

Weekly Media Updates **(04-10 December, 2017)**

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Africa

- **UN suffers worst DR Congo attack as 15 peacekeepers killed¹**

At least 15 United Nations peacekeepers were killed in the restive Democratic Republic of Congo on 9 December 2017, in the deadliest attack in the organization's recent history.

The UN Security Council said the peacekeepers, who were from neighbouring Tanzania, were killed in the North Kivu province late Thursday, alongside five Congolese soldiers, with 53 personnel wounded. UN chief Antonio Guterres called it a "heinous" act. He said in a statement that "I condemn this attack unequivocally. These deliberate attacks against UN peacekeepers are unacceptable and constitute a war crime," he said in a statement.

DR Congo's huge eastern region has long been wracked by violence, but fighting between government soldiers and militia groups, as well as inter-ethnic clashes, has increased significantly this year. North Kivu province, which borders Uganda and Rwanda, has seen a particular uptick in killings and kidnappings between rival ethnic groups.

The UN in October declared a level three emergency in DR Congo -- a status afforded to conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. MONUSCO, the UN's peacekeeping force in DR Congo, said its operating base at Semuliki, North Kivu, was attacked by "suspected ADF elements". ADF are a Ugandan Muslim rebel group, one of several armed groups active in the North Kivu region.

- **President of Ghana Makes Firm Statement on African Autonomy from European Aid²**

After the AU-EU summit in Abidjan, French President Emmanuel Macron visited several African states, including Ghana. The President of Ghana Akufo-Addo told in a joint press conference with Macron, who was visibly surprised by the statements, that "we can no longer pursue a policy for our countries and regions that is based on the support given by the West, France or the European Union.

French President Emmanuel Macron visited Ghana as part of his first African tour. Macron's advisers say he hopes to modernize France's relations with Africa by emphasizing business links, education and sport rather than development aid. In addition he aims to counter hostility towards France's influence over its former colonies, which is particularly strong among young people.

In the joint press conference Macron called for closer relations between Europe and Africa. Echoing the call made for African unity by Ghana's first president and pan-Africanist, Kwame Nkrumah, Macron said: "Not only must Africa unite, but Europe and Africa must unite."

Macron's statement was however not echoed by Ghanaian president Akufo Addo who felt strongly that although European-African relations are favorable, Ghana and Africa must move towards autonomy from the dependency on aid and charity

¹ The Tribune, 9 December 2017, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/un-suffers-worst-dr-congo-attack-as-15-peacekeepers-killed/510618.html>

² This is Africa ,4 December 2017

that has been the trait of the relationship so far. He said "It is not right for a country like Ghana 60 years after independence still having its health and education budget being financed off the generosity and charity of European taxpayers. By now we should be able to finance our basic needs ourselves." Further he said "our concern should be with what do we need to do in this 21st century to move Africa away from being cap in hand begging for Aid, for charity, for handouts.

- **Hundreds of West African Migrants Return from Libya, AU to bring 20,000 migrant home³**

Hundreds of West African migrants who had been stranded in Libya are returning home as worried governments repatriate them amid outrage over slave auctions. Another 164 migrants returned to Nigeria early on Friday, the latest group to be repatriated with help from the European Union and the International Organisation for Migration. The first 504 migrants from neighbouring Niger, including children, returned home on Wednesday, part of an expected mass voluntary evacuation of 3,850 over the coming days, the UN migration agency said. The African Union aims to return 20,000 migrants from Libya over the next six weeks after international condemnation of slave auctions in Libya revealed by recent CNN footage. Between 400,000 and 700,000 migrants are thought to be in more than 40 detention camps across the chaotic north African country, often under inhumane conditions, the AU Commission chairperson has said. Several West African nations including Gambia, Cameroon and Ivory Coast have begun bringing their citizens home.

- **South Africa to Scale Down Nuclear Expansion Plan: Mahlobo⁴**

South Africa intends to push ahead with its nuclear expansion plan but will now do so at a slower pace because there has been a fall in demand for electricity owing to a struggling economy, energy minister David Mahlobo said on Thursday. South Africa has the continent's only nuclear power station and is seeking to expand its nuclear, wind, solar and coal power capacity in the coming decades. Energy analysts have said the 9,600 MW plan was ambitious on timescale and unnecessary, while opponents of President Jacob Zuma raised concerns about a lack of transparency in deals which could cost tens of billions of dollars. Mahlobo did not disclose how much Africa's most industrialised nation would aim to add to its nuclear fleet.

- **South Africa's Jacob Zuma and Morocco Likely to Resume Diplomatic Ties⁵**

South Africa and Morocco will resume diplomatic ties more than a decade after Morocco withdrew its ambassador from Pretoria, South African President Jacob

³ News24, 8 December 2017, at <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/hundreds-of-west-african-migrants-return-home-from-libya-20171208>

⁴ IOL News, 7 December 2017, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/south-africa-to-scale-down-nuclear-expansion-plan-mahlobo-12305951>

⁵ Africanews, 4 December 2017, <http://www.africanews.com/2017/12/04/south-africa-s-jacob-zumah-and-morocco-likely-to-resume-diplomatic-ties-media/>

Zuma said in a newspaper interview published on Sunday. Morocco recalled its ambassador from South Africa in 2004 after former South African president Thabo Mbeki recognised a breakaway region in the Western Sahara which Morocco claims as part of its territory. “Morocco is an African nation and we need to have relations with them,” Zuma told City Press in the interview. “We never had problems with them anyway; they were the first to withdraw diplomatic relations.” Zuma met Morocco’s King Mohammed last week on the sidelines of an African Union-European Union summit. “They felt that even if we differ on the Western Sahara issues, the two countries should have a relationship,” Zuma said about Moroccan official position at the meeting.

- **Switzerland to Return US\$321 Million of Stolen Money to Nigeria⁶**

The Swiss government is to return US\$321 million to Nigeria that was seized from the family of former President Sani Abacha. The assets were confiscated as part of criminal proceedings against Abba Abacha, son of Sani, who ruled Nigeria for five years until his death in 1998. Nigerian investigators believe the former president stole more than US\$4 billion during his time in office. The Swiss government released a statement on Monday announcing that agreement had been reached with officials from the Nigerian government and the World Bank on the terms of restitution. Nigeria is also pursuing US\$480 million that has been seized in the US, but faces a laborious legal process to reclaim it.

North Africa

- **Putin in Cairo to Discuss Nuclear Reactor Program among many other Issues⁷**

The foreign minister of Egypt, Ahmad Shukri in a press briefing told the media person that Russian President Mr. Putin is visiting Ego where he would hold a comprehensive dialogue with his Egyptian counterparts, President El-Sisi on wide ranging issue of mutual interest and other regional and global issues. The most important issue to be discussed between the two leaders is the nuclear power plant where both sides are also expected to sign a comprehensive deal in this regard. It has been more than year since both sides are engaged in serious dialogue for installation nuclear power plant in Egypt and Russia has agreed to supply nuclear reactor for purpose of enhancing electric production and for other means like water purification and medical usage.

⁶ CNN, 6 December 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/06/africa/switzerland-returns-abacha-funds/index.html>

⁷ Asharqal-Awsat, an Arabic Daily
<https://aawsat.com/home/article/1109601/%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%C2%AB%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9%C2%BB>

The foreign minister told the Russia Today TV channel that Egypt is likely to sign a deal with a Russia company, Russian Atom to get supply of nuclear material for power plant. The government of Egypt has decided to install the nuclear plant in the region of Zaba in the Mursi governorate, 330 kilometers north-west of capital town of Cairo. The minister informed that that area of Zaba has been specified thirty years earlier for the same purpose and the project has finally seen the light of the day. It is expected that the nuclear reactor would be capable of producing 48, 00 MW electricity by year 2022.

- **19 Killed in Saudi Raids in Yemen** ⁸

At least nineteen civilians killed in the latest raid of Saudi-led coalition forces targeting the city markets and a media house. According to Yemen news agency, at least four people killed and five others injured when fighter plane raided a satellite TV station in the town of Sana. In another raid in the town of Sana, other five persons lost their lives when the coalitions' plane hit a market building and the incident left four people badly injured. Another source informed that US drone targeted the town of Farshiyah in the Baiza province and later US sources informed that targeted place was an Al-Qaeda hideout.

Central Asia

- **Uzbekistan Hosts Afghanistan President**

President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani visited Uzbekistan on 4-5 December 2017. It was the first visit of Afghan President to bordering Uzbekistan. He held discussions with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the two leaders held discussions on a range of bilateral and regional issues, including countering terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, strengthening security in Central Asia. Uzbekistan President termed Afghanistan as 'a close neighbor' and 'a friendly country'.¹ The Afghanistan President said that the visit further increases the opportunity for bilateral cooperation.

The new government in Tashkent under President Mirziyoyev has been increasing its engagement with neighbouring countries, including Afghanistan. The Uzbekistan government has succeeded in creating a positive atmosphere conducive for regional cooperation. In May 2017, the country appointed the Special Representative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Afghanistan. In November 2017, first direct flight between Tashkent and Kabul was made.

The Uzbekistan side said mentioned that it is important to achieve national reconciliation in Afghanistan. It was emphasized that peace in Afghanistan will make it possible to fully realize the focus of Central Asia on sustainable and progressive development. Tashkent favours dialogue under the aegis of the UN between the Kabul government and the domestic political forces inside Afghanistan and without preconditions. During the Ghani's visit, Uzbekistan said

⁸ Ath-Thaurah, A Yemeni Arabic Daily: <http://www.althawranews.net/archives/502938>

that it will assist in integrating Afghanistan into regional socio-economic processes.

The bilateral trade between Afghanistan and India in 2016 was about US\$520 million. More than 40 contracts were signed for a total amount of US \$ 500 million of export to Afghanistan.² The two countries signed 16 documents on cooperation in various areas, including trade, border crossings, legal assistance, goods transit, customs affairs, agriculture, energy, healthcare and higher education.³

China

- **Xi Jinping Holds Talks with President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom of Maldives**

On December 7, 2017, President Xi Jinping held talks with President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom of Maldives, who was in China for a state visit.

Xi Jinping pointed out that Maldives is a member of the neighboring extended family of China, and both countries enjoy a traditional friendship.

After the talks, the two heads of state jointly witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Jointly Promoting the “Belt and Road” Construction between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Maldives, and a Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Maldives, and bilateral cooperative documents in such areas as economy, technology, human resources development, oceans, environment, health care and finance.

Joint Press Communiqué between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Maldives was released on 8 December 2017. Excerpts from the Joint Press Communiqué is written below:

- The two sides exchanged views on promoting trade and investments. The Maldivian side agreed to facilitate investments by Chinese enterprises in the Maldives, while the Chinese side will encourage more competitive Chinese enterprises to invest in the Maldives and provide assistance within its capacity to Maldives' social and economic development.
- The Maldivian side appreciated the assistance and support by the Chinese side to the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge Project and the Expansion and Upgrading of Velana International Airport Project, the two most important flagship projects of the Government of the Maldives. The two sides agreed to ensure these projects be completed on time and in due quality.
- The Maldives supported China's effort to enhance its relationship with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
- The Maldivian side reiterated its support for and participation in the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road proposed by China. The two sides will deepen pragmatic cooperation under framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative and enhance connectivity.⁹

⁹ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1518237.shtml and http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1517889.shtml

- **Xiaomi's performance in India**

Xiaomi's India unit saw a 696 per cent sales surge to Rs 83.79 billion (\$1.3 billion) with a net profit of Rs 1.64 billion (\$25.42 million) during the Financial Year 2017, marking the company's growing clout in India. This reflects that Xiaomi has started to make a profit in the fiscal ended March 2017 as sales surge more than seven times, as reported by *the Economic Times*.¹⁰

- **India-China Business Seminar Organized in Guiyang**

In a continuation of its efforts to boost Chinese investments in India, the Embassy of India in Beijing organized an India-China Business Seminar in Guiyang on 8th December 2017.

Speaking at the event, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of India, Mr. Amit Narang highlighted the remarkable rise in India's ranking in the Ease of Doing Business report published by World Bank. Emphasizing the complementarity between Indian and Chinese companies in the economic arena, he encouraged all the companies present to visit India and invest in India.

This event saw senior level participation from the local government- with Vice President of Guizhou CPPCC Mr. Li Hanyu, Mayor of Guiyang City Mr. Chen Yan and Vice Mayor of Guiyang City Mr. Xu Qin attending the event and delivering remarks.

The seminar received an overwhelming response with more than 400 representatives from more than 280 Chinese companies attending the event.¹¹

- **PLA Navy conducts Air Defense Missile Assessment in East China Sea**

The missile competitive assessment of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy kicked off in waters of the East China Sea on December 7, 2017.¹²

European Union

- **Brexit Negotiations**

The European Commission has said that the UK and the EU have made "sufficient progress" in Brexit negotiations and agreed to start talks on the future relationship and transition period. There are crucial issues such as the Irish border, financial settlement and EU citizens' rights in the negotiations between the EU and the UK. British Prime Minister May said that there would be no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. She also said that agreement had been reached on guarantee of EU citizens' right and financial settlement. Now talk on future trade, defense and security relations can begin.¹³

¹⁰ <http://technode.com/2017/12/08/xiaomi-india-profit/>

¹¹ <http://indianembassybeijing.in/business-seminar-06-dec-2017.php>

¹² http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2017-12/08/content_4799440.htm

¹³ Brexit: European Commission says 'sufficient progress' has been made, DW, December 8, 2017 <http://www.dw.com/en/brexit-european-commission-says-sufficient-progress-has-been-made/a-41706055>

- **EU to Sue Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic over Migrant Quotas**
The European Commission stated that it has “decided to refer the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to the Court of Justice of the EU for non-compliance with their legal obligations on relocation.” The statement says, “This is why the Commission has decided to move to the next stage of the infringement procedure and refer the three member states to the Court of Justice of the EU.” It was reported that Hungary and Poland have taken no refugee and the Czech Republic has accepted only 12. On the other hand, these countries have argued that the EU is interfering their national sovereignty.¹⁴
- **Finance Minister Mateusz Morawiecki- New Prime Minister of Poland**
Polish President Andrzej Duda named Finance Minister Mateusz Morawiecki as prime minister-designate. President Duda accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Beata Szydło and her Cabinet. New Prime Minister would have 14 days to name his cabinet.¹⁵

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Japanese government approves Emperor Akihito's abdication for April 30, 2019**
One December 8, 2017, during a Cabinet meeting, the Japanese government has approved a decree that April 30, 2019, will be the day when Emperor Akihito abdicates the Chrysanthemum Throne. On the next day, May 1, Crown Prince Naruhito will become emperor, ending the Heisei Era at 30 years and four months and ushering in a new yet-to-be named era, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters. This will be the first abdication in Japan’s history of constitutional politics. The last abdication took place around 200 years ago, when Emperor Kokaku (1771-1840) vacated the throne during the feudal Edo Period (1603-1867).¹⁶
- **Japan to acquire air-launched missiles**
On December 9, 2017 Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera announced that Japan is to acquire medium-range, air-launched cruise missiles. The purchase would be will become the longest-range munitions of Japan that has renounced the right to wage war. The Minister said, "we are planning to introduce the JSM (Joint Strike Missile) that will be mounted on the F-35A (stealth fighter) as 'stand-off' missiles that can be fired beyond the range of enemy threats. “ He also said

¹⁴ EU sues Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland over low refugee intake, DW, December 7, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/eu-sues-czech-republic-hungary-and-poland-over-low-refugee-intake/a-41691870>

¹⁵ Morawiecki tasked with forming new Polish government, Radio Poland, December 8, 2017 <http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/338933,Morawiecki-tasked-with-forming-new-Polish-government>

¹⁶ “Cabinet sets abdication date; talks move to ceremony plans”, The Asahi Shimbun, December 8, 2017, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201712080054.html>

that Japan is also looking to mount Lockheed Martin Corp.'s extended-range Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM-ER) on its F-15 fighters.¹⁷

- **Senior UN official to visited North Korea**

Jeffrey Feltman, the undersecretary general for political affairs at the U.N. visited Pyongyang on December 5-8, 2017. During the visit Feltman met North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho and Pak Myong-guk, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs. According to UN sources they exchanged views on the Korean Peninsula and agreed that the current situation was the most tense and dangerous peace and security issue in the world today.¹⁸

- **South Korea Announced New Sanction on North Korea**

On December 10, 2017 South Korea has announced an additional 20 North Korean firms and 12 individuals on its blacklist as part of its latest unilateral sanctions aimed at squeezing the flow of money to Pyongyang's nuclear and missile development programs. The new sanctions, which will go into effect Monday, come as the international community puts greater pressure on the reclusive regime that has threatened the world with weapons of mass destruction. Seoul previously put 18 North Korean individuals on its blacklist in November.¹⁹

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **US Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital Raises Concern in ASEAN States**

According to Malaysia's deputy prime minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) members must object in a united voice to any suggestion by the US to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Indonesia's top diplomat joined other world leaders urging US President Donald Trump not to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel. Speaking at the opening of a Seminar in support of Palestine, Indonesia's foreign minister Retno Marsudi said that she spoke with US Ambassador to Indonesia Joseph Donovan on December 4, 2017, to persuade the White House against recognising Jerusalem as the capital. Indonesia is a strong supporter of the two-state solution for the Middle-East conflict, which envisages an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital living side-by-side with Israel.²⁰

- **President Duterte declares NPA terrorist Organisation**

¹⁷ "Japan to acquire air-launched missiles able to strike North Korea", The Asahi Shimbun, Decemebr 9, 2017, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201712090011.html>

¹⁸ "Note to Correspondents: Visit of Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", United Nations Secretary-General, December 9, 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2017-12-09/note-correspondents-visit-under-secretary-general>

¹⁹ "S. Korea announces more N.K. firms, individuals on blacklist", The Yonhap News, December 10, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2017/12/10/0200000000AEN20171210002851315.html>

²⁰ "Malaysia, Indonesia concerned over Jerusalem move", *The Straits Times*, December 6, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-warns-us-against-recognising-jerusalem-as-israels-capital>, accessed on December 7, 2017.

President Duterte signed a proclamation classifying the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA) as terrorist groups following the cancellation of peace talks. The President's order also allows the state to go after groups or individuals who are wittingly or unwittingly supporting the CPP-NPA. The US had designated the CPP-NPA as a foreign organisation on August 9, 2002. Duterte has ordered Justice Secretary Vitalliano Aguirre II to file the necessary application for the proscription or declaration of the CPP-NPA as a terrorist group with the appropriate regional trial court. The President also directed the Department of Foreign Affairs to publish the designation of CPP-NPA in accordance with the Human Security Act.²¹

- **Russian Strategic bombers fly mission from Indonesia first time since the Cold War**

According to the Russia's defence ministry two Tu-95 strategic bombers have flown a patrol mission over the Southern Pacific after taking off from Indonesia, as part of Moscow's efforts to restore its Cold War-era military foothold around the world. The two strategic bombers flew from Biak Island in Indonesia's easternmost Papua province. According to Russian state television stations report, the nuclear-capable bombers accompanied by heavy-lift transport planes would spend a few days on Biak. The bombers' visit to Indonesia marked the first such deployment since the Cold War times, when Soviet maritime patrol planes flew over the Pacific from a base in Vietnam.²²

Myanmar

- **Myanmar opposes UNHRC resolution**

Myanmar lambasted the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution that condemned the alleged systematic and gross violations of human rights and abuses committed against the Muslim minority in northern Rakhine State. The December 5 UNHRC draft resolution was issued at the conclusion of the 27th Special Session of the UNHRC that discussed the human rights situation of the Muslim minority in Rakhine. Htin Lynn, ambassador and permanent representative of Myanmar at the UN, said country specific resolutions, such as the one drafted on Tuesday, "are not conducive to meaningful dialogue but give rise also to polarisation, division and even confrontation."²³

- **Rakhine Buddhists find refuge in India's Mizoram State**

²¹"Duterte declares NPA terrorist Organisation", *The Philippine Star*, December 6, 2017, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/12/06/1765782/duterte-declares-npa-terrorist-organization>, accessed on December 6, 2017.

²² "Russian Strategic bombers fly mission from Indonesia", *Bangkok Post*, December 7, 2017, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1374240/russian-strategic-bombers-fly-mission-from-indonesia>, accessed on December 7, 2017.

²³ Myanmar blasts UNHRC resolution, 8th December 2017, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/myanmar-blasts-unhrc-resolution.html>

In a contradiction of its own policy, the Indian government has allowed over 1300 tribal Buddhist refugees from Myanmar's Rakhine State to enter Mizoram. The refugees left their homeland because of the ongoing war between the Myanmar army and the Arakan Army, made up of Buddhist insurgents. This comes nearly a month after India's Home Ministry had directed the northeastern states to take strict measures to prevent Rohingyas – who are Muslims – from entering India. The new group of refugees, belonging to the Chin and few other communities of Myanmar, have come to four villages in Lawngtlai district.²⁴

- **Families in IDP camps get Indian aid**

Several Hindu families currently sheltered at an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Sittwe, Maungdaw, and received aid worth 4 million rupees (nearly K84.5 million) from India on November 2. According to the state media, the 155 Hindu families from the Danyawady Sports Ground camp benefitted from the assistance, which comprised soap, beds, mosquito nets, edibles and other basic supplies. Private donors also contributed to providing mattress for the families²⁵.

- **Myanmar opium production down overall, steady in conflict areas**

A United Nations survey has reconfirmed a link in Myanmar between opium growing and conflict, with insecure areas where there are active insurgencies producing the drug at about the same level of two years ago. The finding is made in the Myanmar Opium Survey 2017 conducted collaboration between the government's Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and released on December 6. The survey noted a significant decline in opium poppy cultivation except in conflict-affected areas of northern Shan and Kachin states²⁶.

- **China criticises UN Human Rights Council resolution on Rakhine crisis**

China said on December 6 that a United Nations resolution expressing grave concern over widespread abuses committed against Myanmar's Rohingya community "cannot help to ease the tensions and solve the problem". The comment came a day after China voted against a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council that said abuses against the Rohingya indicated "the very likely commission of crimes against humanity".²⁷

Latin America and Caribbean Countries

Argentina

- **Cristina Fernandez indicted for treason; Timerman put under house arrest**

²⁴ Rakhine Buddhists find refuge in India's Mizoram State, 6th December 2017,

<https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/rakhine-buddhists-find-refuge-indias-mizoram-state.html>

²⁵ Families in IDP camps get Indian aid, 4th December 2017, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/families-idp-camps-get-indian-aid.html>

²⁶ Myanmar opium production down overall, steady in conflict areas, 7th December 2017,

<https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/myanmar-opium-production-down-overall-steady-in-conflict-areas>

²⁷ China criticises UN Human Rights Council resolution on Rakhine crisis, 9th December 2017,

<https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/china-criticises-un-human-rights-council-resolution-on-rakhine-crisis>

A federal judge in Argentina indicted former President Cristina Fernandez for treason and asked for her arrest for allegedly covering up Iran's possible role in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center that killed 85 people and injured hundreds, a court ruling said on December 7, 2017. As Fernandez is a senator, Congress would first have to vote to strip her of parliamentary immunity for an arrest to occur. The judge, Claudio Bonadio, also indicted and ordered house arrest for Fernandez's Foreign Minister Hector Timerman, the 491-page ruling said. Fernandez called a news conference in Congress to deny wrongdoing and accuse Bonadio and President Mauricio Macri of degrading the judiciary. "It is an invented case about facts that did not exist," she said. While removing immunity from lawmakers is rare in Argentina, Congress voted on October 25, 2017 to do so for Fernandez's former planning minister Julio De Vido, who is accused of fraud and corruption, was arrested the same day. Argentina's legislature has entered a period of judicial recess until March 2018 but can be convened for urgent matters. Fernandez and her allies have been the focus of several high profile cases with arrests and indictments since center-right Mauricio Macri defeated her chosen successor and was elected president in late 2015. The crime of treason is punishable by 10 to 25 years in prison, Argentina's maximum sentence. The next step in the case would be an oral trial and sentences can be appealed on first instance, which could be a long process.²⁸

- **WTO summit takes off in Buenos Aires**

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is taking place in Argentina from December 10, 2017. The Buenos Aires meeting will be the first in the era of US President Donald Trump, who has pummeled the 164-member body relentlessly since taking office, even describing it as a "disaster". The Trump administration had made the WTO a preferred target of its "America First" policy, threatening to pull America out of the trade organization it says is hampering its ability to compete. Expectations of any kind of a breakthrough at the Buenos Aires meeting are low. Argentina's Susana Malcorra, who presides over December 10 to 13, 2017 meeting, was more upbeat recently; saying a deal was likely to end harmful fisheries subsidies, keenly of interest to developing countries. She was also positive about the prospects of an EU-Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) trade deal finally coming to fruition 18 years after talks first began. Washington has been blamed for blocking appointments of judges to the WTO's dispute settlement system, saying it was ineffective and insisting on a more aggressive approach to defending its interests. A European diplomat in Buenos Aires said protectionist US rhetoric may have motivational effects on negotiations

²⁸ "Judge Indicts Cristina Fernandez for Treason and Puts Timerman under House Arrest," December 8, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/08/judge-indicts-cristina-fernandez-for-treason-and-puts-timerman-under-house-arrest>, Accessed on December 11, 2017.

between the EU and Mercosur. As if to prove him right, the EU and Japan announced Friday that they have finalized a major trade agreement.²⁹

Brazil

- **We Will Reach Out to Those Who Protested, Declares Ex-President Lula**

Foreseeing turbulence in 2018, on December 6, 2017, former president Lula da Silva said that he would reach out to those who had protested for the removal of former president Dilma Rousseff. Lula believes that those who supported the impeachment process now regret having done so. "Those who beat on pots and pans, those who went into the streets supporting the coup, they don't have any more pans to beat on. They're beating their heads against the wall with regret. We won't ignore them. We'll reach out to them and say 'come along with us friend'", Lula declared, adding that "it's never too late to learn". In a speech to students of the Federal Institute in the city of Campos de Goytacazes (RJ), Lula declared that supporters of fiscal adjustment "are talking a lot of bullshit". He also called for more investment in the public health system in contrast to the cuts being implemented by the Temer government. On the third stage of his 2017 caravan trip, Lula told the students. "Get ready. 2018 is going to be a turbulent year".³⁰

- **Lava Jato Returns US\$ 200 Million to Petrobras, the Largest Amount Obtained in a Criminal Investigation**

The Prosecutor General's Office held an event on December 7, 2017, announcing that it would be returning R\$ 653.9 million (US\$ 198.7 million) to state-run oil company Petrobras. According to the Prosecutor's Office, it was the largest amount of money ever to be recovered in a criminal investigation. What made the reimbursement possible was the collaboration of construction firms Odebrecht and Andrade Gutierrez with investigators, as well as the application of leniency agreements. The Prosecutor General's Office has championed the recovered funds to argue in favour of the agreements, which have been criticized by some legal professionals, as well as segments of civil society. This is the tenth time funds have been recovered since May of 2015, when the first restitution took place. After this latest restitution, funds recovered have totalled approximately R\$ 1.475 billion (US\$ 448 million). According to the Prosecutor's Office, the amount is equivalent to just 13% of the R\$ 10.8 billion (US\$ 3.28 billion) expected to be recovered through the 163 plea-bargain agreements, as well as the 10 leniency agreements, that have been signed.³¹

²⁹ "WTO Summit Takes Off in Buenos Aires; Anybody's Guess What the Outcome can be," December 11, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/11/wto-summit-takes-off-in-buenos-aires-anybody-s-guess-what-the-outcome-can-be>, Accessed on December 11, 2017.

³⁰ Catia Seabra, "We Will Reach Out to Those Who Protested, Declares Ex-President Lula," December 7, 2017, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2017/12/1941377-we-will-reach-out-to-those-who-protested-declares-ex-president-lula.shtml>, Accessed on December 11, 2017.

³¹ Ana Luiza Albuquerque, "Lava Jato Returns US\$200 Million to Petrobras, the Largest Amount Obtained in a Criminal Investigation," December 8, 2017,

Venezuela

- **Chinese state oil company suing Venezuela's PDVSA in U.S. courts**

China Petroleum & Chemical Corp., the state-controlled oil company, is suing Petroleos de Venezuela SA in the U.S. courts for unpaid bills. Sinopec, as the Chinese company is known, also filed a request for arbitration against PDVSA at the International Chamber of Commerce, as it alleges damages of at least \$23.7 million, according to court papers. The development comes almost three months after PetroChina Company Ltd advised its U.S. unit to avoid any involvement in future loans to PDVSA. The lawsuit further illustrates how the relationship between the two long-time partners is turning bitter after delays in paying past loans and oil quality issues. It's also evidence that Beijing might not always be there to bail out Venezuela, as it has done over and over in the past decade, Russ Dallen, a managing partner at Caracas Capital Markets, a Venezuela-based investment bank, said in a note to clients. Sinopec delivered 45,000 tons of steel products to PDVSA in 2013, and claims it got paid for just half of it. The Chinese company also said that PDVSA was late on making an advance payment for the materials, causing Sinopec to suffer damages, as the company was itself buying the steel products from a third-part supplier. The supplier, which was not named in the documents, eventually filed an arbitration case and was awarded \$2.1 million.³²

- **No elections until “vulgar sanctions” against Venezuela are lifted, warns Maduro**

Venezuela said future elections in the country would only take place once U.S. sanctions against top ranking officials and its finances are lifted, in a sign from the government that next year's presidential vote is at risk. Information Minister Jorge Rodriguez said that any potential accord between President Nicolas Maduro and opposition lawmakers, as well as any vote, hinged on “the lifting of the vulgar sanctions the Venezuelan right wing's leadership requested of Donald Trump's Treasury Department as well as Spanish, Canadian and other authorities.” The U.S. and the European Union have levied a series of sanctions against top Venezuelan officials and on certain financial transactions in response to the Maduro regime policies of undermining the democratic processes in the country. The government has dismissed the sanctions, and described the international penalties as nefarious threats against Venezuela's sovereignty, part of an effort to impose further damage on the country's fragile economy. Venezuela's constitution dictates that a presidential vote must take place every six years, but electoral authorities have yet to establish a date for 2018 elections. Opposition lawmakers have demanded the

<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2017/12/1941705-lava-jato-returns-us-200-million-to-petrobras-the-largest-amount-obtained-in-a-criminal-investigation.shtml>, Accessed on December 11, 2017.

³² “Chinese Government Oil Company Suing Venezuela's PDVSA in US Courts,” December 8, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/08/chinese-government-oil-company-suing-venezuela-s-pdvsa-in-us-courts>, Accessed on December 11, 2017.

government publish a comprehensive electoral calendar, following accusations of fraud during October 2017 election for governors.³³

Russia

- **Russia-India-China Summit**

At the opening remarks with China's top diplomat Wang Yi, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on 11 December that close cooperation between the Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministries has influenced the international agenda to a large extent. "The outgoing year - we will sum up its results today - was rich in events in terms of foreign policy," the minister noted. "Five top-level meetings, including the Chinese president's official visit to Russia, have been held." For his part, Wang Yi noted the importance of contacts between Russia, India and China. "We are one of the world's largest countries, and we should intensify strategic contacts between the three countries," he explained. "Undoubtedly, Russia will play a substantial role in this process."³⁴

- **Russia and India**

On 7 December, Viktor N Kladov, director for international cooperation and regional policy, Rostec, a state-owned Russian defence and industrial group, said that India should assure Russian companies that it will buy their India-made spares and not go for cheaper purchase from a third country to address its armed forces long grievance of delays in procuring critical defence equipment from Moscow. He said that Russia has chalked out a strategy to build technical service centres in India dedicated for specific equipment. It has been a long-standing grievance of the Indian armed forces that supply of critical spares and equipment from Russia takes a long-time, affecting maintenance of military systems procured from Moscow. He said the company was offered a space to set up a facility to produce components, spares for electronics, machinery, engines and helicopters in Maharashtra. "We will set up facilities and this can only be done if the Indian government assures that the Russian products will be purchased," he said. Speaking on the issue of India inching closer to the US and Israel in terms of defence deals and procurement, Kladov said he did not see it as a threat, but as a challenge for Russia as the market is becoming more competitive. "America has many competitive products to offer. It's for Indian government to choose. It's up for the Indian government to build up balances. I can only speak on behalf of the Russian side. We are firm friends and strategic partners of the Indian republic," he said.³⁵

Responding to Russian deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov's remarks in New Delhi on 6 December that Moscow was speaking to China for India's membership

³³ "No Elections Until "Vulgar Sanctions" Against Venezuela are Lifted, Warns Maduro," December 6, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/12/06/no-elections-until-vulgar-sanctions-against-venezuela-are-lifted-warns-maduro>, Accessed on December 11, 2017.

³⁴ "Lavrov says Russian-Chinese ties have huge impact on international agenda", *TASS*, December 11, 2017. <http://tass.com/politics/980136> Accessed on December 11, 2017.

³⁵ "Russian firms want purchase assurance from India: Official", *Economic Times*, December 7, 2017. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/russian-firms-want-purchase-assurance-from-india-official/articleshow/61961407.cms> Accessed on December 11, 2017.

into the NSG, China today asserted its opposition to India's membership bid to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), saying there is no change in its stand and efforts were on to forge "consensus" among the 48-member elite nuclear club about the admission of new members. Ryabkov said that Russia is unwavering in its support to India's membership of international nuclear control regimes and Moscow was speaking to China in this regard. Asked for his reaction to Ryabkov's comments, Geng said all the members of the NSG supported the two-step approach-to find non-discriminatory solution that applies to all non-NPT countries then on that basis discuss the application of the non-NPT countries.³⁶

The International North South Transportation Corridor (INSTC) connecting Mumbai with St Petersburg and beyond – which has been 17 years in the making – is set to be operationalised from the middle of next month with the first consignment from India to Russia. Although the formal operationalisation of INSTC is planned for mid-January, the corridor will start functioning fully in a few months thereafter, according to people aware of the matter. Hectic preparations are underway to firm up all elements of the corridor in all key stakeholder states, informed officials. A Russian railway operator is expected to play key role in INSTC.³⁷

- **Russia and China**

During a meeting with Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission Zhang Youxia on 8 December, Russian Defense Minister, General of the Army Sergey Shoigu said that Russian Defense Ministry intends to further develop relations with the Chinese Ministry of National Defence. Shoigu noted that comprehensive extension of strategic cooperation with China is absolute priority for Russia's foreign policy. He stressed that Russia is closely monitoring the implementation of the agreements reached at the highest level. "We intend to further develop relations between our defense ministries in all areas. Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Zhang Youxia on 7 December. The head of state assured Zhang Youxia that strategic partnership with China remains a major area in the Russian foreign policy."³⁸

- **Russia and the US**

Speaking to the audience at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe event on 7 December, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that the US will maintain sanctions against Russia until it returns full control of Crimea to Ukraine. Speaking in front of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a meeting

³⁶ China says no change in its stand on India's membership to NSG", *Economic Times*, December 7, 2017.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-says-no-change-in-its-stand-on-indias-membership-to-nsg/articleshow/61964228.cms> Accessed on December 11, 2017.

³⁷ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "INSTC to be operationalised mid-Jan 2018; game changer for India's Eurasia policy", *Economic Times*, December 5, 2017. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/instc-to-be-operationalised-mid-jan-2018-game-changer-for-indias-eurasia-policy/articleshow/61926321.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst Accessed on December 11, 2017.

³⁸ Russia, China to boost defense cooperation", *TASS*, <http://tass.com/defense/979852> Accessed on December 11, 2017.

of foreign ministers in Vienna, Tillerson said the US will not tolerate Russian aggression in Crimea.³⁹

At the same meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said North Korea is open to direct talks with the US and passed that message on to US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Mr Lavrov noted the talks would likely be contingent on “security guarantees.” “We know that North Korea wants above all to talk to the United States about guarantees for its security. We are ready to support that, we are ready to take part in facilitating such negotiations,” Mr Lavrov said.⁴⁰

According to a report by the RAND think tank, quoted by CNBC on 8 December, it reported that under certain circumstances, the US may lose a possible conflict with Russia in Europe or with China over Taiwan. The report, is headlined entitled "U.S. Military Capabilities and Forces for a Dangerous World." According to the 190-page document, the capabilities of two countries - Russia and China - have advanced so much that under certain conditions they could have a military edge over the US. The document's authors claim that at present, US armed forces are "insufficiently trained and ready," especially in terms of the active service components. It says that "In short, providing the military power called for by the United States' ambitious national security strategy, which has never been easy, has recently become considerably more challenging," the report reads. "The coincidence of this new reality with a period of constrained defense budgets has led to a situation in which it is now far from clear that our military forces are adequate for the tasks being placed before them. Put more starkly, assessments in this report will show that US forces could, under plausible assumptions, lose the next war they are called upon to fight, despite the United States outspending China military forces by a ratio of 2.7:1 and Russia by 6:1," the document continues. "The nation needs to do better than this." According to analysts, NATO may face certain difficulties if Russia decides to move into Baltic States. "In short, we concluded that, as currently postured, NATO cannot defend the Baltic states against a determined, short-warning Russian attack," the document says. In case of China, the US will have tough times defending Taiwan if Beijing opts to retake the breakaway island republic. Besides, China studied previous US military campaigns to develop own strategies on this basis.⁴¹

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Trump's Decision Will Threaten Peace In Middle East: ARG**

³⁹Liz Stark and Maegan Vazquez, “US to maintain Russia sanctions until it withdraws from Ukraine, Tillerson says”, *CNN*, December 7, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/07/politics/russia-sanctions-crimea-ukraine/index.html> Accessed on December 11, 2017.

⁴⁰ Mythili Sampathkumar, “North Korea open to direct talks with US, says Russia”, *The Independent*, December 9, 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/north-korea-latest-russia-direct-talks-us-trump-kim-jong-un-a8100401.html> Accessed on December 11, 2017.

⁴¹ “US may lose in military conflict with Russia, China — US think tank”, *TASS*, December 10, 2017. <http://tass.com/defense/980090> Accessed on December 11, 2017.

A day after US President Donald Trump officially recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital; the Presidential Palace (ARG) said the Afghan government has expressed its deep concerns with the United States leadership through diplomatic channels over the matter. "The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan understands the deep concerns of the Muslim people of the country and the Muslims world," the Presidential Palace said in a statement on Thursday. "The government of Afghanistan has already shared its deep concerns with US leadership through diplomatic channels about recognition of the Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the transferring of US embassy to the city." "The decision has affected the feeling of Muslims around the world and it will threaten peace in the Middle East. Therefore, any unilateral move in this respect, without the participation of Palestine, will not result in a positive and permanent solution (to the problem)," ARG says in the statement. The statement says the National Unity Government and the people of Afghanistan, along with other Muslims around the world, stand by the rights of Palestine people to have an independent government.⁴²

In a statement issued on 09 December 2017, Saturday, members of Afghan parliament asked the Kabul government to suspend all its relations with the US following President Donald Trump's decision on Jerusalem.⁴³

- **HIA to support Taliban's legitimate demands: Hekmatyar**

Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar on 10 December 2017, Sunday asked the Taliban insurgents to reconcile with the Afghan government under no foreign pressure or interference. He was addressing a rally in Khost province which was attended by thousands of people. Hekmatyar said if the Taliban agreed to reconcile, his party was ready to support all their legitimate demands. Meanwhile, Hekmatyar asked all political parties to completely partake in the upcoming Wolesi Jirga and district council elections. The HIA leader preferred party-based elections otherwise the upcoming polls would give birth to a weak government and a parliament the incumbent one which he called "a market of sale and purchase." Hekmatyar also said no one would be allowed to undermine the incumbent government unless it completed its term.⁴⁴

- **Kabul-Tashkent Transit Pact to Boost Regional Trade**

With the implementation of the transit agreement between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, Afghan businessmen will have the opportunity to access Chinese, Russian and central Asian markets, The Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI) announced. Uzbekistan will also be able to expand its commercial relations with other countries through Afghanistan's trade corridor, the Ministry said. With

⁴² "Trump's Decision Will Threaten Peace In Middle East: ARG", *Tolonews*, 07 December 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/trump%E2%80%99s-decision-will-threaten-peace-middle-east-arg> accessed on 11 December 2017.

⁴³ Massoud Ansar, "Afghan Govt Asked To Suspend Relations With US", *Tolonews*, 09 December 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghan-govt-asked%C2%A0-suspend-relations-us> accessed on 11 December 2017.

⁴⁴ Mohammad Haroon, "HIA to support Taliban's legitimate demands: Hekmatyar", *Pajhwok News*, 10 December 2017. <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2017/12/10/hia-support-taliban%E2%80%99s-legitimate-demands-hekmatyar> accessed on 11 December 2017.

the expansion of Afghanistan's relations with the central Asian countries, it appears that Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan is decreasing and the country is now able to conduct economic relations with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.⁴⁵

- **HPC Sets No Pre-Condition For Talks With Taliban**

The High Peace Council (HPC) Chairman Mohammad Karim Khalili at a ceremony in Kabul on 06 December 2017, Wednesday said the council is ready to start peace talks with the Taliban without any pre-condition. He said the Taliban can open their office, for the peace talks, in any part of the world and even in Kabul. Khalili said the Indonesian vice president and a group of that country's religious scholars will visit Kabul in the near future and are expected to condemn the ongoing war as illegitimate. Last month, Khalili, traveled to Indonesia where he held discussions with high-ranking Indonesian officials, including President Joko Widodo, on the peace process in Afghanistan. Khalili said the Indonesian government is interested in helping the Afghan peace process to end the war in the country.⁴⁶

- **Indonesia Pledges to Mediate Peace Process in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan's High Peace Council (HPC) on December 4, 2017, announced that Indonesia has pledged to cooperate with Afghanistan in its efforts for peace and reconciliation. To that end, a high-level Indonesian delegation will visit Kabul in less than two weeks' time to conduct talks on how to engage in the peace process with the Taliban insurgents. Last month, HPC chief, Mohammad Karim Khalili, traveled to Indonesia where he held discussions with high-ranking Indonesian officials including President Joko Widodo on the peace process in Afghanistan.⁴⁷

- **Mohaqiq and Dostum Hold Talks On Afghanistan Affairs in Turkey**

The deputy chief executive and first vice president of the government of national unity met in Turkey to hold talks regarding the ongoing political, security, and other issues of the country.

The Office of the First Vice President in a statement said the meeting between Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq and General Abdul Rashid Dostum was held in Ankara city of Turkey.⁴⁸

- **Beijing Offers Tripartite Talks Between Afghanistan, Pakistan, China**

Beijing has offered tripartite talks between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China with main focus being peace and stability and economic cooperation. The Office of the President, ARG Palace, in a statement said China's Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Deng Xijun met with President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani on December 4, 2017. The statement further added Mr. Xijun discussed the ongoing

⁴⁵ "Kabul-Tashkent Transit Pact to Boost Regional Trade", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, 09 December 2017. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19634 accessed on 11 December 2017.

⁴⁶ "HPC Sets No Pre-Condition For Talks With Taliban", *Tolonews*, 07 December 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/indonesian-clerics-%E2%80%98will-visit-kabul-condemn-war%E2%80%99> accessed on 11 December 2017.

⁴⁷ "Indonesia Pledges to Mediate Peace Process in Afghanistan", *Tolo News*, December 4, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/indonesia-pledges-mediate-peace-process-afghanistan> (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁴⁸ "Mohaqiq and Dostum hold talks on Afghanistan affairs in Turkey", *Khaama Press*, December 4, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/mohaqiq-and-dostum-hold-talks-on-afghanistan-affairs-in-turkey-03917> (accessed on December 11)

situation in the region and informed regarding Beijing's intent to convene a trilateral summit between the three nations.⁴⁹

- **Uzbekistan, Afghanistan Sign Rail Deal with Eyes on Iran**

Afghanistan and Uzbekistan have signed an agreement to extend a railway between the two countries which could give Uzbekistan a strategic access to the Persian Gulf through Iran. The agreement over the project – which would be within the framework of the Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor that has been in the pipeline for over 12 years – was signed in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent on Thursday (7th December) by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Ashraf Ghani. The plan is to construct a new railway with a total length of above 1,000 kilometers from Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan's northern province of Balkh and to the western city of Herat which is close to the border with Iran.⁵⁰

- **Daesh 'Could Exploit' Mineral Resources in Jawzjan**

Jawzjan Governor says it is not possible for Daesh militants to extract the mineral resources in Darzab district in the province. Following reports on presence of Daesh militants in Jawzjan province, in Afghanistan's north, a member of provincial council of the province said the insurgent group has access to mineral resources in that part of the country. Member of Jawzjan Provincial Council, Halima Sadaf, said the group would possibly extract and smuggle the assets in Darzab district in the province. She said the Daesh militants also have access to historical sites in Jawzjan.⁵¹

नेपाल

द्वितीय चरण में :प्रतिशत मतदान हुआ 67

गुरुवार को नेपाल में संघीय और प्रांतीय चुनाव का द्वितीय चरण प्रतिशत मतदान 67 जिलों में संपन्न हुआ और इसमें 45 चुनाव आयोग ने कहा कि .हुआ इन चुनावों के होने से संविधान का लागुकरण पूरा हुआ है और संक्रमण के दौर का अंत हुआ है.⁵²

वाम दलों का गठबंधन सही:

विश्लेषकों का .अक्टूबर को नेपाल के दो बड़े वाम दलों का जुड़ना आज चुनाव नतीजों के बाद सही प्रतीत हो रहा है 3 कहना है कि एमाले और माओवादी दलों के नारे पर मतदाताओं ने विश्वास किया और वही नेपाली 'स्थिरता से समृद्धि' .कांग्रेस जनता का विश्वास जीतने में असफल रही है⁵³

नेपाल वाम की ओर:

⁴⁹ "Beijing offers tripartite talks between Afghanistan, Pakistan, China", *Khaama Press*, December 5, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/beijing-offers-tripartite-talks-between-afghanistan-pakistan-china-03981> (accessed on December 11)

⁵⁰ "Uzbekistan, Afghanistan Sign Rail Deal with Eyes on Iran", *Bakhtar News*, December 8, 2017, <http://www.bakhtarnews.com.af/eng/business/item/31164-uzbekistan-afghanistan-sign-rail-deal-with-eyes-on-iran.html> (accessed on December 11)

⁵¹ "Daesh 'Could Exploit' Mineral Resources in Jawzjan", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, December 10, 2017. http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19641 (accessed December 11)

⁵² Prithvi Man Shrestha, "Historic Polls conclude with 67pc turnout, The Kathmandu Post", 8 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-08/1>

⁵³ Tika R Pradhan, "Left on Track as alliance move proves right", The Kathmandu Post, 9 December 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-12-09/1>

चुनावों के बाद नतीजों से स्थिति साफ़ होती जा रही है दोनों वाम दलों ने .नेपाल में वाम दल जीत की ओर बढ़ रहे हैं , प्रथम चरण के नतीजों में अच्छी जीत हासिल की है नेपाली .वाम दल प्रान्त दो के अतिरिक्त सभी जगह बढ़त में है . कांग्रेस इन चुनावों में हार का सामना कर रही है

Pakistan

- **China Warns Nationals** - China and the United States have issued fresh advisories, warning their citizens in Pakistan of possible terrorist attacks and asking them to take appropriate measures for their safety and security on December 8th. China cautioned its nationals in Pakistan against a series of imminent terrorist attacks on Chinese targets. The embassy warned all "Chinese-invested organisations and Chinese citizens to increase security awareness, strengthen internal precautions, reduce trips outside as much as possible, and avoid crowded public spaces."⁵⁴
- **The Case of Kulbhushan Jadhav** - The government has allowed Kulbhushan Jadhav to meet his mother, his wife and a diplomat from his country on December 25th, said Foreign Office spokesperson Dr Muhammad Faisal at a media briefing on December 9th. "A diplomat from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad will be allowed to accompany the visitors. Requisite security will be provided to the visitors," he added.⁵⁵
- **The Orange Metro Line** - The Punjab government is set to commence work on the Orange Line Metro Train (OLMT) project on December 9th — following the Supreme Court's verdict on December 8th — it is planning on completing the project on fast track and opening it by April next year. However, members of the civil society who had filed the petition against the construction of the OLMT have decided to file a review petition and fight back.⁵⁶
- **UAE and Pakistan** - Former Muttahida Qaumi Movement leader Hammad Siddiqui, who was arrested in Dubai around two months ago, was handed over to Pakistan by UAE authorities. It was reported that that the "deportation" of Mr Siddiqui, a key suspect in the 2012 Baldia factory fire in which over 250 labourers were killed, was conducted not through standard operating procedures, but by mutual intelligence coordination between Pakistan and the UAE. It was reported that Interpol handed over Siddiqui to a "Pakistani intelligence agency" on December 8th and he was moved to Islamabad.⁵⁷
- **Iran and Pakistan** - Iranian ambassador to Pakistan Mehdi Honardoost has expressed on December 9th his approval at the direction in which ties between Pakistan and his country are moving following the meeting between Army Chief

⁵⁴ China warns its nationals of terrorist attacks in Pakistan, *The News International*, December 9, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/253909-china-warns-its-nationals-of-terrorist-attacks-in-pakistan> (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁵⁵ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Jadhav can meet wife, mother on 25th: FO", *Dawn*, December 09, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1375453> (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁵⁶ Khalid Hasnain, "Work on Orange Line Metro Train set to restart today", *Dawn*, December 09, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1375467> (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁵⁷ UAE hands over MQM's ex-leader Hammad Siddiqui to Pakistan, *Dawn*, December 09, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1375460> (accessed on December 11, 2017)

Gen Qamar Bajwa and President Hassan Rouhani, but emphasised that “time is gold and the movement and action should be faster”. He also called for broadening the scope of ties to “other areas”, pointing out Iran’s potential to become a major seller of electricity to Pakistan, as well as shipping and aviation.⁵⁸

Indian Ocean Region

- **Pakistan handed over command of CTF- 150 to Australia**
Pakistan has handed over the charge of Combined Task Force 150 (CTF-150) to Australia. According to the statement issued by Pakistani navy, (as mentioned in the Express Tribune) "Rear Admiral Naveed Ahmed Rizvi gave the reins of CTF-150 to Commodore Malcolm KM Wise OAM of the Royal Australian Navy in a change of command ceremony held at the Headquarters Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in Bahrain on December 07, 2017."⁵⁹
- **Andaman, Nicobar Islands to be developed as strategic hub: Minister of State for External Affairs General V.K. Singh (retired)**
Minister of State for External Affairs General V.K. Singh (retired) said that the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands will be developed as an economic and strategic hub.⁶⁰ Speaking at the `India-Asean Connectivity Summit` organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in New Delhi on December 11-12, 2017, the Minister said that there was need to focus on improving maritime connectivity with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁶¹ "India has taken initiative to build Andaman and Nicobar group of islands as an economic and strategic hub in the Bay of Bengal. ASEAN is also investing in its own islands,"⁶² he said. "There is scope to unlock the vast potential in cooperation, particularly in tourism, maritime security, disaster management, between us and the ASEAN,"⁶³ further he said.
- **Pakistani Navy announced the launch of 600 tonnes maritime patrol vessel**
Pakistani Navy on December 05, 2017, announced the "launch of the first of the art of the first of six state of the art 600-tonne vessels fully equipped to enforce maritime security and search and rescue missions."⁶⁴ The 68 meter long and 8.7

⁵⁸ Khurram Husain, “Interview: Iran’s envoy urges Pakistan to move faster for better ties”, *Dawn*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1375718> (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁵⁹ Pakistan hands over command of multinational maritime security force to Australia, December 07, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1578439/1-pakistan-hands-command-multi-national-maritime-security-force-australia/> (accessed on 12 December 2017).

⁶⁰ Andaman, Nicobar islands to be developed as strategic hub, December 11, 2017, <http://www.ianslive.in/index.php?param=news/-572558> (accessed on 12 December 2017).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Pakistan strengthens maritime security with six-vessel China deal, December 08, 2017, <http://www.transportsecurityworld.com/pakistan-strengthens-maritime-security-six-vessel-china-deal> (accessed on 12 December 2017).

metre wide vessel is built for Pakistani Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) with the collaboration China Shipbuilding and Trading Company.⁶⁵ According to a media report, "the 600 Tons Maritime Patrol Vessel is a state of the art, multi-mission vessel with steel hull and aluminium super structure having length of 68.5 m, breadth of 8.7 m and can achieve a top speed of 27 knots. The ship is fully equipped to enforce maritime security, search and rescue missions in maritime exclusive economic zone of Pakistan and is being built with technical collaboration of China Shipbuilding & Trading Company (CSTC)."⁶⁶

- **India re-elected to International Maritime Organisation Council**

India has been elected to the Council of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) under category B for the next two years on December 01, 2017 in London.⁶⁷ The category B represents nations with huge interests in international sea borne trade.⁶⁸ During the election, India had managed to secure second highest 144 votes of the member countries, while Germany scored 146 votes- maximum in this category.⁶⁹

Sri Lanka

- **Cabinet approves signing of share ownership agreement on Hambantota Port**

Sri Lanka's Cabinet of Ministers have approved the signing of an agreement of share ownership before commencing operations in the Hambantota Port. On July 29, the amended agreement to expand and develop the Hambantota Port under a public-private partnership was signed between the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) and China Merchant Port Holdings (SM Port), Hambantota International Port Group (HIPG) and Hambantota International Port Services (HIPS). As per the agreement, 85% of the shares of Hambantota International Port Group will be held by China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited or any of its subsidiaries while 15% will be held by the state-owned SLPA. Meanwhile 58% of the shares of the Hambantota International Port Services will be controlled by HIPG while 42% will go to the SLPA⁷⁰.

- **Hambantota port formally handed over to China-led company**

The Hambantota port was formally handed over to a China-led company on 9th December and Sri Lanka received its initial payment for the lease. Following the signing of an agreement, the port operation was handed over to Hambantota

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ 600 tons Maritime Patrol Vessel launched, December 05, 2017, <https://www.app.com.pk/600-tons-maritime-patrol-vessel-launched/> (accessed on 12 December 2017).

⁶⁷ India re-elected to International Maritime Organisation Council, December 02, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-re-elected-to-international-maritime-organisation-council/articleshow/61887097.cms> (accessed on 12 December 2017).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Cabinet approves signing of share ownership agreement on Hambantota Port", 6th December 2017, <https://news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/18900-cabinet-approves-signing-of-share-ownership-agreement-on-hambantota-port>

International Port Group (HIPG) and Hambantota International Port Services (HIPS).⁷¹

- **Sri Lanka to continue to support Palestine for full UN membership**

Sri Lanka will continue to support Palestine for full membership in the United Nations, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tilak Marapana said. Marapana said this after handing over the deed for a plot of land – No. 4, Hewa Avenue, Colombo 7 – to the Ambassador for the State of Palestine to Sri Lanka, Zuhair M.H. Zaid today. The plot of land is a gift from Sri Lanka to the State of Palestine to build its new Chancery in Colombo⁷².

- **Sri Lanka accedes to the Optional Protocol**

Sri Lanka has acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on December 5, 2017 and it will enter into force for Sri Lanka on January 4, 2018, a UN document stated⁷³.

- **US to transfer Coast Guard Cutter to SL**

A US Coast Guard Cutter would be transferred to Sri Lanka further enhancing US-Sri Lanka Indo Pacific Partnership, the US Embassy said. Ahead of the transfer, US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas A. Shannon said this Coast Guard Cutter is a tangible symbol of growing partnership between the two countries and reflects shared commitment of the two nations to regional stability⁷⁴.

- **TELO leaves TNA**

In what appeared to a further split of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) decided to leave it to join hands with other Tamil parties to contest the local government elections. The TELO's politburo that met in Vavuniya on took this decision. The 21member presidium council of TELO concluded that, TELO could not be any more 'a co-traveller' with the ITAK in the Tamil National Alliance⁷⁵.

Maldives

- **Joint Press Communique between the Republic of Maldives and the People's Republic of China 8 December 2017, Beijing**

At the invitation of His Excellency Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives, paid a State Visit to the People's Republic of China from 6th to 9th December, 2017.

⁷¹ Hambantota port formally handed over to China-led company, 9 December 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/12/09/hambantota-port-formally-handed-over-to-china-led-company/>

⁷² Sri Lanka to continue to support Palestine for full UN membership, 8th December 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/12/08/sri-lanka-to-continue-to-support-palestine-for-full-un-membership/>

⁷³ Sri Lanka accedes to the Optional Protocol, 9th December 2017, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Sri-Lanka-accedes-to-the-Optional-Protocol-141874.html>

⁷⁴ US to transfer Coast Guard Cutter to SL, 7 December 2017, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/US-to-transfer-Coast-Guard-Cutter-to-SL-141801.html>

⁷⁵ TELO leaves TNA, 7th December 2017, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/TELO-leaves-TNA-141766.html>

The Maldivian side warmly congratulated the Communist Party of China (CPC) on the successful conclusion of its 19th National Congress, and the confirmation of President Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as an action guideline of CPC by the Congress. The Maldivian side expressed its confidence that under the guidance of CPC Central Committee with President Xi Jinping at the core, the Chinese people will move forward to achieving the two centenary goals and building China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.

The Chinese side reiterated to deepen relations with the Maldives and other neighboring countries in accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness and the policy of forging friendship and partnership with its neighbors, to build a community with a shared future for mankind and create a bright tomorrow for all⁷⁶.

- **China-Maldives FTA among 12 agreements penned during Yameen's visit**

A controversial Sino-Maldives free trade deal was among 12 bilateral agreements penned during President Abdulla Yameen's three-day state visit to China. The FTA was signed by the Maldivian economic development minister and the Chinese minister of commerce at a ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing as President Xi Jinping looked on with President Yameen.

The opposition cried foul after the country's first FTA was rushed through parliament last month but the government says it will open up the world's largest consumer market for tariff-free fish exports. The Maldives also committed to waive import duties for Chinese goods. Former president Mohamed Nasheed called the deal "disgraceful" and warned that it could destabilise the Indian Ocean region⁷⁷.

- **Maldives condemns US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital**

The Maldivian government, political parties and opposition leaders have strongly condemned US President Donald Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In a statement, the government called the move "a flagrant disregard of international law which could have dire consequences not only for the Middle East peace process and to the peace, security and stability in the region, but also, to the maintenance of international peace and security as a whole."

It added: "The Maldives considers East Jerusalem as occupied Palestinian territory. The Maldives therefore calls on the United States to respect the relevant UN

⁷⁶ Joint Press Communique between the Republic of Maldives and the People's Republic of China 8 December 2017, Beijing, 8th December 2017, <http://www.foreign.gov.mv/index.php/en/mediacentre/news/4290-joint-press-communique-between-the-republic-of-maldives-and-the-people-s-republic-of-china-8-december-2017,-beijing>

⁷⁷ China-Maldives FTA among 12 agreements penned during Yameen's visit, 9th December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/china-maldives-fta-among-12-agreements-penned-during-yameens-visit-134461>

Security Council resolutions and not hinder the international efforts to advance the peace process.”⁷⁸

West Asia

- **Fiasco over the Israeli Capital** - An estimated 5,000 Palestinian protesters held demonstrations and clashed with Israeli security forces at some 30 locations across the West Bank and Gaza Strip on December 8th, in a show of anger over US President Donald Trump’s declared recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. The Fatah movement of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said that by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, Trump had issued “a declaration of war against the Palestinian people”.⁷⁹ Palestinians will “never back down” and “will not allow implementation” of new US policy in Jerusalem, a spokesman for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said. A senior Fatah official, said on December 7th that US Vice President Mike Pence — due in the region later this month — was now “unwanted in Palestine.” Abbas’s spokesman appeared to confirm that a meeting between the PA chief and Pence was no longer in the cards.⁸⁰ The al-Qaeda terror group urged its followers the world over to target vital interests of the United States, its allies and Israel in response to US President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.⁸¹ The head of the Hamas Ismail Haniyeh on December 8th vowed the Palestinians’ “blessed intifada” against US President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital would continue until the holy city’s “liberation,” and indicated it will seek to escalate violence.⁸² At an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on December 8th, the US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said President Donald Trump knew his decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital would raise “questions and concerns,” but that he took it to advance peace

⁷⁸ Maldives condemns US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, 7th December 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-condemns-us-recognition-of-jerusalem-as-israels-capital-134449>

⁷⁹ Judah Ari Gross, “5,000 Palestinians hold violent protests across West Bank, Gaza over Jerusalem”, *Times of Israel*, December 8, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/3000-palestinians-hold-violent-protests-across-west-bank-gaza-over-jerusalem/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=6dc5831852-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-6dc5831852-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁸⁰ “Abbas vows Palestinian rage will continue: ‘We’ll never back down’”, *Times of Israel*, December 8, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-vows-palestinian-rage-will-continue-well-never-back-down/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=6dc5831852-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-6dc5831852-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁸¹ “Al-Qaeda urges attacks on US, Israel after Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem”, *Times of Israel*, December 8, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/al-qaeda-urges-attacks-after-trumps-recognition-of-jerusalem/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=6dc5831852-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-6dc5831852-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁸² Hamas chief: ‘Blessed intifada’ will continue until ‘Jerusalem’s liberation’, *Times of Israel*, December 8, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-chief-blessed-intifada-will-continue-until-jerusalem-liberation/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=ea774ce194-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_09&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-ea774ce194-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

between Israel and the Palestinians. The debate unfolded at a largely symbolic emergency meeting of the council — no vote on a resolution was planned, as the US has veto power — two days after Trump reversed two decades of US policy on the holy city.⁸³ Russian President Vladimir Putin said December 7th that he was “deeply concerned” by Washington’s decision to recognize Jerusalem. In a telephone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Putin called for the Palestinians and Israel to “hold back” and renew negotiations. The United States’ recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital “defies common sense,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on December 8th.⁸⁴ Though a general strike was called on December 7th across the West Bank and Jerusalem by the Palestinian Authority, the rest of the places had shops open throughout the next three days. The most serious and violent protests have taken place at the Gaza border where there has been reports of protestors being killed. But people had full access to the Al Aqsa mosque to offer prayers on Friday, December 8th. Hamas is still calling for more violence, while rival Fatah is calling for an intensification of non-violent protests. So the political actors will try to keep people coming into the street. There have been exchange of rockets being fired from Gaza and Israeli air force retaliating, which has led to the death of Hamas members in Gaza. A previously unknown Salafist group calling itself the Salahedin Brigades claimed responsibility for one of the attacks.⁸⁵

- **Netanyahu in Europe** - Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set off for a two-day trip to Paris and Brussels on December 9th criticizing European “hypocrisy” and “double standards” in remarks he made to the press before take-off.⁸⁶ French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his disapproval of the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital December 10th at a press conference with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and urged the Israeli leader to “show courage” in advancing peace talks. Netanyahu, for his part, insisted that Jerusalem is as much Israel’s capital as Paris is France’s. And he said the sooner the Palestinians “come to grips” with the fact that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital, “the sooner we move towards peace.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a different note

⁸³ Defiant Haley chides fuming Security Council members: ‘Change is hard’, *Times of Israel*, December 8, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/defiant-haley-chides-fuming-security-council-members-change-is-hard/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=ea774ce194-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_09&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-ea774ce194-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁸⁴ Russia says Trump’s Jerusalem declaration ‘defies common sense’, *Times of Israel*, December 8, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-says-trumps-jerusalem-declaration-defies-common-sense/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=ea774ce194-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_09&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-ea774ce194-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁸⁵ Dov Lieber, Israeli decision not to limit access to Jerusalem prayers helped reduce protests, *Times of Israel*, December 9, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-decision-not-to-limit-access-to-jerusalem-prayers-helped-reduce-protests/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=47636baaf4-EMAIL_WEEKEND_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_10&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-47636baaf4-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁸⁶ Raphael Ahren, Leaving for Paris, Netanyahu slams European ‘hypocrisy’ on Jerusalem, *Times of Israel*, December 10, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/leaving-for-paris-netanyahu-slams-european-hypocrisy-on-jerusalem/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=c16dc4f09d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_10&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-c16dc4f09d-55556173 (accessed on December 11, 2017)

mentioned that France is supportive of Israel's policies to counter Iran's aggressive behavior in the region.⁸⁷

Turkey

- **OIC summit in Istanbul should recognize Jerusalem as Palestine's capital: Adnan al-Husayni⁸⁸**

An emergency summit of Muslim-majority countries to be convened in Istanbul this week should declare Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Palestine, a senior Palestinian official has said.

"We expect the [Organization of Islamic Cooperation] OIC to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. This will be an answer to [U.S. President Donald] Trump. You know that Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine but you need to declare it. It can have a very strong impact on the political level," Adnan al-Husayni, the Jerusalem governor of Palestinian Authority, told the *Hürriyet Daily News* on Dec. 9.

The leaders of 57 Muslim-majority countries will meet on Dec. 13 in Istanbul at a summit initiated by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, the rotating term president of the OIC, following the U.S.'s controversial recognition of the holy city as the capital of Israel and decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The OIC officially supports a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Al-Huseyni described Trump's controversial decision as a "bomb thrown into the Middle East" that will destroy everything the peace process started.

"Our position as Palestinians, as Arabs, as Muslims is that we see no a [Palestine] state without Jerusalem its capital. This has been very clear since the very beginning of the Oslo [Accords of 1993 and 1995]," he said.

- **Israel is a terror state and Arab leaders must act: Erdoğan⁸⁹**

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has described Israel as a "terror state," while urging leaders of Arab countries to act following U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

"Israel is a state of occupation and a terror state," Erdoğan said in a speech in the Central Anatolian province of Sivas on Dec. 10, vowing that Turkey "will not leave Jerusalem to the consciousness of a child-killer state."

"Jerusalem is the light of our eyes. We won't leave it to the conscience of a state that only values occupation and looting. We will continue our struggle decisively within the law and democracy," he added.

On Dec. 6, Trump announced the U.S.'s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided" capital, saying the U.S. Embassy would relocate from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in a dramatic shift in Washington's Jerusalem policy.

⁸⁷ Raphael Ahren, "Netanyahu says France supports Israel's anti-Iran policies", *Times of Israel*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-says-france-supports-israels-anti-iran-policies/> (accessed on December 11, 2017)

⁸⁸ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/oic-summit-in-istanbul-should-recognize-jerusalem-as-palestines-capital-adnan-al-husayni-123893>

⁸⁹ *Hurriyet Daily News*, 10 December 2017m, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-slams-israel-as-a-terrorist-state-123874>

While demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Turkey and other Muslim-majority countries have been ongoing since the recognition, Erdoğan has been one of the most vocal leaders to slam Washington's move.

- **Turkey, Russia to discuss Jerusalem crisis at Erdoğan-Putin summit⁹⁰**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet on Dec. 11 in Ankara to discuss crises in the Middle East, including the aftermath of the U.S.'s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and joint efforts to stabilize Syria.

Putin is expected to arrive in Ankara in the late afternoon before holding talks with Erdoğan, in their third face-to-face meeting in less than a month.

"Together with Mr. Putin we will discuss developments with regard to Jerusalem and in Syria," Erdoğan said at a rally in the Central Anatolian province of Sivas on Dec. 10.

Erdoğan and Putin held a phone conversation on Dec. 8 amid efforts to mobilize the international community against U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Trump instructed the State Department to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as soon as possible and in line with the 1995-dated Jerusalem Embassy Act.

Both Erdoğan and Putin have expressed serious concerns over Trump's move, saying such steps could thwart all prospects for the Middle East peace process.

A statement released from the Kremlin after the phone conversation underlined that both "Russia and Turkey reaffirmed their commitment to achieving a just and viable solution to the Middle East crisis based, above all, on the relevant resolutions of the U.N. Security Council and the U.N. General Assembly, as well as the realization of the Palestinian people's right to their own state."

The two leaders will also review recent developments in Syria after a three-way agreement with Iran led to the declaration of de-escalation zones in the country, with the objective of cementing a ceasefire between the Syrian army and the opposition groups.

A summit in mid-November in Sochi between Turkey, Russia and Iran reaffirmed continued efforts to this end, with the prospect of launching a joint new effort for a political solution to the six-year long civil war.

- **Turkey, Iran security cooperation 'vital' for region: Turkish Interior Minister⁹¹**

Cooperation on security between Turkey and its neighbor Iran is "vital" for the region, Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said on Dec. 9.

Soylu's remarks came during a news conference after a security meeting with his Iranian counterpart Abdolreza Rahmani Fazlı in Tehran.

"To create peace and prosperity as well as lasting security in the region it is essential that the two major building blocks of a large civilization - Iran and Turkey - come together, especially in security matters," Soylu said.

The interior minister said he and Fazlı discussed issues such as terrorism, immigration, border issues, drugs trafficking and organized crime.

⁹⁰ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-russia-to-discuss-jerusalem-crisis-at-erdogan-putin-summit-123883>

⁹¹ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-iran-security-cooperation-vital-for-region-turkish-interior-minister-123850>

For his part, Iranian interior minister said Turkey and Iran shared common concerns. “The two countries have achieved success in security,” he said.

- **EU-Turkey customs union agreement should be renewed, top adviser says**⁹²
Negotiations to update the Customs Union agreement between Turkey and the EU should be started, Special Adviser to High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini said Sunday. Highlighting that the renewal of the agreement will benefit the bloc, Nathalie Tocci said that the negotiations need to be restarted. She also noted that although Turkey and EU do not fully agree on all matters, they have strong cooperation regarding energy, migration and the fight against terrorism. "Relations between the EU and Turkey are too strong to breakaway" Tocci added. Ankara's Customs Union Agreement with the EU came into force in 1995. Both Turkey and the EU seek to expand the scope of the agreement, which would have positive effects on mutual trade relations in various industries. However, Turkey's worsening relations with Germany have crippled the process.

Cyber Security

- **Ilham Aliyev: Azerbaijan expands technological cooperation with Russia**⁹³
Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev at a TV interview viewed that new areas of cooperation are necessary to deter the newer challenges in international security. In this regard, Azerbaijan is increasing its partnership with Russia on technological issues. The President said, “Azerbaijan is successfully developing, with its role in regional and international issues growing. Our country has great potential. Of course, our country could face such a threat. We are open to cooperation with all our partners. There is a good prospect for cooperation with Russia in this direction. We know that Russia pays huge attention to cyber security. So, of course, our agencies are doing necessary work with their Russian counterparts”.
- **New group aims to connect students, scholars on European security issues**⁹⁴

The students at the Stanford University became deeply disturbed by the chaotic political situation around the world such as Brexit, alleged Russian interference in US elections and therefore they have formed a new student group called the European Security Undergraduate Network (ESUN) to aware students on current political events in Europe. This student network is hoping to produce active political conversation among world class scholars. Sarah Manney, the president and co-founder of ESUN said, “Our job is really to remind people that the issues go

⁹² Daily Sabah 10 December 2017 <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2017/12/10/eu-turkey-customs-union-agreement-should-be-renewed-top-adviser-says>

⁹³ <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/Ilham-Aliyev-Azerbaijan-expands-technological-cooperation-with-Russia.html>, 7 December 2017

⁹⁴ The Stanford Daily, 28 November 2017, <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2017/11/28/new-group-aims-to-connect-students-scholars-on-european-security-issues/>

far beyond what you see in the news and the headlines about fake news or Russian hacking. There's really a long history of issues that have been going on in Europe and in the transatlantic relationship that deserve our attention". The student group believed that human aspect of social studies should include technical knowledge to resolve disputes such as cyber threats, misinformation influencing public opinion and to deal with arms control and engineering and nuclear proliferation. Talking about cyber security, Ben Gardner-Gill, vice president of the group said, "it's all about the new types of technology that go into warfare, which are fundamentally changing the way we think about war. Cyber warfare is part of a gray zone that today's citizens are left to grapple with." He said that this group would build students consciousness about the complexity of internet by adding "Cyber warfare is unknown, but something this generation is going to have to deal with."

- **Ethiopia: New Spate of Abusive Surveillance**⁹⁵

Citizen Lab, a Toronto based research centre on 6 December 2017 published a report on Ethiopian government's growing malware campaign that monitors Ethiopian activists and political opponents. Cynthia Wong, senior internet researcher at Human Rights Watch said, "The Ethiopian government has doubled down on its efforts to spy on its critics, no matter where they are in the world. These attacks threaten freedom of expression and the privacy and the digital security of the people targeted." Ethiopian government has a history of violating human rights inside the country by using mobile surveillance to target independent voices. There is a lack of meaningful protection for the right to privacy under the legal regime and the country failed to prevent unlawful and lopsided surveillance.

- **Delhi University to start course on cyber security**⁹⁶

The University of Delhi released a statement that it would soon launch one year Post Graduate Diploma in Cyber Security and Law. The announcement said, "The programme caters to the domain of cyber security with a unique combination of cyber laws. The course will be held in two semesters will six papers in each. The Program will cater to the niche domain of cyber security with a unique combination of cyber laws." The course would train professionals with practical handling in detection of vulnerabilities. And create a resilient system. Addressing the dire need of professionals in the domain of cyber security, the programme intends to produce professionals who can administer security for varied virtual platforms, banks, social media, industrial applications, mobile data and cloud interface. The University would design the course in a manner that it would cater to the requirements of industry for employment along with entrepreneurship prospects.

⁹⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/06/ethiopia-new-spate-abusive-surveillance>, 6 December 2017.

⁹⁶ New Delhi Times Bureau, 8 December 2017, <https://www.newdelhitimes.com/delhi-university-to-start-course-on-cyber-security/>

International Economic Issues

- **New Policy Approach for East Asia and Pacific Inclusive Growth: World Bank**

According to a World Bank Report titled “*Riding the Wave: An East Asian Miracle for the 21st Century*”, and which was released on December 4, 2017, the countries of developing East Asia and Pacific – among the most successful in the world in reducing poverty and improving living standards – need to adopt a new thinking if they are to achieve inclusive growth going forward. It will require countries to go beyond its successful “growth with equity” model. Prospects for upward mobility are seen as increasingly elusive, reflecting a sense that income and wealth are becoming more concentrated while access to basic social services remains limited and often of poor quality. Achieving economic security for all is more difficult, particularly as the region faces newer challenges: rapid aging, less certain growth prospects, and greater urbanisation. The policy agenda for inclusive growth can have three pillars: The first – fostering economic mobility – requires closing gaps in access to jobs and services, improving the quality of jobs, and promoting financial inclusion. The second pillar -- providing greater economic security -- includes bolstering social assistance systems, expanding social insurance, and increasing resilience to shocks. Strengthening institutions is the third pillar, and includes progressive taxation policies to raise resources and improvements in the effectiveness of inclusive spending programs. Better management of rapid aging and urbanisation as well as enhancing competition will also help.⁹⁷

- **ADB Provides \$346 Million to Upgrade State Highways in Karnataka, India**

On December 8, 2017, the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) Board of Directors has approved a \$346 million loan to upgrade highways in the Indian state of Karnataka. The Karnataka State Highways Improvement III Project will improve road capacity and maintenance, promote safer roads, and increase access to markets and basic services. This is the second loan from ADB for improving the state’s road network. The total cost of this project is \$655 million, of which the state government will provide \$202 million and the private sector will invest an estimated \$107 million through hybrid annuity contracts. The project is due for completion at the end of 2023.⁹⁸

- **EU and Japan finalise Economic Partnership Agreement**

The European Union (EU) and Japan have agreed terms for a free trade deal liberalising almost all trade between the bloc and the world’s third-largest economy on December 8, 2017. It is the largest free trade deal struck by the EU, bringing together economies representing approximately 27 per cent of global

⁹⁷ World Bank, “New Policy Approach Needed for East Asia and Pacific to Achieve Inclusive Growth: World Bank”, Press Release, December 5, 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/12/04/new-policy-approach-needed-for-east-asia-and-pacific-to-achieve-inclusive-growth-world-bank> (accessed on December 10, 2017)

⁹⁸ Asian Development Bank (ADB), “ADB Provides \$346 Million to Upgrade State Highways in Karnataka, India”, News Release, December 8, 2017, <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-provides-346-million-upgrade-state-highways-karnataka-india> (accessed on December 10, 2017)

gross domestic product or about US\$20 trillion, making it slightly larger than NAFTA. Building on the political agreement in principle reached during the EU-Japan Summit on July 6, 2017, negotiators from both sides have succeeded in coming up with the final text of the agreement. The conclusion of these negotiations is an important milestone to put in place the biggest bilateral trade agreement ever negotiated by the EU. The Economic Partnership Agreement will open huge market opportunities for both sides, strengthen cooperation between Europe and Japan in a range of areas, reaffirm their shared commitment to sustainable development, and include for the first time a specific commitment to the Paris climate agreement. The Economic Partnership Agreement will remove the vast majority of the €1 billion of duties paid annually by EU companies exporting to Japan, as well as a number of long-standing regulatory barriers. It will also open up the Japanese market of 127 million consumers to key EU agricultural exports and will increase EU export opportunities in a range of other sectors. The agreement also opens up services markets, in particular financial services, e-commerce, telecommunications and transport. The EU and Japan will now start the legal verification of the text and is expected to come into force before the end of the current mandate of the European Commission in 2019.⁹⁹

- **Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference Begins in Argentina**

In the Opening Ceremony of the Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference on December 10, 2017, which coincides with the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, President Mauricio Macri of Argentina, President Michel Temer of Brazil, President Horacio Cartes of Paraguay and President Tabaré Vázquez of Uruguay, along with other countries including Colombia, Chile, Guyana, Mexico, Peru and Suriname, issued a joint declaration reaffirming the importance of the multilateral trading system as the “best way to take advantage of the opportunities and to face the challenges of international trade”. They also underlined the importance of preserving and strengthening the multilateral trading system, including its dispute settlement system, in order to promote rules “based, open, transparent, inclusive, non discriminatory and equitable trade embodied in the WTO, providing it with the tools it needs to face the challenges of the 21st century”.¹⁰⁰

¹ The Government of Uzbekistan website, “New page in relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan,” 6 December 2017, <https://www.gov.uz/en/news/view/13306>

² Nigar Guliyeva, “Uzbekistan, Afghanistan sign cooperation, export deals,” Trend news agency, 5 December 2017, <https://en.trend.az/casia/2831090.html>

³ The Government of Uzbekistan website, “New page in relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan,” 6 December 2017, <https://www.gov.uz/en/news/view/13306>

⁹⁹ “In deal as big as NAFTA, EU and Japan agree to free trade”, CBC News, December 8, 2017,

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/eu-japan-free-trade-1.4439728> (accessed on December 10, 2017)

European Commission, “EU and Japan finalise Economic Partnership Agreement”, Press Release, December 8, 2017, <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1767> (accessed on December 10, 2017)

¹⁰⁰World Trade Organisation (WTO), “Presidential Declaration”, December 10, 2017,

https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc11_e/declarationmc11_e.htm (accessed on December 10, 2017)