countries to rethink their traditional trading relationships. Courting China as a strong trading partner could give Mexico another large market for a host of exports, diminishing to some degree the importance of the U.S. market. For several reasons, China will never replace the U.S. market, but it will provide to Mexico greater export diversity and significant trading growth opportunities.⁵¹

- **Mexico names veteran trade negotiator to lead its NAFTA talks**

Mexico has named Kenneth Smith as its chief negotiator for high-stakes talks set to begin next month aimed at revamping the 23-year-old NAFTA free trade pact linking Mexico, Canada and the United States, a senior trade official said on July 31, 2017. Smith is a veteran Mexican trade policy expert and currently serves as director of the Trade and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Office at the Mexican embassy in Washington.⁵²

- **Mexico Sees Surge in Venezuelan Asylum Seekers**

Venezuela's deepening political and economic crisis has provoked a surge of asylum seekers to Mexico in 2017, government figures show, with applications to stay in Mexico setting a record pace. During just the first six months of 2017, 1,420 Venezuelans have sought asylum in Mexico, a nearly four-fold jump compared to the 361 total Venezuelan asylum applicants for all of 2016. No Venezuelans applied for asylum in Mexico in 2014 or 2015. About 40% of the Venezuelan asylum applicants have received approval, making them eligible for other protections and benefits including the possibility of obtaining a work visa, while the rest are still being processed.⁵³

Latin American and Caribbean

Argentina

- **Hammond begins round of trade and political talks in Argentina**

The Chancellor of the Exchequer begins on August 2, 2017 a round of trade, investment and political contacts in Argentina, following a two day visit to Brazil, as part of a tour of South America's biggest economy. It is the first time a leading UK cabinet minister sets foot in Argentina in sixteen years; the last was when ex-

⁵¹ Bill Bray and Miyako Yerick, "Will China be a Factor in the Upcoming NAFTA Negotiations?," <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/will-china-be-factor-the-upcoming-nafta-negotiations-21805>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

⁵² Anthony Esposito, "Mexico names veteran trade negotiator to lead its NAFTA talks," <http://www.bnn.ca/mexico-names-veteran-trade-negotiator-to-lead-its-nafta-talks-1.818919>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

⁵³ Stefanie Eschenbacher, "Mexico Sees Surge in Venezuelan Asylum Seekers," <https://thewire.in/165137/venezuelan-asylum-seekers-mexico-surge-crisis-deepens/>, Accessed on 07 August 2017.

Prime Minister Tony Blair met ex-president Fernando De la Rúa in the Iguazu falls in 2001. Hammond met President Mauricio Macri and discussed on UK's support of Argentina's admission to OECD and Argentina's organization of the G20 summit in 2018 to be held in Buenos Aires. UK had also shown interest to continue advancing with the September 2016 joint communiqué, including the chapter on the South Atlantic and its commitments to facilitate Falklands' trade, connectivity, communications and joint scientific approach to natural resources in the area. The British Government is re-introducing export credit financial support for UK businesses looking to trade with Argentina after an almost 20 year hiatus. In effect in March 2016, the UK Export Finance, the government's export credit agency, extended up to £1 billion (US\$ 1.2bn) of support to help UK companies secure business in Argentina.

According to Argentine sources, Hammond underlined that even with Brexit, UK has "great interest" in achieving a trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, and also looking ahead pointed to a possible food accord with Argentina regarding agriculture and food. Bilateral trade remains weak since EU members Germany, Italy and Spain are ahead of UK: in 2015 Argentine exports totaled US\$ 721 million and UK sales US\$ 588.5 million. In 2016, Argentina exported US\$ 697m and imported US\$ 471m from UK. Apparently the thorny issue of the Falklands was not addressed and both countries remained in their positions.⁵⁴

Brazil

- **Brazil's Temer Dodges Corruption Charges in Congress**

On August 2, 2017, the Chamber of Deputies in Brazil rejected charges of passive corruption against President Michel Temer. With the result, Temer will not face a Supreme Court trial and the accusations presented by federal prosecutor Rodrigo Janot can only be resubmitted after the President leaves office, in December 2018. Brazil's Chamber of Deputies voted to reject corruption charges against President Temer. The voting tipped in favor of Brazil's leader, with 263 representatives voting to reject the accusations, while 227 lawmakers voting to continue investigations. After the rejection by the Chamber, President Temer released a statement in which he vows to continue with the reforms and actions he deems necessary to modernize and improve the country. For opposition lawmakers however, the result shows that the current government does not have enough allies in Congress to approve many of the reforms desired by President Temer. This

⁵⁴ "Hammond Arrives in Argentina on Trade Mission Scheduled to Meet Macri," August 1, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/08/01/hammond-arrives-in-argentina-on-trade-mission-scheduled-to-meet-macri>, Accessed on August 7, 2017.

is the second time that the president has managed to remain in his position. In June 2016, President Temer had already been tried for alleged irregularities in his 2014 election campaign, when he was running as Dilma Rousseff's vice president. Although President Temer has survived the two congressional votes, his political career appears to be over. The president seems to be content with merely limping to the 2018 elections, in which he does not plan to run as a candidate, according to *El Mundo*.⁵⁵

Venezuela

- **European Union Denounces Illegal Constituent Assembly Vote in Venezuela**

The European Union does not recognize the National Constituent Assembly voted for in Venezuela on July 30, 2017, according to EU Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini, who asked that the country rectify the problem soon. Some countries, such as Spain, said they won't recognize the Constituent Assembly because it was elected through a "flawed process." The company in charge of the election, Smartmatic, even said the official vote count is most likely inflated and inaccurate. As controversy over the election results continue, the Venezuelan regime has come out accusing the United States of pressuring Smartmatic into denouncing the results to cast doubt on actions of the Constituent Assembly moving forward. The EU statement from August 2, 2017 spoke on behalf of all 28 member countries, though Greece and Portugal expressed concern over whether sanctions were the correct response. The European Union's statement is just one from more than 40 countries that have spoken out against the National Constituent Assembly: The United States, Mexico, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Brazil, Panama, Spain, Germany, Norway, Paraguay and Canada are among them.⁵⁶

- **Spain Considers Sanctions against Venezuelan Dictatorship**

Spanish President Mariano Rajoy is considering sanctions against officials in Venezuela similar to those imposed by the United States in July 2017. During a press conference, Rajoy said a meeting will be held on August 2, 2017 to discuss ways to pressure the Venezuelan dictatorship, one of which may involve revoking the visas of Venezuelan officials and diplomats. Rajoy also said he will address Venezuela's situation in Brussels during a meeting of diplomats led by Head of European Diplomacy Federica Mogherini. After an election for Maduro's Constituent Assembly, the United States sanctioned President Nicolás Maduro,

⁵⁵ Lise Alves, "Brazil's Temer Dodges Corruption Charges in Congress," August 3, 2017, <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-politics/brazils-temer-dodges-corruption-charges-in-congress/>, Accessed on August 7, 2017.

⁵⁶ Orlando Avendano, "European Union Denounces Illegal Constituent Assembly," August 3, 2017, <https://panampost.com/orlando-avendano/2017/08/03/european-union-denounces-illegal-constituent-assembly/>, Accessed on August 7, 2017.

making him the 14th member of his regime to be sanctioned. On August 2, 2017, Senator Marco Rubio said the US would respond with increasingly intense sanctions each time Maduro's regime does something "outrageous." The President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, has asked countries in the European Union to impose sanctions on Maduro's regime, making Rajoy just one of many world leaders to consider taking action. Additionally, Mexico and Panama have indicated that they are willing to impose sanctions against Venezuela.⁵⁷

- **Mercosur suspends Venezuela's membership**

MERCOSUR, a Latin American regional economic bloc, has decided to suspend the membership of Venezuela in the organization. According to a statement adopted after the August 5, 2017 meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers in Brazil, the decision to suspend Venezuela's membership indefinitely for failing to uphold democratic norms amid an intensifying crackdown on dissent in the country. On July 21, 2017, Argentine President Mauricio Macri said Mercosur-comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela-was willing to act as a mediator in the conflict between the Venezuelan government and its opposition. The bloc previously suspended Venezuela in December for failing to uphold commitments it made when it joined the group in 2012. The suspension will have little practical effect, with no economic sanctions or changes to trade or migration, and the bloc said it would try to limit any possible impact on Venezuelans to avoid exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country. The new suspension will also make it harder for Venezuela to return to good standing since it can be lifted only when the bloc is satisfied that democratic order has been restored. The suspension was widely expected, and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro criticized the decision even before it became fact.⁵⁸

Russia

- **Russia and the US**

After meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on 6 August, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson says Russia is showing "some willingness" to start talking about a resolution to the crisis in Ukraine. After the meeting, the Russian diplomat announced that the Trump administration was sending its new special representative for Ukraine negotiations to Moscow for talks. Tillerson said that has deep differences with Russia including on Ukraine, but that it's not a good idea to "just cut everything off on one single issue." He says the US and Russia still have important national security issues to discuss.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Sabrina Martin, "Spain Considers Sanctions Against Venezuelan Dictatorship Including Revoking Visas," August 2, 2017, <https://panampost.com/sabrina-martin/2017/08/02/spain-considers-sanctions-against-venezuelan-dictatorship-including-revoking-visas/>, Accessed on August 7, 2017.

⁵⁸ "Mercosur Suspends Venezuela's Membership," August 6, 2017, <http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/08/06/mercotur-suspends-venezuelas-membership/>, Accessed on August 7, 2017.

⁵⁹ "The Latest: Tillerson says Russia willing to discuss Ukraine", *ABC News*, August 7, 2017.

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/latest-trumps-ukraine-envoy-visit-moscow-talks-49062252>
Accessed on August 7, 2017.

On the counter sanctions by Russia on US, Tillerson said that US will respond by Sept. 1 to Russia's move to force a major reduction in American diplomatic staff. Tillerson says he told Lavrov that the US still hasn't decided how it will respond. He says he asked Lavrov "several clarifying questions" about the act of Russian retaliation in response to new sanctions passed by Congress.⁶⁰

During a meeting with the reporters, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on 2 August said that US' ties with Russia have soured. However, he hopes for the betterment of the ties. On the latest sanctions, he said that neither the US President Donald Trump nor he is happy with it. However, Trump plans to sign the bill nevertheless, another potent reminder of the political baggage that has beset his efforts to mend ties to Russia. If Trump were to veto the bill, Congress would almost surely override his veto. Though the White House said the bill was still being reviewed, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump will sign it. Vice President Mike Pence, traveling Tuesday in the former Soviet republic of Georgia, sought to reframe the sanctions as a "further sign of our commitment" to counter Russian aggression in the region.⁶¹

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedevlashed new US sanctions as a "full-fledged economic war" on Moscow, saying they crushed hopes for repairing ties and demonstrated President Donald Trump's "total weakness ... in the most humiliating way."⁶²

According to the Russian state-funded VTsIOM pollster, Russians' love affair with U.S. President Donald Trump has nosedived in the wake of new sanctions signed into law by the president this week. The results which were published on 4 August showed that 28 per cent respondents felt negatively about the U.S. president, compared to 18 percent who expressed sympathy. In a similar poll conducted only a month earlier, the figure of those who had a positive attitude was 27 percent. The poll was conducted on July 30-31.⁶³

In accordance with a Russian government decree, American diplomats on August 2 announced that they had completely vacated two premises in Moscow. The embassy was required to leave the dacha in Serebryany Bor as well as a diplomatic warehouse in an industrial area in southern Moscow's Dorozhnaya Street by Aug. 1. The US Embassy rejected claims made by some Russian media that it had started

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Josh Lederman, "Tillerson laments sour ties with Russia, but holds out hope", *ABC News*, August 2, 2017.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/tillerson-laments-sour-ties-russia-holds-hope-48982276> Accessed on August 7, 2017.

⁶²"Russia blasts US sanctions as 'economic war'", *Times of India*, August 3, 2017.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/russia-blasts-us-sanctions-as-economic-war/articleshow/59897622.cms> Accessed on August 7, 2017.

⁶³"Trump's Popularity in Russia Takes Sharp Hit After U.S. Sanctions", *The Moscow Times*, August 4, 2017.

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/trump-popularity-nosedives-in-russia-after-sanctions-58583> Accessed on August 7, 2017.

rejecting travel visas for Russian applicants, ahead of massive staff cuts to its diplomatic staff imposed by Moscow.⁶⁴

- **Putin's Popularity within Russia**

During a state-run pollster VTSIOM, the reports which were published on 3 August 2017 showed that over 83 percent of Russians approve of Vladimir Putin's work as president, while the electoral rating of pro-Putin party United Russia stands at over 50 percent. The approval rating for Putin is slightly down on 84.1 percent reported in the middle of the month, but still far ahead of other prominent Russian political figures. The elections rating of the parliamentary majority party United Russia increased from 47.9 percent in early July to 50.3 percent at the end of the month. Other parliamentary parties demonstrated much lower support. Just over 11 percent of respondents said they were ready to vote for the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia, 9.1 percent said they would back the Communists, and just 5 percent opted the Fair Russia party. In the same poll, VTSIOM specialists asked the Russian public which state officials and politicians they trusted the most. Putin topped the rating, with 50.4 percent of respondents confirming their trust in the Russian leader. Other leaders included Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu with 15.7 percent and the head of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Vladimir Zhirinovsky.⁶⁵

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Security, Mutual Relations Top Ghani, Rouhani Meeting**

President Ashraf Ghani met with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of his official visit to Tehran on 5th August 2017, where they discussed issues of mutual interest, security in particular. The Presidential Palace said that boosting Kabul/Tehran ties, security and development were core parts of Ghani and Rouhani's meeting in Tehran. Ghani left Kabul on Saturday morning to attend Rouhani's oath-taking ceremony. A number of Afghan MPs have said the tensions between Iran and Afghanistan have increased following the establishment of the National Unity Government in 2014. Some analysts suggest discussion as the only way to overcome tensions between Afghanistan and Iran.⁶⁶

⁶⁴"U.S. Embassy Vacates Moscow Premises, Denies Visa Refusal Claims", *The Moscow Times*, August 2, 2017. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/us-embassy-vacates-moscow-premises-denies-visa-refusal-claims-58555> Accessed on August 7, 2017.

⁶⁵"Putin tops latest Russian approval ratings with 83% support", *RT*, August 3, 2017. <https://www.rt.com/politics/398460-putin-tops-latest-russian-approval/> Accessed on August 7, 2017.

⁶⁶Massoud Ansar, "Security, Mutual Relations Top Ghani, Rouhani Meeting", *Tolonews*, August 5, 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/security-mutual-relations-top-ghani-rouhani-meeting> (accessed on August 7, 2017).

- **Pakistani Army Chief Meets Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan**

Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa met with the Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan Dr. Omar Zakhilwal. According to reports, two sides discussed issues of bilateral interests between Kabul and Islamabad during their meeting in the Pakistani army headquarters. The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistani military, in a statement said "Issues of mutual interest including security situation and border management were discussed." The meeting between Dr. Zakhilwal and Gen. Bajwa takes places as the relations between Kabul and Islamabad has been at all time low during the recent months.⁶⁷

- **US Spending in Afghanistan Lacks Monitoring: SIGAR**

In its latest quarterly report, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) alleged the results of the massive spending were less than satisfactory due to widespread corruption and lack of US monitoring on the ground. It said the balance between the government and the insurgents fighting against it remained at standstill since 2016. Sixty percent of the Afghan districts were controlled by the government and 40 percent by Taliban or other rebel outfits. The US has failed to offer any justification for hundreds of billions of dollars spent on propping up the Afghan government, as the Taliban control large swaths of the country, where the value of opium has dramatically increased.⁶⁸

- **NATO Ready To Provide Air Support at Any Time**

NATO officials in Afghanistan on 31st July 2017, said they are ready to support the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) fighting insurgents from the air anytime they request help. Defense ministry officials said they work in close cooperation with the foreign troops who carry out between 100 and 200 air strikes a day. NATO officials however did not comment on the number of air strikes, but said they were ready to provide air support at any time.⁶⁹

- **Hekmatyar Says his Party Will Elect Next President**

The next president of Afghanistan will be the person who Hizb-e-Islami supports in the presidential election, its leader claims. The next president who steps into the presidential palace and takes over the office will be someone who wins the

⁶⁷ "Pakistani army chief meets Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan", *Khaama Press*, August 4, 2017.

<http://www.khaama.com/pakistani-army-chief-meets-afghan-ambassador-to-pakistan-03275> (accessed on August 5, 2017).

⁶⁸ "US Spending in Afghanistan Lacks Monitoring: SIGAR", *Outlook Afghanistan*, August 2, 2017.

http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=18755 (accessed on August 3, 2017).

⁶⁹ Massoud Ansar, "NATO Ready to Provide Air Support at Any Time", *Tolo News*, July 31, 2017,

<http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/nato-ready-provide-air-support-any-time> (accessed on August 7, 2017)

support of Hizb-e-Islami in the next presidential election, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of Hizb-e-Islami said at a press conference in Kabul on 5th August 2017.⁷⁰

- **Afghanistan's Underground Economy Thriving: SCO**

According to the statistics, poppy cultivation, drug trafficking, illegal mining, illegal exports, unpaid taxes, the grabbed lands' business and money laundering make the main parts of the underground economy of the country. "An initial review shows that at least 50 percent of the country's economy might be illegal," the SCO deputy chief Hasibullah Moahid said. Moahid said he suggests further assessments into the issue to find the exact figure of illegal economy in the country.⁷¹

Bangladesh

- **Supreme Judicial Council Reinstated**

The Supreme Court has put its own mechanism in place to impeach top judges after the 16th Amendment of the constitution – which had given this authority to parliament – was declared illegal by the apex court a month ago. The Supreme Judicial Council, which had been scrapped via the 16th Amendment, has been reinstated and will carry out the process to remove top court judges.⁷²

- **Take Back Rohingyas**

Urging Myanmar to take back Rohingya populations from Bangladesh, visiting OIC Secretary General Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen yesterday (August 4) said Myanmar should resolve the ongoing humanitarian crisis over the persecuted minorities. "Main responsibility to resolve this longstanding crisis is Myanmar's," he said and called for concrete steps in this regard during his visit to Ukhia upazila in Cox's Bazar.⁷³

- **Finance Division Worried About Budget Deficit**

Finance Division officials have expressed concerns over meeting the deficit in the current budget at the beginning of the fiscal year, citing the unimplemented VAT law. Even Finance Minister AMA Muhith is not immune from worry, as he has also expressed doubts about meeting the ambitious budget targets without the

⁷⁰ "Hekmatyar Says his Party Will Elect Next President", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 6, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=18783 (accessed on August 7, 2017)

⁷¹ "Afghanistan's Underground Economy Thriving: CSO," *Daily Outlook Afghansitan*, August 6, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=18784 (accessed on August 7, 2017).

⁷² Ashif Islam Shaon, "Supreme Judicial Council reinstated, SC judges get their own code of conduct, *Dhaka Tribune*, August 3, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/court/2017/08/03/supreme-judicial-council-reinstated-sc-judges-get-code-conduct/> (accessed August 3, 2017)

⁷³ "Take back Rohingyas," *Daily Star*, August 5, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/take-back-rohingyas-1443805> (accessed August 5, 2017)

implementation of the 2012 VAT Act. The minister has sought a work plan from the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to find ways to meet the deficit.⁷⁴

- **AL in Awkward Situation: BNP**

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on Sunday (August 6) claimed that the Supreme Court's verdict scrapping the 16th constitutional amendment has put Awami League in an awkward situation. "We're least bothered about what Awami League is saying as the party is now in a very bad condition. The country's political situation is worse than the rundown roads," he said. The BNP leader further said, "The verdict on the 16th amendment has reflected people's hopes and aspirations. It has also exposed that people are going through serious repressive acts."⁷⁵

- **Bangladesh For More Trade With Vietnam**

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam stressed the need for intensifying trade and investment between Bangladesh and Vietnam. During a meeting with visiting Vietnamese Vice-Foreign Minister Dang Dinh Quy at his office yesterday (August 6), he also laid emphasis on more business to business contacts between the two countries and invited Vietnam to explore investment opportunities in Bangladesh through joint venture. The state minister sought Vietnam's cooperation in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, according to a press release issued by the foreign ministry.⁷⁶

Pakistan

- **Power Sector in Pakistan** - The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) on August 3rd allowed power producers to charge consumers through tariff one per cent cost of 19 power projects worth \$15.56 billion under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for 20-30 years on account of security cost. Nepra did not accept objections from a number of stakeholders, including the sponsors of the power projects and consumer groups, that provision of security was the responsibility of the state and electricity consumers should not be charged for it given the fact that they were already paying huge taxes to the state to meet its expenses, including security cost.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Asif Showkat Kallol, "Finance Division worried about budget deficit," *Dhaka Tribune*, August 6, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/business/economy/2017/08/06/finance-division-worried-budget-deficit/> (accessed August 6, 2017)

⁷⁵ "AL in awkward situation following SC verdict: BNP," *Prothom Alo*, August 6, 2017, <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/155619/AL-in-awkward-situation-following-SC-verdict-BNP> (accessed August 6, 2017)

⁷⁶ "Bangladesh for more trade with Vietnam," *The Independent*, August 7, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/108118> (accessed August 7, 2017)

⁷⁷ Khaleeq Kiani, "Power consumers to pay security cost of CPEC projects", *Dawn*, August 4, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349492/power-consumers-to-pay-security-cost-of-cpec-projects> (accessed on August 6, 2017)

- **China Pakistan Trade Imbalance** - China emerged as the largest trade partner of Pakistan in 2016-17. Exports to China shrank to \$1.62 billion in 2016-17 from \$2.69bn in 2013-14. Imports from China, in contrast, grew to \$10.53bn in 2016-17 from \$4.73bn in 2012-13, an increase of 123pc. Trade data shows imports from Beijing have been increasing each year as Pakistan consistently failed to grow exports to China. The Ministry of Commerce never announced any strategy or plan to explore the Chinese market for Pakistani products. The official figure for imports from China is also disputed by independent economists. They say Chinese exports to Pakistan are about \$5bn higher than the figure published by Pakistan. The country faces a trade imbalance of \$30.5bn while the current account deficit reached a record-high of \$12bn in 2016-17.⁷⁸
- **US Pakistan and Terrorism** - US National Security Adviser Gen H.R. McMaster said on August 5th that President Donald Trump wants Pakistan to change its 'paradoxical' policy of supporting the militants who are causing the country great losses. "The president has also made clear that we need to see a change in behaviour of those in the region, which includes those who are providing safe haven and support bases for the Taliban, Haqqani Network and others," McMaster said in an interview to a radio programme.⁷⁹
- **Pakistan & India Water Talks** - India and Pakistan disagree about the construction of the Kishenganga (330MW) and Ratle (850MW) hydroelectric power plants being built by India in Jammu and Kashmir. The World Bank is not financing these two projects. A two day talk took place on July 31st and August 1st in World Bank headquarters in Washington. Secretary Ministry of Water Resources Dr Amarjit Singh headed the Indian delegation. Secretary Water and Power Yousaf Naseem Khokhar led the Pakistani delegation. Pakistan opposes the two projects, saying that the plans violate the 1960 Indus Water Treaty that distributes waters of the river Indus and its tributaries between India and Pakistan. As per a statement issued by the WB, Pakistan and India displayed goodwill and cooperation in the latest round of talks on a water dispute and have agreed to meet again in September.⁸⁰

Indian Ocean Region

Maldives

⁷⁸Shahid Iqbal, "Trade balance tilts further in Beijing's favour", *Dawn*, August 6, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349800/trade-balance-tilts-further-in-beijings-favour> (accessed on August 6, 2017)

⁷⁹Anwar Iqbal, "Trump wants Pakistan's 'paradoxical' policies to change: NSA", *Dawn*, August 6, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349856/trump-wants-pakistans-paradoxical-policies-to-change-nsa> (accessed on August 6, 2017)

⁸⁰Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan, India conclude water talks in Washington", *Dawn*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349072> (accessed on August 6, 2017); Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan, India to meet again next month for water talks: World Bank", *Dawn*, August 3, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349288> (accessed on August 6, 2017)

- **Maldives to Implement Death Penalty in Sept: President**

The government is carrying out preparations to implement capital punishment in the Maldives before the end of September announced President Abdulla Yameen on 6th August, speaking at a ceremony of ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) held at State Electric Company (STELCO). According to the regulations compiled by the home ministry on capital punishment, the death penalty will be executed via hanging or lethal injection.⁸¹

- **Opposition Holds Protest Marches In Southern Atolls**

Opposition supporters took to the streets in the southern atolls on 4th August, calling for the resignation of President Abdulla Yameen and the release of four lawmakers detained after the collapse of the government's majority in parliament. Hundreds of protesters carrying placards and banners marched in the southernmost Addu City as well as the islands of Thinadhoo and Gahdhoo in Gaaf Dhaal atoll and Villigili and Kolamaafushi in Gaaf Alif atoll.⁸²

- **9 More Charges Against Jailed ex-VP, 25 Against MMPRC ex-Chief**

The Prosecutor General's Office has decided to file nine more charges against jailed former Vice President Ahmed Adheeb and 25 additional charges against Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC)'s former Managing Director Abdulla Ziyath, in connection to the MMPRC corruption in 2015. The scandal is the largest case of corruption in the history of the Maldives, where MVR 1.2 billion worth of state funds received as acquisition costs via island leases for resort development had been embezzled through the corporation.⁸³

Sri Lanka

- **Sri Lanka hands Over 77 Fishermen to India At IMBL**

Seventy-seven fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, were released by Sri Lanka on 3rd August. The repatriation had taken place along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). The Sri Lankan authorities handed over the fishermen to an Indian Coast Guard patrolling vessel, which was sent to bring them back home.⁸⁴

- **China Has No Intelligence Personnel in Sri Lanka - Yi Xianliang**

China has no intelligence personnel based in Sri Lanka, Chinese Ambassador in Colombo, Yi Xianliang said on 5th August. Speaking on board the Chinese PLA

⁸¹ "Maldives to implement death penalty in Sept: pres", 6th August 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/maldives-to-implement-death-penalty-in-sept-pres/>

⁸² "Opposition holds protest marches in southern atolls", 5th August 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/opposition-holds-protest-marches-in-southern-atolls-131884>

⁸³ "9 more charges against jailed ex-VP, 25 against MMPRC ex-chief", 1st August 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/9-more-charges-against-jailed-ex-vp-25-against-mmprc-ex-chief/>

⁸⁴ "Sri Lanka hands over 77 fishermen to India at IMBL", 4th August 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/08/04/sri-lanka-hands-over-77-fishermen-to-india-at-imbl/> (accessed on August 7, 2017)

Navy hospital ship, Ark Peace, which docked in at the Colombo Port on 5th August to commence its first goodwill visit to Sri Lanka, Xianliang stressed that assistance provided by China was not motivated by geo politics. "We don't have any intelligence personnel here. By strengthening economic cooperation and long standing people to people contacts between our two countries, we want to help Sri Lanka achieve its full potential."⁸⁵

- **Sampanthan Urges Maithri and Ranil to Continue Unity**

Opposition and Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader R Sampanthan urged President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to continue working together in the best interest of the Nation. Speaking in Parliament on Wickremesinghe completing 40 years in Parliament, Sampanthan said that the National issue must be resolved and both leaders need to work together to achieve this goal.⁸⁶

West Asia

Israel

- **Israel Launches Environment Satellite**

Israel launched the country's first environmental research satellite (VENμS) on 2 August 2017 from a launch site in French Guiana, in a joint venture between the Israel Space Agency (ISA) and its French counterpart CNES (Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales). The VENμS satellite's goal is to obtain high-resolution photographs of specific sites to track environmental issues such as desertification, erosion, pollution, natural disasters and other phenomena linked to climate change. The camera on the satellite takes photographs in 12 wavelengths, more than are discernible to the human eye. The high resolution — plants can be distinguished as little as five metres apart — makes possible "precision agriculture," in which farmers would be able to accurately plan for water, fertilizer and pesticide needs. The satellite uses an Israeli-developed electrical propulsion system that allows it to navigate with more accuracy than older satellites. VENμS, which stands for "Vegetation and Environment Monitoring on a New Micro Satellite," will be able to take repeated photos of the same spot in the same light conditions (accounting for the position of the sun), allowing for more accurate tracking of changing environmental issues. This is called "heliosynchronis orbit" because it requires taking a photo of the same coordinates while the sun is in the same position. Previously, satellites have been able to provide heliosynchronis

⁸⁵“China has no intelligence personnel in Sri Lanka - Yi Xianliang”, 6th August 2017, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=169559 (accessed on August 7, 2017)

⁸⁶“Sampanthan urges Maithri and Ranil to continue unity”, 4th August 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/08/04/sampanthan-urges-maithri-and-ranil-to-continue-unity/> (accessed on August 7, 2017)

photos every 10-15 days, while the VENμS satellite will allow for comparable photographs every two days.⁸⁷

- **UN Secretary General to Visit Israel**

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is scheduled to visit Israel at the end of August. Guterres, who according to the Israeli Foreign Ministry is scheduled to be in the country on August 27-29, is expected to couple his visit to Israel with one to the Palestinian Authority. Guterres is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Reuven Rivlin and Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman while in Israel, and PA President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.⁸⁸

- **Israel Plans to Close Al Jazeera Office**

Israel said on 6 August 2017 that it plans to close the local offices of Al Jazeera television network, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the Arab satellite news broadcaster of incitement behind deadly terror attacks. Israel is to join regional Arab states that have already shut stations after accusing the broadcaster of inciting violence, Communications Minister Ayoub Kara said.⁸⁹

Saudi Arabia and GCC

- **GCC Intensifies Relief Project in Yemen**

In a meeting on 6 July 2017, the coordination committee of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) decided to expand the relief operations in Yemen, ensuring delivery of aid as well as addressing humanitarian concerns.⁹⁰ The GCC coordination office for humanitarian assistance and relief assessed that 19 million people in Yemen are in need of aid. They discussed over possible steps required to combat disease, malnourishment and starvation as well as implementing projects in various sectors.⁹¹ According to WHO, around 300,000 people are susceptible to the outbreak of Cholera epidemic and so far 242 people have died of the disease.⁹²

Looking at the proportion of the epidemic, WHO and the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief have signed an agreement for about US\$ 8.3 million

⁸⁷ Melanie Lidman, "Israel launches first environmental research satellite Venμs", *The Times of Israel*, August 2, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-launches-first-environmental-research-satellite-ven%CE%BCs/> (accessed on August 7, 2017)

⁸⁸ Herb Keinon, "UN Secretary-General Guterres set to visit Israel at end of August", *The Jerusalem Post*, August 3, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/UN-Secretary-General-Guterres-set-to-visit-Israel-at-end-of-August-501470> (accessed on August 7, 2017)

⁸⁹ "Israel says it plans to close Al Jazeera's offices", *The Jerusalem Post*, August 6, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-says-it-plans-to-close-al-jazeeras-offices/> (accessed on August 7, 2017)

⁹⁰ "GCC intensifies efforts to expand Yemen relief operations", 6 August 2017, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1140066/saudi-arabia>, *Arab News*, 6 August 2017,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "WHO: Speed of Yemen cholera outbreak 'unprecedented' *Al Jazeera*, 19 May 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/speed-yemen-cholera-outbreak-unprecedented-170519110837434.html>

to support on the ongoing health response to the cholera outbreak in Yemen.⁹³ Previously, last week the King Salman centre had signed US\$ 33 million project with UNICEF to combat the cholera epidemic in Yemen. The project is in water and environmental sanitation sectors. This project is a part of the US\$ 66.7 million financial commitment made by Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman to support the efforts to combat cholera in Yemen.⁹⁴

Since the Yemen crisis erupted in March 2015, around 10,000 people have been killed and 40,000 injured in the fight between the coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Besides vast destruction, more than half of the population has left their houses and are living either in camps or in deserted areas. Before the crisis, more than half of the Yemen's population lived below poverty line, while two-thirds of the youths are unemployed. The two-year of conflict has further pushed half of the population on the verge of starvation. The country is facing severe crisis of water, depletion of oil resources, while the culture of Qat (leaves of an inebriated plants) eating among the Yemenis has further added miseries to their lives. Qat is water intensive crop, which consumes half of the water available for agriculture. Prolonged war in the country has already reduced the chances of foreign investment in areas where money can be put such as rock fertilizer, cement industry and mining. Although 128 countries are involved in Yemen relief programme, only 44 per cent of the projects are being funded.

Saudi Arabia, which has led the operation, has been put under human rights violation scanner. Reportedly, the civilian casualties have occurred due to indiscriminate air attacks, while the Saudi side denies any wilful attempt to target the civilians.

However, looking at the situation in the region, which has further been fuelled by the Qatar crisis, there seems no end of Yemen conflict in near future. The Saudi and UAE forces are trying their best to oust the Houthi rebels and restore the elected government living in exile but till date they are unable to achieve their objectives. It is also said that Abdullah Saleh, the former President of Yemen, may again be invited to form the government. This is strategically important as Houthis, backed by Iran, have proved to be a diehard force, while the extremist organizations such as AQAP and variants of Daesh also do not leave any opportunity to expand their influence in the country.

Turkey

⁹³ "King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief supports cholera response in Yemen", *WHO Media Centre*, 15 June 2017,

<http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/king-salman-centre-for-humanitarian-aid-and-relief-supports-cholera-response-in-yemen.html>

⁹⁴ "King Salman Relief Center signs deal to combat cholera epidemic in Yemen", *Saudi Gazette*, 31 July 2017

<http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/514101/SAUDI-ARABIA/King-Salman-Center-for-Relief-and-Humanitarian-Aid>

- **Turkey Foreign Minister discusses Syria with US, Russian Counterparts**

Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu met on 6 August 2017 with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in the Philippines capital Manila on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, before holding a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson later in the day.⁹⁵

Speaking to reporters following his talks with Lavrov, Cavusoglu said that they discussed the ongoing Syrian conflict, the Astana talks on Syria, visa-free travel for Turkish citizens to Russia and the bilateral economic ties, especially the possible lifting of a ban on export of Turkish tomato to Russia. “It was a positive meeting,” he added.

Ahead of the key meetings, back in Turkey, Ankara sent artillery units to the border with Syria on Aug. 5, where its army regularly clashes with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) militants, state-run Anadolu Agency has reported. A military convoy with at least five howitzers arrived overnight at the southern city of Kilis, the scene of recent cross-border fire between the Turkish army and the Kurdish Peoples’ Protection Units (YPG). The new units were there to reinforce rather than replace the artillery already in place, the agency reported, citing military sources.

Across the border from the province of Kilis lies an area of northwest Syria that is controlled by the YPG, which is Washington-backed but deemed a terror group by Ankara due to its ties to the PKK. Already in August 2016, Turkey launched a ground offensive into northern Syria to push back Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) militants and prevent the YPG forces linking up their different zones of control.

Separately, about 2,000 ISIL militants are estimated to remain in the Syrian city of Raqqa, fighting for their survival in the face of an offensive by the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a senior U.S. official said on Aug. 4. The YPG constitutes the backbone of the SDF. Brett McGurk, the U.S. special envoy for the coalition against ISIL, said the SDF had cleared about 45 percent of Raqqa since launching an attack in early June to seize ISIL’s stronghold in northern Syria.

- **Turkey to Launch New Ground Offensive Against PYD in Syria**

⁹⁵ Daily Hurriyet News, 7 August 2017 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-cavusoglu-talks-syria-with-us-russian-counterparts-in-manila--.aspx?pageID=238&nID=116409&NewsCatID=510>

Turkey signalled a new ground offensive in Syria as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Saturday the military will make new moves in the region.⁹⁶ At the same time, locals in northern Syrian districts have called on Ankara to cleanse the area from the Democratic Union Party (PYD). President Erdogan said that Turkey remains determined to launch "new moves" akin to its previous foray in northern Syria in August 2016. "It's clear that the situation in Syria goes beyond a war on a terror organization," Erdogan said during his address to a large crowd at a stadium opening in eastern Malatya province, while referring to Daesh and alluding to the PKK-affiliated PYD's aspirations for autonomy and statehood.

"We would rather pay the price for spoiling plans against our future and liberty in Syria and Iraq rather than on our own soil," Erdogan said. "Soon we will take new and important steps," he asserted. Erdogan's message on 5 August was not the first time that Ankara has hinted at the possibility of a new operation on Syrian soil. Speaking in front of a large crowd in the border towns of Akcakale and Ceylanpinar located across from areas held by the PKK's Syrian armed wing, the YPG, Erdogan had said in late June, "Despite whoever is by your side [the U.S. coalition], you should know that Turkey, with its armed forces, will not let a state be formed in northern Syria."

"We told the U.S. as well. If there is such a thing, our struggle there will be different," Erdogan said, signalling that Turkey is prepared to intervene in the northern Syrian town of Afrin at any time, currently held by the PYD.

- **Turkey Becomes 'Sectoral Dialogue Partner' of ASEAN**

Turkey has officially become a 'sectoral dialog partner' for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced 6 August.⁹⁷ Speaking during the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila, Cavusoglu said Turkey has been chosen among other countries who applied for the partnership and that the initiative was taken in line with Turkey's proactive and multidimensional foreign policy.

The minister said that for a long period, Turkey was focusing on improving ties with southeast Asian countries and that after opening the Turkish embassy in Laos, the country would have embassies in all across the ASEAN region. "With the new step, our political and institutional relations with the countries in the region will further develop as well as bilateral trade volume. Also the partnership will create important opportunities for Turkish businessmen," Cavusoglu said.

ASEAN was established in 1967 and includes 10 states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and

⁹⁶ Daily Sabah 7 August 2017 <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/08/07/turkey-hints-at-new-ground-offensive-against-pyd-in-syria>

⁹⁷ Daily Sabah 7 August 2017 <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2017/08/06/turkey-becomes-sectoral-dialogue-partner-of-asean>

Vietnam. Turkey became a signatory of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) on 23 July 2010 and thus, the foundation of sectoral cooperation was laid down. Moreover, in recent weeks Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, whose nation holds the rotating ASEAN chairmanship this year, said that Turkey and Mongolia should join ASEAN.

EU Commission Chief Juncker Opposes Suspending Accession Talks with Turkey

The European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker argued against suspending accession talks with Turkey in an interview aired on 3 August 2017.⁹⁸ Speaking to German broadcaster ARD, Juncker acknowledged the success of the migrant deal signed with Ankara, adding that migrant flow through the Aegean had been reduced by 97 per cent since its implementation.

"I see this as a success. Not only because the number of asylum seekers has decreased, but also because we can help the Turkish authorities to treat these people properly," Juncker said. When asked if EU should suspend accession talks with Turkey over recent setbacks, Juncker responded negatively. "No, I don't think so. I think it is right to continue EU membership negotiations for the benefit of all parties," Juncker said.

Yemen

- **Thousands of Yemeni Forces Targeting Qaeda Stronghold in South**

Thousands of Yemeni troops are conducting a clearing operation aimed at driving Qaeda militants from one of their major strongholds in southern Yemen, according to Arab and American security officials.⁹⁹

The offensive in Shabwa Province started last week and includes about 2,000 Yemeni forces backed by dozens of advisers from the United Arab Emirates, and a handful of US Special Operations commandos providing intelligence and planning assistance, American officials said. It is the largest military operation against al Qaeda fighters in Yemen since Yemeni troops in armoured vehicles and backed by airstrikes seized this major port city of al Mukalla in April 2016, after the militants had used it as a base from which to storm through the southern part of the country.

The continuing operation is the latest phase of an increased campaign against the Yemeni militants since President Trump took office in the US. It also reflects the new American President's general embrace of former President Barack Obama's strategy to aid local allies fighting insurgents in hot spots like Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria, rather than dispatch large numbers of American troops.

Jordan Reiterates Support for Legitimate Government in Yemen

⁹⁸ Daily Sabah 3 August 2017 <https://www.dailysabah.com/eu-affairs/2017/08/03/eu-commission-chief-juncker-opposes-suspending-accession-talks-with-turkey>

⁹⁹ The New York Times, 6 August 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/06/world/middleeast/yemen-qaeda-shabwa-province.html>

Jordan on 6 August 2017 reiterated its full support for the legitimate government in Yemen and for efforts to restore stability in the country, the state-run Petra news agency reported.¹⁰⁰ At a meeting in Amman between Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and Yemeni Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdelmalek Mekhlafi, the two sides discussed developments in Yemen. Safadi stressed Jordan's support for the Yemeni government headed by President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. The minister voiced Jordan's full support for a political solution to end the crisis in Yemen.

Jordanian Prime Minister Hani Mulki also met with Mekhlafi and discussed ties between the two countries. Mulki stressed Jordan's continued position to support the legitimate government in Yemen and efforts to restore stability and security in the country. "Jordan will not spare any effort to support Yemen at the diplomatic, political and socio-economic levels under the leadership of King Abdullah II of Jordan," said Mulki. Lower House Speaker Atef Tarawneh also met the Yemeni official and reviewed regional developments, including the recent tension in Al Aqsa Mosque.

Cyber Security

- **UK Government issues New Cybersecurity Guidelines for Smart Cars**

The British government today issued a new set of guidelines designed to encourage automakers to make vehicles' cybersecurity a priority.¹⁰¹ UK Transport Minister Lord Callanan said that as autonomous and connected vehicles are increasingly used on British roadways, minimum protections should be established to protect consumers from cyber attacks, whether it's controlling personal data, or taking control of the vehicle remotely. The goal is to provide "all parties involved in the manufacturing and supply chain ... with a consistent set of guidelines."

The governmental guidance, titled "The key principles of vehicle cyber security for connected and automated vehicles," consists of eight basic principles. Organizations should ensure that security is a priority on a board level, manufacturers should assess potential risks, especially with third-party contractors, vehicle security needs to last for the lifetime of the system in question, organizations and subcontractors must work together to certify their security processes and products, manufactures should manage software over the expected life of the system, data storage should be secure, and the vehicle or systems should be able to withstand attacks and continue to function.

¹⁰⁰ 6 August 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/07/c_136504080.htm

¹⁰¹ <https://www.theverge.com/2017/8/6/16104688/uk-government-issued-cybersecurity-guidelines-smart-autonomous-cars>

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	August 6	Karachi / Sindh	Counterterrorism officials concluded that there are numerous splinter groups — of either Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan or Lashkar-e-Jhangvi — responsible for the spate of attacks on policemen and retired personnel of law enforcement agencies in recent months. “There are multiple groups involved in targeted killings of policemen in the city,” said Counter-Terrorism Department’s chief Additional Inspector General Sanaullah Abbasi. ¹⁰²	Statement	
2	August 6	Dera Bugti / Baluchistan	At least four suspected terrorists were killed during an intelligence based operation carried out by Frontier Corps on suspected terror camps in Kohlu and Dera Bugti Districts. One FC soldier sustained minor injuries during the exchange of fire with the suspects. ¹⁰³	4	1
3	August 1	Karachi / Sindh	Three armed robbers stormed a private microfinance bank in the old city’s Kharadar area, held security guards and staff at gunpoint and took away more than half a million rupees as the bank management allegedly had not followed the standard operating procedures (SOPs) to prevent such robberies. This	Bank heist	

¹⁰² Imtiaz Ali, ‘Multiple’ militant outfits behind law enforcers’ killings in Karachi, *Dawn*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349997/multiple-militant-outfits-behind-law-enforcers-killings-in-karachi>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹⁰³ ISPR says 4 suspects killed during security operations in Kohlu, Dera Bugti, *Dawn*, August 6, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349959/ispr-says-4-suspects-killed-during-security-operations-in-kohlu-dera-bugti>, accessed on August 7, 2017

			was the sixth bank robbery of the year in Karachi. ¹⁰⁴		
4	July 31	Karachi / Sindh	Two IS terrorists were killed during a police raid in Shah Latif area of Bin Qasim town in Karachi. One of the militants was identified as Abu Huzaifa Tanzeemi. ¹⁰⁵ “Abu Huzaifa was previously associated with the al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), but later on he joined IS,” said Malir SSP Rao Anwar. ¹⁰⁶	2	0

Afghanistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	August 6	Sara-e-Pul	At least 40 civilians were killed by unidentified militants in Mirza Oland village of Sara-e-Pul Province. Reports indicate that some of the villagers were beheaded while some others were shot dead. Dozens more civilians were taken hostage by the militants, said officials. The incident happened after the insurgents seized control of the area, said Sar-e-Pul Governor Mohammad Zahir Wahdat. ¹⁰⁷	40	NS
2	August 6	Ghor	The ISIS Khurasan claimed that several Taliban insurgents were killed or wounded during clashes in Ghor Province. Calling the	NS	NS

¹⁰⁴ Imran Ayub, Over half a million rupees looted in year's sixth bank heist, *Dawn*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349007/over-half-a-million-rupees-looted-in-years-sixth-bank-heist>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹⁰⁵ Imtiaz Ali, Two alleged terrorists killed in Karachi's suburbs, *Dawn*, July 31, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1348763/two-alleged-terrorists-killed-in-karachis-suburbs>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹⁰⁶ Imtiaz Ali, Two 'IS militants' shot dead in encounter in Karachi, *Dawn*, August 1, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1348896/two-is-militants-shot-dead-in-encounter-in-karachi>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹⁰⁷ 40 Civilians Massacred in Sar-E-Pul Carnage, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 7, 2017, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=18795, accessed on August 7, 2017

			group's fighters as 'Apostates' the terror group in a statement said that the clashes between the two sides started last week and as a result several Taliban insurgents were killed or wounded. According to ISIS loyalists, Taliban had initially launched a coordinated attack on the fighters of the terror group which was repulsed by them. Taliban has not commented regarding the report so far. ¹⁰⁸		
3	August 4	Khost	Nearly 50 militants were killed during air raids in Mosakhel District of Khost Province, said the Ministry of Defence (MoD). ¹⁰⁹	50	NS
4	August 2	Baghlan	The Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) said that Dand-e-Ghori area of Pul-e-Khumri city was the central command and control point of the Taliban in Baghlan Province. Deputy Minister of Defense Major General Shaor Gul said that a military operation will soon be launched to destroy Taliban safe havens in Dand-e-Ghori. ¹¹⁰	Military operation to be launched	
5	August 1	Paktika	At least 60 Taliban militants were killed and 40 others were injured as security forces launched an offensive in Sarobi District of Paktika Province. The	60	40

¹⁰⁸ ISIS claims several Taliban insurgents killed, wounded in Ghor clashes, *Khaama Press*, August 6, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/isis-claims-several-taliban-insurgents-killed-wounded-in-ghor-clashes-03296>, accessed on August 7, 2107

¹⁰⁹ Airstrikes Leave 50 Rebels Dead in Khost: MoD, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 5, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/August%2006,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹¹⁰ MoD Plans to Launch Dand-E-Ghori Operation, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 3, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/August%2003,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on August 7, 2107

			offensive led to the purging of the militants from several villages of the district. Noor Agha, a resident of Surobi District, said that still many areas of the district were under Taliban control. ¹¹¹		
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Iraq

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	August 6	Saladin	At least 170 Islamic State militants were killed in airstrikes launched by the Iraqi army jets in Shirqat town north of Saladin Province. In a statement, the Iraqi Defense Ministry confirmed the incident. ¹¹²	170	NS
2	August 6	Kirkuk	A bomb exploded at Daqouq region south of Kirkuk, killing and wounding four members of the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. ¹¹³	4	4
3	August 5	Mosul	A senior Sudanese member of the Islamic State, identified as Ali Abdel-Ma'arouf <i>alias</i> Abu al-Asbat Al-Sudani, was killed during an offensive by Iraqi forces designed to clear Mosul from militants. He was the head of the group's prisons and a top legislator for the extremist group in Mosul. According to the	1	0

¹¹¹ 60 Rebels Eliminated, Scores Injured in Paktika Province, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 2, 2017,

<http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/August%2002,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹¹² Nehal Mostafa, At least 170 IS fighters killed in army airstrikes, north of Salahuddin, *Iraqi News*, August 6, 2017,

<http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/least-170-fighters-killed-army-airstrikes-north-salahuddin/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹¹³ Mohamed Mostafa, Bomb blast kills, wounds 4 Peshmerga fighters in Kirkuk, *Iraqi News*, August 6, 2017,

<http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/bomb-blast-kills-wounds-4-peshmerga-fighters-kirkuk/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

			sources, “Abdel-Ma’arouf’s family had set up a mourning tent in Shambat suburb in Khartoum North to receive condolences on the death of their son.” ¹¹⁴		
4	August 4	Mosul	Iraqi Police killed 13 IS militants who were sneaking into a village south of Mosul as security forces continue to comb the recaptured city. Captain Amir Watheq, from Nineveh Police service, said that the militants were sneaking into al-Houd village in Qayyara, south of Mosul, coming from the eastern side of the city of Shirqat, Salahuddin. ¹¹⁵	13	0
5	August 4	Tal Afar	IS militants executed four civilians over accusations of killing two of their comrades in the stronghold town of Tal Afar, west of Nineveh. A local source said that executions of civilians by the Islamic State have escalated over the past period over multiple charges, including collaboration with security forces and assaulting the fighters. ¹¹⁶	4	0

Syria

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Kille	Injured
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¹¹⁴ Mohamed Mostafa, Sudanese Jihadist killed in Mosul, mourning ceremony held back home, *Iraqi news*, August 6, 2016, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/sudanese-jihadist-killed-mosul-mourning-ceremony-held-back-home/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹¹⁵ Mohamed Mostafa, Thirteen Islamic State militants killed sneaking into southern Mosul village, *Iraqi News*, August 4, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/thirteen-islamic-state-militants-killed-sneaking-southern-mosul-village/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹¹⁶ Mohamed Mostafa, Islamic State execute four in Tal Afar for killing militants, *Iraqi News*, August 4, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/islamic-state-execute-four-tal-afar-killing-militants/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

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1	August 6	Damascus	At least 20 militants were killed and 40 more wounded inside Jobar District as the Syrian Arab Army's 42nd Brigade of the 4th Mechanized Division launched an assault on east Damascus suburbs of Jobar and 'Ayn Tarma. ¹¹⁷	20	40
2	August 6	Aleppo	Turkey delivered at least a dozen armoured vehicles to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) Police forces in northern Aleppo this past week, including the Al-Bab Plateau. This move comes just days after the US military delivered supplies to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria. ¹¹⁸	Delivery of arms	
3	August 5-6	Homs	The last 48 hours in the Homs Governorate have been a tremendous success for the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and their allies, as their forces liberate new areas from the ISIS. Backed by Russian airstrikes, the SAA's 18th Tank Division launched an attack northwest of the T-4 Military Airport, targeting the IS's last positions in the area. ¹¹⁹	NS	NS
4	August 3	Raqqqa	The US-led coalition allegedly struck a hospital in Raqqqa with phosphorus bombs killing a	1	7

¹¹⁷ Leith Fadel, No rest for Islamists as SAA troops unleash powerful assault in east Damascus, *Al Masdar News*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/no-rest-islamists-saa-troops-unleash-powerful-assault-east-damascus/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹¹⁸ Leith Fadel, Turkey delivers armored vehicles to rebels in northern Aleppo, *Al Masdar News*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/turkey-delivers-armored-vehicles-rebels-northern-aleppo/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹¹⁹ Leith Fadel, Syrian Army liberates new territory north of strategic Homs-Palmyra highway, *Al Masdar News*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-liberates-new-territory-north-strategic-homs-palmyra-highway/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

			woman and injuring seven children. ¹²⁰ Deputy Director of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent "SARC" Branch in Raqqa Dina al-Asa'ad said that the shelling of the National Hospital in Raqqa by the coalition with phosphorus bombs occurred on the night of August 3. ¹²¹		
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International Economic Issues

- **India-Bhutan Trade and Transit pact come into force**

According to an official statement released on July 31, 2017, India and Bhutan mutually decided to bring into force the 'new' bilateral Agreement on Trade, Commerce and Transit with effect from this July 29. The Agreement was last renewed on July 29, 2006 for a period of ten years. The validity of this Agreement was extended, with effect from July 29, 2016, for a period of one year or till the new agreement comes into force, through exchange of Diplomatic notes. The Agreement provides for a free trade regime between the territories of India and Bhutan. The Agreement also provides for duty free transit of Bhutanese merchandise for trade with third countries. The new Agreement on Trade, Commerce and Transit Agreement was signed on November 12, 2016 by the Minister of State (IC), Ministry of Commerce and Industry on behalf of the Government of India during her visit to Bhutan on November 11-13, 2016.¹²²

- **24x7 operationalization of Petrapole-Benapole Integrated Check Post**

According to an official statement released on July 31, 2017, India and Bangladesh have agreed to operate Petrapole-Benapole ICP 24x7, with effect from August 01, 2017 in order to facilitate movement of cargo across the border. The Petrapole-Benapole Integrated Check Post is a major route for India-Bangladesh bilateral trade. Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI) and Central Board of Excise and

¹²⁰ US-Led Coalition Airstrike Reportedly Kills Woman and 7 Children in Raqqa, *Sputnik News*, August 4, 2017,

<https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201708041056179539-coalition-raqqa-civilians-airstrike/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹²¹ US Coalition Reportedly Launches Strike With Phosphorus Bombs on Raqqa Hospital, *Sputnik News*, August 5, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201708051056204809-coalition-phosphorus-bombs-raqqa/>, accessed on August 7, 2017

¹²² Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, "The new Agreement on Trade, Commerce and Transit between India and Bhutan has come into force with effect from 29th July 2017", July 31, 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=169333> (accessed on August 1, 2017)

Customs (CBEC), the implementing agencies on the Indian side, have issued necessary instructions in this regard. The 24x7 operationalization of Petrapole-Benapole ICP is expected to be a significant milestone towards expeditious clearance of cargo and, hence boost the bilateral trade between the two countries.¹²³

- **19th RCEP Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) Meeting Concluded**

The 19th round of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) meetings and other related meetings were held from July 17-28, 2017 in Hyderabad, India. During the meeting, a set of key elements for significant outcomes, envisaged to be achieved by the end of 2017, were agreed. The Meeting also highlighted the need to have balanced discussions to progress negotiation across all areas, and to continue to deliver outcomes. During the meeting, all RCEP Participating Countries (RPCs) agreed that a good RCEP agreement has immense potential to deliver on new economic opportunities including job creation that are much needed in today's world of uncertainty. The Meeting expressed shared commitment to work collectively and in a cooperative manner, to progress the negotiations in an accelerated way, and achieve a modern, comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial agreement that addresses and balances the aspirations and sensitivities of participating countries.¹²⁴

- **India signs USD 329 million loan pact with AIIB for Gujarat road project**

India on August 4, 2017, signed a loan agreement with Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) for financing of USD 329 million for Gujarat Rural Roads Project. The objective of the project is to improve the rural road connectivity and accessibility (by providing all weather road connectivity) to 1,060 villages in all the 33 districts in Gujarat state benefiting about 8 million people.¹²⁵

¹²³ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, "24x7 operationalization of Petrapole-Benapole Integrated Check Post" July 31, 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx> (accessed on August 1, 2017)

¹²⁴ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, "19th RCEP Meeting", July 31, 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx> (accessed on August 1, 2017)

¹²⁵ "India signs USD 329 million loan pact with AIIB for Gujarat road project", *Economic Times*, August 4, 2017, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/india-signs-usd-329-million-loan-pact-with-aiib-for-gujarat-road-project/articleshow/59919423.cms> (accessed on August 5, 2017)