

Weekly Media Updates **(11-17 December, 2017)**

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Africa

- **African Presidents Draw Strong Consensus for Inclusive Growth at Africa 2017¹**

African presidents reached a strong consensus to focus on regional integration, inclusive growth and youth empowerment in order to achieve continued and sustained growth on the continent at the Africa 2017 Forum held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. President of Egypt Abdel Fattah Al Sisi hosted African heads of state and business leaders including President of the Republic of Guinea Alpha Condé, President of the Republic of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Côte D'Ivoire Alassane Ouattara, and President of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed.

The business and investment Forum titled “Driving investment for inclusive growth” was convened to increase intra-African investments and cross-border collaboration.

The second edition of the Forum was another clear statement of intent from the Egyptian President, who, in his opening remarks, highlighted the strong bond Egypt has with the rest of the continent, saying it has always been a partner in African development. Putting Africa on the global map and paving the way for a prosperous future can be achieved by working harder to attract investment and collaborating more closely.

President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, citing the launch of the Tripartite Free Trade Area in Egypt in 2015, said it was important that African leaders drive the institutional reform of the African Union in order to get the FTA fully operational.

- **Ethiopia's Economy Outlook through the Prism of International Financial Institutions²**

Major financial institutions and leading providers of economic analysis have forecasted that Ethiopia's economy will be the most expansive on the continent for the year 2017. And growth will remain brisk going forward despite some challenges it faced.

Some years after Ethiopia was mentioned as one of the 16 countries that stand to emerge in place of China, and lead the next wave of low-cost global manufacturing growth by George Friedman, Head of Geopolitical Think Tank 'Stratfor', Ethiopia's year of economic outlook through the prism of foreign entities have been mostly positive. According to Friedman, China is at the limits of its 30-year low-wage, high growth phase and its dominance of low-value manufacturing will give way to countries from Ethiopia to Indonesia to Peru to take its place. Those countries, which Friedman collectively calls the "Post China 16," have even lower wage advantages than China.

¹

http://allafrica.com/stories/201712120980.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabibnc

² The Ethiopian Herald, 13 December 2017, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201712130675.html>

And it is by capitalizing on its low wage and large work force, which is expected to grow as a comparative advantage, that Ethiopia is aiming to attract foreign-owned (manufacturing) factories and turn the nation into a major manufacturing hub.

In June of this year, World Bank said that "Ethiopia's economy will be the most expansive on the continent for the year 2017 followed by Tanzania, Ivory Coast and Senegal in that order."

World Bank further noted that growth in non-resource intensive countries was anticipated to remain solid, supported by infrastructure investment, resilient services sectors, and the recovery of agricultural production.

While projecting a generally stable economic performance for most Sub-Saharan Africa economies, the report titled, "A Fragile Recovery," forecasted that economies will averagely "pick up to 2.6 percent in 2017 and to 3.2 percent in 2018, predicated on moderately rising commodity prices and reforms to tackle macroeconomic imbalances

The report noted that Ethiopia's economic growth since 2015 has been pegged at 10.8 percent putting a significant gap between the countries.

It further indicated that Ethiopia's economic growth is hinged on public-led spending on infrastructure and a strong demand by locals, among other factors. Another factor believed to be driving the economy is the country's large population. The report also mentioned how the country's productive capacity is expanding citing its gradual integration into regional value chains.

- **New Report Links France to Genocide in Rwanda³**

Fresh details have emerged in a new report pointing to the involvement of France in the planning and execution of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The report, released on 13 December, Wednesday by the Government of Rwanda, is the result of an inquiry by Washington, DC, law firm Cunningham Levy Muse LLP, and documents the role and knowledge of French officials in the world's fastest genocide that killed more than a million people in a space of a hundred days.

French officials facilitated the flow of weapons into Rwanda in the build-up to the Genocide, despite knowing about violent attacks against the minority Tutsi group in the country, the new report says.

Despite this knowledge of recurring massacres of the Tutsi during the early 1990s, French officials allowed *génocidaires* (perpetrators of the Genocide) to meet within the French Embassy in Kigali and begin to form the interim government that presided over Rwanda during the Genocide, the report adds.

It further says that private communications between French officials reveal that Opération Turquoise, a French military mission deployed in Rwanda at the height of the Genocide and presented as a humanitarian mission "had the military objective of propping up the interim government responsible for the Genocide,

³ The New Times, 13 December, 2017, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201712140099.html>

and preventing its removal by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, who eventually halted the atrocities in July 1994".

The report also cites French officials' continued efforts to protect Genocide perpetrators from justice. It also says that "French authorities have refused to declassify and release documents that are vital to a full understanding of the activity of French officials at the time of the Genocide, and to allowing the public to finally learn the truth".

- **Beijing is Cultivating the Next Generation of African Elites by Training Them in China⁴**

Anthony Kpandu took a delegation from his party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), to China last year to train with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Kpandu is in charge of special working groups at the general secretariat for the SPLM, the liberation movement turned government party that helped South Sudan gain independence from Sudan in 2011. They visited the Central Party School in Beijing, toured industrial zones, drank various types of green tea, and walked part of the Great Wall. Beijing is promoting subtle movement: support for China and its model of development. Instead of relying on Chinese emissaries in African countries, Beijing is bringing thousands of African leaders, bureaucrats, students, and business people to China.

- **Zimbabwe Ruling Party seals Mugabe's fate⁵**

Delegates from Zimbabwe's ruling party sealed the fate of Robert Mugabe, a man they had revered for decades but removed from power in dramatic scenes last month. The ZANU-PF congress officially endorsed its Central Committee's decision to recall Mugabe and replace him with Emmerson Mnangagwa as its leader. It also endorsed Mnangagwa as its candidate for the 2018 elections. The 75-year-old Mnangagwa at his inauguration described Mugabe as a "father, comrade-in-arms and my leader," even though his firing by Mugabe as vice president early last month set the events in motion. Mnangagwa, sanctioned by the US years ago, has said that the government will do all in its power to make sure the elections are "credible, free and fair."

- **Nigeria Troops Arrest 400 Linked to Extremist Group, Including Women and Children⁶**

Nigerian soldiers have arrested more than 400 people associated with the Boko Haram extremist group hiding on the islands of Lake Chad, including fighters, wives and children. A two-week operation, that included air and ground offences, netted the largest number of arrests of Boko Haram fighters in recent months in north-east Nigeria, said Nigerian Colonel Onyema Nwachukwu. Among those arrested were 167 Boko Haram fighters, 67 women and 173 children.

⁴ Quartz Africa, 14 December 2017, <https://qz.com/1119447/china-is-training-africas-next-generation-of-leaders/>

⁵ News24, 15 December 2017, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/zimbabwe-ruling-party-seals-mugabes-fate-20171215>

⁶ ABC News, 16 December 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-17/nigeria-troops-arrest-400-plus-boko-haram-fighters-families/9265738>

- **NEC Approves US\$1bn Excess Crude Funds to Fight Boko Haram**⁷

The National Economic Council in Nigeria gave the federal government the go ahead to spend US\$1 billion from the Excess Crude Account (ECA) on the fight against Boko Haram insurgents. Governor of Edo State, Godwin Obaseki disclosed this while briefing State House correspondents on the outcome of the monthly NEC meeting presided over by Vice President Yemi Osinbajo. The Excess Crude Account, being money saved from the sale of crude oil above the appropriation benchmark, currently stands at US\$2.3 billion.
- **Egypt's Giant Zohr Gas Field Starts Production**⁸

Egypt's Eni SpA-operated Zohr natural gas field has started production, bringing the country closer to its goal of energy self-sufficiency. Gas from the Mediterranean's largest offshore field is pumped to a facility in Port Said city, to be prepared for delivery to the national distribution network, with initial production of 350 million cubic feet per day, said oil minister Tarek El-Molla. Daily output is set to rise to about 1 billion cubic feet in June and 2.7 billion by the end of 2019. Zohr could put an end to the tenders that suppliers from Glencore Plc to Trafigura PTE Ltd. have won in past. Russia's state-owned producer Rosneft PJSC closed a deal in October to acquire 30 per cent of the Zohr field. BP Plc also bought a 10 per cent stake last year.
- **US-Kenya Deal to Boost over 2,000 Small Companies**⁹

A partnership between Kenya and the US promises to see over 2,000 small businesses in Nairobi, Mombasa and Vihiga counties venture into the expansive American market by December next year. According to an MoU, Kenyan SMEs look forward to exporting fruits, fish, coffee, leather products, curios, textile and artifacts. The expected entry of Kenyan enterprises into the US market is the culmination of a partnership between the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI) and the Centre of International Private Enterprise (CIPE), an American-based organisation affiliated to the US Chamber of Commerce.
- **S. Sudan's Ruling Party Factions in Government Commit to Ceasefire Accord**¹⁰

Three factions of South Sudan's ruling party (SPLM) in the coalition government have signed a new deal recommitting themselves to ceasefire. The country's foreign affairs minister, Deng Alor Kuol, defense minister, Kuol Manyang and petroleum minister Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth signed the deal. The three factions signing the deal are: President Salva Kiir's group, faction of the former detainees under ex-SPLM secretary general, Pagan Amum and the armed opposition faction under first vice president in unity government, Taban Deng Gai.

⁷ Leadership, 15 December 2017, <http://leadership.ng/2017/12/15/nec-approves-1bn-excess-crude-funds-fight-boko-haram/>

⁸ Bloomberg, 16 December 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-16/egypt-says-eni-s-giant-zohr-gas-field-starts-first-production>

⁹ Daily Nation, 17 December 2017, <http://www.nation.co.ke/business/US-Kenya-deal-to-boost-over-2-000-small-companies/996-4231624-ouvc8c/index.html>

¹⁰ Sudan Tribune, 16 December 2017, <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64275>

North Africa

- **Russia to Resume Air Service to Egypt Very Soon¹¹**

According to a Russian News Agency, Russia and Egypt will very soon sign an agreement to resume the flight between two nations after it was cancelled following the shooting down of a Russian plane in Sinai Peninsula two years ago which has caused the death of more than two hundred passengers on the board. The news agency added that Egyptian civil aviation minister would visit Russia and both sides would sign the agreement in this regard and it is also expected that new security protocol would also come for discussion during the meeting. It is worth mentioning here that both sides in the past had deep difference over the cause and culprit behind the catastrophe as Egyptian side took long time to accept that it was an outcome of a terrorist design. Later another difference between two was revealed when Russia complained that Egypt failed to provide the required security measures to the Russian plane and the airport in Egypt. Immediately after the incident, Russia had announced that Egypt was not a safe destination for the tourists and the travelers which led to drastic reduction in the numbers of Russian tourists visiting Egypt and subsequently impacting the national economic growth.

- **Misrata Municipally Commissioner killed in Libya¹²**

According to the security officials in Libya, the commissioner of Misrata (third largest town of Libya) municipality was killed in an attack by two unknown assailants. The reports added that some unidentified persons were seen following his vehicle after the former left the Misrata airport while coming back from Turkey and they attacked him on his way. As of now no one has been nabbed and the search is on for the attackers. And no one has taken the responsibility for this killing and the authority too has not identified who is behind the act.

Central Asia

- **Tajikistan President Visits Jordan**

President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon visited Jordan from 9-11 December 2017. It was his first official visit to the country. He met with Jordan King Abdullah II in Amman and discussed issues of mutual interest, including about developing bilateral ties and the regional and global efforts to deal with terrorism in a holistic manner. President Rahmon also held talks with Jordanian Prime Minister Hani al-Mulqi and other dignitaries in the host country.

¹¹ Al-Hurrah, Arabic Daily, <https://www.alhurra.com/a/Egypt-Russian-flights/408248.html>

¹² <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1116471/%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86>

The two countries also signed deals to increase bilateral relations in various areas. Trade, industry, pharmaceuticals, education, science, health care, sports and tourism were identified as areas to boost bilateral cooperation. President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon proposed a supply of fresh water from Tajikistan to Jordan through pipeline.¹³ Jordan is deficient in potable water and has one of the lowest levels of water availability in the world.

The two sides also reportedly affirmed the need to increase Arab, Islamic and international efforts to ‘protect the rights of the Palestinians in the city, that is key to achieving peace and stability in the region’.¹⁴

During the visit, the documents signed included protecting mutual investments and avoiding dual taxation as well as tax evasion, cooperation in higher education, scientific research, agriculture, tourism and art and culture, scientific cooperation. The chambers of commerce of the two countries also signed deal to increase economic cooperation. A joint Jordanian-Tajikistani business council will be formed.¹⁵

- **Kyrgyzstan President Makes First Foreign Visit to Uzbekistan**

Newly elected President of Kyrgyz Republic Sooronbai Jeenbekov visited Uzbekistan on 13-14 December 2017 and held talks with his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev. It was his first foreign visit since becoming the President in November 2017. The Presidents noted that the visit is a good opportunity for discussing issues of developing bilateral relations and main attention was paid to further development of political, trade-economic, transport-communication, banking, financial, scientific, technical, cultural, humanitarian and inter-regional cooperation between the two countries.¹⁶

Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan bilateral trade has been growing in 2017 till November, mutual trade increased by over 56 per cent to US\$ 235 million. They want to take it to US\$ 500 million in coming years.¹⁷ The Government of Uzbekistan is emphasizing on closer cooperation in the region among Republics. The Kyrgyz side supported the proposal of Uzbekistan on holding the first meeting of the Council of Hokims and heads of administrations of border regions in Uzbekistan under the patronage of the Prime Ministers of the two countries.

¹³ Asia Plus, “Tajik president proposes to supply Tajik fresh water to Jordan,” 11 December 2017, <https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/politics/20171211/tajik-president-proposes-to-supply-tajik-fresh-water-to-jordan>

¹⁴ Asia Plus, “Tajikistan, Jordan sign agreements to expand bilateral cooperation,” 11 December 2017, <https://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/tajikistan/politics/20171211/tajikistan-jordan-sign-agreements-to-expand-bilateral-cooperation>

¹⁵ President of Tajikistan website, “Meeting with the Prime Minister of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Dr. Hani al-Mulqi,” 11 December 2017, <http://www.president.tj/en/node/16744>

¹⁶ President of Uzbekistan website, “Negotiations continued in an expanded format,” 13 December 2017, <http://president.uz/en/lists/view/1341>

¹⁷ President of Uzbekistan website, “Negotiations continued in an expanded format,” 13 December 2017, <http://president.uz/en/lists/view/1341>

China

- **PLA reports interference from foreign warplanes during high-seas drills**
Several Chinese bombers, fighters and surveillance aircraft encountered and dealt with interference from foreign warplanes while conducting a training mission over the Tsushima Strait on 18 December 2017, according to a Chinese military spokesperson.
This is the first time that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force has flown over the Tsushima Strait, Shen Jinke, spokesman for the Chinese PLA Air Force, was quoted as saying in a statement released on the organization's official Sina Weibo account.¹⁸
- **Conference on Sino-Tibetan languages and linguistics**
The 50th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics sponsored by the Presidium of the Academic Divisions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the Bureau of International Cooperation of CASS and the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of CASS was held in Beijing from November 26 to 28. Li Peilin, Vice-President of CASS, said the internationally acclaimed Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics Conference celebrated its 50th birthday in China.¹⁹
- **First phase of Yamal LNG project becomes operational**
Yamal LNG shipped the first cargo of LNG from Sabetta, marking the formal operation of the first phase of this super project on 8 December. Yamal LNG, world's largest and most complex LNG project in the Arctic region, is a significant example of energy cooperation between China and Russia.
Yamal LNG is an integrated project that covers an entire chain of natural gas production, processing, LNG manufacturing, and sales and shipping. The project has proved reserves of 1.3 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and 60.18 million tons of gas condensate. It will be put into operation in three phases. At full capacity, the three-train facility will supply 16.5 million tons of LNG per year to Asian and European markets.
The project is jointly owned by Novatek (50.1%), Total (20%), CNPC (20%), and Silk Road Fund (9.9%). As one of the shareholders, CNPC has participated in the operation of the project throughout its industry chain.²⁰
- **President Xi meets with visiting ROK President Moon**
The leaders of China and the Republic of Korea (ROK) on 14 December agreed to advance bilateral relations to ensure the long-term stability of their ties.
The commitment was made during talks between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his ROK counterpart Moon Jae-in in Beijing. Xi welcomed Moon on his state visit to China for the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Moon's visit coincided with China's annual memorial for the victims of the Nanjing Massacre, which fell on 13 December 2017. Moon extended

¹⁸ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/1219/c90000-9305807.html>

¹⁹ http://casseng.cssn.cn/news_events/news_events_news_briefing/201712/t20171215_3781684.html

²⁰ <http://www.cnpc.com.cn/en/nr2017/201712/8693f3894fe448058aab436384e94fc4.shtml>

his empathy to the victims. This was Moon's fifth trip to China and the first as ROK president. He expressed his admiration for China's development achievements. Calling the two countries important trading partners, Moon said the development of regional countries is closely linked with China's Two Centenary Goals. The ROK expects joint efforts with China to cement political trust and friendship between the two peoples, boost cooperation in various areas and coordination in global and regional affairs, Moon said.

The two leaders also exchanged their views on the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

"We must unswervingly uphold the goal of a nuclear-free peninsula and never allow war or chaos on the peninsula," said Xi. China believes that ultimately, the Korean Peninsula issue could only be solved through dialogue and consultation, he said.²¹

- **Use of unauthorised 'halal' logo in restaurants restricted in China's Xinjiang**
Chinese authorities have banned the use of "unauthorised" halal logos in restaurants in Urumqi, the capital of the restive Xinjiang region in the country's far west, a move that experts say is aimed at reducing religious symbolism in everyday life. The halal sign can only be used in restaurants that meet standards set by the China Islamic Association (CIA) for Islamic cuisine, state media reported on 12 December. The association is the Communist Party-approved national organisation for Muslims in China. Halal food must be genuine and meet standards required by the Quran and Islamic law, the association had earlier said. "To make sure the halal food is genuine is to protect Muslim consumers from spiritual harm. Fake halal food might not hurt their lives but will make them suffer mental trauma," state media quoted the association as saying. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, home to millions of Muslim Uyghurs, has witnessed unrest blamed by Beijing on radical extremists. Rights groups, however, say the violence is triggered by the Chinese government's repressive policies.²²
- **What team will Xi Jinping choose to steer world's second-largest economy into the future?**

President Xi Jinping's key economic adviser Liu He is likely to be promoted to vice-premier in March, as Xi assembles a new team to steer the world's second largest economy over the next five years, according to sources with knowledge of the arrangement. After spending his first term amassing unprecedented power through a much trumpeted anti-corruption crusade, Xi is now under increasing pressure to tackle the daunting challenges facing the US\$12 trillion economy that range from ballooning debts and rampant excess capacity to an inefficient state-owned sector.

In the weeks following the ruling Communist Party's five-yearly leadership shake-up in late October, all eyes were on who would take up the key economic policy roles when the new cabinet is unveiled at the annual legislative meeting next March. In the State Council, Premier Li Keqiang is set to stay on after retaining a

²¹ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/39767.htm>

²² <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/use-of-halal-logo-in-restaurants-restricted-in-china-s-xinjiang/story-bbTsSmLLHVn51poaZl0vnM.html>

seat on the Politburo's supreme Standing Committee, but all of his four deputies are due to retire or move on. Sources said Liu, who now sits on the 25-strong Politburo, is expected to fill Ma Kai's role in charge of finance.²³

- **The Dark Side of the Tim Cook-Approved Chinese Environmental Policy**

Last Wednesday (13 December), Apple CEO Tim Cook praised China's environmental policy, poverty relief and innovation. In an interview at the Fortune Global Forum in Guangzhou, China, a southern city near Hong Kong, Cook discussed Apple's business presence in China. "[China's] environmental leadership is very clear, and it aligns completely with Apple's values," Cook said. "They are very fixated on doing the right things to avert climate change."

In ironic contrast to Guangzhou's warm climate, where Cook and other clean-cut CEOs spoke, many residents in northern China struggle to keep their living rooms warm—a direct result of a recent government effort to “avert climate change.” The same week of the Fortune event, a vendor in Linfen, Shanxi province was arrested for selling coal on a personal tricycle; in a nearby city, Yizhou, a construction worker was detained by police for five days for burning coal for heat at home. Both men were in violation of a recent government order that bans coal burning in 28 cities in northern China.²⁴

- **Handling of Doklam shows importance of India-China ties: Wang Yi**

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said India and China's strategic interests outweigh “partial frictions” and handling of the Doklam standoff through diplomatic means reflects the importance of bilateral ties. Ahead of his visit to India to attend the Russia-India-China (RIC) Foreign Ministers' meeting to be held in New Delhi on Monday, during which he would also hold talks with top Indian officials, Mr. Wang said China always values good neighbourliness and friendship between the two countries as “we are each other's big neighbours and ancient civilisations.”

He said India-China strategic interests outweigh differences and “partial friction.” “We have handled the issue of cross-border incursions by the Indian border troops into China's Donglang [Doklam] area through diplomatic measures,” Mr. Wang told a symposium here last week, maintaining Beijing's stand.²⁵

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Japan, Britain to develop missiles in move toward ‘semi-alliance’**

On December 14, 2017 Japan and Britain agreed to jointly work on various defense projects amid uncertainties over the U.S. security commitment in East Asia and continuing concerns about China's maritime advances. Foreign Minister Taro

²³ <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2123716/key-xi-jinping-adviser-set-major-role-team-steering>

²⁴ <http://observer.com/2017/12/tim-cook-praises-chinese-environmental-policy-heat-shortage/>

²⁵ <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/handling-of-doklam-shows-importance-of-india-china-ties-wang-yi/article21389620.ece>

Kono and Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera met with their British counterparts, Boris Johnson, the foreign secretary, and Gavin Williamson, the defense secretary, in London and agreed to push forward joint research in developing missiles for fighter jets. This will be Japan's first joint research on missiles that does not include the United States. A joint statement issued after the meeting stated that Japan and Britain would move toward "research prototyping and the launch testing" of the Joint New Air-to-Air Missile (JNAAM). The statement also said the ministers "looked forward to the early embodiment of the joint research project." The statement said the two nations would work toward "elevating their global security partnership to the next level."²⁶

- **Tokyo imposes new sanction on North Korea**

On December 15, 2017 Japan imposed fresh sanctions on North Korea by freezing the assets of 19 North Korean institutions. The move brought the total number of North Korea-linked organizations and individuals whose assets Japan has frozen to 103 and 108, respectively. Of the 19 organizations newly added to the blacklist, three are banks, two trade minerals including coal, 10 run transportation businesses and four dispatch workers overseas, according to the Foreign Ministry. These institutions have already been singled out by the United States in a series of sanctions unveiled after January 2016, a ministry official said.²⁷

- **South Korean President Moon Jae-in Concludes Visit to China**

South Korean President Moon Jae-in carried out his first presidential visit to China on December 13-16, 2017 at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Moon first visited Beijing where he met with top officials including President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang to steady a relationship that has been put into a tailspin since last year over the deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense antimissile system in Korea. The trip created momentum for the normalization of strained bilateral relations, as Moon managed to persuade China to lift its unofficial economic sanctions. Though successful in persuading China to lift informal economic restriction South Korea, Moon failed to press China on exerting further pressure on North Korea. There had been speculation that he might ask Xi to impose a complete oil embargo on the regime, but he failed to do so during the summit.²⁸

- **Secretary Tillerson offers direct talk with North Korea without "pre-conditions"**

On December 12, 2017 U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson offered North Korea direct talks without preconditions while speaking at a think tank in Washington, a renewed diplomatic overture to the isolated regime. "We've said from the diplomatic side, we're ready to talk anytime North Korea would like to talk," Tillerson told a forum hosted by the Seoul-based Korea Foundation and the

²⁶ "Japan, Britain to develop missiles in move toward 'semi-alliance'", The Asahi Shimbun, December 15, 2017, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201712150029.html>

²⁷ "Tokyo freezes assets of 19 more North Korean institutions", The Japan Times, December 15, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/12/15/national/politics-diplomacy/tokyo-freezes-assets-19-north-korean-institutions/#.Wji2k9-WaM8>

²⁸ "Moon concludes successful China trip", Korea JoongAng Daily, December 18, 2017, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3042197>

Atlantic Council in Washington. He added “we’re ready to have the first meeting without preconditions. Let’s just meet.”²⁹

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand met with the United States Special Representative for North Korea Policy**

On 14 December 2017, Mr. Joseph Yun, United States Special Representative for North Korea Policy called on Mr. Virasakdi Futrakul, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The meeting was constructive during which both sides exchanged views on the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Mr Yun reaffirmed U.S. Secretary of State’s position that the United States is determined to resolve the tension on the Korean Peninsula through a diplomatic solution and dialogue. In this regard, Deputy Foreign Minister Virasakdi underscored the commitment of Thailand to see peace on the Korean Peninsula. He also reiterated that Thailand has complied with the relevant UNSC resolutions which imposed sanctions on North Korea. Moreover, Thailand supports the rising call by the international community on North Korea to return to the negotiation process in order to reduce tension and denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, which will lead to sustainable peace and security in the region.³⁰

Thailand has drastically reduced trade with North Korea amid mounting international pressure to isolate the state. During the first nine months of 2017 bilateral trade with North Korea amounted to \$1.6 million, a 94 per cent decrease from the same period in 2016, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “It’s expected that by late 2017 there will be no export or import of goods between Thailand and North Korea,” said Pimchanok Vonkorpon, director of the Thai Commerce Ministry’s Trade Policy and Strategy Office.³¹

- **All ASEAN leaders to attend India's Republic Day**

In a first, 10 world leaders from ASEAN will be chief guests at India's annual Republic Day parade on January 26 to mark the silver jubilee of India's relations with ASEAN. This is the first time that leaders from a bloc, instead of an individual country, will be the chief guests at the parade. The acceptance of the invitation by all ASEAN members is an indication of the growing importance of their relations with India - both as a bloc and bilaterally. While addressing the 15th India-ASEAN summit in Manila last month, Prime Minister Modi had said that 1.25 billion people of India are keen to welcome the ASEAN leaders. India and ASEAN are also discussing in Jakarta a joint declaration to be issued by PM Modi and ASEAN

²⁹ “‘Let’s talk,’ Tillerson tells North”, Korea JoongAng Daily, December 13, 2017, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3042035>

³⁰ “Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand met with the United States Special Representative for North Korea Policy”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand*, December 14, 2017, <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news3/6886/84749-Deputy-Minister-of-Foreign-Affairs-of-the-Kingdom.html>, accessed on December 15, 2017.

³¹ “Thailand cuts back North Korean trade to nearly ‘none’”, *Borneo Bulletin*, December 15, 2017, <http://borneobulletin.com.bn/thailand-cuts-back-north-korean-trade-to-nearly-none/>, accessed on December 15, 2017.

leaders at the end of their day-long summit. The fight against terrorism will be an important component of the declaration.³²

Myanmar

- **UN Chief Says Arrest of Reuters Journalists Shows Erosion of Press Freedom in Myanmar**

The arrest of two Reuters journalists in Yangon this week was a signal that press freedom is shrinking in Myanmar and the international community must do all it can to get them released, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on 14th December. Guterres said his main concern over Myanmar was the “dramatic violations of human rights” during a military crackdown in Rakhine State that forced more than 600,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee the country for southern Bangladesh, and the arrest of the journalists was probably related.³³

- **China donates USD 500,000 towards Peace Process**

The People’s Republic of China donated USD 500,000 to National Reconciliation and Peace Center yesterday afternoon in Nay Pyi Taw, state media reported on 18 December. Speaking at the ceremony at the center, Mr. Sun Guoxiang, Special envoy of Asian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China said, “China supports Myanmar’s peace process and will provide up to USD 3 million for it. The country will donate USD 1 million next year. Although the amount is not large, the donation reflects China’s goodwill towards Myanmar as the two are friendly countries. China will provide more assistance for Myanmar.”³⁴

- **Japan pledges Yangon infrastructure aid**

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Myanmar President U Htin Kyaw held a meeting on 14th December in Tokyo, with the Japanese leader expected to announce fresh support for infrastructure projects in the country. The planned projects are aimed at promoting the development of Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar, facilitating logistics and improving electric infrastructure, according to Japanese government officials. During their talks in his office, Abe was set to reaffirm Japan’s support for Myanmar’s democratic transition following decades of military rule³⁵.

- **UNFC Seeks Talks with State Counselor, Army Chief**

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a bloc of ethnic armed organizations that has yet to sign up to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), has requested meetings with the State Counselor and the Myanmar Army chief later this month, hoping to revive deadlocked talks on peace negotiations.

³² “In a first, all ASEAN leaders to attend India's Republic Day”, *The Straits Times*, December 14, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/in-a-first-all-ASEAN-leaders-to-attend-indias-republic-day>, accessed on December 15, 2017.

³³ UN Chief Says Arrest of Reuters Journalists Shows Erosion of Press Freedom in Myanmar, 14 December 2017, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/un-chief-says-arrest-reuters-journalists-shows-erosion-press-freedom-myanmar.html>

³⁴ China donates USD 500,000 towards Peace Process, 18 December 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/china-donates-usd-500000-towards-peace-process>

³⁵ Japan pledges Yangon infrastructure aid, 15 December 2017, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/japan-pledges-yangon-infrastructure-aid.html>

The proposed meeting would be the group's second with State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The first was in March³⁶.

- **Germany grants 1.1 Million USD in Humanitarian Aid**

The Federal Republic of Germany has granted the World Food Programme subsidies worth one million Euros (approx.. 1,17 million USD) for humanitarian aid in Myanmar. The attribution is meant to fund the project "Myanmar Country Strategic Plan"³⁷.

- **6,700 killed in first month of Myanmar violence: MSF**

At least 6,700 Rohingya Muslims were killed in the first month of a Myanmar army crackdown on terrorists in Rakhine state beginning in August, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said on 14th December 2017. The figure is the highest estimated death toll yet of violence that erupted on August 25 and triggered a massive refugee crisis, sending some 647,000 Rohingya fleeing across the border to Bangladesh³⁸.

North America

Canada

- **Defence Minister says Canada will support road building project in Jordan to enhance security**

Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan announced Sunday (Dec. 17) that Canada will support the construction and "rehabilitation" of a road along Jordan's northern border with Syria. The project will contribute to the security and stability of Jordan by allowing the Jordanian Armed Forces to better respond to threats along the border, according to the Department of National Defence. Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan announced Sunday that Canada will support the construction and "rehabilitation" of a road along Jordan's northern border with Syria. The project will contribute to the security and stability of Jordan by allowing the Jordanian Armed Forces to better respond to threats along the border, according to the Department of National Defence.³⁹

- **Canadian arms makers get OK to sell to Ukraine**

The Liberal cabinet has given the green light for Canadian defence contractors to sell weapons to Ukraine in a watershed decision which a senior official of that country hopes will influence the Trump administration to follow suit. The embattled eastern European country has been added to Canada's automatic firearms country control list. The decision was made on Nov. 23, according to a cabinet order posted online. It was released publicly on Wednesday, as the House of Commons prepared to rise for the Christmas break. The long-standing plea by the Ukrainian government was a feature of last fall's meeting between President

³⁶ UNFC Seeks Talks with State Counselor, Army Chief, 13 December 2017, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/unfc-seeks-talks-with-state-counselor-army-chief.html>

³⁷ Germany grants 1.1 Million USD in Humanitarian Aid, 15th December 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/germany-grants-11-million-usd-humanitarian-aid>

³⁸ 6,700 killed in first month of Myanmar violence: MSF, 15th December 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/6700-killed-first-month-myanmar-violence-msf>

³⁹ David Pugliese, "Defence Minister says Canada will support road building project in Jordan to enhance security," <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/defence-minister-says-canada-will-support-road-building-project-in-jordan-to-enhance-security>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17.

Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The move puts Canada out ahead of the United States, which has been considering its own weapons sales. It is, however, expected to anger both the human rights groups that petitioned against it and Russia, which annexed Crimea in 2014 and has been accused of supporting separatist forces in eastern Ukraine. Conservative defence critic James Bezan said he welcomed the move and noted the process was started under the previous Conservative government.⁴⁰

- **Protesters say new border law is 'draconian'**

Dozens of members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Canada rallied in Vancouver, Saturday, protesting what they call "intrusive" powers granted to United States border security officials. Workers said they are concerned about Bill C-23, which grants U.S. customs and border officials the right to detain Canadians in pre-clearance centres at Canadian airports, cruise ship terminals and other points of departure. They also say the new law will deny Canadian workers' jobs. The bill, also known as the Preclearance Act, was introduced by Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale in June last year, received royal assent on Dec. 14, and will soon become law. Preclearing customs mean Canadian travelers don't have to pass through customs in the U.S., as they've already been approved before leaving Canada. It replaces and expands powers under the Air Transport Preclearance Agreement signed between the two countries in 2001 and does not allow U.S. officials to arrest Canadians, though individuals can be held or detained. Several Canadian airports, including in in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver, permit Canadian travelers to clear US Customs and Border Protection procedures before they board US-bound flights. Proponents have argued the bill will increase the efficiency of the flow of people and goods across the border, but others say it puts Canadian workers and residents at risk.⁴¹

The United States

- **Trump criticizes how Mueller obtained transition emails, says no plans to fire special counsel**

President Trump appeared to back the claims of a lawyer for his presidential transition team that special counsel Robert S. Mueller III improperly obtained Trump associates' emails, saying that "a lot of lawyers thought that was pretty sad." Trump also said he has no plan to fire Mueller, who is investigating Russian interference in the presidential election, including the possibility of coordination with the Trump campaign. Mueller's investigation has resulted in charges against two people and guilty pleas by two others, including former national security adviser Michael Flynn. A lawyer for Trump's transition team contends that Mueller should not have been able to obtain a trove of emails from the period between Trump's 2016 election victory and his Jan. 20 inauguration without the consent of transition officials. The batch of emails totaling thousands of pages of communications was provided to Mueller by the federal General Services Administration, the lawyer representing the organization known as Trump for

⁴⁰ Murray Brewster, "Canadian arms makers get OK to sell to Ukraine," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-ukraine-weapons-1.4446891>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17.

⁴¹ CBC NEWS, "Protesters say new border law is 'draconian'," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/protesters-say-new-border-law-is-draconian-1.4452934>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

America said in a letter delivered to congressional investigators. A spokesman for Mueller's team rejected the allegations of impropriety.⁴²

- **Once a Long Shot, Democrat Doug Jones Wins Alabama Senate Race**

Doug Jones, a Democratic former prosecutor who mounted a seemingly quixotic Senate campaign in the face of Republican dominance here, defeated his scandal-scarred opponent, Roy S. Moore, after a brutal campaign marked by accusations of sexual abuse and child molestation against the Republican. The upset delivered an unimagined victory for Democrats and shaved Republicans' unstable Senate majority to a single seat. Mr. Jones's victory could have significant consequences on the national level, snarling Republicans' legislative agenda in Washington and opening, for the first time, a realistic but still a difficult path for Democrats to capture the Senate next year. It amounted to a stinging snub of President Trump, who broke with much of his party and fully embraced Mr. Moore's candidacy, seeking to rally support for him in the closing days of the campaign. Propelled by a backlash against Mr. Moore, an intensely polarizing former judge who was accused of sexually assaulting young girls, Mr. Jones overcame the state's daunting demographics and deep cultural conservatism. His campaign targeted African-American voters with a sprawling, muscular turnout operation, and appealed to educated white voters to turn their backs on the Republican Party.⁴³

- **India is a US defence partner on a par with NATO allies: Keith Webster**

Keith Webster handled US-India defence relations for several years as a senior Pentagon official in the Obama administration. Now, a senior vice-president with the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum he stated, "In May 2016, during the waning months of former President Barack Obama's administration, we began debating in the Pentagon the need to cement the solid defence relationship we had achieved. We decided the best way to "immortalise" the relationship was to bring in the term "major defence partner" (MDP) into the June 2016 joint statement between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Obama. We proposed the MDP designation, and the Modi government accepted putting it into the Modi-Obama joint statement. Late in 2016, there was a short exchange of letters between US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter and Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar on what MDP broadly meant. And then, MDP was mentioned in our National Defense Authorisation Act of 2017, signed by Barack Obama in December 2016. That means the legislation is in place on the US side...the benefits would be First, in transferring defence capabilities, India will be on par with NATO allies. Second, when we talk about "Make in India", we can now transfer more critical technologies to Indian industries than without MDP categorisation."⁴⁴

- **Trump signs nearly \$700b US defence bill; Pakistan to get \$700m under CSF**

⁴² Anne Gearan and Philip Rucker, "Trump criticizes how Mueller obtained transition emails, says no plans to fire special counsel," https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/mueller-unlawfully-obtained-emails-trump-transition-team-says/2017/12/16/6162f350-e2cc-11e7-8679-a9728984779c_story.html?utm_term=.7c89e47bbea4, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

⁴³ Alexander Burns And Jonathan Martin, "Once a Long Shot, Democrat Doug Jones Wins Alabama Senate Race," <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/12/us/politics/alabama-senate-race-winner.html>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

⁴⁴ Ajai Shukla, "India is a US defence partner on a par with NATO allies: Keith Webster," http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-is-a-us-defence-partner-on-a-par-with-nato-allies-keith-webster-117121100049_1.html, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

President Donald signed a massive defence policy bill that he said would help America bolster its military might and modernise the services. The National Defense Authorisation Act (NDAA) calls for nearly \$700 billion of military spending for the coming fiscal year, but Congress has yet to fully fund it. While the NDAA passed Congress with bipartisan support, lawmakers have not agreed on how to fund the mammoth spending package, which amounts to more than that of the world's next seven militaries combined. Trump called on Democrats in Congress to get in line with Republicans and back a "clean funding bill." The United States has allocated \$700 million for Pakistan, according to the bill, which would be paid under the Coalition Support Fund. However, half of the allocated amount, i.e. \$350 million, requires certification by the US secretary of defence that "Pakistan continues to conduct military operations that are contributing to significantly disrupting the safe havens, fundraising and recruiting efforts, and freedom of movement of the Haqqani Network in Pakistan."⁴⁵

Mexico.

- **Mexican senate votes to keep troops in police role despite outcry from rights groups**

Mexico's senate has approved controversial legislation enshrining the role of the military in law enforcement, despite soaring violence and repeated allegations that the country's security forces have committed human rights abuses. Lawmakers pushed through the "interior security law" amid heavy security to stop protesters who allege the measure will militarise the country and cement a failed strategy of using soldiers to combat drug cartels. The bill now returns to the lower house of congress, where its passage is expected to be a formality. Human rights organisations have also warned that the law could turn over public security and policing duties of untrained soldiers under the command of unaccountable army brass, while reducing civilian oversight and relegating human rights to an afterthought.⁴⁶

- **Mexico right-left coalition presents bid to run in 2018 election**

Mexico's newest political force formally emerged when a right-left coalition presented its official request with the electoral institute to compete in next year's presidential election. The coalition, known as "For Mexico in Front," brings together the conservative National Action Party (PAN), the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the Citizens Movement party. The coalition will compete against the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and leftist front-runner Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, of the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), in next July's vote. President Enrique Pena Nieto is constitutionally barred from running again. With the formalizing of the coalition, the contours of the election are beginning to take shape. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen who "For Mexico in Front" will pick as its candidate. PAN president Ricardo Anaya is seen as the most likely figure, although Mexico City's PRD Mayor

⁴⁵ AFP, "Trump signs nearly \$700b US defence bill; Pakistan to get \$700m under CSF," <https://www.geo.tv/latest/172013-trump-signs-us-military-defense-bill-worth-nearly-700bn>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

⁴⁶ David Agren, "Mexican senate votes to keep troops in police role despite outcry from rights groups," <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/15/mexican-military-police-drugs-crackdown-human-rights>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

Miguel Angel Mancera is also seen as a contender. Former Mexican first lady Margarita Zavala broke with the PAN in October in order to run as an independent. Finance Minister Jose Antonio Meade resigned to seek the presidential nomination of the PRI, which has broken with tradition by seeking outside help to clean up its tarnished image and stay in office for another six years.⁴⁷

- **Mexico plots open trade course to escape Trump's NAFTA threats**

President Trump's threats to dump NAFTA and his plan to slash corporate taxes have fired debate in Mexico over how to respond, from overhauling its own tax system to increasing land cultivation and even scrapping all tariffs to become a free trade hub. U.S. exporters may still face tit-for-tat countermeasures if Trump imposes curbs on business with Mexico, but officials say the Latin American country's ultimate objective is to lower barriers to trade. The government's stated 'plan B' in the event of NAFTA collapsing involves diversifying trade, guaranteeing foreign investments and ensuring financial authorities cushion any market ructions. President Enrique Pena Nieto's government has also indicated it could change tariffs, without suggesting how. Mexico is already in talks with Argentina, Brazil and the European Union to either sign new or upgrade existing trade agreements, and is pushing to revive the stalled Trans-Pacific Partnership deal. To counter Trump's tax cuts and keep investment flowing to Mexico, business lobbies and some influential lawmakers have urged the government to lower corporate levies. A tax overhaul which set out to capture the quarter of the economy that works off the books could provide Mexico with room for maneuver.⁴⁸

Latin America and Caribbean Countries

Argentina

- **Argentina suspends debate on pension reform after violent protests**

The Chamber of Deputies of Argentina has suspended a controversial pension system reform vote after a heated legislative debate and clashes between police and protesters outside the building, in a blow to the government's plans to reduce the public deficit. The project, which already has the approval of the Senate, is part of a package of reforms with which the liberal President Mauricio Macri hopes to lower Argentina's production costs to attract investment. Critics say the bill, which was expected to be discussed in the framework of the extraordinary end-of-year sessions that the government called this week (mid-December 2017), will hurt retirees. The ruling party – which has no majority in any House of Congress – said it obtained the necessary quorum to debate, but the opposition said it was after the deadline and counted legislators who are not yet part of the Congress despite having been elected in the October 2017 elections. The Government says that, with the new law, retirements would rise 5 points over inflation next year (2018), which

⁴⁷ Reuters, "Mexico right-left coalition presents bid to run in 2018 election," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexico-right-left-coalition-presents-bid-to-run-in-2018-election-idUSKBN1E3063>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

⁴⁸ Dave Graham, "Mexico plots open trade course to escape Trump's NAFTA threats," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-nafta-mexico/mexico-plots-open-trade-course-to-escape-trumps-nafta-threats-idUSKBN1E915C>, Accessed on 18 Dec. 17

the Central Bank aims to rein in between 8 and 12% in 2018. After half an hour of strong arguments the session was suspended on December 14, 2017.⁴⁹

Brazil

- **Appeals Court Schedules Decision on Brazil's Ex-President Lula for January**
The TRF-4 regional appeals court in Porto Alegre has scheduled the trial of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, regarding the triplex apartment case, for January 24, 2018. The Brazilian appeals court is responsible for upholding or overturning the trial court's conviction, rendered by Judge Sergio Moro. Lula's case is being processed in record time in court. It took only 42 days between conviction and commencement of appellate proceedings. Judge-rapporteur Gebran Neto, for example, needed 36 business days to vote. On average, proceedings usually take 102 days from the vote by the judge-rapporteur until trial. In Lula's case, it will only take 52 days. Lula's defense issued a note in which it states the case needs to be debated "under the perspective of violation against the principle of equality before the law, a fundamental guarantee of any citizen." Lula's defense has been trying to prove that the court has been acting with exceptional promptness in the case of his appeal, in order to cast him out of the presidential race in 2018.⁵⁰

On December 13, 2017, former president Lula da Silva said he will not hide behind a candidacy and that he will fight "until the end" to run for president of Brazil in 2018. Lula said that, if the investigators of the Lava Jato operation prove that he is guilty, then there will be "no moral conditions" for him to become a candidate; however, he challenged the Prosecutor General's Office to show evidence against him. Lula's speech during the first meeting of PT representatives in the Lower House and in the Senate in Brasília was his first public reaction after the decision made by the TRF-4 regional appeals court to schedule the trial of the three-floor penthouse to January 24, 2018. The former president also said that it would be "flippancy" to run for president next year if there were "any evidence" against him. "The only thing that I don't want is to be sentenced if I am innocent. That is why I will fight until the end – because I know that the objective is to prevent the PT from returning to office. In Brazil we are still a little numb," said Lula.⁵¹

Chile

- **Chile, Argentina agree to boost energy exchange**
Energy ministers from Chile, Andrés Rebolledo, and from Argentina, Juan José Aranguren, signed a bilateral agreement in Buenos Aires that will allow increasing energy exchange, both electricity and natural gas. The agreement, under the energy swap modality, establishes the regulatory framework through which the natural gas and electricity exchanges will be made on either side of the mountain range, and considers as conditions for its realization the supply of temporary or seasonal deficiencies of the respective resource in the destination country; supply

⁴⁹ "Argentina Suspends Debate on Pension Reform After Violent Protests," December 17, 2017, <http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/12/17/argentina-suspends-debate-on-pension-reform-after-violent-protests/>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁵⁰ Monica Bergamo and Ana Luiza Albuquerque, "Appeals Court Schedules Decision on Brazil's Ex-President Lula for January," December 13, 2017, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2017/12/1942913-appeals-court-schedules-decision-on-brazils-ex-president-lula-for-january-24.shtml>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁵¹ Marina Dias, "Ex-President Lula Says He Will Fight 'Until the End' to Run for President," December 14, 2017, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2017/12/1943243-ex-president-lula-says-he-will-fight-until-the-end-to-run-for-president.shtml>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

temporary lack of supply generated by emergency situations or public calamity; and transport electricity or natural gas through the networks of both countries, in order to supply areas of a country that are not directly connected to the point of origin of energy in the same country. In this way Argentina will return to export natural gas to Chile after 10 years, after the crisis that implied the unilateral cut off shipments in the midst of the energy deficit that the country went through. The negotiations for the signing of this agreement started in 2014, but intensified during 2016, with a series of meetings between the ministers and the technical teams of both countries, which concluded with the signature of the document in Buenos Aires.⁵²

- **Chile elects Sebastián Piñera as Bachelet's successor**

Conservative billionaire Sebastián Piñera has won a new term in office after gaining a wider than expected margin in Chile's presidential election run-off on December 17, 2017. In his first speech outside of the Crown Plaza, at Av. Bernardo O'Higgins, where thousands of his supporters gathered, Piñera said he will be president of all Chileans. He also thanked his team and wife, Cecilia Morel. His center-left opponent Mr. Alejandro Guillier conceded victory and congratulated the former president on his win. In his concession speech at a hotel in downtown Santiago, the former TV anchorman and current senator called his loss a "harsh defeat" and urged his supporters to defend the progressive reforms of outgoing President Michelle Bachelet's second term. With more than 95% counted, the 68-year-old billionaire already has over 54% of the vote. Mr. Piñera, who governed Chile from 2010 to 2014 — having been both preceded and succeeded by Ms. Bachelet — won the first round of votes on Nov. 19 by a large margin, when the number of candidates reduced from eight to two for a final run-off. During the first round, Beatriz Sanchez of the Broad Front coalition came in third with 20 per cent of the vote. She pledged her support to Guillier. About 14 million were eligible to vote in the ballot, including Chileans living abroad for the first time. However, voter turnout was low on Sunday.⁵³

Peru

- **President of Peru Refuses to Resign over Odebrecht Bribes Scandal**

President of Peru, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski strengthened his denial against accusations that he had ties to a corruption scandal involving the Brazilian construction company, Odebrecht. He said he wants to release his bank records to prove it. In an address to the nation, Kuczynski said he intends to cooperate with the investigation so as to prove his innocence. He also clarified that he will not resign despite calls from five officials to do so. The scandal stems from an investigation into Odebrecht, whose executives admitted to giving Us \$29 million to Peruvian politicians between 2005 and 2014—a time period that coincides with the presidential terms of Alejandro Toledo (2001-2006), Alan García (2006-2011) and Ollanta Humala (2011-2016). Kuczynski claimed he has nothing to hide and

⁵² "Chile, Argentina Agree to Boost Energy Exchange," December 15, 2017, <http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/12/15/chile-argentina-agree-to-boost-energy-exchange/>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁵³ "Chile Elects Sebastian Pinera as Bachelet's Successor," December 17, 2017, <http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/12/17/chile-elects-sebastian-pinera-as-bachelets-successor/>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

that he is willing “to defend the truth before the Lava Jato commission,” which is why he requested that his bank records be released.⁵⁴

Venezuela

- **Venezuela’s Cryptocurrency, the Petro, to Be Backed by Oil Reserves – Maduro**

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro promised on December 12, 2017 to certify the new Petro cryptocurrency in the near future, which will be backed by the country’s oil reserves. The Ministry of Finance of Venezuela clarified that the cryptocurrency is necessary to carry out financial transactions and to seek new ways of financing. President Maduro said the introduction of a digital cryptocurrency, the Petro, would help Venezuela “advance in issues of monetary sovereignty, to make financial transactions and overcome the financial blockade.” Opposition leaders derided the announcement, which they said needed congressional approval, and some cast doubt on whether the digital currency would ever see the light of day in the midst of turmoil. The real currency, the bolivar, is in freefall, and the country is sorely lacking in basic needs like food and medicine. Currency controls and excessive money printing have led to a 57% depreciation of the Bolivar against the dollar November 2017 alone on the widely used black market. That has dragged down the monthly minimum wage to a mere US\$4.30.⁵⁵

- **Venezuelan opposition receives European Union prize for human rights**

Venezuela’s opposition received a European Union prize for human rights and urged the world to keep a close eye on an upcoming presidential election where it aspires to end two decades of socialist rule in the OPEC nation. Foes of President Nicolas Maduro failed to dislodge him during months of street protests this year that turned violent killing more than 125 people, and have been dismayed to see him consolidate his power in recent months. But they hope a presidential vote due in 2018 will galvanize exhausted and despondent supporters, and want foreign pressure for reforms to an election system they say is at the service of Maduro’s “dictatorship”. The prize, named after the Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov, was awarded this year to Venezuela’s National Assembly and “all political prisoners”, according to the citation. The opposition has a dilemma in choosing its candidate for the 2018 race, given that its most popular figures cannot run: Leopoldo Lopez is under house arrest, while Henrique Capriles is prohibited from holding office.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Karina Martin, “President of Peru Refuses to Resign over Odebrecht Bribes Scandal,” December 15, 2017, <https://panampost.com/karina-martin/2017/12/15/president-of-peru-refuses-to-resign-over-odebrecht-bribes-scandal/>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁵⁵ “Venezuela’s Cryptocurrency, The Petro, To Be Backed by Oil Reserves-Maduro,” December 14, 2017, <http://todayvenezuela.com/2017/12/14/venezuelas-cryptocurrency-the-petro-to-be-backed-by-oil-reserves-maduro/>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁵⁶ “Venezuelan Opposition Receives European Union Prize for Human Rights,” December 15, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/15/venezuelan-opposition-receives-european-union-prize-for-human-rights>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

- **Opposition parties will be barred from 2018 presidential vote**

President Nicolas Maduro announced on December 10, 2017 that leading opposition parties will be barred from taking part in 2018's presidential vote after they boycotted mayoral polls, in a move set to further consolidate his grip on power. That includes the groups of key figures who have led street protests against his rule such as Henrique Capriles, Leopoldo Lopez and others, Maduro told reporters after casting his vote in the municipal polls. "If they don't want elections, what are they doing? What's the alternative? (Civil) war?" the president asked, visibly angry.⁵⁷

Mercosur

- **Mercosur and EU Trade Agreement Postponed Again**

The completion of the agreement between the European Union and Mercosur nations, which has been negotiated for almost twenty years, has been postponed once again, now to the beginning of 2018, according to Mercosur and EU officials, who are meeting in Buenos Aires this week. Until the first week of December 2017, Mercosur member countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), hoped to announce the conclusion of the trade deal, but according to a source interviewed by Reuters European Union officials are still weary of some trade terms. According to EU officials, the bloc needs time to convince the agricultural sector, which has been strongly resisting opening up its markets to the South American countries. Negotiators have signaled that the greatest resistance comes from trade agreements in the areas of ethanol and beef. Talks between Mercosur and the European Union countries started in the 1990s as an alternative to the U.S.'s FTAA project, which sought to integrate the countries of the Americas.⁵⁸

Russia

- **Russia and India**

On 11 December, in an address at a think tank, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pitched for India joining China's One Belt One Road initiative and hoped that New Delhi will find a way out to benefit from the mega connectivity project without sacrificing its position on the issues flagged by it. In Quadrilateral talks, he also said that a sustainable security architecture in the Asia Pacific region cannot be achieved through "bloc arrangement", in a clear signal of Moscow's opposition to the quadrilateral grouping comprising the US, Japan, India and Australia. On a question about the possibility by Moscow joining China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of OBOR, he said that Russia has its own corridors and has a large territory for such corridors and connectivity initiatives.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ "Opposition Parties will be Barred from 2018 Presidential Vote, Maduro Anticipates," December 11, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/11/opposition-parties-will-be-barred-from-2018-presidential-vote-maduro-anticipates>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁵⁸ Lise Alves, "Mercosur and EU Trade Agreement Postponed Again," December 13, 2017, <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-politics/mercosur-eu-trade-agreement-postponed-to-2018/>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁵⁹ "Russia pitches for India's participation in OBOR", *Economic Times*, December 12, 2017. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/russia-pitches-for-indias-participation-in-obor/articleshow/62024855.cms> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

Russia, India and China on 11 December condemned terrorism in all forms and reaffirmed their determination to prevent and counter it. They said that those committing, organising, inciting or supporting terrorist acts must be held accountable and brought to justice. In a joint communique issued after the 15th meeting of foreign ministers of Russia, India and China in New Delhi, the countries made it clear that their cooperation was not directed against any nation. The statement urged all countries to take adequate measures to prevent terrorist activities from their territory.⁶⁰

On 15 December, Russia's envoy Nikolay Kudashev said cooperation in the field of information security is one of the pillars of Russia's strategic bilateral partnership with India. Kudashev said a very important agenda for his country is to develop a broad network of multilateral and bilateral confidence-building measures in the use of Information and Communication Technology.⁶¹

- **Russia and US**

The Kremlin said on 17 December that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency provided Russian authorities with information that thwarted a series of Islamic State bombings planned in St. Petersburg. Moscow said Russian President Vladimir Putin called U.S. President Donald Trump to thank him for the CIA information, a call the White House confirmed. Russia said the intelligence was significant enough for its Federal Security Service to track down seven suspects last week who were planning suicide bomb attacks Saturday on the two-century-old Kazan Cathedral and other sites in Russia's second largest city. Three more were arrested on 17 December who authorities said were linked to the planned attack.⁶²

- **Russia and Venezuela**

On 18 December, Venezuela has awarded licenses to Russian energy giant Rosneft to develop two offshore gas fields. The deal allows its subsidiary, Grupo Rosneft, to export gas produced at the Patao and Mejillones fields in the Caribbean Sea for the next 30 years.⁶³

- **Russia and Syria**

On 12 December, the Kremlin said that Russia will keep a naval and an air base in Syria capable of carrying out strikes against insurgents if required after a partial military pull-out announced by President Vladimir Putin. Putin on 11 December ordered “a significant part” of Moscow’s military contingent to start pulling out of Syria, declaring their work largely done. He made the announcement during a surprise visit to the Russian Hmeymim air base, where he met President Bashar al-Assad and addressed Russian forces. He added that Russia would keep

⁶⁰“India, Russia and China slam terrorism”, *The Hindu*, December 11, 2017. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-russia-china-slam-terrorism/article21390676.ece> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁶¹“Coop in info security important pillar of India, Russia ties: Envoy”, *Economic Times*, December 15, 2017. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/coop-in-info-security-important-pillar-of-india-russia-ties/articleshow/62076254.cms> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁶²“Russia: CIA Information Thwarted St. Petersburg Attack”, *VOA*, December 17, 2017. <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-says-cia-information-thwarted-st-petersburg-attack/4167442.html> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁶³“Russia’s Rosneft wins gas licences in Venezuela”, *BBC*, December 18, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-42388488> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

the Hmeymim air base in Syria's Latakia Province and its naval facility in the port of Tartous.⁶⁴ The first Russian troops returned home on 12 December from their deployment in Syria, the army said.⁶⁵

- **Russia and Yemen**

On 12 December, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Russia has temporarily shut its embassy in Yemen and evacuated all of its diplomats. She said that the ambassador and other diplomats will fulfill their duties from the Saudi capital, Riyadh. Zakharova said the decision to close the embassy, in the rebel-held capital, Sanaa, was related to the security situation in the country, without elaborating.⁶⁶

- **Russia and China**

At their meeting on the sidelines of the 15th trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of China, Russia and India, on 11 December, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov vowed to maintain the high-level bilateral Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination and promote cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Wang said China and Russia have been firmly supporting each other on issues of core interests, closely cooperating with each other in international affairs, and actively contributing to the establishment of a new type of international relationship. The alignment of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union has yielded primary results, and the pragmatic cooperation between China and Russia has made headway, Wang said, adding that the Chinese side is willing to push the bilateral ties to a higher level. As a chair nation of the SCO summit in 2018, China hopes to work with Russia to push the summit to achieve more results, especially on the deeper integration of China's Belt and Road Initiative and other member countries' development strategies, so as to inject impetus to regional joint development, the Chinese foreign minister said. For his part, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said Russia is willing to work with China to further strengthen coordination and cooperation within the bilateral and multilateral frameworks, in a bid to promote respective development and safeguard common interests. Russia is willing to assist China and push forward the integration of SCO member countries' respective development strategies, and promote regional cooperation.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Denis Pinchuk, "Russia will keep bases in Syria to strike at insurgents: Kremlin", *Reuters*, December 12, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-withdrawa/russia-will-keep-bases-in-syria-to-strike-at-insurgents-kremlin-idUSKBN1E610F> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁶⁵"Russia begins partial withdrawal from Syria", *The Hindu*, December 12, 2017. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/russia-begins-partial-withdrawal-from-syria/article21543545.ece> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁶⁶"Russia shuts its embassy in Yemen, evacuates diplomats", *The Vindicator*, December 12, 2017. <http://www.vindy.com/news/2017/dec/12/russia-shuts-its-embassy-yemen-evacuates-diplomats/?newswatch> Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁶⁷"Chinese, Russian FMs meet on cooperation, regional integration", *Global Times*, December 12, 2017. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1079848.shtml>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

- **Russia and Japan**

Russian military chief General Valery Gerasimov warned Japan on 11 December that military exercises the U.S. is conducting around the Korean Peninsula could heighten tension with North Korea in the region. The warning from the chief of staff of Russia's armed forces came as the U.S., Japan and South Korea began a two-day missile tracking exercise in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. They are the first trilateral anti-missile drills the allies have rolled out since North Korea on November 29 launched its most powerful missile yet, reportedly capable of reaching anywhere in the U.S. mainland.⁶⁸

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Security Forces Detain Four Afghan-Turk School Teachers**

Afghan security forces raided an Afghan-Turk female high school in Taimani area in Kabul and detained four school teachers on 12 December 2017 evening. The acting Minister of Education Mohammad Ibrahim Shinwari said that the raid by the security forces on Afghan-Turk girls' school was not carried out on the orders of the government leadership. Reacting to the raid, the deputy chairman of Afghan-Turk schools in Afghanistan, Fawad Haidari, said the raid was in contravention of the laws of the country⁶⁹ and the government is exploiting the educational institution. The raid came few hours after Afghan president Ashraf Ghani left Kabul for Istanbul to attend an emergency meeting of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit on Jerusalem. Sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, have said that a court in Turkey had ordered the arrest of three teachers of the Afghan-Turk schools, including a Turkish restaurant owner in Kabul. The Turkish government has asked the Afghan government to hand over these individuals to Turkey. However, there is no agreement between Afghanistan and Turkey about the extradition of individuals between the two countries. Amid speculation about the link between the raid and President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Turkey, the presidential palace has said that the move was not linked to the trip of the president.⁷⁰

On the other hand, President Ashraf Ghani has met his counterpart, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in Turkey on the sidelines of the summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and discussed regional issues. At the meeting, Erdogan reaffirmed the continuation of Turkey's support and partnership with Afghanistan and stressed the need to strengthen ties.⁷¹

⁶⁸Jessica Kwong, "Russia Warns U.S and Japan Military Drills will 'Increase Tension' with North Korean", *Newsweek*, December 12, 2017. <http://www.newsweek.com/russia-warns-us-japan-military-drills-increase-tension-north-korea-744437>, Accessed on December 18, 2017.

⁶⁹Sayed Sharif Amiri, "Leaders Did Not Order Raid On Afghan-Turk School: MoE", *Tolonews*, 13 December 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/leaders-did-not-order-raid-afghan-turk-school-moe> accessed on 15 December 2017.

⁷⁰Karim Amini, "Fate of Four Afghan-Turk Teachers Remains Uncertain", *Tolonews*, 13 December 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/fate-four-afghan-turk-teachers-remains-uncertain> accessed on 14 December 2017.

⁷¹"Ghani, Erdogan Discuss Regional Issues", *Tolonews*, 14 December 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/ghani-erdogan-discuss-regional-issues> accessed on 15 December 2017.

- Afghan MPs Hold Talks with Pakistani Delegation**
 Afghan and Pakistani officials and MPs stress the need for stronger ties between Kabul and Islamabad to ensure regional security. The Wolesi Jirga Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy met on 16 December 2017 with a Pakistani delegation, discussing Kabul-Islamabad ties and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistani parliamentarians said Pakistan helped Afghans during the jihad against the then USSR, but they said Pakistan has not cooperated sincerely in the fight against corruption. The delegation stressed the need for strengthened ties between Kabul and Islamabad.⁷²
- Hekmatyar Offers All-Out Support to Taliban if the Group Opts Peace Talks**
 The leader of Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has offered an all-out support to Taliban if the group opts to participate in peace talks with the Afghan government. Hekmatyar made the offer during his visit to south-eastern Paktia and Khost provinces where he met with supporters of his party during his three-day stay. He said the ongoing conflict has no winner and will burn the Afghan nation since this is a conflict among the Afghan people and only the nation will suffer.⁷³
- US Forces Raid Destroys \$80m of Taliban's Drug Money in Helmand**
 The United States military officials have confirmed that a US-led coalition in Afghanistan has destroyed at least \$80 million USD in narcotics money as part of a campaign to target Taliban's revenue stream. According to a report by UPI, Air Force Brig. Gen. Lance Bunch, head of the Resolute Support's future operations division, said the campaign has eliminated 25 illegal drug-processing laboratories in southern Helmand province, denying \$16 million of the \$80 million in destroyed funds that was set to be "direct revenue" to the drug lords' Taliban partners, the reported said.⁷⁴
- IMF Praises Afghanistan's Pursuit of Self-Reliance**
 The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has completed the second review of Afghan government's measures in structural reforms and praised the country for its commitments and performance. Finance Ministry's spokesperson Ajmal Hammed Abdul Rahimzai said the IMF had appreciated "the commitments and performance of Afghan government in the areas of maintaining financial stability, economic growth, macroeconomic stability, and implementation of reforms in financial sector, increased anti-corruption steps and providing job opportunities for Afghans."⁷⁵
- Russia Ready to Cooperate with US on Afghanistan: Putin**
 Russian President Vladimir Putin in his annual speech on December 14, 2017 said his country is ready to cooperate and work with the United States in counter-narcotics and counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan. Putin said threats are

⁷² "Afghan MPs Hold Talks with Pakistani Delegation", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, 17 December 2017. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19687 accessed on 18 December 2017.

⁷³ "Hekmatyar Offers All-Out Support To Taliban If The Group Opts Peace Talks", *Khaama Press*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.khaama.com/hekmatyar-offers-all-out-support-to-taliban-if-the-group-opts-peace-talks-04036> (accessed on December 18)

⁷⁴ "US Forces Raid Destroys \$80m Of Taliban's Drug Money In Helmand", *Tolo News*, December 13, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/us-forces-raid-destroys%C2%A080m-talibans-drug-money-%C2%A0helmand> (accessed on December 18)

⁷⁵ "IMF Praises Afghanistan's Pursuit Of Self-Reliance", *Wadsam*, December 16, 2017, <http://wadsam.com/afghan-business-news/imf-praises-afghanistans-pursuit-self-reliance-232/> (accessed on December 18)

increasing in Afghanistan, especially in the northern parts and that it is worrying. He said if Russia and the US jointly work in Afghanistan, the result of the efforts will be much greater in fighting the international terrorism.⁷⁶

- **India Most Reliable Regional Partner of Afghanistan: Pentagon**

The United States Defense Department has welcomed additional economic, medical and civic support from New Delhi to Afghanistan and has told the US Congress that India is Afghanistan's "most reliable regional partner". "India is Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and the largest contributor of development assistance in the region," said the Pentagon in its report to the Congress titled 'Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan'.⁷⁷

Bangladesh

- **Khaleda: Civil liberties, rights absent in Bangladesh**

People in Bangladesh are not enjoying civil liberties and rights as they are absent at present times, alleges BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia. "Public opinion in the country was blatantly disregarded through the one-sided polls of January 5, 2014. The people have no freedom, and all their rights were taken away," she said in a statement on Friday (December 15). Frustration, fears and anarchy have gripped the entire nation, and those who have "seized the power are carrying out brutal tortures on the commoners," she alleged.⁷⁸

- **AL-BNP chaos mars festivity**

The ruling Awami League and BNP activists carried out vandalism and clashed over Victory Day celebrations in different areas yesterday (December 16). In Lalmonirhat, AL and BNP men chased each other during a rally on Station Road in the town. Earlier, the AL people vandalised the Railway Sramik Dal office on the road. In retaliation, BNP activists vandalised the nearby Railway Sramik League office. However, no causality was reported. At Chittagong University, two Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activists were injured in an attack launched by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men.⁷⁹

- **Vote anti-liberation forces out**

Sheikh Hasina on Sunday (December 17) expressed her belief that the people would reject forever the anti-liberation forces, their patrons, perpetrators of brutal arson attacks and the corrupt elements in votes. "They will never be able to come to power. . . the people will not allow their installation to power," she said.⁸⁰

- **UN human rights chief toughens warning of "genocide"**

⁷⁶ "Russia Ready to Cooperate with US on Afghanistan: Putin", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 16, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19677 (accessed on December 18)

⁷⁷ "India Most Reliable Regional Partner Of Afghanistan: Pentagon", *Tolo News*, December 17, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/india-most-reliable-regional-partner-afghanistan-pentagon> (accessed on December 18)

⁷⁸ "Khaleda: Civil liberties, rights absent in Bangladesh," *Dhaka Tribune*, December 15, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/12/15/khaleda-civil-liberties-rights/> (accessed on December 15, 2017)

⁷⁹ "AL-BNP chaos mars festivity, *Daily Star*, December 17, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/al-bnp-chaos-mars-celebration-1506121> (accessed on December 17, 2017)

⁸⁰ "Vote anti-liberation forces out," *Dhaka Tribune*, December 17, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2017/12/17/pm-hasina-vote-anti-liberation-forces/> (accessed on December 17, 2017)

The top UN human rights official has said he would not be surprised if a court one day ruled that acts of genocide had been committed against the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar. Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini told the BBC that attacks on the Rohingya had been "well thought out and planned" and he had asked Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi to do more to stop the military action.⁸¹

- **40 Rohingya villages burned since October**

Analysis of satellite imagery reveals new destruction of Rohingya villages during October and November 2017 in northern Rakhine State in Myanmar, Human Rights Watch said on Monday (December 18). The New York-based global rights body identified 40 villages with building destruction occurring in October and November, increasing the total to 354 villages that have been partially or completely destroyed since August 25, 2017.⁸²

नेपाल

- ओली ने कहा हम विपक्ष को साथ लेकर चलेंगे:

हाल ही में हुए चुनावों में जबरदस्त जीत के बाद एमाले के अध्यक्ष के पी शर्मा ओली ने कहा कि हम सरकार बनायेंगे तो विपक्ष का भी ध्यान रखेंगे और उन्हें साथ लेकर शासन करेंगे ओली ने कहा कि . . . जीत के बाद बाद दलों में घमंड आ जाता है जो कि देश और लोगों के हित में नहीं है⁸³

- देउबा अभी पार्टी अध्यक्ष पद छोड़ने के मूड में नहीं:

हाल ही के चुनावों में नेपाली कांग्रेस की बुरी हार के बाद पार्टी में सुधार की बातें उठ रही हैं इसके . बाद नेपाली कांग्रेस के अध्यक्ष शेर बहादुर देउबा स्पष्ट किया कि वे अभी किसी बैठक करने की स्थिति . में नहीं हैं और पार्टी के अध्यक्ष पद से इस्तीफा देने के मूड में नहीं हैं⁸⁴

- वाम गठबंधन में सरकार बनाने की बात शुरू:

प्रतिनिधि सभा में एमाले की शानदार जीत के बाद पार्टी के अन्दर नई सरकार बनाने और अन्य जिम्मेदारियों पर बातचीत शुरू हो गयी है पार्टी के सूत्रों ने कहा कि अभी निर्णय ओली और प्रचंड की . बैठक के बाद पूर्णतया लिया जायेगा⁸⁵

- देउबा ने प्रधानमंत्री पद से त्याग पत्र देने की बात कही:

चुनावों के परिणाम के बाद प्रधानमंत्री शेर बहादुर देउबा ने पद छोड़ने की बात कही लेकिन उन्होंने कहा कि वे एमाले के कहने मात्र से पद नहीं छोड़ेंगे पहले संसद में बहुमत सिद्ध करना होगा सभी . प्रक्रियाओं को अपनाते हुए ही सरकार का निर्माण होगा⁸⁶

⁸¹ "UN human rights chief toughens warning of "genocide" in Myanmar," *Prothom Alo*, December 18, 2017, <http://en.prothom-alo.com/international/news/168099/UN-human-rights-chief-toughens-warning-of> (accessed on December 18, 2017)

⁸² "40 Rohingya villages burned since October," *The Independent*, December 18, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/128657> (accessed on December 18, 2017)

⁸³ Parwat Portel, "Oli says 'we will take opposition along', *The Kathmandu Post*, 12 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-12/1>

⁸⁴ "Deuba in no mood to resign as NC chief", *The Kathmandu Post*, 13 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-13/1>

⁸⁵ "Left alliance set to start govt formation talks", *The Kathmandu Post*, 14 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-14/5>

⁸⁶ "Deuba says 'eager to handover' power", *The Kathmandu Post*, 15 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-15/1>

Pakistan

- **CPEC Long Term Plan** – Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal has announced that the long-term plan (LTP) for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that was signed on November 21 will be made public on December 18. Making the LTP public was a commitment given by the minister back in June.⁸⁷
- **US and Pakistan** - The Trump administration has informed Congress that it will take unilateral steps in areas of divergence with Pakistan while expanding cooperation between the two countries where their interests converge. The Pentagon also underlined the need for a joint US-Afghan platform for combating more than 20 militant groups active in the region. This is the Pentagon's first report on Afghanistan since August 21, when President Donald Trump announced his new South Asia strategy, which deepens American military involvement in Afghanistan while urging Pakistan to back US efforts for defeating the Taliban. The report to Congress emphasised the need for a “fundamental change” in the way Pakistan deals with the alleged terrorist safe havens on its territory. The report said that the Pak-Afghan border region remained a sanctuary for groups like Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, ISIS-K and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.⁸⁸
- **COAS to brief Senators** - Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO), Maj Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza, will brief the Senate Committee of the Whole House on the national security situation in the country during an in-camera session on December 19th. The extraordinary meeting will be presided over by Senate Chairman Raza Rabbani. It will be after six years that the military leadership will be coming to the Parliament House for a presentation to the elected representatives on the security situation. Last time it was in May 2011 when then army chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lt Gen Ahmed Shuja Pasha had briefed a joint session of parliament about the Abbottabad operation in which Al Qaeda head Osama bin Laden had been killed by the US forces.⁸⁹

Indian Ocean Region

- **INS Kalvari Commissioned into Indian Navy**
The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi commissioned INS Kalvari, the first of the six Scorpene class submarines build under project 75 into the Indian

⁸⁷ “CPEC long-term plan to be made public on Dec 18: Ahsan Iqbal”, *Dawn*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1376344> (accessed on December 18, 2017)

⁸⁸ Anwar Iqbal, “US to take unilateral steps in ‘areas of divergence’ with Pakistan: Pentagon”, *Dawn*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1377317/us-to-take-unilateral-steps-in-areas-of-divergence-with-pakistan-pentagon> (accessed on December 18, 2017)

⁸⁹ Amir Wasim, “Army chief to brief senators on ‘national security’ tomorrow”, *Dawn*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1377311/army-chief-to-brief-senators-on-national-security-tomorrow> (accessed on December 18, 2017)

Navy at Naval Dockyard Mumbai on 14 December 2017.⁹⁰ "Kalvari would be followed by five more submarines at a gap of nine months each."⁹¹ During the Commissioning Ceremony of INS Kalvari, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the gathering. Speaking at the commissioning ceremony, PM said, commissioning of INS Kalvari is a proud moment for the entire country and the submarine was an example of government's Make in India project.⁹² During his speech, PM also applauded the efforts of Indian Navy in disaster management and combating piracy. He said, "be it terrorism via sea, piracy, drug smuggling or illegal fishing, India is playing an important role in combating them."

The Kalvari submarine is named after dreaded tiger shark – deadly deep sea predator of the Indian Ocean.⁹³ The old INS Kalvari submarine was inducted into the Indian Navy in 1967.⁹⁴

- **India, Australia, Japan discussed maritime security**

During the trilateral meeting on 13 December in New Delhi, India, Australia and Japan stressed the need for intense engagement on maritime security and domain awareness.⁹⁵ The foreign secretaries of the three countries also discussed the economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region and draws attention to their shared commitment towards promoting peace, economic cooperation and rule based order in the region.⁹⁶ This was the fourth India-Japan-Australia trilateral dialogue. The dialogue was among India's foreign secretary S. Jaishankar, Japan's vice minister of foreign affairs Shinsuke J. Sugiyama and Australia's secretary of the department of foreign affairs and trade Frances Adamson.⁹⁷

According to the statement issued by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India," the three sides highlighted the growing convergence of their respective countries' interests in the Indo-Pacific region and underscored their shared commitment to peace, democracy, economic growth and a rules-based order in the region. They underscored their support for ASEAN centrality in the political and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region."⁹⁸

⁹⁰ INS Kalvari Commissioned into the Indian Navy, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-kalvari-commissioned-indian-navy> (accessed on 18 December 2017).

⁹¹ INS Kalvari customised to be laden with old torpedoes, 15 December 2017, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/ins-kalvari-laden-old-torpedoes/1/1110637.html> (accessed on 18 December 2017).

⁹² PM Narendra Modi commissions INS Kalvari, a stealthy 'tiger shark' named after Indian Navy's first submarine, 14 December 2017, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indian-navy-ins-kalvari-submarine-commissioned-by-narendra-modi/1/1109753.html> (accessed on 18 December 2017).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ India, Australia, Japan discuss maritime security, counter-terrorism, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/india-australia-japan-discuss-maritime-security-counter-terrorism201712131633260002/> (accessed on 18 December 2017).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ India, Australia and Japan bat for rules-based order in Indo-Pacific, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/elvStgDPJPTDpAcdH6XrIO/India-Australia-and-Japan-bat-for-rulesbased-order-in-Indo.html> (accessed on 18 December 2017).

⁹⁸ 4th India-Australia-Japan Trilateral Dialogue (December 13, 2017), http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29176/4th_IndiaAustraliaJapan_Trilateral_Dialogue_December_13_2017 (accessed on 18 December 2017).

- **Cabinet approves UNESCO Agreement to be signed for establishing ITCOcean as Category-2 Centre**

As approved by the Cabinet on December 15, 2017, "the International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography, hosted at the ESSO-INCOIS (ESSO-Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services) campus in Hyderabad will be established as a Category-2 Centre (C2C) through an agreement to be signed with UNESCO."⁹⁹ ESSO-INCOIS, is a premier institution in operational oceanography in Indian. ESSO-INCOIS provides several services like "the ISO 9001:2008 certified Potential Fishing Zone Advisory Service, Ocean State Forecast Service and Tsunami Warning Service."¹⁰⁰ Establishing ITCOcean with UNESCO C2C recognition will provide benefit to India in forging cooperation in such technical areas in many Indian Ocean region countries.¹⁰¹

Sri Lanka

- **UN experts accuse Sri Lanka of carrying out arbitrary detention**

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has identified significant challenges to the enjoyment of the right to personal liberty in Sri Lanka, resulting in arbitrary detention across the country. They said further urgent action is required to give effect to Sri Lanka's obligations under international human rights law, as well as the commitments made by the Government in its Human Rights National Action Plan 2017-2021¹⁰².

- **Stay order preventing the arrest of Gotabaya extended**

A stay order issued by the Court of Appeal preventing the arrest of former Secretary of Defence Gotabaya Rajapaksa, has been extended till January 25, 2018. The stay order was earlier issued to the Financial Crimes Investigation Department (FCID), against arresting Rajapaksa over the alleged misappropriation of public funds¹⁰³.

- **EU welcomes Sri Lanka as 163rd State Party to mine ban convention**

The European Union (EU) says it is pleased to welcome Sri Lanka as the 163rd State Party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. On 13 December 2017, Sri Lanka deposited its instrument of accession to the Convention of the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (commonly known as the Ottawa Convention).¹⁰⁴

- **ADB grants USD 270 Mn to implement two development projects**

The Government of Sri Lanka entered into three Loan Agreements worth of USD 270 million with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the implementation of

⁹⁹ Cabinet approves UNESCO Agreement to be signed for establishing ITCOcean as Category-2 Centre (C2C), 18 December 2017, http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-cm/cabinet-approves-unesco-agreement-to-be-signed-for-establishing-itcoocean-as-category-2-centre-c2c-117121800092_1.html, (accessed on 18 December 2017).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² UN experts accuse Sri Lanka of carrying out arbitrary detention, 15 December 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/12/15/un-experts-accuse-sri-lanka-of-carrying-out-arbitrary-detention/>

¹⁰³ Stay order preventing the arrest of Gotabaya extended, 14 December 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/12/15/stay-order-preventing-the-arrest-of-gotabaya-extended/>

¹⁰⁴ EU welcomes Sri Lanka as 163rd State Party to mine ban convention, 16 December 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/12/16/eu-welcomes-sri-lanka-as-163rd-state-party-to-mine-ban-convention/>

two projects; Integrated Road Investment Program and Jaffna Kilinochchi Water Supply Project. A loan of USD 150 million was obtained for the investments required for the 4th Tranche of the Integrated Road Investment Program and two loans worth of USD 120 million were obtained as additional financing for the investment required for the ongoing Jaffna-Kilinochchi Water Supply Project.¹⁰⁵

- **Top Chinese Communist Party official holds thematic briefing**

Wang Yajun, Assistant Minister of International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held a thematic briefing on the 19th National Congress of CPC at the BMICH today. Minister of Public Enterprise Development Kabir Hashim attended the event as the Chief Guest. Mr. Wang is in Sri Lanka on a visit from December 12 to 15.¹⁰⁶

Maldives

- **Council suspended for meeting India's ambassador to the Maldives**

Three councillors have been suspended for meeting India's ambassador to the Maldives, days after authorities banned local officials from hosting foreign diplomats without prior consent. The decision to punish the Gaafu Alifu representatives was made at a board meeting of the Local Government Authority on 13th December. Diplomats were quick to condemn the LGA's ban.¹⁰⁷

- **India breaks silence on China-Maldives FTA**

India on 14th December, gave a guarded response to the Free Trade Agreement signed between China and the Maldives, saying it had yet to see the full document and could not comment on its contents. India's External Affairs spokesman Raveesh Kumar told the media in a weekly briefing that the development of bilateral relations between China and the Maldives was welcomed as long as it contributed to the peace and stability in the region. "As you are aware India attaches the highest importance to its relations with Maldives. We are also committed to support democracy, development and stability in Maldives. "It is our expectation that as a close and friendly neighbor Maldives will be sensitive to our concerns in keeping with its India First policy."¹⁰⁸

- **Maldives, India to hold joint military exercises**

The joint military exercises between the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) and the Indian Army are being held in India. The exercise named "Ekuverin" will be conducted in Belgam in the state of Karnataka. The two week long bilateral exercise will focus on sharing and acquainting both armies with each other's counter terrorism operation experiences¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁵ ADB grants USD 270 Mn to implement two development projects, 16 December 2017, <https://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/18992-adb-grants-usd-270-mn-to-implement-two-development-projects>

¹⁰⁶ Top Chinese Communist Party official holds thematic briefing, 13-12-2017, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Top-Chinese-Communist-Party-official-holds-thematic-briefing-142170.html>

¹⁰⁷ Council suspended for meeting India's ambassador to the Maldives, 13 December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/island-council-suspended-for-meeting-indias-ambassador-to-the-maldives-134550>

¹⁰⁸ India breaks silence on China-Maldives FTA, 14th December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/india-breaks-silence-on-china-maldives-fta-134577>

¹⁰⁹ Maldives, India to hold joint military exercises, 14th December 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/maldives-india-to-hold-joint-military-exercises/>

- **Israel's occupation of Jerusalem violates international law: Maldives**
Israel's occupation of Jerusalem and its pursuit in declaring Jerusalem as its capital is against all international laws, declared the Maldives at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit held in Turkey. The Maldives also strongly condemned the move by the US to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel¹¹⁰.
- **India has 'zero sum' mentality in the region, says China**
New Delhi's outdated strategic mentality cannot "dampen the strong enthusiasm" in the region for deepening cooperation with Beijing, Chinese state media has claimed. The Global Times, an excitable tabloid that often reflects party thinking, said the formal handover of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease had stirred alarm in New Delhi¹¹¹.

West Asia

Israel

- **The Jerusalem Imbroglio** – While most of the world leaders criticised President Trump's decision of recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Russian President Vladimir Putin criticized the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital on December 11th, warning that it could destabilize the region and derail the Middle East peace process.¹¹² Iranian President Hassan Rouhani spoke with the leader of Hamas on December 11th, as Iran vowed to back the terror group in fighting Israel after US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Hamas has been urging Palestinians to launch a new intifada.¹¹³ The EU's 28-nation bloc's foreign policy head Federica Mogherini on December 11th rejected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's suggestion that Europe would follow the US in recognizing Jerusalem as the Jewish state's capital, saying there would be no change to its stance on the holy city.¹¹⁴ Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said his terror group was wrapping up fighting in Syria and would turn its attention to fighting Israel, as

¹¹⁰ Israel's occupation of Jerusalem violates international law: Maldives, 14 December 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/israels-occupation-of-jerusalem-violates-international-law-maldives/>

¹¹¹ India has 'zero sum' mentality in the region, says China, 13 December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/india-has-zero-sum-mentality-in-the-region-says-china-134522>

¹¹² Putin says US Jerusalem move may 'finish prospects' for peace deal, *Times of Israel*, December 11, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/putin-says-us-jerusalem-move-may-finish-prospects-for-peace-deal/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=835d65a905-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-835d65a905-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹¹³ "Iranian leaders vow to back Hamas in fight against Israel", *Times of Israel*, December 12, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/iranian-leaders-vow-to-back-hamas-in-fight-against-israel/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=835d65a905-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-835d65a905-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹¹⁴ "EU upbraids Netanyahu for suggesting it will follow US lead on Jerusalem", *Times of Israel*, December 11, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-upbraids-netanyahu-for-suggesting-it-will-follow-us-on-jerusalem/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=835d65a905-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-835d65a905-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

he raged against the US recognition of Jerusalem on December 11.¹¹⁵ Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said in the emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Countries on December 13th that Palestinians won't accept any future role for the US in the peace process due to US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and threatened to pull out of existing agreements with the Jewish state.¹¹⁶ The White House on December 13th panned Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's comments against the US and its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying such rhetoric "has prevented peace for years."¹¹⁷ Islamic leaders in the meeting held in Istanbul on December 13th urged the world to recognize East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, and said the United States no longer had any role to play in the peace process, which was supported by the Saudi King, who failed to attend the emergency meeting.¹¹⁸ US Secretary of State Tillerson stated on December 12th that relocating the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem will likely take at least three years and quite possibly longer.¹¹⁹ During this period, there were continuous protests which carried on through the second week in West Bank which clashed with Israeli Security forces, though apparently in smaller numbers than the week before.¹²⁰ Within this time, a senior administration official told reporters ahead of US Vice President Mike Pence's visit to Israel (due on December 20th) on December 15th that the White House "envisions" the Western Wall will

¹¹⁵ "Hezbollah chief says Trump Jerusalem move 'beginning of end' for Israel", *Times of Israel*, December 11, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/at-massive-rally-hezbollah-chief-calls-for-intifada-over-jerusalem/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=835d65a905-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-835d65a905-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹¹⁶ Dov Lieber, "Abbas says no future US role in peace process, threatens to void past agreements", *Times of Israel*, December 13, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/no-more-us-role-in-peace-process-abbas-declares/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=7c8c86414c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-7c8c86414c-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹¹⁷ "White House: Abbas's rhetoric 'has prevented peace for years'", *Times of Israel*, December 13, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/white-house-abbas-rhetoric-has-prevented-peace-for-years/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=5ca723bddb-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-5ca723bddb-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹¹⁸ "Islamic leaders urge recognition of East Jerusalem as 'Palestine's capital'", *Times of Israel*, December 13, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/islamic-leaders-urge-recognition-of-east-jerusalem-as-palestines-capital/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=7c8c86414c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-7c8c86414c-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017); "Saudi king: Palestinians have right to East Jerusalem as capital", *Times of Israel*, December 13, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-king-palestinians-have-right-to-east-jerusalem-as-capital/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=7c8c86414c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-7c8c86414c-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹¹⁹ "Tillerson says US embassy unlikely to move to Jerusalem before 2020", *Times of Israel*, December 13, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/tillerson-says-us-embassy-unlikely-to-move-to-jerusalem-before-2020/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=7c8c86414c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-7c8c86414c-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹²⁰ Judah Ari Gross, "Clashes break out in West Bank and Gaza for second Friday in a row", *Times of Israel*, December 15, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/low-level-clashes-break-out-across-west-bank-for-second-friday-in-a-row/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=dd3ff38c26-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_15&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-dd3ff38c26-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

remain part of Israel under any accord with the Palestinians, which was bitterly rejected by the Palestinian Authority.¹²¹ Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction on December 16th called for "angry" demonstrations next week to protest against the US Vice President visit.¹²² It was also decided on December 17th that Palestinians will not meet with any United States officials regarding the peace process in the future.¹²³ Turkey's president said on December 15th that Muslim nations will ask the United Nations for an "annulment" of US President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and asked to declare East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.¹²⁴ The United Nations Security Council will be voting on December 18th on annulling the US moves on Jerusalem.¹²⁵ US Vice President Mike Pence will skip the Palestinian territories during his upcoming trip to the region, after PA officials said they wouldn't meet him due to the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.¹²⁶

Turkey

- **War between Turkey, US in Syria's Afrin possible: CIA report**¹²⁷

¹²¹ Eric Cortellessa, "White House 'cannot envision situation' where Western Wall is not part of Israel", *Times of Israel*, December 15, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/white-house-cannot-envision-situation-where-western-wall-not-part-of-israel/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=e247ac0740-US+can%27t+envision+Western+Wall+not+part+of+Israel&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-e247ac0740-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017); Eric Cortellessa, "Furious Palestinians reject White House talk of Western Wall as Israel's forever", *Times of Israel*, December 16, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/furious-palestinians-reject-white-house-talk-of-western-wall-as-israels-forever/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=4de14dbaad-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-4de14dbaad-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹²² "Fatah calls for 'angry' protests against US during Pence's Jerusalem visit", *Times of Israel*, December 16, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/fatah-calls-for-angry-protests-against-us-during-pences-jerusalem-visit/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=4de14dbaad-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-4de14dbaad-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹²³ Dov Lieber, "Palestinians won't meet with Kushner, Greenblatt or any US officials on peace", *Times of Israel*, December 17, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-aide-we-wont-meet-with-kushner-greenblatt-or-any-us-officials-on-peace/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=4de14dbaad-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-4de14dbaad-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹²⁴ "Erdogan: Muslim nations to seek UN 'annulment' of Trump's Jerusalem move", *Times of Israel*, December 17, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/erdogan-muslim-nations-to-go-to-un-over-jerusalem/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=488d3c9471-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-488d3c9471-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹²⁵ Tamar Pileggi, "Security Council to vote tomorrow on annulling US moves on Jerusalem — report", *Times of Israel*, December 17, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-december-17-2017/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=4de14dbaad-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-4de14dbaad-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹²⁶ Raphael Ahren, "Snubbed by Abbas, US vice president to skip Palestinians on upcoming trip", *Times of Israel*, December 14, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/snubbed-by-abbas-us-vice-president-to-skip-palestinians-on-upcoming-trip/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=dd3ff38c26-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_15&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-dd3ff38c26-55556173 (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹²⁷ Yeni Safek 17 December 2017 <http://www.yenisafak.com/en/news/war-between-turkey-us-in-syrias-afrin-possible-cia-report-2890796>

A report published by Rand Corporation, an American think tank closely affiliated with the CIA, has deemed that the US army could clash with Turkey in Syria.

As Turkey prepares to launch an operation against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorists in Syria's Afrin, the U.S. has threatened war with Turkey in the PKK-occupied city, in a report published by the CIA-affiliated Rand Corporation.

The most recent report, titled "U.S. Strategic Interests in the Middle East and Implications for the Army," was published by the Rand Corporation, an American think tank closely affiliated with the CIA.

The report concluded that opposing interests between Ankara and Washington may lead to possible clashes between the two countries, deeming a potential confrontation to be "not entirely out of the question."

The Rand report warned the U.S. army that it will be facing the region's most powerful armed forces, unlike any that it has gone up against before.

"It is not entirely out of the question that the [U.S.] Army could be called on to help protect Kurdish forces [YPG] in Iraq or Syria, which have been the United States' staunchest allies in the war against [Daesh], from potential or actual attack by Turkey, placing American forces in opposition to an army far more capable than those they have faced in past conflicts in the Middle East."

The PYD and its military YPG wing are Syrian branches of the PKK, which has waged war against Turkey for more than 30 years. Since the PKK launched its terror campaign in Turkey in 1984, tens of thousands of people have been killed, including more than 1,200 since July 2015 alone.

Turkey has repeatedly objected to U.S. arms being sent to the PYD, due to its links to the terrorist organization the PKK.

- **Turkey to take FETÖ-backed Zarrab case to UN, Hague¹²⁸**

Turkey will appeal the ongoing Reza Zarrab case in the United States in various international platforms as Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu contended that Gülenists in the U.S. judiciary take an active role in the case. Presidential legal experts and lawyers in the government and the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) are working around the clock to start a new initiative in the face of the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ)-backed Zarrab case in the U.S. According to reports in Turkish media outlets, Turkey will take the Zarrab case to the United Nations and The Hague.

Reports also contended that President and AK Party Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told his fellow party members to be on the offensive rather than the defensive amid the controversy in the case.

Professor Mustafa Şentop, head of the Constitutional Committee in Parliament and AK Party deputy, said regarding the case that the United States judiciary is acting against international law. "The United States is now against international law. Only the UN can take decisions that bind the states," he said.

Stressing that Turkey did not act against U.N. resolutions, Şentop said the U.S.'s rules only bind itself, not Turkey.

Zarrab, 34, a former gold trader, last month accepted all the U.S. charges against him, including violation of the now-lifted U.S. sanctions against Iran, money

¹²⁸ Daily Sabah 17 December 2017 <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2017/12/18/turkey-to-take-feto-backed-zarrab-case-to-un-hague>

laundering and other charges, and agreed to cooperate as a witness against Mehmet Hakan Atilla, former deputy CEO of Turkey's state-run lender Halkbank. Zarrab was arrested by U.S. authorities in March 2016 on suspicion of taking part in the alleged sanctions-busting scam, but is now cooperating with the authorities in an apparent plea bargain.

- **Turkey will open embassy to Palestine in East Jerusalem: Erdoğan**¹²⁹

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Dec. 17 said Turkey wants to open an embassy in East Jerusalem, following a decision by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to recognize East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state.

“We have already declared East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state but we haven’t been able to open our embassy there because Jerusalem is currently under occupation. God willing we will open our embassy there,” Erdoğan said, speaking at a ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) meeting in the Central Anatolian province of Karaman.

“[U.S. President Donald] Trump has declared Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, with an evangelist and Zionist understanding, with the logic of ‘I have done it and it’s over.’ The U.S. is also moving its embassy there. Those who have taken this step, despite U.N. decisions, has moved with the logic of ‘We don’t recognize you.’ Well, we don’t recognize you either,” he added.

“Do not attempt to undertake a Zionist operation. If you do, the cost of this will be heavy,” he said.

“I [as the current OIC term president] summoned the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for an extraordinary meeting [on Dec. 13]. In a week, they [the country representatives] all came. I also telephoned the Pope [Francis] and saw that he is of the same opinion as us,” Erdoğan said, referring to the OIC summit in Istanbul earlier this week.

- **Turkey plans ‘Uniting for Peace’ UN bid for Palestine**¹³⁰

Turkey and all members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) will launch a new initiative at the United Nations this week after their declaration of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, following U.S. President Donald Trump’s controversial recognition of the city as the “undivided” capital of Israel.

As stated by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the OIC summit on Dec. 13 in Istanbul, the OIC will focus on annulling Trump’s move on Jerusalem through the relevant U.N. bodies, Foreign Ministry sources told the Hürriyet Daily News on Dec. 17.

The road map of the OIC countries will include step-by-step diplomacy.

The first step will be taken by Egypt, as one of the temporary members of the U.N. Security Council, through a resolution to be submitted in the coming days. The resolution, which has been in fact drafted by Palestine, calls on all member states to not recognize the U.S. decision on Jerusalem, in line with a number of U.N. Security Council resolutions on the matter.

As the resolution will not be approved due to the U.S.’s veto at the Security Council, Turkey and all OIC countries will focus on the subsequent phase,

¹²⁹ Hurriyet Daily News, 17 December 2017 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-will-open-embassy-in-east-jerusalem-erdogan-124271>

¹³⁰ Hurriyet Daily News, 17 December 2017 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-plans-uniting-for-peace-un-bid-for-palestine-124286>

bringing the resolution to the U.N. General Assembly through the “Uniting for Peace” mechanism.

This mechanism was introduced to the U.N. system in the late 1940s in a bid to avoid stalemates at the U.N. Security Council because of the veto rights of the five permanent members.

Half of the member nations at the U.N. have to vote in order to bring an issue to the U.N. agenda but voting needs at least a two-thirds majority under this mechanism. Palestine gained its non-member observer state at the U.N. General Assembly through a similar vote in 2012.

- **Ankara blasts new Austrian coalition government’s Turkey program¹³¹**

The Turkish government has slammed Austria’s new coalition government over its program vowing to end Turkey’s accession process to the European Union and to find allies within the EU to this end.

“This unfortunate and short-sighted clause in the program of the new government in Austria unfortunately confirms concerns that this political line is based on discrimination and marginalization,” read a written statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Dec 17.

Austria’s conservative People’s Party (OVP) and the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) on Dec. 15 announced the formation of a coalition government following October parliamentary elections. To be led by OVP leader Sebastian Kurz as the new chancellor, the coalition will be one of rare far-right governments in Europe.

Turkey’s EU Minister Ömer Çelik took to Twitter on Dec. 17 to criticize the new Austrian government.

“The government to be formed in Austria by (so-called) center right and far right parties has already begun attacking democratic values,” Çelik wrote.

Describing new Chancellor Kurz’s mindset “even more radical than far-right politicians,” Çelik said it was the first time that such a far-right coalition has formed a government in the EU.

Çelik also blasted the EU commissioner responsible for enlargement, Johannes Hahn, who is an Austrian national, for welcoming this new Vienna government to “the EU orientation.”

“What EU orientation? Mentioning EU orientation while ignoring racist reflections in government programs is a great blindness,” he wrote.

“In the face of so many crises in the world, the EU represents a stable order. The protection of this order is only possible with the protection of political values. This stability cannot be preserved if values are damaged,” Çelik added.

- **Turkey warns US that sanction case witness is a fugitive from Turkey¹³²**

Turkey has sent a letter warning the United States over a fugitive former police officer who testified during a trial into a former Turkish state bank executive in New York, saying the former officer is being sought over membership of the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ).

“We asked our U.S. addressee to end this unlawful practice immediately and to extradite the FETÖ terrorist organization member former police officer, for whom

¹³¹ Hurriyet Daily News 17 December 2017 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ankara-blasts-new-austrian-coalition-governments-turkey-program-124243>

¹³² Hurriyet Daily News 17 December 2017 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-warns-us-that-sanction-case-witness-is-a-fugitive-from-turkey-124233>

a warrant has been issued by Turkey's judiciary," Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gül told reporters in the Black Sea province of Samsun on Dec. 16, commenting on a letter he sent to his U.S. counterpart Jeff Sessions.

Hüseyin Korkmaz, a police officer sought in Turkey over being a follower of the U.S.-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, testified against former Halkbank deputy general manager Mehmet Hakan Atilla in the Iran sanctions case, prompting criticism from Ankara.

Gül has penned a letter to Sessions on the issue in which he asked for "an end to this unlawful practice."

The minister also said Korkmaz had been determined to be a user of ByLock, a smartphone application used for communication by Gülenists, the group widely believed to have orchestrated the July 2016 coup attempt.

"The protection of a fugitive terror group member, who was determined to be using ByLock and who contributed to the illegal structuring of FETÖ, or putting him on a salary by public institutions and giving him monthly pay is never acceptable," Gül said, referring to Korkmaz's statements about receiving \$50,000 of aid from the FBI and rental aid from the prosecutor's office.

Warning that bilateral ties between Ankara and Washington could be harmed over the issue, Gül noted that "it is unacceptable for the U.S. to remain silent when a terrorist is creating disinformation against Turkey and carrying out a campaign against the country."

Cyber Security

- **Ransomware biggest threat for most Indian firms: Report¹³³**

On 15 December 2017, a KPMG survey on India's cyber crime reported that nearly 43 percent organisations in India faced ransomware attacks in the year 2016. It is quite disturbing to note that though 79 percent organisations mentioned cyber security as their top priority but only 10 percent of the total planned budget has been spent on cyber security. According to Akhilesh Tuteja, Partner and Head-Risk Consulting for KPMG in India, "Cybercrime has moved from corporate espionage and theft of Intellectual Property to use of advanced technology and malicious software, with the intent of holding companies to ransom and the threat of sabotaging brand reputation with data security breaches". In order to combat cyber security risks, Sudesh Anand Shetty, Partner-Risk Consulting, KPMG in India said, "Cyber breaches should no longer be looked upon as isolated incidents linked with IT or IT security. Organisations should consider it as an indicator to a potential cyber fraud and be vigilant online". Viewing cyber attacks as the reality of today's world, Atul Gupta, Partner IT Advisory and Leader-Cyber security, KPMG in India focussed, "There is a need to there is a need for an organisation to have balance between the protect and response measures, currently the preparedness on response to cyber-attacks need to be enhanced significantly".

¹³³ <https://tech.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/internet/ransomware-biggest-threat-for-most-indian-firms-report/62092729>, 16 December 2017

- **Russian Envoy wants Kaspersky Lab to secure BHIM Project¹³⁴**

Addressing at a discussion on cyber security, *International Cooperation in Information Space: Threats, Trends and Perspectives*, at the Russian Embassy in New Delhi on 14 December 2017, Nikolay Kudashev, Russia's Ambassador to India, stressed on greater Indo-Russian cooperation in cyber security and proposed that Kaspersky Lab, Russia's cyber security company would be the digital partner with the digital payment –interface BHIM app that was launched by Prime minister Narendra Modi in 2016. At the discussion, Nikolay Kudashev highlighted, “Global statistics show that an average every 40 seconds a computer connected to the internet is being hacked. An even more dangerous trend is that a cyber-provocation can bring countries into confrontation or even war. I would like to make a small but relevant remark about the Bharat Interface for money initiative for digital payments developed in India. I am confident that Kaspersky Lab can provide security solutions for such platforms”. Eugene Kaspersky, the founder and CEO of Kaspersky Lab viewed that India's vulnerability to cyber attacks increased due to growing digitization of the country and Kaspersky lab would strengthen digital security of India's critical infrastructure. Eugene Kaspersky also met India's cyber security chief Gulshan Rai and they discussed the issue of cyber terrorism. Kaspersky Lab's Managing Director for Asia Pacific operations, Stephan Neumeier identified India as one of their important market owing to the country's young demographic profile and larger internet penetration. He also added, “We are expanding our business in India. We are hiring local talents as we are in the process of establishing more offices in New Delhi and other metro cities”.

- **Israeli experts to audit Telangana government's cybersecurity policy before its launch¹³⁵**

On 14 December 2017, Jayesh Ranjan, Telangana's Principal Secretary, Information Technology at a cyber security conference said that Telangana would keen to develop security Operation Centre (SOC) to protect public information of government websites and requested Konfidas Digital Ltd, an Israel based cyber security firm to collaborate with the government to make a policy framework in this regard. By implementing this, Telangana would be the first Indian state to have a robust cyber security policy. Jayesh Ranjan appreciated the success of Israeli National Information Security Agency in building a vigorous cyber security framework and said, “A strong similarity exists between India and Israel through the start-up incubators which operate to increase private companies' participation. I request the Israeli company to do diagnosis to know the guidelines and policy framework”. While on the other hand, Ram Levi, Konfidas CEO mentioned, “Israel sees great potential for business partnerships with Indian companies”. He welcomed IT players to look out various opportunities by collaborating with Israel companies”.

¹³⁴ National Herald, 15 December 2017, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/international/russian-envoy-wants-kaspersky-lab-to-secure-bhim-project>

¹³⁵ Indian Express, 15 December 2017, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2017/dec/15/israeli-experts-to-audit-telangana-governments-cybersecurity-policy-before-its-launch-1727710.html>.

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 11	Balochistan	The Balochistan government constituted a three-member inquiry committee to probe into the murder of 20 labourers in the Kech district and submit its report within the next 15 days. At least 15 dead bodies were recovered on November 15 and five others were recovered on November 18. ¹³⁶	Three member enquiry committee constituted	
2	December 17	Balochistan	At least nine people, including women and children, were killed and 30 others were injured in a suicide attack on the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church on Zarghoon Road in provincial capital Quetta. ¹³⁷	9	30

Afghanistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 11	Takhar	Taliban insurgents captured three security checkpoints and four villages in Dasht-e-Qala district. In this takeover, one policeman and a militant were killed while two policemen went missing. ¹³⁸	2	0
2	December 12	Uruzgan	More than 50 health centers which had been closed by Taliban militants have reopened in the provincial capital Tirinkot. The Taliban ordered closed the 59 health facilities in Tirinkot and some districts three months ago for what they alleged “not offering proper services.” ¹³⁹	Health centres reopen	

¹³⁶ Syed Ali Shah, Balochistan CM forms new committee to probe killing of 20 labourers in Kech district, *Dawn*, December 11, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1375974/balochistan-cm-forms-new-committee-to-probe-killing-of-20-labourers-in-kech-district>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹³⁷ Syed Ali Shah, 9 killed in suicide attack on Quetta's Bethel Memorial Methodist Church, *Dawn*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1377184/9-killed-in-suicide-attack-on-quettas-bethel-memorial-methodist-church>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹³⁸ Taliban captures three security posts, villages in Takhar, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 13, 2107, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2013,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹³⁹ NGO-Run Clinics Reopen in Uruzgan after Taliban Ban, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 13, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2013,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on December 18, 2017

3	December 12	Sar-e-Pul	Taliban captured Tabar area of Sancharak district after a public uprising commander, identified as Raees Karim, joined them. Raees had defected to Taliban along with several other militants. ¹⁴⁰	Taliban captures Tabar (Sara-e-Pul)	
4	December 14	Faryab	The Taliban captured Baloch area and two security posts in Sherin Tagab district. According to an unnamed official, the militants killed an uprising Commander and captured Baloch area, bringing to an end a three month old siege. ¹⁴¹	Taliban captures areas in Faryab	
5	December 15	Paktika	At least 15 militants were killed and eight others were injured during an operation that was launched on militants' hideouts in Lamana area of Barmal district. ¹⁴²	15	8
6	December 17	Kabul	The US military officials in Afghanistan are saying that the Afghan National Defense And Security Forces receive High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) support from the US forces during counter-terrorism operations. US Marine Staff Sgt. Ryan Crider, the Task Force Southwest HIMARS launch chief has said "Our mission is to have all-weather, 24-hour artillery support capability. Since HIMARS is the only weapon system that can do this, it provides fire support for any ANDSF personnel who need it." ¹⁴³	Afghan forces receive HIMARS for CT operations	
7	December 17	Balkh	An explosion occurred in Mazar-e-Sharif city province of Afghanistan close to noon time today, leaving at	1	2

¹⁴⁰ Joined By Uprising Commander, Taliban Overrun Tabar Area, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 14, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2014,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁴¹ Taliban Capture Faryab's Baloch Area, Security Posts, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 16, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2016,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁴² 15 Militants Eliminated in Barmal Operation: Police, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 17, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/December%2017,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁴³ Afghan forces receive HIMARS support during the counter-terrorism operations, *Khaama Press*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.khaama.com/afghan-forces-receive-himars-support-during-the-counter-terrorism-operations-04067>, accessed on December 18, 2017

			least one dead and two wounded.		
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Iraq

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 13	Erbil	The Ministry of Peshmerga said that the Islamic State (IS) is planning for attacks, adding that the hideout of the group's supreme leader is still unknown. "IS is still not totally eliminated, in accordance with the information we have. It's true it was defeated in the Iraqi cities as an Islamic caliphate and officially in Mosul and Raqqa. However, it was not fully eliminated," Jabbar al-Yawar, Secretary General of the Ministry said. ¹⁴⁴	IS not totally eliminated	
2	December 14	Ramadi	At least 13 IS militants were killed and underground hideouts and tunnels destroyed during Jazira Operations of the army, backed by tribes, targeting al-Mahboubiya region in Hit Island, west of Ramadi. Mohamed Mohannad, head of Hit Municipal Council confirmed the incident. ¹⁴⁵	13	0
3	December 15	Samarra	At least two security personnel were killed and six others were injured in a suicide attack that was launched against Saraya al-Salam (Peace Brigades) in al-Howeish region. ¹⁴⁶	2	6
4	December 17	Diyala / Salahuddin	The Iraqi Army announced the liberation of 25 villages on the border between Diyala and Salahuddin from IS. In a statement, the War Media Cell said, "Forces from Tigris, Samarra and Salahuddin operations commands, backed by Iraqi Air Force and al-Hashd al-Shaabi fighters, have launched a wide-scale security campaign to pursuit terrorists and	25 villages liberated from IS	

¹⁴⁴144 Nehal Mostafa, Peshmerga says Islamic State plans for attacks through suicide bombers, *Iraqi News*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/peshmerga-says-islamic-state-plans-attacks-suicide-bombers/>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁴⁵145 Nehal Mostafa, Over ten IS members, soldier killed in clashes, west of Ramadi, *Iraqi News*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/ten-members-soldier-killed-clashes-west-ramadi/>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁴⁶146 Nehal Mostafa, Eight security personnel killed, injured in suicide attack, northwest of Samarra, *Iraqi News*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/eight-security-personnel-killed-injured-suicide-attack-northwest-samarra/>, accessed on December 18, 2017

			criminals at Mteibijah area near the border between the provinces of Salahuddin and Diyala. ¹⁴⁷	
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Syria

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	December 17	NS	<p>French President Emmanuel Macron predicted that IS would be crushed in Syria by February, pushing for the Syrian government and opposition to come together for fresh peace talks early next year. “We have just won the war in Iraq with the coalition,” Macron said, adding, “And I think that by the middle to the end of February, we will have won the war in Syria.”</p> <p>He underlined that France’s top priority, as part of the US-led coalition pounding IS, is “the extermination” of the <i>jihadi</i> group rather than ousting Assad, which has been the country’s official stance since June.¹⁴⁸</p>	ISIS in Syria will be crushed by February 2018	
2	December 18	Lebanon	<p>The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) launched a big attack in the southeastern countryside of Aleppo Governorate, targeting Hay’at Tahrir Al-Sham’s positions near the town of Al-Rashidiyah.</p> <p>Led by their Republican Guard and 4th Mechanized Division, the SAA managed to score a large advance towards the Idlib Governorate after capturing three towns that were</p>	SAA launches attack	

¹⁴⁷Mohammed Ebraheem, Iraqi army announces liberation of 25 villages from Islamic State remnants, *Iraqi News*, December 17, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraqi-army-announces-liberation-25-villages-remnants/>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁴⁸ Macron predicts Islamic State group will be defeated in Syria by February, *France 24*, December 17, 2017, <http://www.france24.com/en/20171217-french-president-macron-predicts-islamic-state-group-defeated-syria-february>, accessed on December 18, 2017

			under the control of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham and their allies. ¹⁴⁹	
3	December 18	Ghouta	The SAA uncovered a massive tunnel in the East Ghouta region of Damascus, while combing through the Tal Kurdi area near 'Adra. According to military report, the tunnel was found underneath the town of Tal Kurdi and measured over 300 meters long and 8 meters deep. The SAA engineering teams put a large quantity of bombs inside the tunnel and then detonated the explosives in a bid to destroy it. ¹⁵⁰	Tunnel uncovered

International Economic Issues

- **WTO meeting ends in stalemate**

The World Trade Organization's 11th biennial meeting ended in stalemate on December 13, 2017, after US criticism and member country vetoes, raising questions about the body's ability to govern increasingly disputed global trade. WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo remarked that WTO members needed to do some "real soul searching" about the way forward and realize they cannot get everything they want. Some 70 member countries, including the United States, European Union, Japan and Brazil pledged to forge ahead with an effort to negotiate rules on electronic commerce after a broader deal among the full membership failed. Absent from the group were China, India, Vietnam and Indonesia. U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer set an acrimonious tone at the start of the conference with sharp criticisms of the WTO. The 23-year-old trade body requires unanimity among all 164 WTO member countries to reach any agreement. Mr. Lighthizer told WTO ministers on December 11, 2017 that it was impossible to negotiate new rules while many of the current rules were not being followed, and that the WTO was losing its focus and becoming too litigation-focused. The failure to reach any major deals meant that negotiations on the same topics will continue into 2018, with no deadline and no heavyweight ministerial momentum to get agreement.¹⁵¹

- **India to host 3rd AIIB annual meeting**

India will host the 3rd Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) at Mumbai on June 25-26, 2018. The Theme of the Annual Meeting, 2018 will be "Mobilizing Finance for Infrastructure:

¹⁴⁹ Leith Fadel, Syrian Army makes big push to enter Idlib from Aleppo – map, *Al Masdar News*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-makes-big-push-enter-idlib-aleppo-map/>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁵⁰ Leith Fadel, Syrian Army uncovers massive tunnel used to launch surprise attacks in East Ghouta, *Al Masdar News*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-uncovers-massive-tunnel-used-launch-surprise-attacks-east-ghouta/>, accessed on December 18, 2017

¹⁵¹ "WTO meeting ends in stalemate", *The Hindu*, December 14, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/wto-meeting-ends-in-stalemate/article21618425.ece> (accessed on December 18, 2017)

Innovation and Collaboration”. The Government of India and AIIB Secretariat on December 12, 2017, signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to delineate the duties and responsibilities of major stakeholders who would be involved in organizing the aforesaid Annual Meeting. A Special Committee at the level of Secretary, DEA has been constituted for coordinating the matters relating to organizing the 2018 Annual Meeting, with representatives from various Ministries concerned of Government of India and Government of Maharashtra. The Government of Maharashtra has nominated Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) as the nodal agency for organising the Annual Meeting.¹⁵²

- **UK Government Pledges US\$50 million to AIIB Project Preparation Special Fund**

On December 16, 2017, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), President Jin Liqun, and United Kingdom (UK) Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Philip Hammond, have signed an agreement for the UK to contribute US\$ 50 million to AIIB’s Project Preparation Special Fund which provides grant support primarily to low income developing member countries to prepare high quality projects. The AIIB Project Preparation Special Fund was established in June 2016. China and the Republic of Korea committed US\$ 50 million and US\$ 8 million respectively. The Fund is open for more contributions. These additional resources is expected to help low-income member countries to prepare projects that will meet AIIB’s standards and result in more projects that are financially viable, environmentally sustainable and welcomed by local communities.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Press Information Bureau, “India to host 3rd annual meeting of Board of Governors of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank”, Ministry of Finance, December 12, 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1512377> (accessed on December 18, 2017)

¹⁵³ AIIB, “UK Government Pledges US\$50 million to AIIB Project Preparation Special Fund”, December 16, 2017, https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/news/2017/20171216_001.html (accessed on December 18, 2017)