

Weekly Media Updates **(25-31 December, 2017)**

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Africa

- **Sudanese president vows to remove trade barriers for Turkey¹**

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on Monday vowed to remove all barriers hampering trade ties between Sudan and Turkey. Al-Bashir made the pledge when addressing the Sudanese-Turkish economic forum in presence of his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Sudanese president called for establishment of a Turkish bank in Sudan to facilitate trade exchange between the two countries. He also called for increasing the volume of the annual trade exchange between Sudan and Turkey to 10 billion U.S. dollars from current 500 million dollars.

Al-Bashir further urged the Turkish private sector to increase its investments in Sudan and benefit from the natural resources available in Sudan.

The Sudanese-Turkish economic forum sessions was held in Khartoum Monday with participation of around 200 businessmen from both countries together with a number of experts and economists.

Erdogan on Sunday arrived in the Sudanese capital Khartoum as the first stop of his tour in Africa that also took him to Chad and Tunisia.

Erdogan's visit marked the first time that a Turkish president has visited Sudan since the independence of the North African nation in 1956.

- **Republic of Congo Reaches Peace Deal With 'Ninja' Rebels²**

The Republic of Congo on 23, December 2017, Saturday agreed a ceasefire with rebels in the southeast region of Pool, ending a 15-year conflict that forced tens of thousands to flee their homes.

The conflict escalated in April 2016 after a contested presidential election was won by the 74-year-old President Denis Sassou Nguesso, who has ruled the country for 33 of the past 38 years

Frederic Bintsamou, a militia leader better known as Pastor Ntumi, battled Sassou Nguesso during and after a civil war in 1997. The government has blamed him for deadly attacks on police military and government bases. The so-called Ninja

¹ Africa Updates, 26 Decemebr2017, <http://africaupdates.info/sudanese-president-vows-to-remove-trade-barriers-for-turkey/>

² DW, 23 December2017,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201712260093.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Ainternal&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabafbt

militants he led also erected blockades aimed at choking off trade in the Pool region.

It's unclear how many people may have died in the years-long conflict. But more than 200,000 people were forced to flee their homes. The displacements prompted human rights groups to accuse government troops of abuse.

Interior Ministry security adviser François Ndé and Pastor Ntumi's representative, Jean Gustave N'tondo, signed the peace agreement between the two sides

N'Tondo assured respect for the cease-fire as long as the government helped resettle people in the region and reintegrated fighters.

The agreement calls for the militias to hand over their weapons and allow the free movement of trade between the capital Brazzaville and the commercial hub of Pointe Noire. During hostilities, rail and road traffic was often brought to a halt by the militias.

Ecowas to Spend U.S.\$29 Bn On Development Projects in West Africa³

Economic Community of West African States has said that it has concluded plans for sub-regional development projects worth 29.66 billion dollars for the period of 2018 to 2022.

President of the ECOWAS Commission, Marcel Alain de Souza said this at the just concluded Second Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament held in Abuja, while presenting the Status Report on the State of the Community.

De Souza was represented by the commission's Vice President, Edward Singhaty.

He said that the projects would come under the Community Development Programme and cover seven priority sectors including infrastructure, energy, agriculture and health.

For the period 2018 to 2022, the commission has selected seven priority projects from key sectors namely: Infrastructure, energy, agriculture and health.

Speaking on the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Union and West Africa, he said that only Gambia, Mauritania and Nigeria were yet to sign.

Furthermore, De Souza said that the meeting of the Presidential Task Force on the proposed ECOWAS single currency was scheduled to hold in Feb. 2018.

³ Vanguard, 28 December 2017,
http://allafrica.com/stories/201712290145.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkgta

He said the EPA, ECOWAS single currency, the Common External Tariff among others, were plans aimed at promotion integration, intraregional trade and international cooperation.

- **Decisive Win for George Weah in Liberian Presidential Election⁴**

After an agonizing wait, the outcome of the 2017 Presidential elections appears to have been decided with George Weah's commanding lead in the announced preliminary results of the December 26 runoff election by the Chairman of the National Elections Commission (NEC), Jerome Korkoya. It can be recalled that following the announcement of the results of the October 10 elections in which no party attained the 50 plus one percent thresh-hold, the Liberty Party (LP), the All Liberian Party (ALP), the Alternative National Congress as well as the Unity Party, charging widespread fraud and irregularities, filed a motion to the Supreme Court to annul the elections results. The Supreme Court however ruled that the alleged fraud and irregularities were not of sufficient magnitude and scope to warrant an annulment of the results. It instead ordered the NEC to conduct a runoff based on the attainment of certain benchmarks, foremost amongst which was the cleanup of the Final Registration Roll (FRR) and the public display of the cleaned-up rolls at all polling places around the country before the conduct of the elections.

- **South African Court Raises Pressure for Zuma to Go⁵**

South Africa's highest court ruled that the Parliament stood behind the scandal-plagued president during his eight years in office and failed to properly investigate Mr. Zuma's conduct in a long-standing corruption case when it voted not to impeach him. The court ordered lawmakers to create rules to regulate a president's impeachment, a move that makes it more likely that ANC leaders will try to force Mr. Zuma's removal as president, to avoid the distraction and embarrassment of potentially impeaching a lame-duck leader.

- **Mozambique Cracks Down on Tanzanians Accused of Terrorism⁶**

Mozambique has announced a security crackdown that will target Tanzanians accused of "terrorism" after a spate of attacks in the country's north, blamed by authorities on jihadists. On Tuesday, police spokesperson Inacio Dino announced the start of a "terrorist hunt" in the forests around Mutumbate in Cabo Delgado province. Roughly three dozen Tanzanian nationals sought by police will be targeted, Dino said.

⁴ Daily Observer, 29 December 2017, <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/decisive-win-for-george-weah/>

⁵ The New York Times, 29 December 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/29/world/africa/south-africa-court-zuma-impeach.html>

⁶ Business Live, 28 December 2017, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2017-12-28-mozambique-cracks-down-on-tanzanians-accused-of-terrorism/>

- **Mozambique Earns US\$3.38b, Surpasses 2017 Revenue Target⁷**

Mozambique's Tax Authority (AT) surpassed its 2017 tax collection target by six per cent, after it earned US\$3.38 billion by 27 December. Addressing a media briefing on Friday in Maputo, AT chairperson Amelia Nakhare Nakhare said the target "will certainly be exceeded by more than six per cent, if the final four days of the year are taken into account". She added that these figures do not include the US\$352.6 million of capital gains tax paid by the Italian energy company, ENI, on the sale of shares in the natural gas fields of the Rovuma Basin in the far north of the country to the American oil and gas giant, ExxonMobil.

- **Zambia Deploys Army to Fight Cholera Outbreak⁸**

Zambia's President Edgar Lungu has dispatched the military to help fight a cholera outbreak, which has killed 41 people in the capital, Lusaka, and affected more than 1,500 others since September. In a Facebook post late on Friday, Lungu said "all three wings of the Defence Force" had been deployed "to escalate efforts" to minimise the spread of the disease.

- **Somalia Takes Control of Its Own Skies⁹**

The Somali government has retaken control of its air space after more than two decades. Air traffic over the Horn of Africa nation had been controlled by the United Nations from neighboring Kenya since 1992, a year after the Somali civil war broke out. Inaugurating the aviation control center in the capital, Mogadishu, President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo said this is a sign the country is moving forward. Somalia's aviation and air transport minister, Mohamed Abdullahi Salad, told reporters the entire process of controlling the country's skies will be complete in early 2018.

- **South Sudan Cease-Fire Begins Amid Calls for Compliance¹⁰**

A cease-fire between government and several rebel groups in war-torn South Sudan went into effect on Sunday, aiming to revive a stalled 2015 peace deal and end four years of civil war. The South Sudanese government and numerous opposition factions on Thursday signed a cessation of hostilities agreement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and it began on December 24, 2017. The cease-fire agreement brokered by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an east Africa regional bloc, asked the warring parties to stop military operations,

⁷ Journal du Cameroun, 29 December 2017, <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/mozambique-earns-3-38b-surpasses-2017-revenue-target/>

⁸ Al Jazeera, 31 December 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/zambia-deploys-army-fight-cholera-outbreak-171230190812235.html>

⁹ Voice of America, 28 December 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-takes-control-of-its-own-skies/4182804.html>

¹⁰ Xinhua Net, 25 December 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/25/c_136851242.htm

demands that forces remain in their bases and further called for release of political detainees.

- **South Sudan Rebel Appointed Governor Abducted in Kenya¹¹**

An armed South Sudan opposition governor has been abducted in neighbouring Kenya, sparking concerns about security and the safety of the key opposition figures in the eastern African country. The abduction occurred at the refugee camp in northern Kenya on Friday evening. Rebel deputy spokesman Paul Lam Gabriel said in a statement released on Sunday that the opposition appointed the Governor of Kapoeta State Marko Lokidor Lochapio was abducted from Kakuma Refugee Camp. Gabriel, according to the statement, said the abducted rebel official was driven to Lokichogio the same night and was taken to Nadapal w on Saturday.

- **Renewed Unrest in Ethiopia's Oromia Regional State Leaves 1 Dead¹²**

Renewed unrest in Ethiopia's central Oromia regional state left one person dead and four others injured. Speaking to journalists, Ketema Bekelcha, Head of security department at Huro Guduru Wollega zone of Oromia regional state, said the unrest occurred on Friday when youths in Shambu city, 303 km northwest of Addis Ababa, tried to rob passing trucks carrying sugar. The incident is the second time in two months that unrest over sugar being transported in Oromia caused deaths. Martial law declared in October 2016 and later lifted in August 2017 had calmed Oromia regional state, but renewed anti-government protests starting October left several people dead and property damages.

- **Sudan Says Next Round of Peace Talks on Two Areas “Decisive”¹³**

The government negotiating team for the Two Areas talks with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/North (SPLM-N) said the next round of talks would be decisive stressing no new items will be added to the discussions agenda. The Sudanese army has been fighting the SPLM-N rebels in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan, also known as the Two Areas since 2011. Talks between the Sudanese government and SPLM-N for a cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access are stalled since August 2016. The SPLM-N asked the African mediation to delay the talks until its internal divisions were resolved and an official delegation was appointed.

- **Contact Made with 'Missing' Angolan Satellite¹⁴**

Russian scientists have restored communications with a satellite days after they lost contact with it. Launched on 26 December 2017, Angosat-1 will boost mobile and net communications in Angola as well as broadcast radio and TV shows. Soon

¹¹ Sudan Tribune, 31 December 2017, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64385>

¹² Xinhua Net, 31 December 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/31/c_136862115.htm

¹³ Sudan Tribune, 31 December 2017, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64387>

¹⁴ BBC News, 29 December 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-42510865>

after launch, Russian ground control staff said they were no longer receiving data from the spacecraft. It comes soon after Russia revealed "programming errors" led to the loss of another multi-million pound satellite. The launch of Angosat-1 was the culmination of a project started in 2009 and was the first communications satellite built for Angola. The development and launch of the satellite cost more than 286 million Euros (£253m).

China

- **China, Pakistan, Afghanistan agree to discuss extending economic corridor**

Foreign Ministers from China, Pakistan and Afghanistan on 26 December agreed to discuss ways to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.

"In the long run, through Afghanistan, we will gradually connect the CPEC with the China-Central and Western Asia Economic Corridor," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters after China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' meeting in Beijing.

"With regard to specific cooperation projects and ways of cooperation, we will determine through tripartite consultations on an equal footing" he said.¹⁵

- **Forum probes ties between water, civilization**

More than 200 scholars and experts from universities and academic institutions around the world recently gathered in Shanghai to discuss the relationship between water resources management and the evolution of ancient civilizations under the theme "Water, Society and Civilization."

Noting the dialectical, complicated relationship between water and the rise and fall of ancient civilizations, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) President Wang Weiguang stressed the significance of investigating how ancient civilizations progressed through different forms of water resources management and utilization because water is a basic natural resource needed to sustain the earth's ecosystem and support the economic development of human society.¹⁶

- **Tourism Promotion Seminar Organized in Shanghai**

Consulate General of India, Shanghai along with Shanghai Tourism Trade Association jointly organized a Seminar entitled "Incredible India: Tourism Promotion Seminar" on 27 December 2017 in Shanghai to promote India Tourism. The seminar was attended inter-alia, by nearly 120 leading tourism/travel agencies

¹⁵ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/41201.htm>

¹⁶ http://english.cssn.cn/topstories/201712/t20171215_3782152.shtml

from the Eastern China region, tourism association, tourism experts, and members of media.¹⁷

- **China unveils tax exemption to attract foreign investment**

China's Ministry of Finance (MOF) said on 28 December 2017 that it will exempt foreign companies from paying provisional withholding income tax on profits they re-invest in the country.

The news comes as the Chinese government is moving to attract foreign investors after a host of countries unveiled similar measures to lure foreign and domestic investment.

Foreign companies play an increasingly important role in boosting China's economy and promoting industrial and technological upgrades. The new policy will provide a better environment for foreign companies in the long-run, encourage them to continuously expand investment in China and boost win-win cooperation, the MOF said on its website.

The exemption is effective from January 1, 2017, meaning taxes paid this year will be refunded.¹⁸

- **President Xi delivers New Year speech vowing resolute reform in 2018**

Chinese President Xi Jinping December 31, 2017 delivered a New Year speech, vowing that China would resolutely carry out reform in 2018. "We will take the opportunity of celebrating the 40th anniversary of the reform and opening-up in 2018 to further carry out reform, as reform and opening-up is the path we must take to make progress in contemporary China and to realize the Chinese dream," Xi said.

He cited a Chinese adage, saying that the Chinese people would "cut paths through mountains, and build bridges across rivers" to move forward on reform. He extended New Year greetings to all Chinese, and best wishes to friends all over the world. Xi said the year 2018 marked the first year of fully implementing "the spirit of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC)," which outlines China's desired development blueprint over the next three decades.¹⁹

- **"1992 Consensus" to be further upheld in 2018: mainland's Taiwan affairs chief**

The year 2018 will see the Chinese mainland unswervingly upholding the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus and opposing all forms of "Taiwan independence," said the Chinese mainland's Taiwan affairs chief Zhang Zhijun. The

¹⁷ <http://www.indianconsulate.org.cn/slide.php?id=235>

¹⁸ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/41667.htm>

¹⁹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/31/c_136863468.htm

19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) charted direction for pushing forward the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations, and advancing the process toward the peaceful reunification of China in the new era, said Zhang, head of the Taiwan Work Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, in his New Year message carried by the "Relations Across Taiwan Straits" periodical. Zhang said the cross-Strait situation was "complex and severe" in 2017. The Democratic Progressive Party administration refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus and impeded cross-Strait exchanges, he said.²⁰

- **Beijing's top office on Hong Kong affairs says city 'must implement' controversial joint checkpoint for high-speed rail**

China's State Council-level institution overseeing Hong Kong affairs on Wednesday said the city "must implement" a controversial joint checkpoint for the cross-border rail link under construction as Beijing had formally approved the plan, even as the city's legal experts maintained that it went against the rule of law. The Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) in Beijing made its remarks after China's top legislative body, the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) authorised a plan where mainland Chinese officials would enforce national laws in part of the West Kowloon station, which will be the Hong Kong terminus for an express rail link connecting it to Guangzhou and Shenzhen.²¹

- **China's trade minister pledges easier market access for foreign investors**

China will make it easier for foreign investors to access the country's markets, will protect their rights and ensure a fair and transparent investment environment, Trade Minister Zhong Shan said in comments published on 31 December. Writing in the latest issue of the Communist Party theoretical journal Qiushi, Zhong said the government would "raise the level of use of foreign investment". China would make market access a lot easier, protect the legitimate rights of foreign firms and create a "fair, transparent and predictable business environment", he added, without giving details. Foreign business groups in China have warned that overseas companies face an increasingly hostile environment and that Beijing's policies and regulations unfairly favour domestic competitors.²²

²⁰ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/31/c_136863479.htm

²¹ <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/2126016/beijings-top-office-hong-kong-affairs-says-city-must>

²² <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2126345/chinas-trade-minister-pledges-easier-market-access-foreign>

European Union

- **Parliament in Italy Dissolved**

Italian President Sergio Mattarella has dissolved the Parliament on 28 December 2017. The elections for the new Parliament would be held on March 4, 2018. Analysts are predicting a hung parliament, which may impact political instability in the country. However, Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, “We mustn't dramatize the risk of instability; we are quite inoculated against it.”²³

Spain

- **Spanish King Urged to Avoid Confrontation in Christmas Speech**

In his Christmas Eve address, King Felipe VI called on Catalonia's newly elected parliament to ‘renounce further moves toward secession from Spain.’ The King said, “The way forward cannot once again lead to confrontation or exclusion that, as we now know, only generates discord, uncertainty, anguish.” The previous Catalonia's parliament was dissolved after it voted to declare Catalonia an independent republic in October, 2017.²⁴

Germany

- **Chancellor Merkel's New Year Address**

In her New Year address, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for respecting political differences in the country. The Chancellor said, “it has been a long time since the differences of opinion about this have been so stark.” She added, “Some have even spoken of a rift running through our society.”

Chancellor Merkel is negotiating to form the next coalition government in the country. She assured that a new government would be formed as quickly as possible. She said, “The world will not wait for us.” She also said that her country should aim to secure jobs, generate more employment opportunities, improve education, reduce regional inequalities and take benefits of new digital technologies. The Chancellor also stressed on the importance of the EU in success of Germany. She urged that the 27-country bloc to ‘band together and secure its external border in the next few years.’²⁵

²³ Italy's parliament dissolved ahead of election, DW, December 28, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/italys-parliament-dissolved-ahead-of-election/a-41955379>

²⁴ Spanish king urges Catalan lawmakers to avoid confrontation in Christmas speech, France 24, December 25, 2017, <http://www.france24.com/en/20171225-spain-catalonia-king-felipe-christmas-speech-catalan-independence-lawmakers-calm>

France

- **French President Macron's New Year Speech**

In his New Year speech, French President Macron stressed on strengthening the European Union. The President said, "I deeply believe Europe can become that economic, social, environmentally-friendly, scientific power that will be able to face China and the United States." He further noted, "Europe is good for France. France can't succeed without a strong Europe."²⁶ He also said that France would continue to take "determined action" in the fight against Islamist terrorism. He believes that the Islamic State would be close to eradicated in Syria. He said, "We must win the peace."²⁷

The EU

- **The EU Council Presidency**

Bulgaria has taken over the rotating presidency of the EU Council. The EU Council Presidency is rotated in six months among the member states. Lilyana Pavlova, Bulgaria's Minister for the EU Presidency, stated that a successful presidency would require reaching political consensus and mutual understanding, and engaging in dialogue.²⁸

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Former Democratic Party leader Renho joins CDPJ**

On December 28, 2017, former Chief of Democratic Party Renho joined the Constitutional Democratic Party. She is the sixth Upper House lawmaker to join the opposition party. Since the DP's decision on how to handle her letter of

²⁵ Angela Merkel calls on Germans to respect political differences in New Year's address, DW, December 31, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkel-calls-on-germans-to-respect-political-differences-in-new-years-address/a-41982501>

²⁶ Angelique Chrisafis 'Macron's new year's speech: 'France can't succeed without a strong Europe'', The Guardian, December 31, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/31/macrons-new-years-speech-france-cant-succeed-without-a-strong-europe>

²⁷ Macron warns against nationalism, scepticism in New Year's message, France 24, December 31, 2017, <http://www.france24.com/en/20171231-macron-delivers-annual-new-years-eve-address-elysee-palace-france-live>

²⁸ Alexander Andreev, Bulgaria takes over EU presidency in turbulent times, DW, January 1, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/bulgaria-takes-over-eu-presidency-in-turbulent-times/a-41963616>

resignation isn't due until next year, Renho will have dual membership for the time being.²⁹

- **Russia warns Tokyo on its decision to deploy US missile Defense System**

Recent Japanese government's decision to deploy a U.S. missile defense system-Aegis will damage Moscow's relations with Tokyo said Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on December 28, 2017. She also said that the deployment is also a breach by Washington of a landmark arms control treaty, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Russia and Japan never formally ended their hostilities after World War Two because of a dispute over a chain of islands in the Pacific.³⁰

- **Japan dismisses South Korean criticism of 'comfort women' deal**

On December 27, 2017 Tokyo rejected a South Korean government report that raised doubts over the process that led to a bilateral deal aimed at resolving a dispute over Korean women who were forced to work in Japan's wartime military brothels. "We see no problem in the process leading to the accord, which followed a legitimate negotiation process between the two governments," Foreign Minister Taro Kono said in a statement, adding that seeking to change the 2015 deal is "totally unacceptable." Kono added that Tokyo "strongly demands" that Seoul steadily implement the deal, which the two countries confirmed at the time would resolve "finally and irreversibly" the comfort women issue.

In the report issued the same day, a South Korean government task force said the opinions of former comfort women were not "sufficiently reflected" in the negotiation process led by the government of President Moon Jae-in's impeached predecessor Park Geun-hye. It also said the talks were conducted secretly and a renewed dispute over the issue was "unavoidable" despite the declaration by the two governments in 2015 that the issue had been resolved.³¹

- **U.S. sanctions 2 N.K. officials over missile program**

The United States on December 26, 2017 sanctioned two senior North Korean officials for their involvement in the regime's illicit ballistic missile program. The Treasury Department said in a press release it has designated Kim Jong-sik and Ri Pyong-chol, both belonging to the Munitions Industry Department of the North's

²⁹ "CDP grants membership to former DP leader Renho; DP says resignation not final", Japan Times, December 28, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/28/national/politics-diplomacy/cdp-grants-membership-former-dp-leader-renho/>

³⁰ "Russia says Tokyo's deployment of U.S. missiles a blow to relations and will impact peace treaty negotiations", The Japan Times, December 28, 2017, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/28/national/politics-diplomacy/russia-says-tokyos-deployment-u-s-missiles-blow-relations-will-impact-peace-treaty-negotiations/#.WklJyze_PIU

³¹ "Japan dismisses South Korean criticism of 'comfort women' deal", The Japan Times, December 27, 2017, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/27/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-dismisses-south-korean-criticism-comfort-women-deal/#.WklKMze_PIU

Workers' Party of Korea. Any of their property within U.S. jurisdiction is blocked and American citizens are generally banned from engaging in transactions with them.³²

- **N. Korea says there will be no change to its nuclear policy in 2018**

On December 30, 2017 North Korea's official media KCNA said that Pyongyang will continue to enhance its nuclear capabilities in the future, declaring the communist state an "invincible" and "responsible" nuclear power. "The DPRK, an undeniable new strategic state and nuclear power of Juche, declares: Do not expect any change in its policy. Its entity as an invincible power can neither be undermined nor be stamped out," the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in what it called a detailed report titled "No Force Can Prevail over Independence and Justice."³³

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

Myanmar

- **Bangladesh targets 100,000 for first Rohingya repatriation**

Bangladesh wants to send up to 100,000 Rohingya back to Myanmar in the first batch of repatriations of Muslim refugees who fled ethnic violence this year. Senior minister Obaidul Quader said a list of 100,000 names was to be sent to Myanmar authorities so repatriations could start in late January under an accord between the two governments.³⁴

- **Drone-flying camera crew freed from jail in Myanmar**

Foreign and local journalists jailed for flying a drone near Myanmar's parliament were freed after spending two months in prison, in a case that spiked alarm over an increasingly dangerous climate for reporters in the country. Lau Hon Meng from Singapore and Mok Choy Lin from Malaysia were on assignment for Turkish state broadcaster TRT when they were detained in late October along with Myanmar journalist Aung Naing Soe and driver Hla Tin while.³⁵

- **Myanmar 'feels sad' over US sanction decision**

³² "U.S. sanctions 2 N.K. officials over missile program", The Yonhap News, December 26, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2017/12/27/0301000000AEN20171227000352315.html>

³³ "N. Korea says there will be no change to its nuclear policy in 2018", The Yonhap News, December 30, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/12/30/0401000000AEN20171230000800315.html>

³⁴ Bangladesh targets 100,000 for first Rohingya repatriation, 30th December 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-regional/bangladesh-targets-100000-first-rohingya-repatriation>

³⁵ Drone-flying camera crew freed from jail in Myanmar, 29 December 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/drone-flying-camera-crew-freed-jail-myanmar>

Myanmar "feels sad" over a U.S. decision to sanction a military general, a government spokesman said, after Washington linked the commander last week to abuses against the Rohingya Muslim minority. This targeted sanction is based on unreliable accusations without evidence, as we have repeatedly said, so we feel sad for that," Zaw Htay, spokesman for Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, told Reuters by phone.³⁶

- **UN Rights Investigator Calls for Pressure on China, Russia over Myanmar Abuses**

The United Nations' independent investigator into human rights in Myanmar has called for international pressure on China and Russia to try to get them to oppose human rights abuses in Myanmar. UN special rapporteur Yanghee Lee, who was last week barred by the Myanmar government from visiting the country, singled out China and Russia because they had failed to back some moves in the UN aimed at trying to halt the Myanmar military's crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim community in Rakhine State.³⁷

North America

Canada

- **Canada's military seeks major cyber defence upgrade**

Canada's military says it needs to upgrade its defences against cyberattacks, documents released by the Department of National Defence read. The documents, released by the department earlier this month, detail a significant and long-term project to give military brass better "situational awareness" of cyber space, guard against attacks, and "respond" to "advanced threats." The push for stronger online defences comes as Canada and NATO allies are adapting military doctrine to address the growing role of cyber operations in modern warfare. There are two separate but related initiatives laid out in the documents: a Cyber Security Awareness project and an upgraded Defensive Cyber Operations unit. The former aims to give military commanders better awareness of the Forces' online security, while the latter would create an in-house team to monitor DND's networks around the clock to detect and respond to cyberattacks and "maintain commanders' freedom of manoeuvre in cyberspace."³⁸

³⁶ Myanmar 'feels sad' over US sanction decision, 28th December 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/myanmar-%E2%80%98feels-sad%E2%80%99-over-us-sanction-decision>

³⁷ UN Rights Investigator Calls for Pressure on China, Russia over Myanmar Abuses, 29th December 2017, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/un-rights-investigator-calls-pressure-china-russia-myanmar-abuses.html>

³⁸ Alex Boutilier, "Canada's military seeks major cyber defence upgrade," <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/12/27/canadas-military-seeks-major-cyber-defence-upgrade.html>, Accessed on 01 January 2018.

- **Canadian PM Justin Trudeau to visit India in February**

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh will meet with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during his visit to India in late February, if the government requests, but he will raise the prickly issue of “pro-Khalistan propaganda”, the CM’s office says. According to Canadian officials, Mr. Trudeau, whose visit is expected in “early 2018”, will travel after the Canadian House of Commons goes into recess on February 17, and will likely visit India from February 19-23.³⁹

The United States

- **Rex Tillerson: I Am Proud of Our Diplomacy**

In an oped piece to the New York Time, Sec. Tillerson wrote, “ver the past year, the United States has faced immense challenges in its dealings with North Korea, China and Russia, and in its efforts to defeat international terrorism. But Americans should be encouraged by the progress the State Department and United States Agency for International Development have made in pushing for global peace and stability.... Defeating terrorism remains one of the president’s highest priorities. The administration’s aggressive strategy to counter the Islamic State delegates greater authority to American military commanders on the battlefield, giving our forces more freedom and speed to do what they do best, in partnership with indigenous fighting forces.... I am proud of what our State Department and Agency for International Development teams around the world have accomplished this year, and our progress will continue in 2018 and beyond.”⁴⁰

- **US forces fighting ISIS shifting focus to more 'stabilizing' role in 2018**

Defense Secretary James Mattis told reporters that ISIS in 2018 will be seen as a "brand" for terrorists but insisted the group has lost its luster and still needs to be hunted down. Globally, Mattis also said the DoD planned to use conventional forces more for some missions previously done by special operations teams. Special forces have increasingly been used by Washington for counter-terrorism operations in Africa and elsewhere, and the number of casualties has been growing too. At the same time, Mattis said U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria would shift their focus in 2018 from largely offensive missions to a stabilizing role that supports rebuilding in the war-torn region. The secretary's remarks underscore that the

³⁹ Suhasini Haidar and Vikas Vasudeva, “Canadian PM Justin Trudeau to visit India in February,” <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/canadian-pm-to-visit-india-in-february/article22327924.ece>, Accessed on 01 January 2018.

⁴⁰ Rex Tillerson, “I am Proud of Our Diplomacy,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/27/opinion/rex-tillerson-state-department-diplomacy.html>, Accessed on 01 January 2018.

Trump administration has no immediate plans to remove U.S. troops from Syria despite pressure from the Russians to do just that.⁴¹

- **Trump threatens China, says Russia inquiry makes America 'look very bad'**

President Donald Trump suggested Thursday that he may act on his numerous threats against China following reports of the Asian giant providing oil to North Korea. "If they don't help us with North Korea, then I can do what I've always said I want to do," he told The New York Times. All year, Trump has repeatedly warned Beijing of punitive tariffs that will come if China continues with what Washington deems unfair trade practices. "They have to help us much more," he told the Times. The president has taken an aggressive stance toward China over the last 24 hours. Separately Trump tweeted that there will "never be a friendly solution to the North Korea problem" if Beijing continues to aid Pyongyang. Speaking to the Times at what was apparently an impromptu interview at the Trump International Golf Club in Florida, the president also said he expects fair treatment from an ongoing inquiry about Russian interference in the 2016 election.⁴²

Mexico

- **Mexico claims stronger U.S. ties in 2017 despite Trump's wall rhetoric**

Despite their public differences over trade and immigration, Mexico strengthened its ties with the United States in 2017, the Mexican Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a statement. At the start of the year, President Enrique Pena Nieto formulated 10 goals and five principles to guide his country's relationship with the new U.S. government under President Donald Trump. The goals included getting a commitment from Washington to respect the legal rights of Mexican citizens and ensuring the free flow of remittances from the U.S. that is a pillar of Mexico's economy. The principles range from holding comprehensive negotiations that also covered security, terrorism, migration and drug trafficking, as well as North American integration, involving Mexico, Canada and the U.S. The ministry said Mexico strengthened political dialogue with U.S. authorities at the highest level. Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray visited the U.S. over 20 times this year to meet with White House and other officials. Ties between the two countries strained ahead of Trump assuming office in January, thanks to his campaign promise to

⁴¹ Jeff Daniels, "Mattis: US forces fighting ISIS shifting focus to more 'stabilizing' role in 2018," <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/12/29/dod-secretary-mattis-us-forces-fighting-isis-shifting-focus-in-2018.html>, Accessed on 01 January 2018.

⁴² Nyshka Chandran, "Trump threatens China, says Russia inquiry makes America 'look very bad'," <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/12/28/donald-trump-threatens-china-in-new-york-times-interview.html>, Accessed on 01 January 2018.

stem illegal immigration from Mexico by building a wall along their shared border.⁴³

- **Mexico presidential hopeful hemmed in by ruling party legacy**

Mired in allegations of corruption, Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has thrown its weight behind an untainted outsider in a bid to clean up its image and hang on to the presidency in elections next July. But having never been a member of the party, former finance minister and PRI presidential hopeful Jose Antonio Meade faces a delicate balancing act persuading undecided voters he will cut out graft without alienating the grassroots support he needs to win. A survey by polling firm Parametria published on Dec. 19 put him 11 percentage points behind leftist front-runner Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a former Mexico City mayor who has spent years railing against corruption and inequality. Serving in the cabinet for almost seven years running, Meade has sold himself as irreproachably honest and the safest pair of hands for the economy, painting Lopez Obrador and conservative rival Ricardo Anaya as risky bets for Mexico's stability. However, his time in government has left the 48-year-old with a problematic legacy to defend.⁴⁴

Latin America and Caribbean Countries

Argentina

- **Argentine Senate approves tax reform and 2018 budget**

Argentina's Senate on December 27, 2017 gave final approval to the government's tax reform and 2018 budget plan, part of President Mauricio Macri's push to cut business costs and attract investment to Latin America's third top economy. Macri was elected in late 2015 with a mandate to free the markets by ditching the heavy controls put on the economy by the previous government. The 2018 budget bill foresees economic growth of 3.5% and average inflation of 15.7%. On December 19, Congress approved Macri's pension reform plan, part of his campaign to cut Argentina's fiscal deficit to 3.2% of GDP by the end of 2018 from 4.2% currently. The pension reform debate prompted violent protests outside of Congress and a 24-hour general strike by labour unions that accuse Macri of cutting benefits to already-struggling pensioners while lowering corporate income taxes. Argentina's economic activity expanded 5.2% in October compared with the same month last

⁴³ Xinhua, "Mexico claims stronger U.S. ties in 2017 despite Trump's wall rhetoric," http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/26/c_136852613.htm, Accessed on 01 January 2018.

⁴⁴ Dave Graham, "Mexico presidential hopeful hemmed in by ruling party legacy," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-election/mexico-presidential-hopeful-hemmed-in-by-ruling-party-legacy-idUSKBN1ELOZO>, Accessed on 01 January 2018.

year, government data showed on December 27, bringing the country closer to the level that would trigger a payout of growth-linked bonds.⁴⁵

Brazil

- **Brazil expels top Venezuelan diplomat in tit-for-tat move**

Venezuelan chargé d'affaires Gerardo Antonio Delgado Maldonado was considered a persona non grata on December 26, 2017 by the Brazilian government, days after Caracas kicked out Brazil's top diplomat Ruy Pereira. Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it is abiding by the principle of reciprocity. The Brazilian government informed the Venezuelan representative of its decision. When someone is declared a persona non grata, they normally have 72 hours to leave the country. The ministry, however, did not stipulate a deadline for Mr. Maldonado to leave. Mr. Maldonado has been in charge of the Venezuelan embassy in Brasília ever since then-ambassador, Alberto Efraim Castellar Padilla, was summoned back to Venezuela in May of 2016 as a form of protesting against the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff. Caracas has been fiercely pushing back against growing international condemnation of President Nicolas Maduro's tightening hold on power. Canada, the U.S., Europe and most Latin American nations have denounced what they call the trampling of democracy and human rights in the country.⁴⁶

- **Lula's presidential ambition: on January 24 a Porto Alegre court will rule on his appeal**

Brazil's former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will learn in January whether a prison sentence against him is upheld, officials said, potentially knocking him out of next year's presidential election. Lula was sentenced in July to 9.5 years behind bars after being convicted of corruption in Brazil's huge "Car Wash" graft scandal. The court in Porto Alegre said it will rule on his appeal January 24. That could decide whether Lula can take part in October 2018 presidential elections in which he is currently the frontrunner. Although experts say Lula may still manage to find ways to appeal further, a ruling against him would throw the already unusual race into further uncertainty. After years of economic decline and corruption scandals, Brazilians are so far turning away from centrist, traditional candidates, with Lula a comfortable leader in the polls, despite his many legal problems. An appeals court spokesman said that a three-judge panel would consider the case. Investigators have revealed that swaths of political parties and politicians -- allegedly including current President Michel Temer, Lula and many others at the top -- took bribes

⁴⁵ "Argentine Senate Approves Tax Reform and 2018 Budget; Economy Expanded 0.2 in October," December 28, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/28/argentine-senate-approves-tax-reform-and-2018-budget-economy-expanded-0.2-in-october> 28, 2017, Accessed on January 1, 2018.

⁴⁶ "Brazil Expels Top Venezuelan Diplomat in Tit-for Tat," December 27, 2017, <http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/12/27/brazil-expels-top-venezuelan-diplomat-in-tit-for-tat-move/>, Accessed on January 1, 2018.

from big Brazilian companies for years in exchange for help in getting them contracts.⁴⁷

- **Temer appoints new Labor minister; officials resign to run in 2018 elections**

Brazilian President Michel Temer will appoint Congressman Pedro Fernandes as the new labor minister, the leader of the Brazilian Labour Party, Jovair Arantes, said on December 28, 2017. Brazilian Labor Minister Ronaldo Nogueira has resigned because he plans to seek a seat in Chamber of Deputies in next year's election. The Labor Ministry's press office said Nogueira resigned so he can become a candidate to serve in Congress' lower house. Nogueira belongs to the right-of-center Brazilian Labor Party. Temer is expected to change most ministers by next April 2018, when politicians need to leave their government posts to run for congressional elections scheduled for October 2018. In related news it was reported that the Brazilian economy lost 12,292 jobs in November as 1,111,798 people were hired and 1,124,090 were dismissed during the last month, according to government data. From January to November, however, there was a 299,635 net gain in jobs. According to the data, only the retail sector had a positive result in November, creating 68,602 jobs, whereas manufacturing had the worst performance, shutting down 29,006 job positions, followed by construction (-22,826).⁴⁸

Chile

- **Chile records highest annual increase in copper price since 2010**

On the last business day of 2017, copper stopped its impressive bull run, which lasted for 13 consecutive days. However, despite the 0.82% drop on December 29, 2017 on the London Metal Exchange, the red metal closed 2017 with an annual increase that was not seen since 2010. On December 29, the red metal was traded at US\$ 3.246 per pound, US\$3.273 on December 28, and US\$3.239 on December 27. Thus, Chile's main export recorded a weekly increase of 1.96% in its value per pound, while the monthly increased by 5.85%. With respect to December 30, 2016, where it was quoted at US\$2.49521, copper registered an advance of US\$0.75115, which means that it increased its value per pound by 30.10% in the year. The increase in its price was not seen since 2010, according to data from Bci Estudios, where it registered an annual increase of 30.56%. For its part, in the year 2010, the minimum price of the commodity was registered on May 8, 2010, when the red

⁴⁷ "Lula's Presidential Ambition on January 24 a Porto Alegre Court Will Rule on his Appeal," December 31, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/31/lula-s-presidential-ambition-on-january-24-a-porto-alegre-court-will-rule-on-his-appeal>, Accessed on January 1, 2018.

⁴⁸ "Temer Appoints New Labor Minister; Officials Resign to Run in 2018 Elections," December 28, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/28/temer-appoints-new-labor-minister-officials-resign-to-run-in-2018-elections>, Accessed on January 1, 2018.

metal was quoted at US\$2.47934, while the highest was US\$3.27312, which was seen on December 28, 2010.⁴⁹

- **Outgoing President Bachelet Scrambles to Draft a New Constitution for Chile**

As Chilean President Michelle Bachelet's term nears its end, she has made it a priority to get constitutional amendment proposals to parliament. Spokeswoman Paula Narváez said some of the bills were originally expected to go into "final review" in October 2016 before being sent to Congress some time in January 2017. As officials work to adjust the legislative agenda for the coming weeks, Narváez said they will prioritize gay marriage and gender identity. Another bill seeks to split up the National Service for Minors by separating the responsibility of protecting minors from those that handle minors who have broken the law. "It's a very complex bill. It was a legislative initiative that implies a lot of spending," she said. Regarding free higher education in the public university system and the pension bill that seeks to create collective savings and an increase of five percent to employer taxed contributions, Narváez said Bachelet's administration would "continue with great effort" to make progress, but also asked that their supporters "understand that they have a time limit" that isn't conducive to the amount of broad debate that is required in bringing it to fruition. The constitutional reform project was supposed to include each of these proposed changes, and should have been a priority for the Bachelet administration, many have said. It was one of the main issues that she campaigned on, but it was left for the last minute. With 74 days remaining in office, Bachelet still has not sent parliament her proposal, and its approval or rejection will take place under the new government. President-elect Sebastián Piñera supports "perfecting" the constitution, "but not as a tool for an election campaign." He said he agrees that the Chilean constitution should be "perfected, but only in a climate of unity and collaboration."⁵⁰

Venezuela

- **With Venezuela on the Ropes, Maduro Reaches Out to Russia, China**

With the erosion of democracy in Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro is now widely considered to be a regional pariah. He counts on the support of three hardcore Marxist allies: Bolivia, Cuba, and Nicaragua. In practical terms, this support does little to help prop up his regime, which is staggering under the weight of hyperinflation. Of far more value is his close relationship with Russia and China, who appear to be extending Maduro a lifeline. Russia recently allowed Maduro to

⁴⁹ "Chile records Highest Annual Increase in Copper Since 2010," January 1, 2018, <http://santiagotimes.cl/2018/01/01/chile-records-highest-annual-increase-in-copper-price-since-2010/>, Accessed on January 1, 2018.

⁵⁰ Karina Martin, "Outgoing President Bachelet Scrambles to Draft a New Constitution for Chile," December 29, 2017, <https://panampost.com/karina-martin/2017/12/29/outgoing-president-bachelet-scrambles-to-draft-a-new-constitution-for-chile/>, Accessed on January 1, 2018.

restructure a USD \$3 billion loan with more favorable terms, while China continues to take a high-risk gamble with Venezuela, exchanging loans for future oil deliveries. Last week of December 2017, as Venezuela declared both Brazil and Canada's ambassadors to be *personas non grata*, Maduro continued to cultivate relationships with China's Communist regime, and Vladimir Putin, who is gearing up for reelection in the coming year. Both nations have remained steadfast in their support of Maduro, as they seek geopolitical influence in the United States' backyard. With regard to the unfolding debt crisis, the Chinese Foreign Ministry released a statement, suggesting: "We believe the Venezuelan government and people have the ability to appropriately handle their affairs, including the debt issue." Venezuela is about to face a serious double whammy: spiraling hyperinflation, and an inability to meet its debt obligations. Its external debt has been estimated at nearly USD \$200 billion, with \$23 billion due to China alone. It has currency reserves of just \$9 billion. Thus, a more likely end game in Venezuela now may involve the nation's creditors seizing oil shipments to pay off debts. If that were to happen, it could be the catalyst needed to force Maduro from power, perhaps into exile in Cuba.⁵¹

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Putin Supports US Military Presence in Afghanistan**

The Russian President Vladimir Putin has emphasized on the importance role of the US military presence in Afghanistan as he expressed concerns regarding the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, saying the situation in Afghanistan would have been probably worse in the absence of the US forces. Putin reportedly made the remarks during a meeting with a delegation of the Russian parliamentarians on Sunday (December 24).⁵²

- **MPs Warn Of Public Taking Up Arms in Support of Noor**

Some members of Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga, the Lower House of Parliament, on December 27, 2017 said that a number of Jihadi commanders and citizens have been armed in support of Atta Mohammad Noor, the governor of Balkh, who was recently ousted by President Ashraf Ghani. The legislators accused the government of fuelling a crisis in the country. The MPs reiterated the call to government

⁵¹ David Unsworth, "With Venezuela on the Ropes, Maduro Reaches Out to Russia, China," December 30, 2017, <https://panampost.com/david-unsworth/2017/12/30/venezuela-maduro-russia-china/>, Accessed on January 1, 2018.

⁵² "Putin Supports US Military Presence in Afghanistan", *Khaama Press*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.khaama.com/putin-supports-us-military-presence-in-afghanistan-04122> (accessed on January 1, 2018)

officials to engage in talks with *Jamiat-e-Islami* party where Noor serves as chief executive and resolve their disputes through diplomacy and negotiations.⁵³

- **Ousted Governor Returns to Office in Defiance of Presidential Orders**

Noor returned to his office on December 30, 2017 and chaired an official meeting in violation of a presidential decree that ousted him from his post earlier this month. The escalating political uncertainty comes as the United States and its allies step up military efforts in support of Afghan forces as they try to counter the Taliban insurgency and the Islamic State group plots fresh deadly suicide bombings in the war-torn country.

Ghani's office announced two weeks ago that the president had accepted Noor's resignation and named a replacement. But the ousted governor swiftly rejected the move, saying he had submitted his resignation months back and linked it to acceptance of a list of demands.⁵⁴

- **Afghanistan's Imports From Pakistan Drop By 80pc This Year**

As its trade with Central Asia states has been on the rise, Afghanistan's imports from Pakistan have declined by 80 percent, say traders in northern Balkh province. Due to commerce and transit issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan, businesspeople in the province say imports through the Torkham port have precipitously fallen.⁵⁵

Bangladesh

- **Religious and ethnic minorities are most persecuted in Bangladesh: NHRC**

Ethnic and religious minorities are the most persecuted and oppressed people in Bangladesh, data collected by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has revealed. NHRC Chairman Kazi Reazul Kabir said on Thursday that although the constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens regardless of their religion and ethnicity, Bangladeshi minorities have been consistently denied their rights and evicted from their own land.⁵⁶

⁵³ "MPs Warn Of Public Taking Up Arms In Support of Noor", *Tolo News*, December 27, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/mps-warn-public-taking-arms-support-noor> (accessed on January 1, 2018)

⁵⁴ "Ousted Governor Returns to Office in Defiance of Presidential Orders", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 31, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19789 accessed on January 1, 2018.

⁵⁵ "Afghanistan's Imports From Pakistan Drop By 80pc This Year", *The Pashtun Times*, December 31, 2017, <http://thepashtuntimes.com/afghanistans-imports-from-pakistan-drop-by-80pc-this-year/> accessed on January 1, 2018.

⁵⁶ "Religious and ethnic minorities are most persecuted in Bangladesh," *Dhaka Tribune*, December 28, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2017/12/28/religious-ethnic-minorities-persecuted-bangladesh/>, accessed on December 28, 2017.

- **Physical arrangement draft of Rohingya repatriation finalized**

Bangladesh has finalized the draft of the physical arrangement agreement for the repatriation of the Rohingyas, which is likely to be handed over to Myanmar next week. Dhaka is also working swiftly to hand over the first list of the Rohingyas for scrutiny. Two important meetings, presided over by the foreign secretary, were held in Dhaka on Thursday (December 28). The first one was the meeting of the national task force on the Rohingyas and the second one was an inter-ministerial meeting to decide future work plan. Sources say the draft was finalized in these meetings.⁵⁷

AL doesn't want to see bloodshed in Bangladesh: PM

Seeking votes for Awami League in the next general election for the continuation of development, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday (December 31) said her party does not want to see any bloodshed in the country. "We don't want to see any bloodshed in Bangladesh. Bangladesh will be a developed and prosperous country...it'll will march forward," she said.⁵⁸

Work together to restore democracy: Khaleda

Congratulating the people of the country on the occasion of New Year, Khaleda Zia on Sunday (December 31) called upon all to work together for restoring the 'lost democracy and voting rights' in 2018. Khaleda said all must get united and work together to turn 2018 into a year of democracy, peace and progress. Mentioning that democracy earned by sacrificing huge blood is now 'abducted', she said the current anti-people forces have also besieged people's all democratic rights.⁵⁹

Future depends on AL-BNP consensus: Sakhawat

The future of Bangladesh will depend on the behaviour of the two main political parties—Awami League and BNP—in the coming years, former election commissioner Sakhawat Hossain told *The Independent*. "What has happened in the past is over. Now, the people expect the ruling and opposition parties to reach a consensus on a minimum acceptable stance to hold a free, fair and acceptable election in the country," he added.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ "Physical arrangement draft of Rohingya repatriation finalized, *Dhaka Tribune*, December 29, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2017/12/29/physical-arrangement-draft-rohingya-repatriation-finalized/>, accessed on December 29, 2017.

⁵⁸ "AL doesn't want to see bloodshed in Bangladesh: PM," *The Independent*, December 31, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/130565>, accessed on December 31, 2017.

⁵⁹ "Work together to restore democracy: Khaleda," *The Independent*, December 31, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/130566>, accessed on December 31, 2017.

⁶⁰ "Future depends on AL-BNP consensus," *The Independent*, January 1, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/130639> accessed on January 1, 2017.

नेपाल

- प्रान्त दो में मधेश गठबंधन की सरकार बनेगी:महतो :

राष्ट्रीय जनता पार्टी के अध्यक्ष राजेन्द्र महतो ने कहा कि प्रदेश संख्या दो में मधेश गठबंधन की सरकार बनेगी.और यह लगातार संविधान में संशोधन के लिए संघर्ष करती रहेगी .⁶¹

- राष्ट्रपति ने उच्च सदन का अध्यादेश जारी किया:

राष्ट्रपति बिद्या देवी भंडारी ने शुक्रवार को काफी दिनों से लंबित नेशनल एसेम्बली के चुनाव का अध्यादेश जारी कर दिया है.जिससे अब उच्च सदन का चुनाव हो सकेगा .⁶²

- नेपाल को अपने पड़ोसियों से आर्थिक समृद्धि का लाभ लेना चाहिए:प्रचंड :

माओवादी नेता पुष्प कमल दहाल ने कहा कि नेपाल को अपने पड़ोसियों से अपना आर्थिक विकास करना चाहिए.एक सभा को संबोधित करते हुए उन्होंने कहा कि उन्होंने अपने प्रधानमंत्री के अत्र्यकाल . के दौरान भारत और चीन के त्रिपक्षीय सहयोग को आगे बढ़ाया था और अभी भी इसे आगे .बढ़ाया जाना चाहिए⁶³

- एमाले और माओवादियों में सीटों का बंटवारा:

वाम गठबंधन में मुख्य पदों को लेकर बंटवारे की बातचीत शुरू हो गयी है.प्रस्ताव के अनुसार यदि . और इसी .एमाले प्रधानमंत्री का पद लेता है तो पार्टी के अध्यक्ष का पद माओवादियों के पास रहेगा .प्रकार अन्य पदों का भी बंटवारा होगा⁶⁴

Pakistan

- **Speakers' Conference and Islamabad Declaration** - The six-nation first Speakers' Conference began in Islamabad on December 24th to discuss "the challenges of terrorism and inter-regional connectivity". Speakers from Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey participated in the conference.⁶⁵ Pakistan incorporated the issue of Kashmir in the Islamabad Declaration at serial number 19 in the 29-point of the joint declaration. "We agreed that for ensuring global and regional peace and stability, the issue of Jammu & Kashmir needs peaceful resolution by Pakistan and India in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions," read the text of the declaration. The Russian

⁶¹ "Madhesh alliance will form govt in province 2: Mahto", The Kathmandu Post, 28 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-28/1>

⁶² "Prez approves ordinance on upper house", The Kathmandu Post, 30 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-30/1>

⁶³ "Nepal should take benefit from neighbors economic prosperity, says dahal", The Himalayan Times, 31 December 2017,

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/kathmandu/nepal-take-benefit-neighbours-economic-prosperity-says-dahal/>

⁶⁴ "UML, CPN-MC dwell on sharing posts", The Himalayan Times, 1 January 2018, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/cpn-uml-cpn-maoist-centre-dwell-sharing-posts/>

⁶⁵ "Six-nation Speakers' conference begins in Islamabad to discuss terrorism", *The News International*, December 24, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/260203-six-nation-speaker> accessed on January 1, 2018

delegation had expressed reservations over the inclusion of the issue Kashmir, which were then picked up Iran and Afghanistan as well. Iran had objections over the language of the Kashmir-specific section. However, the Pakistani side contended that since Russia, Iran and Turkey had included issues of political interest to them — such as the crises in Iraq and Syria, the problems of the Middle East and Al Quds, and Turkey’s failed coup — it would be impossible for Pakistan to leave out the Kashmir issue.⁶⁶

- **US and Pakistan** - The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) chief Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor stated in both English and Urdu on December 28th that the country was being threatened with “unilateral action” by the US. He stated that the US should be warned that despite Pakistan’s desire for cooperation on Afghanistan, there could be no compromise on national respect and sovereignty.⁶⁷ It can be noted that there are chances that the Trump administration may withhold \$225 million (Dh825.75 million) in government aid to Pakistan over frustration with the country’s handling of terror groups within its borders.⁶⁸
- **Sharif and Saudi Arabia** – First Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif left for Saudi Arabia on a special plane sent by the Saudi royals on December 27th.⁶⁹ He was followed by ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who arrived in Riyadh on December 30th. PML-N stated that Nawaz would hold meetings with the royal family on matters of national interest and his visit was not for personal reasons.⁷⁰ Maryam Nawaz even rubbished the news that Nawaz’s visit to Riyadh was a self-exile.⁷¹ It should be noted that the Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim was also present in Saudi Arabia during the Sharifs visit. There have been speculations that Turkey was mediating to improve relations between the Sharif family and the Saudi royals with the mediation of Turkey, which got strained when Pakistan declined Saudi request by deciding not to send troops to Yemen.⁷²
- **India and Pakistan** - National Security Advisers (NSAs) of India and Pakistan met in Bangkok on December 27th. It was reported to be a “pre-scheduled meeting”. As per Pakistani media, the context of the meeting was important as it followed a goodwill gesture by Islamabad of allowing Jadhav to meet his family members. They thought the meeting was useful and said it might help in restarting some sort of engagement at the diplomatic level as well.⁷³ It should be noted here that Palestine has recalled its envoy to Pakistan Ambassador Walid Abu Ali, after India

⁶⁶ Syed Irfan Raza, “How Kashmir found mention in ‘Islamabad Declaration’”, *Dawn*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1378853> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁶⁷ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Army warns US against ‘unilateral action’ in Pakistan”, *Dawn*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1379499> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁶⁸ “US weighs withholding \$225m in aid to Pakistan”, *Gulf News*, December 30, 2017, <http://gulfnews.com/news/asia/pakistan/us-weighs-withholding-225m-in-aid-to-pakistan-1.2149353> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁶⁹ Amjad Mahmood, “Shahbaz Sharif off to Saudi Arabia for ‘important’ meetings”, *Dawn*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1379298> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁷⁰ Zulqernain Tahir, “Nawaz Sharif in S. Arabia to hold talks on ‘matters of national interest’”, *Dawn*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1379900> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁷¹ “Maryam rubbishes rumors of Nawaz’s exile”, *Dunya News*, December 31, 2017, <http://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/421405-Maryam-rubbishes-rumors-of-Nawaz-exile> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁷² Zulqernain Tahir, “Nawaz Sharif in S. Arabia to hold talks on ‘matters of national interest’”, *Dawn*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1379900> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁷³ Baqir Sajjad Syed & Jawed Naqvi, “Pakistan, India NSAs hold secret dialogue”, *Dawn*, January 1, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1380004/pakistan-india-nsas-hold-secret-dialogue> accessed on January 1, 2018

objected to his appearance in a public meeting on Al Quds along with Jamaatud Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed.⁷⁴

Indian Ocean Region

- **Chinese New Underwater Surveillance Network to Help its Submarines in South China Sea and the Indian Ocean**

According to a media report, "China has developed a new underwater surveillance network to help its submarines get a stronger lock on targets while protecting the nation's interests along the maritime Silk Road, which included the Indian Ocean."⁷⁵ Referring the report of South China Morning Post, the Economic Times mentioned that the system has already started gathering information regarding underwater environment particularly about sea temperature and salinity.⁷⁶ Navy uses such type of information to track target vessels and improve navigation and positioning.⁷⁷ According to the above mentioned report, "the project is part of an unprecedented military expansion fuelled by Beijing's desire to challenge the US in the world's oceans".⁷⁸ The project was led by the South China Sea Institute of Oceanography under the Chinese Academy of Science.

- **Australian warship seized almost eight tons of hashish in the Arabian Sea**

An Australian warship HMAS Warramunga, has seized about eight tons of hashish in the Arabian Sea. According to Australian defence department, estimated value of seized hashish is about \$ 415million.⁷⁹ The ship's commanding officer Dugald Clelland said, "The crew prepared extensively for a task like this and we were able to employ our helicopter and boarding crews to locate and board three suspect vessels."⁸⁰ Describing the seizure as a big setback for drug traffickers in the region, Major General John Frewen, head of Australian Forces in the Middle East said, "this operation will impact on the flow of narcotics around the world and the use of drug money to fund extremist organizations."⁸¹

⁷⁴ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Palestine recalls envoy for sharing stage with Hafiz Saeed", *Dawn*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1379890/palestine-recalls-envoy-for-sharing-stage-with-hafiz-saeed> accessed on January 1, 2018

⁷⁵ China develops underwater surveillance networks in Indian Ocean, South China Sea, January 01, 2008, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-develops-underwater-surveillance-networks-in-indian-ocean-south-china-sea/articleshow/62326410.cms> (Accessed on January 01, 2018).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Australia warship makes huge Arabian Sea hashish seizure, December 30, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2017/Dec-30/431996-australia-warship-makes-huge-arabian-sea-hashish-seizure.ashx> (Accessed on January 01, 2018).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

- **African Maritime Technology Cooperation Centre (MTCC-Africa) launched in Africa**

The African Maritime Technology Cooperation Centre (MTCC-Africa) has launched recently as part of an International Maritime Organization (IMO)-EU project to create "a global network of centres to further global efforts in addressing climate change."⁸² The recently launched centre is an attempt to create region focal points for a wide range of activities such as "improving compliance with existing and future international energy-efficiency regulations; promoting uptake of low-carbon technologies and operations in maritime transport, and establishing voluntary pilot data-collection and reporting systems to feed back into the global regulatory process."⁸³ During the launch of centre on 13 December in Mombasa, Kenya IMO Director of the Marine Environment Division, Stefan Micallef, discussed the importance of its mission to promote low-carbon shipping.⁸⁴ He said, "Global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from shipping rely heavily on improvements in energy efficiency and increased uptake of low-carbon technologies. Better energy efficiency means less fuel is used, and that means lower emissions. This is also good for the ship-owner, because less fuel means less operational costs."⁸⁵

Sri Lanka

- **Army releases 133.34 acres of lands to civil land owners**

Sri Lanka Army in keeping with the government's policy, released another land area of 133.34 acres being used by armed forces for security requirements in Keppapilavu in the Mullaittivu Maritimepattu Divisional Secretariat, together with newly-built or completely renovated 28 houses and all buildings to the civilians today (28th Dec.). Sri Lanka Army troops as of 1st December 2017 have released a total of 55,510.58 acres of private and state land in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaittivu, Mannar and Vavuniya in the northern province.⁸⁶

- **CB receives first payment from Chinese Company on Hambantota Port operations**

The first payment of USD 292.1 million from China Merchant Port Holdings (CMPort) Co. Ltd for the handing over of operations of the Hambantota Port has been credited to the US Dollar account of the Government of Sri Lanka maintained at the Central Bank, states a press release from the International Operations

⁸² Africa Maritime Cooperation Centre Launched, <https://www.marinelink.com/news/cooperation-maritime432139> (Accessed on January 01, 2018).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ "Army releases 133.34 acres of lands to civil land owners", 28th December 2017, <https://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/19099-army-releases-133-34-acres-of-lands-to-civil-land-owners>

Department of the Central Bank. The Port was handed over to the Chinese company on 9th December, where Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was given a cheque of USD 292,097, 400 million as an advance payment.⁸⁷

- **Trump urged to intervene and ensure justice for Tamils**

US President Donald Trump has been urged to intervene and ensure justice for Tamils in Sri Lanka. The ‘Tamils for Trump’ organisation, in a letter to President Trump, wished him for the new year and urged him to work for international justice for the Tamil victims either through the ICC or International Tribunal for the war crimes committed by Sri Lankan officials during the ethnic war that killed over 145,000 Tamils.⁸⁸

- **Sri Lanka first in South Asia in Food Security**

Sri Lanka has been ranked the first in the South Asian region on the newly published Global Food Security Index 2017, obtaining 66th place in the global ranking. Bangladesh and Nepal ranked 80th position and Myanmar has been reported as 81st in the index while Pakistan is at 77th rank, India secured the 74th position. The Global Food Security Index published by United Nations ranks countries around the world on the basis of the food security currently, only 113 countries are ranked accordingly.⁸⁹

- **SL Navy arrests 13 Indian fishermen**

Thirteen Indian fishermen have been arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for engaging in illegal fishing in the Sri Lankan territorial waters in the seas off Katchativu Island this morning. Navy said a fast attack craft attached to the Northern Naval Command arrested the fishermen along with two trawlers.⁹⁰

Maldives

- **Jumhoory Party leader slams Maldives’ narrowing foreign policy**

Jumhoory Party’s leader Qasim Ibrahim slammed the government’s foreign policy, warning that the Maldives would not receive any aid or assistance in crucial moments should its policy conform only to the interests of a few nations. Qasim,

⁸⁷ CB receives first payment from Chinese Company on Hambantota Port operations, 27th December 2017, <https://news.lk/news/world/item/19082-cb-receives-first-payment-from-chinese-company-on-hambantota-port-operations>

⁸⁸ Trump urged to intervene and ensure justice for Tamils, 31st December 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/12/31/trump-urged-to-intervene-and-ensure-justice-for-tamils/>

⁸⁹ Sri Lanka first in South Asia in Food Security, 26 December 2017, <https://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/19077-sri-lanka-first-in-south-asia-in-food-security>

⁹⁰ SL Navy arrests 13 Indian fishermen, 31 December 2017, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/SL-Navy-arrests-Indian-fishermen-143119.html>

who is currently in Germany for medical treatment, made the remark in his speech regarding the National Unity Day. The former lawmaker warned that if the foreign policy of the Maldives is molded to protect the interests and people of only a few select nations, no country would heed the cries of the Maldives during its moment of need.⁹¹

- **Ruling party hits out at Nasheed, NGO chief in religion row**

Authorities must investigate those who speak out against religion, the Maldives' ruling party has said, condemning former president Mohamed Nasheed for his defence of an NGO chief at the centre of a religion row and criticising opposition leaders for their silence. Shahindha Ismail, executive director of the Maldivian Democracy Network, has been under fire for saying that Allah allowed for other faiths in response to President Abdulla Yameen asserting he would only permit Islam to be practiced in the Maldives. On Friday Nasheed tweeted: "Attacks on civil society defenders by self-appointed sheikhs is the clear manifestation of "State within the State" of #Maldives." The ruling PPM Saturday condemned "a former president" for "defending and encouraging Shahindha Ismail."⁹²

- **Yameen slams MDP over inviting 'foreign influence'**

Attempts to invite foreign influence into civil matters damage the country's interests, President Abdulla Yameen said, as he criticized the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party. "Haven't we seen the foreign minister of the MDP government Dr Shaheed tweeting that the special forces of a friendly country need to take over the Maldives because of our country's situation back then?" he asked. "Even now, amid the current developments, prominent political figures continue to invite foreign states and diplomats to bring foreign influence into civil matters. That is an act infringing a right of the Maldivian state."⁹³

- **Maldives president weighs in on diplo drama**

President Abdulla Yameen has criticized diplomats for speaking about foreign policy issues in the islands, after authorities banned councils from meeting envoys without prior written permission. He said foreign policy should be discussed with the government but denied accusations his administration did not respect diplomats, saying there were rules they needed to adhere to. "If the diplomats and visitors are visiting different islands in Maldives to offer aid to the people, the processes in international treaties is that it is done through the government, if the

⁹¹ "Jumhoory Party leader slams Maldives' narrowing foreign policy", 27th December 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/jumhoory-party-leader-slams-maldives-narrowing-foreign-policy/>

⁹² "Ruling party hits out at Nasheed, NGO chief in religion row", 31st December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/society/ruling-party-hits-out-at-nasheed-ngo-chief-in-religion-row-134816>

⁹³ "Yameen slams MDP over inviting 'foreign influence'", 26th December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/yameen-slams-mdp-over-inviting-foreign-influence-134745>

aid is being given by one country to another or one government to another,” he said⁹⁴.

- **Yameen invites ex-presidents to open landmark bridge**

President Abdulla Yameen declared that he would extend invitations to former presidents to attend the official unveiling of the landmark bridge, being developed between capital Male and airport island Hulhule, next year to bear witness to progress. Speaking after inaugurating the harbour of Baa atoll Kendhoo island during his current trip to three northern atolls, Yameen stated that while the joint opposition kept up its criticism of his government, they remained selectively blind to the development brought about by his administration.⁹⁵

West Asia

Turkey

- **US, Turkey resume full visa services after diplomatic spat⁹⁶**

The United States and Turkey on Thursday turned the page on a visa crisis triggered nearly three months ago by the arrest of a staff member at the American mission in Ankara, but relations between the NATO allies remain tense.

The two sides announced the resumption of full visa services for each other's citizens, but their statements revealed lingering misgivings between the countries, who are partners in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) group. Washington said it had won assurances from Ankara that no further legal proceedings would be launched against its staff, though the Turkish embassy in the US capital insisted "no such assurances have been given."

Nevertheless, the State Department said it was "confident that the security posture has improved sufficiently to allow for the full resumption of visa services in Turkey." The US move is effective immediately, a department official told AFP. Shortly thereafter, the Turkish mission in Washington said: "Within the framework of the principle of reciprocity, the restrictions placed from our side on the visa regime for US citizens are being lifted simultaneously."

The US decision to stop handing out visas was implemented from October 8 and was followed by a tit-for-tat move by Turkey to stop giving visas to Americans.

⁹⁴ "Maldives president weighs in on diplo drama" 25th December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-president-weighs-in-on-diplo-drama-134735>

⁹⁵ "Yameen invites ex-presidents to open landmark bridge", 25th December 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/yameen-invites-ex-presidents-to-open-landmark-bridge/>

⁹⁶ <http://www.france24.com/en/20171229-us-turkey-resume-full-visa-services-diplomatic-spat>

- **CHP’s campaign for justice and democracy to accelerate in 2018: Kılıçdaroğlu⁹⁷**

The main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) has voiced its determination to step up efforts in the name of democracy, the rule of law and media freedom in 2018, vowing to carry the hope of the “No” campaign in the April 2017 referendum to future elections.

“Despite all the problems we faced in 2017, there are some lessons that we can draw. We have realized how we are right and that we are not alone in our struggle for freedom and justice against a government that has abandoned the principle of the rule of law,” CHP head Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu said in his New Year message on Dec. 31.

“The ‘No’ votes cast in the April 16, 2017 constitutional amendment referendum against a one-man regime show that we are a big family loyal to democracy,” Kılıçdaroğlu added, vowing to “re-install the parliamentary system.”

Some 48.6 percent of voters opposed the constitutional amendments in the referendum, which led to a narrow win for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The CHP led the “No” campaign with the support of the Kurdish issue-focused Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and other political parties and civil society groups.

- **Turkey says EU funds not being actively used for needs of Syrian refugees⁹⁸**

A substantial portion of the funds promised by the European Union to help Syrian refugees in Turkey is still not being used actively to meet their needs, Turkey’s EU Ministry said on Dec. 30.

Of the 6 billion euros (\$7.20 billion) agreed upon in two deals in 2015 and 2016, only 1.78 billion euros has been transferred to Turkish ministries and international organizations responsible for implementing the projects, the ministry said in a statement.

“While Turkey has used more than \$30 billion of its national funds for the needs of Syrians who have been in Turkey for approximately seven years, a substantial amount of the 3 billion euros promised by the EU in November 2015 has effectively not been used in the field.”

Of the 1.78 billion euros transferred so far, it said 1.3 billion went to international organizations, 270 million to the Education Ministry, 120 million to the Health Ministry, and 12 million to the Interior Ministry.

⁹⁷ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chps-campaign-for-justice-and-democracy-to-accelerate-in-2018-kilicdaroglu-125030>

⁹⁸ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-says-eu-funds-not-being-actively-used-for-needs-of-syrian-refugees-125005>

Yet that did not equate to the funds being actively used to meet the needs of Syrian refugees, the ministry said.

“Unfortunately, the spending mechanism of the EU funds are not working fast,” it said.

- **Erdoğan, Macron to meet in Paris over Syria, Jerusalem⁹⁹**

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will make his first foreign visit of 2018 to Paris on Jan. 5 to meet his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron.

The visit is notable as the Turkish president has in recent years rarely traveled to Europe amid frosty ties between Ankara and a number of European capitals.

“Jerusalem, Syria, Iraq and Turkey-EU relations and regional issues, particularly the fight against terrorism [will be discussed],” Turkish Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın said regarding Erdoğan’s trip to Paris.

“[The visit] will serve to further advance our cooperation with France in a way that will benefit both our nations and the entire region,” Kalın said in a written statement on Dec. 31.

“France is an important commercial and economic partner, a prominent ally with which we have around six centuries of history and multi-dimensional relationships,” he added, noting that Turkey and France pursue “intense dialogue at all levels on global and regional issues, especially in the fight against terrorism.”

“Our deeply rooted relationships are further reinforced by major projects in a wide range of mutual investments: Energy, defense industry, science and technology, transport, culture and education. The Turkish people living in France, with a population of about 700,000, act as a bridge between our countries,” Kalın said.

- **Turkey will continue ‘active and bold’ foreign policy in 2018: Erdoğan¹⁰⁰**

Turkey will not be fully secure if it fails to help resolve conflicts in its region, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said, vowing to continue pursuing a “more active and bold” foreign policy in 2018.

“Turkey will not be able to secure its future without resolving problems in its region. This leads us to pursue a more active, bold and if necessary more risky foreign policy,” Erdoğan said in his New Year message published on Dec. 31.

Citing developments in Syria, Iraq and Palestine, Erdoğan stressed the importance and sensitivity these problems for Turkey’s future.

⁹⁹ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-to-meet-macron-in-paris-discuss-syria-jerusalem-reuters-124992>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-hails-turkish-nations-firm-stance-on-jerusalem-in-new-years-message-125015>

“Our recent experiences have shown us that one cannot be involved in [negotiations] without being [active] in the field. To this end, we have taken significant steps over the last year by launching an operation into Idlib [in Syria] and by nixing the regional government’s independence bid in Iraq,” he said, referring to the Kurdistan Regional Government’s (KRG) independence referendum in September.

Turkey’s ongoing Idlib operation is part of a three-way deal between Russia and Iran to create a de-conflict zone in northern Syria to cement the ongoing truce between the regime and opposition groups.

- **Greece moves to cancel Turkish soldier's asylum¹⁰¹**

Greece's government has filed a request to cancel the granting of asylum to one of eight Turkish soldiers who fled their country during last year's failed coup attempt.

The move on Saturday came hours after a Greek administrative committee ruled in favour of the man's appeal against his earlier application for asylum.

The committee's ruling angered neighbouring Turkey, which has repeatedly called for the soldiers' extradition, accusing them of having a hand in the putsch bid.

In a statement, Turkey's ministry of foreign affairs called the decision politically motivated and warned that it would affect ties between the two countries.

"Greece failed to show the support and cooperation we expect from an ally in the fight against terrorism by preventing criminals who took part in killing hundreds of Turkish people and targeting the democratic order," the statement said, according to a translation in Turkish newspaper Daily Sabah.

Later on Saturday, the Greek government said that it had filed an appeal against the decision by the administrative committee for asylum requests.

Athens said in a statement that its move was in line with "its standing position regarding the eight soldiers, as it has been repeatedly and publicly expressed".

- **Turkey, Saudi Arabia key for ensuring peace in the region, PM Yildirim says¹⁰²**

Turkey and Saudi Arabia are two key countries for ensuring permanent peace and stability in the Middle East, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said late Wednesday during an official visit to the Kingdom.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/greece-moves-block-asylum-granted-turkish-soldier-171230184031580.html>

¹⁰² <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/12/27/turkey-saudi-arabia-key-for-ensuring-peace-in-the-region-pm-yildirim-says>

"It is necessary for both Saudi Arabia and Turkey to work jointly, not only for the benefits of two countries individually but also for regional and global peace," Yıldırım added.

"We have discussed the ways to improve our bilateral trade and cooperation in the defense industry. I can say that we share almost the same view in terms of ways of solution for the matters concerning us and the region," he concluded.

Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Bin Salman will visit Turkey soon, Yıldırım also announced after a meeting with the prince.

Yıldırım arrived in Saudi Arabia earlier on the same day. The prime minister first met the Saudi King Salman Bin Abdulaziz.

Yıldırım and Salman agreed on the necessity of taking a common stance to protect the Palestinians' rights, according to prime ministerial sources.

Riyadh, a close U.S. ally, and NATO member Ankara have both slammed U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to upend decades of careful Washington policy, recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

In an hour-long closed-door meeting, the two leaders discussed the importance of Jerusalem's status, the sources said on conditions of anonymity.

- **Turkey, Russia sign deal on supply of S-400 missiles¹⁰³**

Turkey and Russia on Friday signed an accord for Moscow to supply Ankara with S-400 surface-to-air missile batteries, Turkish authorities said, finalizing a deal set to deepen military ties between NATO member Turkey and the Kremlin.

The S-400 deal, reportedly worth some \$2.5 billion and in the works for more than a year, has worried the West because the system cannot be integrated into NATO's military architecture.

As part of NATO's collective defense pledge, the allies integrate their ships, planes and weapons systems to make them work together, as well as sharing command across the alliance.

The accord is the latest in a series of moves by Ankara to boost its defense capabilities as it faces threats from Kurdish and Islamist militants at home and conflicts across its borders in Syria and Iraq.

In a statement late on Friday, Turkey's Undersecretariat for Defence Industries (SSM) said that Moscow would supply the S-400 missile batteries to Ankara in an initial delivery planned for the first quarter of 2020.

¹⁰³ <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/12/29/turkey-russia-sign-deal-on-supply-of-s-400-missiles.html>

On Wednesday, Sergei Chemezov, head of the Russian state conglomerate Rostec, told the Kommersant daily that Russia would supply Turkey with four batteries of S-400s under the deal.

However, the SSM said Turkey would buy two S-400 batteries from Russia under the agreement, with one being optional, and added the systems would be used and managed "independently" by Turkish personnel, rather than Russian advisors.

Iran

- **Protests in Iran on Price Rise and Economic Conditions**

Iran has been witnessing a series of popular protests since December 28, 2017, one that is the biggest since the previous popular unrest held in 2009 to protest the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for his second term as President. The current protest, originating¹⁰⁴ in Mashhad over rising prices of food and prevalent economic conditions, has spread across other cities in Iran and has taken a political dimension. In these protests, dozens of people have lost their lives and hundreds of protestors have been arrested.¹⁰⁵ These protests in Iran, 'which erupted over declining economic conditions, corruption and a lack of personal freedoms, presented a serious challenge to the government of President Hassan Rouhani, who won re-election on promises to revitalize the economy.'¹⁰⁶

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Ali Shamkhani termed these protests a result of 'proxy war'¹⁰⁷ against Iran waged by its enemies through the social media. He particularly blamed the United States, Britain and Saudi Arabia for instigating these riots in Iran through social media. Shamkhani said: "Based on our analyses, around 27 percent of the new hashtags against Iran are generated by the Saudi government"¹⁰⁸ adding that "what is happening in Iran will be over in a few days, and there is no reason to worry at all."¹⁰⁹

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, while acknowledging¹¹⁰ people's problems, attempted to undermine the intensity of these protests. Rouhani said that enemies of Iran are angry due to Iran's progress but these protests are an opportunity and his administration would make all efforts to solve people's problems. Rouhani said that Iran's "economic condition is better than world's mean but this does not mean

¹⁰⁴ *The Guardian*, "Nine more reported dead in Iran as protests enter sixth day," January 2, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/02/nine-more-reported-dead-in-iran-as-protests-enter-sixth-day>, accessed on January 2, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *The New York Times*, "Iran Confronts 3rd Day of Protests, With Calls for Khamenei to Quit," December 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/30/world/middleeast/iran-protests-rouhani.html>, accessed on January 2, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ *Press TV*, "Recent riots result of foreign proxy war against Iran: Shamkhani," January 2, 2018, <http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2018/01/02/547526/iran-snsc-shamkhani-proxy-war>, accessed on January 2, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Official Website of Iran's President, "President in a meeting with heads of parliament specialised committees," January 1, 2018, <http://www.president.ir/en/102252>, accessed on January 2, 2018.

that all problems have been solved,”¹¹¹ and added, “These achievements have made our enemies angry. Our unity was very hard to believe for them, our progress was unbearable for them, our success in the politics of the world, and against the United States and the Zionist regime was intolerable for them.”¹¹² He further said, “The Iranian nation will easily confront these problems. Our people will put an end to a small group who chant slogans against people’s will and against the law, insulting the values of the revolution and damaging public properties.”¹¹³ He also said, “The enemy will not remain silent in the face of the progress and greatness of the Iranian nation. Of course, there are a number of people among the protesters who are deceived who have right demands.”¹¹⁴

It is yet to be seen whether these protests are clamped down by the Iranian authorities or it gets further intensified, taking the shape of a mass protests.

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 29	Sindh	A Lyari gangster, identified as Umer Kutchhi, who was wanted in over 40 criminal cases, was killed in an encounter in Phool Pati Line near Juna Market in Kharadar area of Saddar Town. ¹¹⁵	1	0
2	December 30	Sindh	Karachi Police claimed to have killed five suspected Islamic State (IS) militants in an encounter on the outskirts of the provincial capital Karachi. According to details provided by Senior Superintendent Police (SSP) Malir Rao Anwar Ahmed, acting on a tip-off, the Police conducted a targeted raid on a hideout in Sohrab Goth area of Gadap Town, killing five IS militants. ¹¹⁶	5	0

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ ‘Notorious Lyari gangster killed in encounter’, *Dawn*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1379599/notorious-lyari-gangster-killed-in-encounter>, January 1, 2018

¹¹⁶ Imtiaz Ali, Five IS militants killed in ‘encounter’ outside Karachi: police, *Dawn*, December 30, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1379779/five-is-militants-killed-in-encounter-outside-karachi-police>, accessed on January 1, 2018

Afghanistan

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 25	Kabul	Islamic State claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on a compound of Afghanistan's national intelligence agency in Kabul that killed at least five people and wounded two others. ¹¹⁷	5	2
2	December 28	Kabul	At least 40 people were killed and dozens wounded in a suicide blast at a compound comprising Afghan Voice news agency, Shia cultural centre and religious school in Kabul. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. ¹¹⁸	40	NS
3	December 28-29	Several provinces	More than 40 militants were killed during security operations in various parts of the country, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) said. The ground offensives, backed by artillery and air support, were carried out in Nangarhar, Ghazni, Wardak, Paktika, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabol, Farah, Faryab and Helmand provinces. ¹¹⁹	40	NS
4	December 30	Uruzgan	At least 10 Taliban militants were killed in a clash with security forces (SFs) in Uruzgan province. Mullah Abdul Samad District Police Chief for Khas Uruzgan district said SFs thwarted a Taliban attack on security check posts in the district. ¹²⁰	10	0
5	January 1	Helmand / Nangarhar	At least 15 Taliban and IS militants were killed during operations in Helmand and Nangarhar provinces. ¹²¹	15	0

¹¹⁷ Islamic State Claims Blast at Afghan Intelligence Agency in Kabul, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 26, 2017,

<http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2026,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹¹⁸ Kabul blast at Afghan Voice, Tebyan centre kills dozens, *Al Jazeera*, December 28, 2017,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/kabul-killed-suicide-attack-afghan-voice-171228063628772.html>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹¹⁹ 41 Militants Killed in Round-the-Clock Offensives: MoD, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 30, 2017,

<http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2030,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹²⁰ Ten Taliban Killed in Uruzgan Clash: Police, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 31, 2017,

<http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2031,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹²¹ 15 Militants Eliminated in Helmand, Nangarhar Operations, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, January 1, 2018,

<http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/January%2001,%202018/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on January 1, 2018

Iraq

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 27	Salahuddin	The pro-government paramilitary troops have killed four IS militants in Salahuddin province. While a patrol of al-Hashd al-Shaabi was setting up an ambush at al-Qawshaja region, south of Amerli, in Salahuddin, confrontations occurred in the evening with Islamic State militants. The troops managed to kill four IS members and destroyed their vehicle, which urged the rest to run away. ¹²²	4	0
2	December 28	Iraq	At least 3,000 Yazidis are still held by IS, Hussein Qa'idi, head of Kurdistan Region Government's (KRG's) Yazidi Kurds Liberation Office declared. "3,073 Yazidi males and females of different age groups are still captivated by IS." According to Qa'idi, the federal government in Baghdad does not offer any kind of assistance in searching for or liberation of the kidnapped. ¹²³	Yazidis in captivity	
3	December 31	Diyala	"The Popular Mobilization Forces' 24th brigade, backed by Iraqi warplanes, launched a wide-scale security campaign in northeastern Diyala, killing 13 IS militants, including four senior leaders with explosive belts," the PMF's 24th brigade commander Ziyad al-Tamimi said. ¹²⁴	13	0
4	December	Nineveh	Five IS militants, who were	17	NS

¹²² Nehal Mostafa, Four IS members killed, two paramilitary personnel wounded in attack in Salahuddin, *Iraqi News*, December 27, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/four-members-killed-two-paramilitary-personnel-wounded-attack-salahuddin/>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹²³ Nehal Mostafa, At least 3,000 Yazidis still held by Islamic State in Iraq, Syria: Kurdistan, *Iraqi News*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/least-3000-yazidis-still-held-islamic-state-iraq-syria-kurdistan/>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹²⁴ Mohammed Ebraheem, 13 IS militants, including four leaders with explosive belts, killed in Diyala, *Iraqi News*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/13-militants-including-4-leaders-explosive-belts-killed-diyala/>, accessed on January 1, 2018

	31		<p>hiding inside an island in the Tigris River near Albu Saif area in Mosul, were killed by Iraqi troops backed by US-led international coalition warplanes.</p> <p>In addition, another 12 IS militants who tried to escape were also killed by the coalition warplanes.¹²⁵</p>		
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Syria

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 30	Syria	The Syrian Interim Government, which has been formed by the Syrian opposition, announced forming the Syrian National Army, after many calls to unify the fragmented factions of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). ¹²⁶	Syrian National Army formed	
2	December 31	Idlib	The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) managed to recapture the town of Al-Khuwein after launching an attack inside the southeastern countryside of the Idlib Governorate. Led by their elite Tiger Forces, the SAA was able to once again breakthrough Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham's front-lines at Al-Khuwein, forcing the latter to retreat west from the town. ¹²⁷	SAA town	recaptures
3	December 31	Dara'a	A roadside bomb killed four FSA fighters in Karak Al-Sharqi and Rakhim in Dara'a Governorate. ¹²⁸	4	0

¹²⁵ Mohammed Ebraheem, Backed by int'l coalition warplanes, Iraqi troops kill 17 IS militants in Mosul, *Iraqi News*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/backed-intl-coalition-warplanes-iraqi-troops-kill-17-militants-mosul/>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹²⁶ Loaa Adel, Syrian Interim government announces forming "National Army", *Iraqi News*, December 30, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/interim-government-forms-national-army/>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹²⁷ Leith Fadel, Breaking: Syrian Army retakes town in southeast Idlib, *Al Masdar News*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/breaking-syrian-army-retakes-town-southeast-idlib/>, accessed on January 1, 2018

¹²⁸ Leith Fadel, Four FSA fighters killed by roadside bomb in Daraa, *Al Masdar News*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/four-fsa-fighters-killed-roadside-bomb-daraa/>, accessed on January 1, 2018