

## **Weekly Media Updates** **(12– 18 February, 2018)**

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## Africa

- **V K Singh calls on Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi; holds bilateral talks<sup>1</sup>**

Minister of State for External Affairs in Government of India, Gen(Retd) Vijay Kumar Singh, visited Maputo from 11 to 13 February 2018 on an official visit. The purpose of the visit was to review the state of ongoing bilateral cooperation between Mozambique and India, including commitments agreed during the visit of President of Mozambique, H.E Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, to India in 2015, and the visit of Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi to Mozambique in July 2016. This was the first incoming visit in Mozambique by a minister from a foreign country this year, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs.

Both the countries reviewed the defence cooperation and agreed to accelerate the initiatives discussed earlier, with special emphasis on maritime security. "On behalf of the Indian Government, Gen. Singh assured increase in training of [the] Mozambican Defence Armed Forces Personnel in India as well as assistance for upgrading equipment and Infrastructure of the FADM, including for upgrading the military medical facilities, for English training of FADM personnel, and for hydrographic surveying of Mozambique waters," the joint press statement read.

He also held meetings with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Jose Pacheco; Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Dr Ernesto Max Tonela; and Minister of Industry and Trade Dr Ragendra de Sousa.

Singh said he looked forward to welcoming Nyusi for the ISA's first founding summit in New Delhi on March 11. The Framework Agreement for Mozambique's accession to the International Solar Alliance (ISA) was signed by Tonela.

- **South Africa: Hunt for Ajay Gupta Heats Up As More Rewards Offered<sup>2</sup>**

The hunt for Ajay Gupta, who has officially been declared a fugitive from justice, is heating up, with more rewards for his arrest being offered. Forensic consultant Paul O'Sullivan's organisation, Forensics for Justice, on Thursday afternoon said it was offering a R100 000 reward "for any person that gives information that leads to the arrest of Ajay Gupta within the next 48 hours". O'Sullivan put out an additional R100 000 reward leading to the arrest of Ajay's brothers Atul and Rajesh, also known as Tony, as well as Duduzane Zuma, with an additional R100 000 bonus if all four were arrested.

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

<sup>2</sup> News 24 Wire, 17 February 2017, [http://allafrica.com/stories/201802170253.html?utm\\_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkgta](http://allafrica.com/stories/201802170253.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkgta)

- **Cyril Ramaphosa Confirmed as South Africa's President after Zuma Quits<sup>3</sup>**

Cyril Ramaphosa was confirmed on Thursday as South Africa's new President, hours after scandal-plagued leader Jacob Zuma resigned. Ramaphosa, 65, the leader of the ruling African National Congress party since December, was the only candidate nominated during a session of the South African Parliament. Some lawmakers in the National Assembly in Cape Town greeted the announcement on Ramaphosa, though members of the opposition Economic Freedom Fighters party walked out of the chamber in protest during the debate. Ramaphosa's elevation caps a dramatic week that saw Zuma, dogged by corruption allegations for years, effectively pushed out of office by his own party. Zuma denies all the corruption allegations against him. Parliament had been due to hold a no-confidence vote Thursday to remove Zuma from office.

- **Nigeria Releases 475 Boko Haram Suspects for Rehabilitation<sup>4</sup>**

A Nigerian court has released 475 people allegedly affiliated with Boko Haram for rehabilitation, the justice ministry said, as the country's biggest legal investigation of the militant Islamist insurgency continued. The first person convicted for the kidnapping in 2014 of Chibok schoolgirls, sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment last week, was also handed an additional 15-year sentence, to run back-to-back, the ministry said in a statement. More than 20,000 people have been killed and 2 million forced to flee their homes in north-eastern Nigeria since Boko Haram began an insurgency in 2009 aimed at creating an Islamic state.

- **Arrest Bashir If He Comes to Kenya, Appeal Court Orders State<sup>5</sup>**

Security officers should arrest Sudan President Omar Al Bashir if he dares step into the country, Kenya's Court of Appeal has ruled. In the judgement issued on Friday, Court of Appeal judges Daniel Musinga, William Ouko and Agnes Murgor said Kenya acted in utter impunity for failing to arrest the Sudan leader when he attended the 2010 Constitution promulgation fete. Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court for a host of crimes against humanity. Under President Al-Bashir, Sudan signed the Rome Statute on September 8, 2000 but has not ratified it to this date. It wrote on August 27, 2008 to the ICC saying it had no legal obligation to hand in its President for trial. Kenya rode on this to argue that courts must respect that Sudan is a friendly neighbour which hosts thousands of her citizens, and in the event Al Bashir is arrested, they may be victimised.

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<sup>3</sup> CNN, 15 February 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/15/africa/south-africa-president-intl/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> The Guardian, 18 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/18/nigeria-releases-475-boko-haram-suspects-for-rehabilitation>

<sup>5</sup> Standard Digital, 18 February 2018, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001270156/arrest-bashir-if-he-comes-to-kenya-appeal-court-orders-state>

- **State of Emergency Declared in Ethiopia as PM Resigns<sup>6</sup>**

Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, resigned from his post and from the chairmanship of the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and as member of Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Movement (SPDM). In a televised statement, Hailemariam stated that he has made the decision in light of the recent dire situation in the country and to "make way for a smooth transition of power." In related news, before the excitement surrounding PM's resignation subsides, the government of Ethiopia has declared a State of Emergency (SoE), for the second time in two years. The government said it was necessary to declare the state of emergency to ensure peace and stability of the nation and safeguard the wellbeing of the public.

- **South Sudan Govt. Rejects Rules for Peace Talks<sup>7</sup>**

The second round of the South Sudan peace talks, which started on February 5 in Addis Ababa, hit a snag on Friday when the government delegation objected to a clause calling for punitive measures against saboteurs of the peace process. Previous agreements have been violated within hours of signing. The government side consequently refused to sign the Declaration of Principles, which will guide the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) mediated talks meant to revive the 2015 peace deal. The government of President Salva Kiir feels that it is being targeted for sanctions and cannot be treated equally with the rebels, as they have "a country to run and law and order to keep." The main objection by the government delegation led by the Minister for Presidential Affairs, Martin Lomoru, is Article 28 in the agreement on Declaration of Principles. It says, "IGAD should take all necessary measures including those decided by the IGAD heads of state and government in November 2014 against peace spoilers."

- **Sudan May Look to Gulf as Inflation Rockets<sup>8</sup>**

Sudan, also known as North Sudan since South Sudan's independence in 2011, is struggling to control runaway inflation that has more than doubled in the space of a month, increasing the likelihood that North Sudan's president Omar Al Bashir will turn to the Arabian Gulf for help. The January inflation rate more than doubled the 25 per cent figure recorded in December, Central Statistics Office chief Karamallah Ali told a news conference in Khartoum, bringing with it unrest as consumers take to the street. "This rate of inflation is the highest in recent years," Mr. Ali said. "Even in 2013 when inflation was very high, it did not reach this level." In response the government has lowered the official exchange rate of the Sudanese pound to 30 to the dollar, from 18 previously. Sudan's external debt, which the IMF described as unsustainable, is expected to have reached \$54.1 billion in 2017 and increase to \$56.5bn in 2018.

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<sup>6</sup> The Reporter, 17 February 2018, <http://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/soe-declared-pm-resigns>

<sup>7</sup> Africa News, 12 February 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/02/12/south-sudan-govt-rejects-rules-for-peace-talks/>

<sup>8</sup> The National, 17 February 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/business/sudan-may-look-to-gulf-as-inflation-rockets-1.705345>

Consumers are now reporting shortages of basic goods and empty shelves in stores. Banks are also limiting the amount of cash consumers can withdraw. It is not yet clear whether this is down to government intervention or some other issue.

- **South Sudan Rebel Warns Executing Spokesman Will affect Reconciliation<sup>9</sup>**

The diaspora wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) under the leadership of the former first vice president Riek Machar has warned the government against executing the death sentence on James Gadet Dak, former spokesman of the rebel leader, saying it will gravely affect the IGAD-led reconciliation process. The head of the SPLM-IO in the United States of America said in a statement extended to *Sudan Tribune* that the sentencing of Dak was a wrong move at the wrong time. The SPLM-IO official said the government, through the death sentence, might intend to deflect the attention from its refusal to sign the Declaration of Principles proposed by the mediators, however, the international community and the region should put the needed pressure on review this sentence.

- **Somalia Given Greenlight to Respond in Border Case<sup>10</sup>**

The International Court of Justice has allowed Somalia to file a response to a case in which it has sued Kenya over a maritime border. The move kick-starts a fresh round of arguments which could determine the final flow of the border. Somalia sued Kenya in August 2014, saying the border between the two countries should extend diagonally into the sea, south of Kiunga and not eastwards as currently it is. But Kenya has argued that this may also affect its sea border with Tanzania. The current border has existed largely as a result of Presidential Proclamation of 1979. When the case was presented to court last year in February, Kenya's preliminary objections were dismissed. The area in contest is about 100,000 square kilometres, forming a triangle east of the Kenyan coast.

- **Funding al-Shabaab: How Aid Money Ends Up with al-Shabaab<sup>11</sup>**

The murderous al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab is making millions of dollars each year by exploiting foreign aid money sent to Somalia by the very western nations who are trying to eliminate the terror group. A CNN investigation has revealed how money given directly by the United Nations to people displaced by conflict and famine is ending up in the hands of Africa's oldest terrorist organization. Former members of al-Shabaab and Somali intelligence agents said the terror group is extorting thousands of dollars per day through road blocks and taxes on merchants attempting to transport food and supplies to sell to internally displaced people in towns where they are concentrated. The UN has estimated that a single roadblock generated about \$5,000 per day on the road to Baidoa. Aid organizations were so desperate to help that they paid warlords to permit access to starving victims. Until Western nations intervened,

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<sup>9</sup> Sudan Tribune, 17 February 2018, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64749>

<sup>10</sup> Daily Nation, 13 February 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Somalia-allowed-to-respond-border-case/1056-4302180-fc3em4/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> CNN, 12 February 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/12/africa/somalia-al-shabaab-foreign-aid-intl/index.html>

the warlords worked to sustain the famine in order to keep the aid money flowing into their coffers – effectively exploiting desperate people to turn a profit.

- **Djibouti to Construct Three New Ports<sup>12</sup>**

Djibouti that inaugurated three new ports last year is going to launch the construction of another new three ports this month. The logistics hub that is the main gateway for the land locked Ethiopia is going to commence the construction of different ports along the coast lines of the outskirts of the capital Djibouti city and Damerjog on the aim to expand its port handling capacity, which has now upper hand in the region.

- **Zanzibaris Challenge Union with Tanzania in Regional Court<sup>13</sup>**

Separatist campaigners on the East African island of Zanzibar have appealed to a regional court to challenge the legality of its union with mainland Tanzania, they said Thursday. Rashid Salum Adiy, head of the Zanzibar Rights of Freedom and Autonomy (Zarfa) organisation, a group not recognised by the Tanzanian authorities, claims to have the backing of 40,000 supporters for his appeal. He has filed an appeal to the East African Court of Justice to challenge the legality of agreement. The court, in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha, will hear the case on March 8, 2018. The long-ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) retained power in Zanzibar, the party of Tanzanian President John Magufuli. Some Zanzibari opposition parties have long wanted to break ties and return to the independence it briefly enjoyed in early 1964 before merging with Tanganyika.

- **Acacia Mining Considers Selling Stake in Tanzania Assets<sup>14</sup>**

Acacia Mining, the Tanzania-focused gold miner that has been embroiled in a dispute with the country's president, is looking to sell a stake in some or all of its operations in the East African state. Acacia said in a statement the company is “engaging with a small number of potential investors” over the sale and had received expressions of interest from Chinese companies. The discussions come as Acacia reported a loss of more than US\$700m in 2017 after it was forced to write down the value of its assets in Tanzania, following the imposition of an export ban in March. Reuters earlier reported that Shandong Gold, Zijing Mining Group and China National Gold Group have held discussions with Acacia. The arrangement being discussed is a 50-50 joint venture, it said.

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<sup>12</sup> Capital, 12 February 2018, at <http://capitalethiopia.com/2018/02/12/djibouti-construct-three-new-ports/>

<sup>13</sup> New Vision, 16 February 2018, [https://www.newvision.co.ug/new\\_vision/news/1471319/zanzibaris-challenge-union-tanzania-regional-court](https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1471319/zanzibaris-challenge-union-tanzania-regional-court)

<sup>14</sup> Financial Times, 16 February 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/e147faf2-133c-11e8-8cb6-b9ccc4c4dbbb>

- **Zambia to Rearrange China Loans to Meet IMF Conditions<sup>15</sup>**

Zambia will rearrange loans from Chinese companies and instead look to borrow directly from the Asian giant's government in a bid to satisfy International Monetary Fund conditions and unlock a potential US\$1.3 billion loan from the multilateral lender. On Saturday the Zambian presidency said borrowing directly from the Chinese government would ease the repayment burden after the IMF on Friday rejected Zambia's latest plan, saying it would make it harder for the country to sustain its debt load. The presidency and treasury did not respond to requests from Reuters to clarify whether the Chinese government would now underwrite the loans from the firms or grant Zambia new loans.

- **Hungary to invest US\$172 mln in Angolan economy<sup>16</sup>**

Hungary will invest US\$172 million in the Angolan economy through various projects including a line of credit through its export-import bank, the European nation's trade minister said on Wednesday in Luanda. Hungarian foreign and trade minister Péter Szijárto said companies from Hungary operating in Angola, mainly in the agriculture and energy sectors, would make the investments resulting in a 16-fold increase in bilateral trade, according to state media agency Angop. Szijárto was meeting with Angolan vice-president Bornito de Sousa.

- **Drought Forces Mozambique Capital to Ration Water<sup>17</sup>**

Mozambique authorities on Wednesday introduced water rationing to more than a million residents in the capital Maputo due to a severe drought. The city is cutting the water supply to consumers to just 40 per cent of normal levels, Casimiro Abreu, deputy director of the National Emergency Centre said in a statement. About 1.3 million people in Maputo and its surroundings are affected by the restrictions, raising fears of disease outbreaks. Low rainfall over the past three years has left a dam that supplies the city with most of its water to just 19 per cent of capacity.

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<sup>15</sup> Reuter, 17 February 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/zambia-economy-imf/zambia-to-rearrange-china-loans-to-meet-imf-conditions-idUSL8N1Q70E8>

<sup>16</sup> Reuters, 14 February 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/angola-hungary-investment/hungary-to-invest-172-mln-in-angolan-economy-idUKL8N1Q47VA>

<sup>17</sup> News24, 14 February 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/drought-forces-mozambique-capital-to-ration-water-20180214>

## North Africa

- **National Accord Government in Libya Holds a Rare Military Exercise**<sup>18</sup>

For the first time since the fall of Colonel Gaddafi government in 2011, National Accord Government-supported military wing of Colonel Haftar conducted a military exercise near the town of Sirte, eastern part of the capital town of Tripoli. This was an eve of the seventh anniversary of Libyan revolution and subsequent ouster and killing of Gaddafi. According to Libyan news agency, the exercise was conducted in the military airport of *Namva* in the presence of Libyan deputy prime minister and other senior officials of the government.

The official statement also added that the exercise lasted for more than three hours and it was primarily meant to raise the capability of Libyan armed forces in the country and the military exercise was also attended by the Libyan air forces. The major part of the exercise was conducted in the *Sadadah* region, a semi-desert landscape of the country while the Libya air forces used those areas to demonstrate their military capability which of late have emerged as a new hub of the ISIS after they were chased out of town of Site in 2016. While the ground military exercise under the command of colonel Haftar was conducted in the town of Dirne which has been another major centre of extremist forces in Libya.

In Dirne the military exercise was a ground preparation to liberate the town from the control of other extremist forces. According to the sources in *Ashrqal Awsat* Haftar has already rejected the demands of western power and UN and its special envoy to Libya to stop the operation in the town. He has also not heeded many offers of mediation and negotiation with the forces who have taken shelter in the town of Dirne.

On his part, head of Libyan National Accord Government in message to the people of Libya said yesterday that rising incidents of violence in Dirne is a major concern of his government and the ongoing conflict an operation would lead to death of civilians and the innocent people. He also called upon Colonel Haftar to stop the operation in Dirne saying that anti-terror operation cannot justify the death and execution of innocent people and no war can rationalize the destruction of the town and demolition of the houses. Some media houses have also reported that Haftar's delegation held a comprehensive meeting with a Russian and US delegations outside the country in recent past. In a related development, Libyan armed forces have

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<sup>18</sup> Ashrqal Awsat , An Arabic Daily

<https://aawsat.com/home/article/1179761/%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%C2%AB%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82%C2%BB>



decided to send two more battalions to Dirne to retake the town of from the opposition forces who took control of the city in early 2017.

## China

- **Development plan for Hohhot-Baotou-Ordos-Yulin cluster**

China's State Council has approved the development plan for the Hohhot-Baotou-Ordos-Yulin urban cluster, according to a circular released on February 12. Hohhot, Baotou and Ordos are in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, while Yulin belongs to Shaanxi province.

According to the document, the central government encourages these cities to create a coordinated development mechanism, in which different industries develop in a balanced way and infrastructure connects various areas. In addition, population and economy aggregation should be enhanced to foster the urban cluster into an influential region in central and western China,

Provincial governments of Inner Mongolia autonomous region and Shaanxi are urged to enhance their leadership to guarantee the timely completion of the task.

Specific policies and measures still need to be rolled out, which will be formulated by related authorities of the State Council. The National Development and Reform Commission of China will track, analyze and oversee the implementation of the plan.<sup>19</sup>

- **Chinese leaders extend Spring Festival greetings**

President Xi Jinping on behalf of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council, extended Spring Festival greetings to all Chinese people on February 14.

Xi delivered a speech to a festival reception at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, greeting all Chinese on the mainland, in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan and abroad. The reception was presided over by Premier Li Keqiang. Other senior leaders, including Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Zhang Gaoli, Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji and Han Zheng, were also present.

Earlier (on 19<sup>th</sup> February) Xi Jinping visited a military base in Sichuan Province and extended festival greetings to all officers and soldiers of the People's Liberation Army and the armed police force, and all militia and reserve personnel.<sup>20</sup>

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[http://english.gov.cn/policies/latest\\_releases/2018/02/12/content\\_281476045036514.htm](http://english.gov.cn/policies/latest_releases/2018/02/12/content_281476045036514.htm)

- **Xi stresses difficulty, urgency of poverty alleviation**

Chinese President Xi Jinping has stressed the difficulty of the battle against poverty and the urgency of solving significant problems in poverty alleviation. Xi made the remarks on 12 February at a symposium on poverty alleviation in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province.

As one of China's "three tough battles," poverty alleviation is of great significance to the country's building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and achieving its first centenary goal, Xi said.<sup>21</sup>

- **Europe signals alarm at assertive China's Belt and Road initiative by Laura Tingle**

European leaders have singled out a new assertiveness by China, particularly its Belt and Road Initiative, as a spur to develop a joint foreign policy that could see Europe contest China's infrastructure drive into central Asia. European leaders attending a major security summit in Munich on the weekend made time to speak of the challenges posed by China's Belt and Road initiative.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe all spoke at the Munich Security Conference of the challenges to Western liberalism and the prevailing world order laid down by the rise of China and other authoritarian regimes.

"Powers will start shifting with the rise of China. The new Silk Road initiative is not what some people in Germany think it is – only a sentimental reminiscence of Marco Polo – but it is an attempt to establish a comprehensive system to put a Chinese mark on the world. "It is not just about business and industry. China is developing a comprehensive system that is not like ours, not based on freedom, democracy and human rights." Mr Gabriel said.<sup>22</sup>

## European Union

- **British Prime Minister May's Speech at Munich Security Conference**

In her speech at the 2018 Munich Security Conference, British Prime Minister Theresa May said, "...as we leave the EU and forge a new path for ourselves in the world, the UK is just as committed to Europe's security in the future as we have been in the past."

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<sup>20</sup> [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-02/12/content\\_4804706.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-02/12/content_4804706.htm),  
[http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-02/14/content\\_4804883.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-02/14/content_4804883.htm)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/14/c\\_136975730.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/14/c_136975730.htm)

<sup>22</sup> *Financial Review* <http://www.afr.com/news/world/europe/europe-signals-alarm-at-assertive-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-20180217-h0w95z#ixzz57XZYkayy>

She added, “Europe’s security is our security.” Arguing for a deep and special partnership between the UK and the EU to deal with today’s security challenges, she noted, “This cannot be a time when any of us allow competition between partners, rigid institutional restrictions or deep-seated ideology to inhibit our cooperation and jeopardise the security of our citizens.” Prime Minister May also said, “We are leaving the EU and there is no question of a second referendum or going back, and I think that’s important.”<sup>23</sup>

- **French President Macron Said, “...put Iran under surveillance over its ballistic missiles.”**

French President Emmanuel Macron said, “I want a new cycle of negotiations with regional parties and the permanent members of the Security Council, like we did for the nuclear deal, but widening it to regional countries so that we can reduce and eradicate this insecurity.”<sup>24</sup> He added, “And (we need) to put Iran under surveillance over its ballistic missiles. It’s indispensable for the security of the region and so we need a mechanism of sanctions and control adapted to that.”<sup>25</sup>

- **German Journalist Deniz Yücel Released from Jail**

German journalist Deniz Yücel has been released from Turkish prison. German Foreign Ministry also confirmed the report of his release. Deniz Yücel had been detained for a year. German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel told DW at the Munich Security Conference, “There is an atmosphere of cooperation with Turkey, but we should not overestimate this special case.”<sup>26</sup>

## **East Asia /South-East Asia**

### **Korean Peninsula and Japan**

- **Time is not ripe for inter-Korean Summit: President Moon**

South Korea President Moon Jae-in on February 17, 2018 said that it is premature to talk about an inter-Korean summit, making clear that Washington and Pyongyang have to get closer to talking before that can take place. On inter-Korea summit he

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<sup>23</sup> PM Speech at Munich Security Conference: 17 February 2018, GOV.UK, Feb 17, 2018; May pleads for 'urgent' post-Brexit European Union security deal, The Gulf Today, Feb 17, 2018, <http://gulftoday.ae/portal/c2e443de-c18e-4da8-84b4-775c7067b6ff.aspx>; Britain's May wins backing for EU security pact, timing unclear, Reuters, Feb 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-security/britains-may-wins-backing-for-eu-security-pact-timing-unclear-idUSKCN1G10B6>

<sup>24</sup> France says Iran's missile program must be put 'under surveillance', Reuters, Feb 14, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-france/france-says-irans-missile-program-must-be-put-under-surveillance-idUSKCN1FY24L>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Gabriel: Yücel release a 'good signal' DW, Feb 16, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/gabriel-y%C3%BCcel-release-a-good-signal/av-42622009>

said, “anticipations are high, but I think it is too impetuous.” Moon said he is satisfied that various goals he set for the Olympics are being achieved. “One of the most important goals was prompting peace through the PyeongChang Olympics,” he said. “North Korea’s participation successfully eased tensions on the peninsula and the inter-Korean team and joint cheerleading impressed the world. On the way forward he said “consensus is growing that dialogue between the United States and North Korea is necessary.” He said that Seoul is “expecting that the ongoing talks between the two Koreas will lead to talks between the United States and the North and eventually denuclearization talks.”<sup>27</sup>

- **Japan, Russia agreed to step up talks for joint projects on disputed isles**

On February 16, Japanese Prime Minister Taro Kono and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov agreed to accelerate work toward starting joint economic activities on a group of Russian-held islands claimed by Japan. The two leaders met on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference in Germany. Foreign Minister Kono lodged a protest with Lavrov over Russia's military exercise being held on the islands off Hokkaido and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's approval of military use of a civilian airport on the island of Etorofu, called Iturup by Russia. They also decided to meet again in Tokyo on March 21 to prepare for Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's planned visit to Russia in May 2018.<sup>28</sup>

- **Abe and Trump agree to maintain pressure on North Korea until it’s willing to give up its nuclear program**

On February 15, 2017, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he and US President Donald Trump agreed to continue to put pressure on North Korea until Pyongyang seeks dialogue on the basis of giving up its nuclear program. “Dialogue for the sake of dialogue would be meaningless,” Abe said. “We talked thoroughly about what we should do from here on to make the denuclearization of North Korea a reality.” He also said the two confirmed the unshakable bond of the Japan-U.S. alliance in the face of the North Korea threat. Prime Minister Abe’s telephonic conversation with President Trump followed a rapprochement in inter-Korean relations with North Korea’s participation at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Moon urges U.S., North to talk", Korea JoongAng Daily, February 19, 2018, [koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3044665&cloc=joongangdaily|home|top](http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3044665&cloc=joongangdaily|home|top)

<sup>28</sup> "Japan, Russia to step up talks for joint business on disputed isles", The Mainichi, February 17, 2018, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180217/p2g/00m/0dm/001000c>

<sup>29</sup> "Abe and Trump agree to maintain pressure on North Korea until it’s willing to give up its nuclear program", The Japan Times, February 15, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/02/15/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-trump-agree-keep-pressure-north-korea-seeks-meaningful-talks/#.Wopr8ahuaM9>

- **Bareun Mirae Party, new centrist political party of South Korea**

On February 13, 2018, The Bareun Mirae Party (BMP), formed through the merger between the liberal People's Party and the conservative Bareun Party officially announced its formation in South Korea. The two parties agreed to appoint two four-term lawmakers from each party — Park Joo-sun, former interim leader of the People's Party, and Yoo Seong-min, chairman of the Bareun Party — as co-chairman of the BMP. The 30-seat BMP is likely to have some leverage with the two larger parties, since the 121-seat ruling Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) and the 116-seat opposition, Liberal Party (LKP) both need the cooperation of BMP lawmakers in pushing ahead their bills in the 293-member National Assembly.<sup>30</sup>

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Philippines terminates helicopter deal with Canada**

Philippines have scrapped the contract for 16 combat utility helicopters from Canada, a deal which was worth \$ 233 million and that took two years to negotiate. The deal was terminated as Canada's trade minister, Francois-Philippe Champagne, ordered a review of the contract over concerns about Manila's intended use of the helicopters towards anti-rebel operations. Philippines' Defence Minister Delfin Lorenzana told reporters that, "It is not an attack helicopter but a medium-lift, meaning for transport of personnel and supplies. We are not asking these for free but we're buying them. We do not have to justify how we will use this equipment". President Rodrigo Duterte after terminating the deal on February 9, 2018, ordered his generals not to buy from the United States and Canada because of conditions imposed on arms sales.<sup>31</sup>

- **PM of Cambodia Accuses US of Establishing Espionage Networks**

Prime Minister Hun Sen lavished praise on China, attacking anyone who questioned the Kingdom's relationship with its largest foreign investor, while also accusing the United States of setting up a purported espionage network through civil society organisations. From 2007 until 2013, Cambodia received about \$189 million in funding from the EU, with nearly half a billion dollars pledged from 2014 to 2021. According to the State Department, the US provided more than \$78.8 million in foreign assistance last year. In 2016 alone, however, China offered a whopping \$732 million in bilateral aid. The prime minister also repeated his challenge to Western countries like the US

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<sup>30</sup> "New centrist party vows to beat two major parties", The Korea Times, February 13, 2018, [www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/02/356\\_244165.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/02/356_244165.html)

<sup>31</sup> Philippines may turn to China, Russia for helicopters", *The Bangkok Post*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1411203/philippines-may-turn-to-china-russia-for-helicopters>, accessed on February 13, 2018.

to cut off aid, claiming that “they do not dare” to do so because of their support for purported NGO “spies” – a claim in line with months of hardline rhetoric accusing allegedly foreign-backed politicians and organisations of trying to stage a so-called “colour revolution”.<sup>32</sup>

- **Indonesia-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**

In a courtesy visit to Prime Minister Li Keqiang the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Retno L.P. Marsudi openly urged that the Republic of Indonesia (RI) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) should strive to overcome the various obstacles and take advantage of opportunities to realize various cooperation agreements in the field of economy, trade and investment, and digital economy, as part of RI-PRC's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Therefore, the Foreign Minister of RI expressed the hope that Prime Minister Li Keqiang would continue to provide full support for this cooperation and partnership. This courtesy visit to PRC Prime Minister is part of a series of bilateral visitation activities of the Foreign Minister of Indonesia to China, at the invitation of the Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi.

On this occasion, the Foreign Minister of RI specifically conveyed the need for efforts to promote the rapid and balanced growth of bilateral trade. The Foreign Minister of RI also asked the PRC Prime Minister to continue to boost China's investment in Indonesia, particularly in the fields of infrastructure, digital economy, and industry. Indonesia wishes to build the largest digital economy communication in Southeast Asia with a targeted worth of \$ 130 billion of e-commerce transactions.<sup>33</sup>

## Myanmar

- **Government to vet over 8000 names on initial repatriation list**

Myanmar will start vetting the names of more than 8000 Muslims on the initial list of over 650,000 people to be repatriated from refugee camps in Bangladesh. The refugees fled from Myanmar's northern Rakhine State since last August to escape violence between government forces and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), which the government has declared a terrorist organisation. Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan gave the list of 8032 refugees who have been cleared by the

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<sup>32</sup> Ben Sokhean, “Hun Sen lauds China, lashes out at US”, February 12, 2018, The Phnompenh Post, February 12, 2018, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/hun-sen-lauds-china-lashes-out-us>, accessed on February 13, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> “In the presence of Prime Minister of PRC, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Expected the Concrete Realization of RI-PRC's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia*, February 11, 2018, <https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/In-the-presence-of-Prime-Minister-of-PRC,-the-Minister-for-Foreign-Affairs-of-Indonesia.aspx>, accessed on February 15, 2018.

Bangladeshi side to his Myanmar counterpart Lt Gen Kyaw Swe, who visited Dhaka last week<sup>34</sup>.

- **UN Rights Envoy Says Suu Kyi Complicit in Persecuting Rohingya**

The UN Special Envoy on Human Rights in Myanmar has claimed that State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi could be complicit in the systematic persecution of Rohingya Muslims. In an interview with Channel 4 News posted to the British broadcaster's website on 14 February, Yanghee Lee said there were grounds for bringing Myanmar's de facto leader before an international tribunal for failing to intervene in the military's "clearance operation" in Rakhine state following attacks by ARSA militants in August that killed 11 security personnel<sup>35</sup>.

- **Myanmar Received \$5 Bn in Foreign Investment in Current Fiscal Year**

Myanmar has received more than US\$5.1 billion in foreign investment in the current 2017-18 fiscal year from April to the first week of February, according to the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA). "We have received more than \$4.4 billion in foreign investment as of the first week of February, while existing foreign businesses have increased their investment by nearly \$700 million," said U Than Aung Kyaw, deputy director general of DICA<sup>36</sup>.

- **Tatmadaw seizes K9b in drugs in Shan State**

The Tatmadaw has seized K9 billion (US\$6.77 million) worth of illegal drugs in the conflict-torn area of Shan State, a month after the country made a record drug bust in the same area, the Tatmadaw said in a statement. The drugs were recovered during a raid at four areas near Loikham village in Kutkhai township in northern Shan State on 16 February.<sup>37</sup>

- **Government reaffirms stand on groups signing NCA before peace talks**

The government will strengthen the peace process based on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and exert all efforts to convince all armed ethnic groups to sign the pact, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said on 13 February. "Even though new groups have signed the NCA, our future programme is clear. We will continue to work with organisations that have already signed the NCA to consolidate the ceasefire processes," she said in a speech at the signing of the pact with the New Mon State

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<sup>34</sup> Government to vet over 8000 names on initial repatriation list, 19 February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/government-vet-over-8000-names-initial-repatriation-list.html>

<sup>35</sup> UN Rights Envoy Says Suu Kyi Complicit in Persecuting Rohingya, 16 February 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/un-rights-envoy-says-suu-kyi-complicit-persecuting-rohingya.html>

<sup>36</sup> Myanmar Received \$5 Bn in Foreign Investment in Current Fiscal Year, 14 February 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmar-received-5-bn-foreign-investment-current-fiscal-year.html>

<sup>37</sup> Tatmadaw seizes K9b in drugs in Shan State, 19 February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-seizes-k9b-drugs-shan-state.html>



party (NMSP) and Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) at the Myanmar Convention Centre in Nay Pyi Taw. The signing of the NCA by the NMSP and the LDU brought to 10 the number of armed ethnic groups that have signed the pact, a prerequisite for participating in the peace process<sup>38</sup>.

## North America

### Canada

- **Canadian PM Trudeau begins 7-day India visit to boost ties**

National security advisers of India and Canada met, ahead of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's seven-day visit to India which is aimed at further boosting strategic ties with a focus on defence and counter-terror cooperation. The two NSAs prepared the ground for Trudeau and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intensify defence and security cooperation, and India's concerns over rising Sikh radicalism in Canada are understood to have figured in the meeting held a couple days back, Canadian diplomatic sources indicated. On trade, the sources said Canadian investments in India were likely to decline in absence of a mechanism to protect them and Trudeau and Modi may deliberate, during their talks on February 23, on making forward movement in firming up the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between the two countries. Both sides are also expected to deliberate on enhancing cooperation in civil nuclear sector.<sup>39</sup>

- **Canada in talks with India to combat Sikh radicals**

Canada has initiated a dialogue with India on investigating cases against Sikh extremists and combating Sikh radicalism, an apparent attempt to dispel controversy over the Justin Trudeau government's alleged links with Sikh extremists. This comes ahead of Canadian PM Trudeau's week-long visit to India, from Saturday, during which security and defence partnership is expected to figure high on the agenda. The two sides recently held a meeting of the joint working group on counter-terrorism to firm up specific areas of cooperation and this was preceded by a deputy NSA level dialogue. The issue of revival of Sikh radicalism in Canada and presence of supporters of Khalistan movement in Trudeau cabinet have cast a shadow on Indo-Canadian partnership, the growing economic partnership including rising investments in India notwithstanding. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has raised the issue with Trudeau during their meetings. Nonetheless several gurdwaras in Canada have barred Indian officials from entering the premises. Canada's official line, which Trudeau is expected

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<sup>38</sup> Government reaffirms stand on groups signing NCA before peace talks, 14 February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/government-reaffirms-stand-groups-signing-nca-peace-talks.html>

<sup>39</sup> Colin Robertson, "Trudeau must make haste on trade with India," <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-commentary/trudeau-must-make-haste-on-trade-with-india/article38001923/>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.



to deliver during the trip, is that it supports a unified India and will not support any form of extremism. The controversy over Sikh radicalism notwithstanding, India and Canada will try to firm up maritime defence partnership, and Canada is willing to share expertise of its defence industry in maritime sphere, the people cited earlier said. While Canada has growing ties with China it also supports India's position on the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, Canadian officials said. <sup>40</sup>

- **In 'Paradigm Shift,' Trudeau Announces Talks on Indigenous People's Rights**

In the midst of a growing and sometimes angry debate over how the judicial system treats Canada's Indigenous people, Prime Minister Trudeau announced that his government would ask them in a series of formal meetings how to fundamentally change the laws to better protect their rights. The exact nature of the measures will be worked out through talks with all of Canada's Indigenous groups, Mr. Trudeau told the House of Commons, rather than be determined by his government. Numerous commissions and studies, particularly a 1991 inquiry, have proposed reworking the legal system to guarantee Indigenous rights and allow aboriginal people to run their own affairs. The consultations will be led by Jody Wilson-Raybould, the justice minister, and Carolyn Bennett, the Indigenous relations minister, with the aim of putting changes in place by fall 2019.<sup>41</sup>

- **Canada to rejoin NATO AWACS program, defence minister confirms**

Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan says Canada will rejoin NATO's airborne warning and control system, a program which the Harper government abandoned. Speaking in a conference call from Brussels after a series of meetings with NATO ministers, Sajjan says the so-called AWACS program is important and that the previous government pulled out needlessly. He says that in an alliance like NATO, each country needs to contribute its fair share. Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan says Canada will rejoin NATO's airborne warning and control system, a program which the Harper government abandoned. He says that in an alliance like NATO, each country needs to contribute its fair share. Rejoining the program means Canada will support its operations and support budget. Sajjan says doing so will cost between \$17 million and \$20 million a year. A number of Trudeau's cabinet colleagues including Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland, Science and Economic Development Minister Navdeep

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<sup>40</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Canada in talks with India to combat Sikh radicals," Canada in talks with India to combat Sikh radicals,"

[//economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/62953277.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/62953277.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst), Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Ian Austen, "In 'Paradigm Shift,' Trudeau Announces Talks on Indigenous People's Rights," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/14/world/canada/trudeau-indigenous-peoples-rights.html>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

Bains, Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan, Science and Sports Minister Kirsty Duncan and Infrastructure Minister Amarjeet Sohi are also visiting India.<sup>42</sup>

- **Canada set to open free trade talks with South American bloc**

On March 8, Canada's minister of international trade, Francois-Philippe Champagne, will sign the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership — the CPTPP, formerly known as the TPP. The following day, if all goes as planned, Canada's delegation will board a plane and fly over the Andes to Asuncion, Paraguay, to launch free trade talks with the Mercosur bloc of nations. Mercosur is a trade bloc formed in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. It is the largest trade bloc in this hemisphere after NAFTA. (Venezuela is also a member but is currently suspended because of the collapse of democratic institutions in the country. Bolivia is in the process of joining.) Canada is connected to those Pacific nations through an extensive web of deals. Canada has had free trade with Chile through a bilateral deal for over 20 years. It recently updated that deal and is also about to join Chile in the CPTPP. But Canada has no such connections to the eastern side of South America, including the continent's two industrial powerhouses, Brazil and Argentina. One point of contention between Canada and its Latin counterparts, however, might be how far-reaching the deal would be. Mercosur nations have been more eager to lift barriers to trade in goods than in services. Canada wants to do both.<sup>43</sup>

## The United States

- **Trump faces calls to act against Russia after Mueller's indictments**

Donald Trump faced mounting calls to act against Russia after special counsel Robert Mueller unveiled indictments on Friday accusing 13 Russians and three companies of interfering in the 2016 presidential election to help Republicans. President Trump has attempted to spin the indictments as a personal victory, falsely claiming that they prove his campaign did not collude with the foreign power during the election and that Russian meddling had no effect on the outcome. But the president has voiced no interest in the detailed evidence contained in the indictments suggesting that those charged had targeted US democracy via online interference from as far back as 2014. Trump has attempted to spin the indictments as a personal victory, falsely claiming that they prove his campaign did not collude with the foreign power during the election and that Russian meddling had no effect on the outcome. But the president has voiced no interest in the detailed evidence contained in the indictments suggesting that those charged had targeted US democracy via online interference from

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<sup>42</sup> PTI, "Canadian PM Trudeau begins 7-day India visit to boost ties,"

<https://www.businesstoday.in/current/world/canadian-pm-trudeau-begins-7-day-india-visit-saturday-to-boost-ties/story/270887.html>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Evan Dyer, "Canada set to open free trade talks with South American bloc," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-mercosur-free-trade-talks-1.4537338>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

as far back as 2014. Trump's failure to grapple with Russia's successful meddling in the election and inability to articulate a strategy to prevent it occurring again, has placed him at odds with the consensus among his administration's security officials.<sup>44</sup>

- **What are the immediate consequences of the Russia indictment?**

Thirteen Russian nationals and three entities have been indicted for allegedly breaking U.S. laws to interfere with the 2016 presidential election, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein announced. Although the indictment doesn't mention the Russian government, but judging by the size and scope, it's "impossible to think" the operation could have been carried out without the blessing of the Kremlin. On Friday, a D.C. federal grand jury returned an indictment against the Internet Research Agency, a Russian organization which has connections to Russian President Vladimir Putin. It names 13 Russian nationals and three Russian entities and accuses them of violating U.S. criminal laws to meddle in U.S. elections and political processes. According to a spokesman for the special counsel's office, the indictment charges all of the defendants with conspiracy to defraud the U.S., as well as "three defendants with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and bank fraud, and five defendants with aggravated identity theft." There's no allegation that any American was knowingly involved in the conspiracy<sup>45</sup>

- **US politics sees an Indian American surge**

There were 2.4 million Indian immigrants in the US as of 2015, according to Washington think tank Migration Policy Institute, the second-largest immigrant group after Mexicans, almost 6% of the 43.3 million foreign-born population. Despite a reputation for leadership in technology, business and education, Indian-Americans have always punched below their weight in public life. However, things are changing. This year, a record 60 Indian-American candidates are running for federal, state and local offices across the US, including 20 first-time Congressional candidates. Though more and more Indian-Americans are running for public offices ranging from school boards, county offices and state legislatures to Capitol Hill, some common campaign issues such as healthcare and immigration reform unite them. "Fund-raising is proving to be one of the biggest challenges for candidates of Indian origin to keep their campaigns viable," said Sanjay Puri, chairman of US India Political Action Committee. The bipartisan USINPAC is helping many to connect with donors, party lead.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Oliver Laughland, "Trump faces calls to act against Russia after Mueller's indictments," <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/18/donald-trump-faces-mounting-calls-to-act-against-russia>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>45</sup> ----, "What are the immediate consequences of the Russia indictment?," <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-are-the-immediate-consequences-russian-indictment/>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Ishani Duttgupta, "US politics sees an Indian American surge," <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/nris-in-news/us-politics-sees-an->

- **Tillerson works to repair ties with Turkey**

The US and Turkey will create working groups to tackle unresolved areas of tension, including Washington's anti-ISIS partnership with a Kurdish group Turkey staunchly opposes.

Acknowledging that US-Turkey relations have been in crisis, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and his Turkish counterpart said in Ankara that the two countries will create the groups to deal with points of friction. Even as Tillerson called out Turkey's increasingly dire record on democratic norms, and its plans to purchase Russian military equipment in violation of US sanctions, he stressed the need to move forward. During a meeting of more than three hours on Thursday evening, Tillerson said he and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan decided they needed to concentrate on how to move forward. "The relationship is too important, it's too valuable to NATO and our NATO allies, it's too valuable to the American people, it's too valuable to the Turkish people for us to not do anything other than concentrate on how are we going forward," Tillerson said.<sup>47</sup>

## Mexico

- **Mexico admits government spies tailed opposition presidential candidate**

Mexico's Interior Department acknowledged Wednesday that a federal intelligence agency sent a plainclothes agent to tail an opposition presidential candidate, even though the candidate never asked for and apparently did not want a tail. There have long been fears the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, was using the National Center for Security and Investigation for political spying. But few suspected the monitoring would be so clumsy. Interior Secretary Alfonso Navarrete said that the agency, known as CISEN, had put a tail on candidate Ricardo Anaya solely for security reasons, and he said authorities had thought he had been informed. Critics questioned the justification for monitoring political opponents in a country that has struggled to carry out successful intelligence operations against its main security threat, the drug cartels.<sup>48</sup>

- **Mexico's presidential campaign takes shape, with 3 candidates formally accepting party nominations**

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indian-american-surge/articleshow/62962126.cms, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Nicole Gaouette, "Tillerson works to repair ties with Turkey," <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/16/politics/tillerson-turkey-relationship-repair/index.html>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Associate Press, "Mexico admits government spies tailed opposition presidential candidate," <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-mexico-candidate-20180214-story.html>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

Three presidential candidates formally accepted the nominations of Mexico's main political parties, entering what is shaping up to be a crowded, six-person race to the July 1 election. In dueling rallies in the capital, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Ricardo Anaya and Jose Antonio Meade addressed key domestic issues such as violence, corruption and the economy, and also relations with the United States. Lopez Obrador of the leftist Morena party, the early front-runner in what is his third bid for the presidency, proposed to tackle insecurity by creating a federal public security department and a national guard incorporating both police and military forces. Lopez Obrador also criticized Trump administration plans for what he called an "unnecessary" wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Lopez Obrador also criticized Trump administration plans for what he called an "unnecessary" wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Meade promised to create a "national registry of the needs of every person" that his government would follow up on if elected — things like scholarships, medicines and support for small businesses and transportation.<sup>49</sup>

## Latin America and Caribbean Countries

### Argentina

- **Argentina's Shale Energy Plans Run Into Trouble**

Argentina boasts some of the largest shale gas and oil formations in the world, and is well positioned to replicate the shale revolution that has transformed U.S. energy production over the past few years. Sensing opportunity, President Mauricio Macri has made attracting foreign investment to the energy sector a key part of his economic agenda since taking office in 2015. So far, despite high labor costs and lingering doubts about Argentina's long-term political stability, Macri has largely succeeded. Argentina boasts some of the largest shale gas and oil formations in the world, and is well positioned to replicate the shale revolution that has transformed U.S. energy production over the past few years. Sensing opportunity, President Mauricio Macri has made attracting foreign investment to the energy sector a key part of his economic agenda since taking office in 2015. So far, despite high labor costs and lingering doubts about Argentina's long-term political stability, Macri has largely succeeded. Land conflicts involving the Mapuche are not new in Argentina's heartland or in Patagonia. A lot is at stake, for both Argentina and global energy supplies. Argentina, once a net energy exporter, saw production consistently decline and found itself reliant upon costly energy imports for seven consecutive years. Now, it faces the specter of a prolonged conflict similar to the tensions in Chile, where for decades the Mapuche

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<sup>49</sup> Associated Press, "Mexico's presidential campaign takes shape, with 3 candidates formally accepting party nominations," <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-mexico-candidates-20180218-story.html>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

and government have clashed over land rights, autonomy and the construction of energy infrastructure. It is unclear whether Argentina's Mapuche have the will, numbers or resources to sustain a Chile-style protest movement. So far, investors seem more perturbed about the high cost of drilling than the land disputes.<sup>50</sup>

## Brazil

- **Brazilian army to take control of security in Rio as violence rises**

Brazilian president Michel Temer has signed a decree putting the military in charge of security in Rio de Janeiro, following a rise in street crime and drug gang violence. Massed robberies and gunfights during carnival, followed by a storm that killed four and caused chaos, have heightened a sense that the city is slipping out of control. "I am taking this extreme measure because the circumstances demand it," Temer said after signing the decree. But Temer's decree will also put the army in charge of the city's police force – the first time Brazil has taken such a decision since it introduced a new constitution in 1988 following two decades of military dictatorship. It takes immediate effect, though a vote in Congress could overturn it, and lasts until the end of the year. Security in Brazil is normally under the control of individual states. It will now be run by General Walter Braga Netto, who helped coordinate security during the Olympics two years ago, local media reported.<sup>51</sup>

- **Brazil: Workers' Party Condemns State of Emergency**

Brazil's Workers' Party, or PT, has released an official statement calling the recent federal troop intervention in the state of Rio de Janeiro "a dangerous step aimed at the consolidation and worsening the of a state of emergency in Brazil." The document was signed by senator and PT president Gleisi Hoffman, as well as PT lawmakers Lindbergh Farias and Paulo Pimenta. The statement went on to note that the measure was aimed at circumventing political obstacles such as the approving of Temer's "destructive" pension reform and his "extremely low popularity." The document concluded that the people of Brazil, "particularly the poorest of people, demand and deserve the responsible participation of the federal government as it relates to Public Security, implementing sound programs and efficient politics, but repudiates pyrotechnic measures of mere propogandistic effects."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Benjamin N. Gedan and Christopher Phalen, "Argentina's Shale Energy Plans Run into Trouble," <http://www.americasquarterly.org/content/argentinas-shale-energy-plans-run-trouble>, Accessed 19 February 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Dom Phillips, "Brazilian army to take control of security in Rio as violence rises," <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/16/brazilian-army-rio-de-janeiro-michel-temer>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>52</sup> ---, "Brazil: Workers' Party Condemns State of Emergency," <https://www.telesurty.net/english/news/Brazil-Workers-Party-Condemns-State-of-Emergency-Army-Command-of-Rios-Police-20180217-0007.html>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.

## Colombia

- **Colombian political parties demand unilateral ceasefire from ELN**

Representatives from six Colombian political parties issued a letter to the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group, demanding its immediate unilateral ceasefire as a sign that it truly wants peace. Senator Roy Barreras, from the Social Party of National Unity and sponsor of the initiative, said that such a ceasefire was the best way to return to the negotiation table and advance the peace process. Beyond being a huge impediment to the peace process, Barreras warned that the armed struggle of the ELN is "an act of suicide." Since the ceasefire was lifted in January, a number of attacks have taken place in Colombia, including blowing up of bridges and destruction of some sections of highways in the north of the country. On Jan. 29, President Juan Manuel Santos suspended the peace talks in Quito, Ecuador after the ELN carried out three attacks on police stations, killing 8 officers and injuring over 40 more. Peace talks between the government and the ELN began on Feb. 7, 2017 in Quito to seek an end to the country's last armed conflict, after Colombia's largest guerrilla group, the FARC, successfully negotiated a peace deal with the government that led to the group renouncing armed conflict and joining politics in 2016.<sup>53</sup>

## Venezuela

- **Maduro Calling for Peace and Unity Among Venezuelans**

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, members of his cabinet and president of the National Constituent Assembly, Delcy Rodriguez, made an announcement in sign language this evening to the public calling for "peace (and) unity." Maduro is calling on all in the country to maintain inclusivity, "love (and) dialogue." The message comes as the government wraps up a two-day national event that gives all Venezuelans the opportunity to sign the Dominican Republic accords that the Madura administration and opposition parties crafted together after several rounds of mediated negotiations held in the Caribbean island. Maduro signed the agreement, but at the last minute the opposition stalled and finally refused to sign giving into domestic and international interests.<sup>54</sup>

## Russia

- **Russia and US**

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<sup>53</sup> ----, "Colombian political parties demand unilateral ceasefire from ELN," [http://xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/13/c\\_136972028.htm](http://xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/13/c_136972028.htm), Accessed on 19 February 2018.

<sup>54</sup> ----, "Maduro Calling for Peace and Unity Among Venezuelans," <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Maduro-Calling-for-Peace-and-Unity-Among-Venezuelans-20180218-0020.html>, Accessed on 19 February 2018.



On the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on 17 February, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the United States will promote its interests in Europe under the pretence of restraining Russia, and the sanction spiral, winded by the U.S., hinders the business cooperation between Russia and Germany.<sup>55</sup>

Commenting on the attacks on the Russian Center for Science and Culture on 17 February by the neo-Nazi Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Russian embassy in Washington said in a statement on 19 February that Russia expects US officials to stop supporting primitive nationalism in Ukraine and other eastern European countries.<sup>56</sup>

Another subject of the conference that tensed the atmosphere was the tensions surrounding Russia and the U.S over nuclear arms controls. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov fired a shot at President Trump's new 74-page nuclear doctrine calling for a modernization of America's nuclear arsenal. U.S. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster shot back at Lavrov's statements defending the U.S. nuclear posture, which calls for more low-yield atomic bombs and outlines explicitly Russia and China are the primary sources of security concern for the Pentagon. He declared that "We will not allow Russia any of the power to hold the populations of Europe hostage".<sup>57</sup> On Russia's relations with EU, NATO and U.S., Russian foreign minister Lavrov accused NATO, the U.S. and the EU of anti-Russian propaganda that has led to "paralysis" in mutual contacts and called for greater respect to be shown to Russia.<sup>58</sup>

- **Russia, Arctic and Saudi Arabia**

On 14 February during a press conference, Saudi Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid al-Falih said that Russia has invited Saudi Arabia's national oil company Saudi Aramco to take part in the Arctic LNG-2 project of Russian Novatek gas producer. He said that it is a big project and will become part of Aramco's gas strategy. The Arctic LNG-2 is the second LNG plant of Novatek, scheduled for a start in 2023. Its capacity will be over 18 mln tonnes of LNG per year.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>"US wants to promote economic interests in Europe by restraining Russia – Lavrov", TASS, February 17, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/990534> Accessed on February 19, 2018.

<sup>56</sup>"Russia expects US to stop supporting primitive nationalism in Ukraine", TASS, February 19, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/990653> Accessed on February 19, 2018.

<sup>57</sup>"Tensions Escalate between Russia and the U.S. at the Munich Security Conference", *Stock Board Asset*, February 19, 2018. <https://stockboardasset.com/insights-and-research/tensions-escalate-russia-u-s-munich-security-conference/> Accessed on February 19, 2018.

<sup>58</sup>"Spotlight: Triangle ties among EU, U.S., Russia in focus at Munich Security Conference", *Xinhua Net*, February 18, 2018. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/19/c\\_136984263.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/19/c_136984263.htm) Accessed on February 19, 2018.

<sup>59</sup>"Arctic LNG-2 project may become part of Saudi Aramco's gas strategy", TASS, February 14, 2018. <http://tass.com/economy/990028> Accessed on February 19, 2018.



- **Russia and Moldova**

Moldova's Prime Minister Pavel Filip, who took part in the Munich Security Conference, spoke for withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria breakaway region on February 17. Philip expressed hope for "Russia's sincere intention to help in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict and withdraw its armed forces and ammunition from the territory of the Republic of Moldova." The Moldovan government has repeatedly raised the issue of the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria and the transformation of the peacekeeping operation into a civilian mission under an international mandate. Supporting the country's stronger neutrality Moldovan President Igor Dodon said that before reorganizing the peacekeeping operation, it is necessary to settle the Transnistrian conflict, negotiations on which have been stalled for many years. The authorities of Transnistria are against the withdrawal of Russian military, who are considered guarantors of peace.<sup>60</sup>

## South Asia

### Afghanistan

- **Ghani Discusses Terrorism with Uzbek and Kazakh COAS**

In a meeting with the army chiefs of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Kabul on 12 February 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said that the arrival of top security officials from these central Asian nations opens a new chapter of security and economic cooperation in the region. In turn, the army chiefs of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also pointed to the need for broader economic, security and transit ties with Afghanistan, the presidential palace said in a statement. Ghani met the top security officials amid a spike in insecurity and after a spate of deadly attacks by the Taliban and Daesh militant groups in Afghan cities. There are major concerns among central Asian countries about the expansion of Daesh in Afghanistan.<sup>61</sup>

Further, a meeting between the Chief of Staff of the Afghanistan National Army, the Pakistan army, Uzbekistan's army and Kazakhstan's army, along with the Commander of Resolute Support Mission Gen. John Nicholson, was held on 13 February 2018 in Kabul. The meeting was hosted by Resolute Support Mission, and focused on the fight against insurgency and drug trafficking. Participating countries - especially

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<sup>60</sup>"Prime Minister of Moldova calls for withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria", *TASS*, February 18, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/990587> Accessed on February 19, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Syed Zabiullah Langari, "Ghani Discusses Terrorism with Uzbek and Kazakh COAS", *Tolonews*, 12 February 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/ghani-discusses-terrorism-uzbek-and-kazakh-coas> accessed on 13 February 2018.

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan – recently voiced their concern over the growing number of insurgents in the north of Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup>

- **Interior Ministry Unveils 4-Year Plan to Speed up Reforms**

The The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has worked on the plan for four months in order to map out the way forward for the ministry and the police over the next four years. MoI on 18 February 2018 unveiled its four-year strategic plan that will boost reforms in the ministry and within the structures of the Afghan National Police (ANP). Key measures in the plan include the fight against corruption, the need for professional training of Afghan police forces and systematic reforms in certain sectors. The new plan is expected to be rolled out from Kabul and Herat provinces and within four years, the plan will be extended to all provinces across Afghanistan. Representatives of donor countries, the European Union (EU) and the UN, along with the Afghan police welcomed the move. The strategic plan illustrates that the level of public confidence in the Afghan police has significantly declined over the past decade despite police forces demonstrating dedication and sacrifices. Therefore, in the new plan, the MoI will undertake comprehensive measures to close this gap. However, the MoI argues that the relevant body will prefer to implement the reforms process gradually in 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

The strategic plan states that the external threats towards Afghanistan include groups associated with extremism, coordinated crime, drugs, terrorism and certain neighbouring countries which see Afghanistan as a threat to their national interests. The strategic plan says that over the past few months, the threats emerging from Daesh have significantly increased - the main reason being that a number of terrorist groups announced their allegiance to the group. The plan will deal with all these issues.<sup>63</sup>

- **Afghan Officials and Taliban Talk Despite Wave of Violence**

Afghan officials are carrying out at least two tracks of talks with the Taliban, even after a month of brutal bombings and attacks by the militants that killed nearly 200 and despite President Donald Trump's angry rejection of any negotiations for now. The persistence of the back-channel contacts reflects the desire to keep a door open for reconciliation even as the Afghan government and its top ally, the United States, fumble for a strategy to end the protracted war, now entering its 17th year. Rifts within

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<sup>62</sup> Sayed Sharif Amiri, "Army Chiefs Of Four Countries Meet In Kabul", *Tolonews*, 13 February 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/army-chiefs-four-countries-meet-kabul> accessed on 14 February 2018.

<sup>63</sup> "Interior Ministry Unveils 4-Year Plan to Speed up Reforms", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, 19 February 2018. [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=20223](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20223) accessed on 19 February 2018.

the Afghan government have grown vast, even as the Taliban gain territory and wage increasingly ruthless tactics.

The United States has unleashed heavier air power against the Taliban and other militants. After the string of Taliban attacks in recent weeks, Trump angrily condemned the group. Still, Afghanistan's intelligence chief Masoom Stanikzai and its National Security Chief Mohammed Hanif Atmar continue to each talk separately to the Taliban, say those familiar with the backdoor negotiations. The problem, however, is that neither is talking to the other or to the High Peace Council, which was created by the government to talk peace with the Taliban.<sup>64</sup>

- **Govt Defines First Ever Five-Year Land Rights Policy**

Afghanistan Land Authority - Arazi - has outlined a five-year land management program which is aimed at developing a land ownership management system and land ownership rights system to protect customary ownership in Afghanistan. President Ashraf Ghani said that previous governments in Afghanistan failed to introduce a safe ownership system in the country. He said that the incumbent government is trying to ensure that every citizen in the country has the right to secure land ownership. He said that government is also trying to allot land for refugees who are returning to the country. Meanwhile, officials from Afghanistan Land Authority – Arazi - said that with the implementation of the five-year program, the institution will be able to introduce systematic reforms in the management of the land ownership process in Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup>

- **Ghani Meets Australian Defense Minister**

President Ashraf Ghani met Australian Defense Minister Marise Payne on 16 February 2018, afternoon where they discussed bilateral ties and other mutual interest issues, Presidential Palace said in a statement. The statement said the two sides also talked about expanding bilateral cooperation, counterterrorism and training of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. The Australian minister said her country is ready to cooperate with Afghanistan in providing higher education for Afghans, especially in military sector, read the statement. She said her country supports Afghanistan's strategy in peace, counterterrorism and expansion of cooperation in the region. President Ghani said he commends the Australian government's support to

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<sup>64</sup> "Afghan Officials and Taliban Talk Despite Wave of Violence", *Daily outlook Afghanistan*, 14 February 2018. [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=20193](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20193) 15 February 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Zarmina Mohammadi, " Govt Defines First Ever Five-Year Land Rights Policy", *Tolonews*, 15 February 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/govt-defines-first-ever-five-year-land-rights-policy> accessed on 16 February 2018.

Afghanistan. He said the Defense Ministry will follow the plan to receive Australia's help in military trainings.<sup>66</sup>

## Bangladesh

- **Court to decide Khaleda's polls fate: Quader**

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader on Monday (February 19) said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's participation in the upcoming national election is under the jurisdiction of court. "...court will decide whether Khaleda could contest the parliamentary polls...this is not a matter of politics of the ruling party," said Quader while responding to queries from reporters at the Secretariat.<sup>67</sup>

- **UN wants fair polls in Bangladesh**

The United Nations has expressed the hope that a favourable climate will be created in Bangladesh to hold a free and fair election, reports UNB. "...like in any country, this is our principal position that a climate could be created where free and fair elections could take place," spokesman for the secretary-general Stephane Dujarric told reporters in a regular briefing at the UN headquarters on Friday (February 16). He said they are following the situation in Bangladesh very closely. "We've expressed our concern."<sup>68</sup>

- **Myanmar urges Bangladesh to provide info on ARSA**

Myanmar has urged Bangladesh to investigate and provide information about the list of "terrorists and criminals" belonging to the ARSA, which had been previously sent to Bangladesh, says Myanmar media. Myanmar Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe made the request during his meeting with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan held in Dhaka on Friday (February 16). Myanmar, earlier, sent a list containing names of more than 1,300 Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) members to Bangladesh.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Rajab Taieb, " Ghani Meets Australian Defense Minister", *Tolonews*, 16 February 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/ghani-meets-australian-defense-minister> accessed on 16 February 2018.

<sup>67</sup> "Court to decide Khaleda's polls fate: Quader," *The Independent*, February 19, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/137982>, accessed on February 19, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> "UN wants fair polls in Bangladesh," *Prothom Alo*, February 18, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/171248/UN-wants-fair-polls-in-Bangladesh>, accessed on February 18, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> "Myanmar urges Bangladesh to provide info on ARSA," *The Independent*, February 18, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/137810>, accessed on February 18, 2018.

- **AL wants to grab state power: Ahmed**

The Awami League wants to “grab state power” again by ousting its main political opponent from the electoral battle, alleged Col (retired) Oli Ahmed, chief of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), yesterday (February 17). Citing the BNP Chairperson as a popular leader, he said Khaleda Zia or her son Tarique Rahman did not misappropriate the Zia Orphanage Trust funds. He alleged that Khaleda and Tarique have become “victims of politics of vengeance”.<sup>70</sup>

- **Arrest warrants issued against 23 BNP leaders**

A Dhaka court has issued arrest warrants against 23 BNP leaders in two cases. Judge Md Kamrul Hossain Molla of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judges’ Court passed the order on Sunday (February 18). The cases were filed against 41 accused on charges of torching a vehicle in Malibagh during a demonstration on February 3, 2015. Taking cognizance of two charge sheets, the court issued the arrest warrants after cancelling the bail of 23 BNP leaders.<sup>71</sup>

## नेपाल

- **एमाले और माओवादी केंद्र में अंतिम एकता के लिए समझौता:**

3 अक्टूबर को एमाले और माओवादी केंद्र ने चुनावों से पहले वाम गठबंधन बनाकर सभी को चोंकाया था. इसके बाद इस गठबंधन को बड़ी जीत हासिल भी हुई. अभी सरकार बनाने से पहले दोनों दलों को एक करने के लिए बातचीत चल रही है. सूत्रों के अनुसार बैठक में ओली और प्रचंड संयुक्त नेतृत्व के लिए राजी हुए हैं और संभवतया प्रधानमंत्री पद के लिए साझेदारी की व्यवस्था रहेगी.<sup>72</sup>

- **देउबा ने पद छोड़ा और ओली प्रधानमंत्री बने:**

नेपाल में बदलते हुए घटनाक्रम के तहत अंततः 15 फरवरी को शेर बहादुर देउबा ने प्रधानमंत्री पद से त्यागपत्र दे दिया और नए प्रधानमंत्री के रूप में के पी शर्मा ओली ने पदभार ग्रहण किया. चुनावों के

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<sup>70</sup> “AL wants to 'grab state power again',” *Daily Star*, February 18, 2018, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/al-wants-grab-state-power-again-1536238>, accessed on February 18, 2018.

<sup>71</sup> “Arrest warrants issued against 23 BNP leaders,” *Dhaka Tribune*, February 18, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/court/2018/02/18/arrest-warrants-issued-bnp-leaders/>, accessed on February 18, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Tika R Pradhan, “UML and Maoist Centre set for final unity deal”, 13 February 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-02-13/1>

बाद वर्तमान संविधान के अंतर्गत ओली पहले चुने हुए प्रधानमंत्री है। नई सरकार में ओली को माओवादी केंद्र का पूर्ण समर्थन है.<sup>73</sup>

- **ओली ने देउबा सरकार के निर्णयों की समीक्षा के लिए कहा:**

के पी शर्मा ओली ने प्रधानमंत्री बनते ही मुख्य सचिव लोक दर्शन रेग्मी को निर्देश दिए कि वे देउबा सरकार के दौरान लिए गये निर्णयों की पूर्ण समीक्षा करें। इनमें मुख्य मुद्दे हैं- सरकारी एजेंसियों में राजनीतिक नियुक्ति, शहीद के दर्जे की घोषणा, बुदी गण्डकी हाइड्रो पावर प्रोजेक्ट की संविदा को रद्द करना आदि.<sup>74</sup>

- **प्रधानमन्त्री की कोर टीम पर चर्चा:**

के पी शर्मा ओली ने प्रधानमंत्री कार्यालय में एक मजबूत टीम बनाने की बात कही है। सूत्रों के मुताबिक बिष्णु रिमाल प्रधानमंत्री के राजनीतिक सलाहकार होंगे, युबराज खातिवाडा आर्थिक सलाहकार होंगे और राजन भट्टराई विदेश संबंधों के सलाहकार होंगे.<sup>75</sup>

## Pakistan

- **The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), US and Pakistan**

United States along with Britain has put forward a motion to place Pakistan on a global terrorist-financing watch list with Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which was later joined by France and Germany. Pakistan has been scrambling in recent months to avert being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with terrorist financing regulations by the FATF. Pakistan was previously on the FATF watch list from 2012 to 2015. Pakistani officials and Western diplomats say being put on the FATF watch list could deal a blow to Pakistan's economy, making it harder for foreign investors and companies to do business in the country.<sup>76</sup> Foreign Office spokesman Dr Muhammad Faisal said at a weekly briefing on February 15<sup>th</sup> that the FATF was an international body responsible for setting standards for combating money laundering and terrorist financing. Such motions were aimed at hampering the economic growth of Pakistan.<sup>77</sup> FATF began a week-long plenary session in Paris on

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<sup>73</sup> Binod Ghimire, "Deuba finally passes the baton to oli", 16 February 2018,

<http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-02-16/1>

<sup>74</sup> "PM Oli orders review of Deuba govt's decisions", 18 February 2018,

<http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-02-18/1>

<sup>75</sup> "Cabinet discusses PM's core team", 19 February 2018,

<http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-02-19/3>

<sup>76</sup> "US moves to put Pakistan on terror-financing watchlist", *Dawn*, February 14, 2018,

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1389299> accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>77</sup> "Pakistan concerned over FATF watchlist move", *Dawn*, February 16, 2018,

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1389696> accessed on February 19, 2018

February 18<sup>th</sup> to review proposals that include putting Pakistan back on a list of countries which have failed to prevent terrorist financing. Over 700 delegates from the FATF global network, as well as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other partners, will attend the meetings. In November 2017, the International Cooperation Review Group in Argentina adopted a resolution, calling attention to Pakistan's support to the Lashkar-i-Taiba, Jaish-i- Mohammad and affiliated groups like Jamaatud Dawa. The meeting also demanded a full report on Pakistan's efforts to curb terrorist financing before the FATF meetings. Pakistan hopes that China, which has supported Pakistan in the past, will rescue it again. Pakistan has also lobbied for support with Russia, Turkey and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.<sup>78</sup>

- **General Bajwa and Munich Security Conference**

While addressing the Munich Security Conference, Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa on February 17<sup>th</sup> asked the US to stop blaming Pakistan for its problems in Afghanistan and instead search for the reasons for its failures. He categorically denied the existence of terrorist sanctuaries on the country's soil and recalled the steps taken to prevent unauthorised movements across the porous border. Gen Bajwa said that Pakistan was being attacked from terrorist hideouts on Afghan soil. He also emphasised the need for repatriation of 2.7 million Afghan refugees currently residing in Pakistan. Pointing to the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and Islamic State safe havens, he said terrorists had established sanctuaries on the Afghan soil along the border with Pakistan. Gen Bajwa said Pakistan had rendered a lot of sacrifices for defeating terrorism. He also underscored the importance of international cooperation against terrorism. Speaking about the operations launched in the country against terrorists, he said that besides kinetic operations, a lot of emphasis had been put on cutting off their financial sources.<sup>79</sup>

- **Pakistan Army Troops and Saudi Arabia**

Taking a major decision, the army on February 15<sup>th</sup> announced that it is deploying troops in Saudi Arabia under an existing bilateral security pact. "In continuation of ongoing Pak-KSA bilateral security cooperation, a Pakistan Army contingent is being sent to KSA on training and advice mission," the Inter-Services Public Relations announced after a meeting between Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa and Saudi Ambassador Nawaf Saeed Al-Maliki at the General Headquarters. The ISPR insists that the new deployment and nearly 1,000 Pakistani troops already stationed there would

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<sup>78</sup> Anwar Iqbal, "FATF begins today review of move to put Pakistan on grey-list", *Dawn*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390160> accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>79</sup> "COAS urges US not to blame Pakistan for its failures", *Dawn*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390159/coas-urges-us-not-to-blame-pakistan-for-its-failures> accessed on February 19, 2018

not be “employed outside KSA”.<sup>80</sup> Questions over the ‘unilateral decision’ of sending troops to Saudi Arabia in violation of a unanimously adopted parliamentary resolution were raised on February 16<sup>th</sup> in both houses of parliament which sought a policy statement on the issue from the defence minister and admonished the foreign ministry for keeping parliament in the dark on the issue. The Senate directed the defence minister to appear before the house on February 19<sup>th</sup>, while the National Assembly asked the foreign ministry to provide a detailed reply why Pakistani troops were being deployed in the kingdom and under which bilateral agreement.<sup>81</sup>

- **Amendment to Anti Terror Law 1997**

On February 12<sup>th</sup>, President Mamnoon Hussain promulgated the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 that enables the government to impose a ban on the entities banned by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The federal government on February 14<sup>th</sup> issued a notification directing the authorities concerned to freeze the assets of Jamaatud Dawa (JuD) and Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation (FIF) under the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018. On February 13<sup>th</sup>, the Interior Ministry placed a ban on terrorist outfit Jundullah. A group associated with the banned outfit, Al-Harmain Foundation, was also banned on charges of collecting funds, pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) of the United Nations Security Council’s (UNSC).<sup>82</sup>

## Indian Ocean Region

- **India's Access to Omani Port Duqm for Military Use and Logistic Support**

Getting access to the Omani port of Duqm for military use and logistic support was one of the key highlights of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oman on 11 and 12 February 2018.<sup>83</sup> Experts have seen this access as an important development which would help India counter Chinese presence in the region.<sup>84</sup> India's naval activities in

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<sup>80</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Army says troops being sent to Saudi Arabia”, *Dawn*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1389722> accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>81</sup> Iftikhar A. Khan & Syed Irfan Raza, “NA, Senate chide govt over troops for Saudi Arabia”, *Dawn*, February 17, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1389964> accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>82</sup> “Pakistan freezes assets of Hafiz Saeed’s JuD, FIF”, *Pakistan Today*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/02/14/pakistan-freezes-assets-of-hafiz-saeeds-jud-fif/> accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>83</sup> What gaining access to Omani port Duqm means to India, <https://www.oneindia.com/international/what-gaining-access-to-omani-port-duqm-means-to-india-2641335.html> (Accessed on 18 February 2018)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



Duqm have increased in recent times.<sup>85</sup> In September 2017, India deployed an attack submarine to this port. To enhance cooperation and surveillance India's naval unit were on a long deployment at the Omani port.<sup>86</sup>

The joint statement issued during PM Modi visit read, "The Indian side thanked Omani side for facilitating operational visits by Indian naval ships and aircraft as well as Indian Air Force aircraft to various Omani ports and airports."<sup>87</sup> "The two sides agreed to enhance cooperation to strengthen maritime security in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean regions, vital for the security and prosperity of both countries. They further agreed to promote bilateral collaboration for humanitarian assistance and evacuation in natural disasters and conflict situations. The Indian Prime Minister thanked His Majesty The Sultan for the Omani assistance during "Operation Rahat" conducted by India to evacuate Indian and foreign nationals from Yemen in March-April 2015."<sup>88</sup>

- **Indian Delegation Meets Japanese PM in Tokyo to Boost Maritime Security Cooperation**

A delegation of Indian lawmakers met Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen cooperation on maritime security and connectivity in the Indian Ocean region. The delegation comprised lawmakers cutting across party lines. Baijyant Panda was the leader of the delegation.<sup>89</sup> The delegation, which arrived in Tokyo on 18 February 2018, will be in Japan till 25 February. During the visit the delegation scheduled to meet with various high-ranking officers, ambassadors and some key leaders of the country.<sup>90</sup>

- **Indian Navy to get submarine rescue vehicles in June, 2018**

Indian Navy will get submarine rescue vehicle in June 2018 as a Scotland-based company JFD – a leading underwater capability provider expects to supply two third-generation deep search and rescue vehicles (DSRVs) to the Indian Navy by June 2018.<sup>91</sup> It is expected that the company will complete the successful completion of harbour acceptance trials soon.<sup>92</sup> JFD awarded the contract of deliver the two complete flyway

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> India Oman Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister to Oman, 12 February 2018, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29479/India+Oman+Joint+Statement+during+visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+Oman>, (Accessed on 18 February 2018)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Indian delegation meets Japanese PM in Tokyo to bolster ties, <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/indian-delegation-meets-japanese-pm-in-tokyo-to-bolster-ties-1173360-2018-02-19> (Accessed on 18 February 2018)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Indian Navy to get submarine rescue vehicles in June, 17 February 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/indian-navy-to-get-submarine-rescue-vehicles-in-june/story-3Hrx66C6ZMv73yg2fBgiMJ.html>, (Accessed on 18 February 2018)

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

submarine rescue vehicles in March 2016. JFD said in a recent statement, “The initial harbour acceptance trials of the first DSRV, which were undertaken at Glasgow’s King George V dock, are now complete. As part of this process the system has been comprehensively tested in a variety of conditions.”<sup>93</sup>

## Sri Lanka

- **Diplomatic community concerned over MR returning**

The diplomatic community is concerned over the possibility of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa returning to power in the near future. Western diplomats are believed to have raised their concerns with the Government and among the diplomatic community. The concerns arise from steps taken by President Maithripala Sirisena to have talks with the joint opposition to form a United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) Government<sup>94</sup>.

- **Sri Lanka assures support for Chinese projects and investments**

President Maithripala Sirisena said that Sri Lanka will actively support Chinese projects and investments in Sri Lanka, China Times reported. The President also reiterated his support for the “One Belt, One Road” initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping. President Sirisena expressed these views at a meeting with China’s Ambassador to Sri Lanka Cheng Xueyuan on 16<sup>th</sup> February. <sup>95</sup>

- **I’ll continue as PM under the Constitution: Ranil**

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said he would continue to function as the Prime Minister under the current Constitutional provisions and that any attempt to form a new government should also be carried out in line with those provisions. “We conducted the local government elections on a single day and it was easy to organize the elections,” he told a news conference. “We accept the results of the elections and it indicates a setback for all political parties within the government. That has to be

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Diplomatic community concerned over MR returning, 18 February 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/02/18/diplomatic-community-concerned-over-mr-returning/>

<sup>95</sup> Sri Lanka assures support for Chinese projects and investments, 17 February 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/02/17/sri-lanka-assures-support-for-chinese-projects-and-investments/>

accepted. The reason for the set back are the adverse situations on the economic front<sup>96</sup>.

- **Thailand to seek approval to sign FTA with Sri Lanka**

Thailand says it is keen to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Sri Lanka and will seek cabinet approval for the negotiations. Auramon Supthaweethum, Director-General of the Trade Negotiations Department in Thailand told the Bangkok Post that Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak plans to sign an FTA with Sri Lanka, as he expects the South Asian country will become a key trading partner<sup>97</sup>.

## Maldives

- **Maldives wants foreign help to investigate judges**

The Maldives is seeking international help to investigate two of its top judges, a senior diplomat has said. Two Supreme Court judges, who are under police investigation for accepting bribes and attempting to overthrow the government, have visited various countries and purchased expensive properties and items, the Maldives ambassador to Belgium and the European Union Ahmed Shiaan told Reuters. Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and Justice Ali Hameed were arrested after the Supreme Court issued a ruling that freed nine opposition leaders and reinstated an opposition majority in parliament, a blow to the government of President Abdulla Yameen.<sup>98</sup>

- **Surveillance radar systems in Maldives stop transmission: India**

Indian newspaper “The New Indian Express” reported that the Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems (CSRS) established in the Maldives have stopped transmitting. According to the newspaper, a source from the Indian defence establishment said that three CSRS were established in the Maldives, the last of which was set up in 2015. They also reported that India is facing difficulties due to the interrupted transmission. The report further noted that if the radars do not work, they would have to use the

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<sup>96</sup> I'll continue as PM under the Constitution: Ranil, 16 Feb 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/I-ll-continue-as-PM-under-the-Constitution-Ranil-145982.html>

<sup>97</sup> Thailand to seek approval to sign FTA with Sri Lanka, 16 February 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/02/16/thailand-to-seek-approval-to-sign-fta-with-sri-lanka/>

<sup>98</sup> Maldives wants foreign help to investigate judges, 17 Feb 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/maldives-wants-foreign-help-to-investigate-judges-135934>

helicopters stationed in the Maldives to monitor traffic around the island nation, in particular the Chinese traffic movements<sup>99</sup>.

- **Saudi grants additional USD 160 mln aid to Maldives**

Saudi Arabia has granted additional USD 160 million aid for projects in the Maldives, Saudi-based 'Arab News' has reported. According to the website, the amount is an addition to the USD 100 million given to develop the main airport in Maldives and the USD 80 million to develop the reclaimed suburb Hulhumale, as per the pledges made by the Saudi Kingdom earlier.<sup>100</sup>

- **Former President Nasheed briefs Indian Defense Minister on the situation in Maldives**

Former President Nasheed has briefed Indian Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on the situation in the Maldives. Nasheed tweeted a picture of his meeting with Indian Defense Minister. He did not reveal any details of the meeting. He met her during a time the opposition has been asking for international help to resolve the political crisis in Maldives. The opposition has been asking India to send an envoy to Maldives. The government has invited the opposition for dialogue. However they say that they want to hold discussion with UN as a mediator. UN has accepted the proposal made by the opposition to become a mediator in the discussion<sup>101</sup>.

- **UAE issues travel warning to the Maldives**

The UAE issued a travel warning to the Maldives, advising its passengers to be vigilant and cautious when visiting the country. The advisory was published on the UAE foreign ministry's official Twitter account in Arabic, stating that Emiratis travelling to the Maldives should take precautions due to the political instability in the country. UAE's travel warning to the Maldives comes at a time when the UK, US, India and China have issued similar warnings, after President Abdulla Yameen declared a state of emergency on February 5<sup>102</sup>.

- **China retaliates allegations of "taking over" Maldives islands**

China declared that it was investing only in seven islands of the Maldives, hitting back at recent allegations that the Asian superpower had "taken over" several islands of the

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<sup>99</sup> Surveillance radar systems in Maldives stop transmission: India, 18 February 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/surveillance-radar-systems-in-maldives-stop-transmission-india/>

<sup>100</sup> Saudi grants additional USD 160 mln aid to Maldives, 18 February 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/saudi-grants-additional-usd-160-mln-aid-to-maldives/>

<sup>101</sup> President Nasheed briefs Indian Defense Minister on the situation in Maldives, 18 February 2018, <http://miadhu.mv/article/en/9962>

<sup>102</sup> UAE issues travel warning to the Maldives, 14 February 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/uae-issues-travel-warning-to-the-maldives/>

archipelago. The statement released by the Chinese Embassy in capital Male was a rejoinder to recent claims by former President Mohamed Nasheed, who in interviews to foreign media had alleged that 17-18 islands of the Maldives were now under China's power<sup>103</sup>.

- **India will not send troops to Maldives: defence ministry**

The government of the Maldives announced that it has received assurance that India would not send military troops to deal with the political tensions in the archipelago. The defence ministry made the declaration in a statement regarding recent talks by certain opposition figures, and media reports in India, about taking military action against the island nation<sup>104</sup>.

## West Asia

### Turkey

- **Turkey warns against pro-Syria regime militia in Afrin**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has told Russian President Vladimir Putin that the Turkish army will “continue its advance towards Afrin with determination,” warning that the Syrian regime’s attempts to enter the enclave will bring about unwanted consequences, sources have told daily Hürriyet.

Erdoğan and Putin spoke on the phone on Feb. 19 after news broke that the Syrian army and the Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) had agreed that the latter would leave control of Afrin to the regime forces.

However, the Turkish president reportedly voiced Ankara’s commitment to “clear Afrin of terrorists” and vowed that “Operation Olive Branch” will continue as planned.

“If Syria opts for such a move, there will be consequences,” Erdoğan reportedly told his Russian counterpart. Turkish presidential sources say Putin said he was “not in a position to confirm an agreement” between the Syrian regime and the YPG in Afrin, while “reiterating Moscow’s understanding” over Turkey’s military operation into Afrin.

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<sup>103</sup> China retaliates allegations of “taking over” Maldives islands, 14 February 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/china-retaliates-allegations-of-taking-over-maldives-islands/>

<sup>104</sup> India will not send troops to Maldives: defence ministry, 13 February 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/india-will-not-send-troops-to-maldives-defence-ministry/>

The two leaders also reviewed the situation in the rebel-held province of Idlib, where Turkey recently established three new monitoring posts as part of an agreed “de-escalation agreement.”

- **Turkey warns against pro-Syria regime militia in Afrin**<sup>105</sup>

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesman Bekir Bozdag on Monday called Syrian state-run news agency reports on pro-regime militia preparing to enter Afrin "unrealistic", saying this has not been confirmed by officials.

“Although Syrian official news agency SANA reported that some forces linked to the Syrian regime will enter Afrin, this news has not been confirmed by the official authorities. It is unrealistic, not related to the fact,” Bozdag told reporters following the cabinet meeting in the capital Ankara.

"Any decision by the Syrian regime to send forces in Afrin to support PYD/YPG terror organizations or any step taken in this direction will have disastrous consequences for the region," Bozdag added.

Earlier, the state-run news agency SANA reported that pro-regime "Popular Forces" would enter Afrin in northwestern Syria where a Turkish military operation to remove YPG/PKK-Daesh terrorists is ongoing.

The terrorist organization YPG/PKK-Daesh is said to have held talks with the Syrian regime after more than 70 different strategic areas were liberated during Turkey's Operation Olive Branch since its launch.

- **Turkish, Iranian leaders discuss Syria on phone**<sup>106</sup>

The Turkish and Iranian presidents exchanged views over the phone late Monday on the latest developments in Syria, particularly Afrin and Idlib, according to presidential sources.

The sources who spoke on condition of anonymity said Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hassan Rouhani stressed cooperation in the fight against terrorist elements.

The two leaders discussed the Astana process and the Sochi Congress regarding finding solution to Syrian issue.

The Syrian National Dialogue Conference was held in the southern Russian city of Sochi on Jan. 29-30.

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<sup>105</sup> <http://aa.com.tr/en/todays-headlines/turkey-warns-against-pro-syria-regime-militia-in-afrin/1067916>

<sup>106</sup> Anadolu Agency, 19 February 2018, <http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkish-iranian-leaders-discuss-syria-on-phone/1067898>

At the Sochi meeting -- which included representatives from Syria and the guarantor countries Russia, Iran, and Turkey -- a proposal to form a constitutional committee was agreed by all parties. Earlier this month, Erdogan and Rouhani agreed to hold a summit of the leaders of Turkey, Russia and Iran in Istanbul on the Syrian conflict.

Erdogan also offered his condolences to Rouhani following the passenger plane crash in Iran. Iranian authorities on Monday found the wreckage of a passenger plane that crashed with 66 people onboard in central Iran a day earlier.

- **Erdogan to travel to Africa on Feb. 26, sources say**<sup>107</sup>

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will travel to Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal and Mali on Feb. 26 to March 2, presidential sources said Monday.

The president was also planning to visit several Latin American countries but had to delay the visit as a result of Turkey's ongoing Operation Olive Branch against terrorist PKK-linked People's Protection Units (YPG) and Daesh in northern Syria. The president will visit a total of four countries in five days, sources said. Erdogan also went on Africa tours in May 2016 and December 2017 to boost bilateral ties.

## **GCC & Saudi Arabia**

- **India's Finance Minister visits Saudi Arabia to Co-Chair the 12<sup>th</sup> JCM**

On Sunday 17 February 2018, India's Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitely paid a two-day state visit to co-chair the 12<sup>th</sup> India-Saudi Arabia Joint Commission Meeting (JCM). Mr. Majid Al-Qassabi, Saudi Minister of Trade & Investment, represent the Saudi side. The two officials will also inaugurate the Indian-Saudi Business Council.<sup>108</sup>

On Monday, the two sides is likely to discuss over the issues such as improving the bilateral economic, trade, investment, knowledge economy and energy security. Before formally inaugurating the 12<sup>th</sup> JCM on Monday, the FM called on Saudi King Salman Ibn Saud at Al Yammama Palace. King Salman and the Indian Finance Minister discussed bilateral relations and ways of developing and enhancing them in various fields," reported by Saudi Press Agency.<sup>109</sup> Shri Jaitely also met with a large number of top-notch Saud businessmen at the Council of Saudi Chamber (CSC). Dr. Saud M. Al-Sati, the Saudi ambassador to India, told Arab News: "The Saudi-India Joint Ministerial Commission's (JMC) meeting will be held here on Monday." The JMC, in which many top Saudi and Indian officials will participate, will chalk out a

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<sup>107</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/02/19/erdogan-to-travel-to-africa-on-feb-26-sources-say>

<sup>108</sup> <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/arun-jaitely-to-leave-for-two-day-saudi-arabia-visit-tonight-5068007/>

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/arun-jaitely-to-visit-saudi-arabia-today-for-two-days-here-is-why/1069911/>

plan to cooperate with each other for economic development, he added.<sup>110</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> JCM was held in New Delhi in May 2015 and the review meeting of the 15<sup>th</sup> JCM took place in Riyadh in December 2015.<sup>111</sup>

In the last one and half decades, the relations between India and Saudi Arabia have significantly grown. Recently, India was also invited as the ‘Guest of Honour’ of the prestigious Saudi Arabia’s Cultural and Heritage Festival, “Jandariya 2018”. India’s Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj represented India in the cultural event. India had built its own Pavilion in the festival, which attracted large number of native population. It has been reported that daily approximately 1000 people used to visit Jandariya and common Saudis took great interest in Indian cultural events and issues. The Director General of Indian Council of World Affairs, Ambassador Nalin Surie was also invited to deliver a speech in the “Annual Saudi National Festival of Heritage and Cultural Janadriyah 2018”. Jandariya is organized by Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG). It has been started in 1985 with a purpose of showcasing the rich Saudi cultural heritage.

## Israel

- **US, Israel and Annexation of Occupied Territories**

Israeli lawmakers pushed for a bill that would annex large parts of the West Bank, Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely on February 12<sup>th</sup> said she has “no doubt” Israel could reach “agreements” with the Trump administration on extending sovereignty to the entire territory, as a statement of Prime Minister Netanyahu stressing that he was in discussion with the US administration on matters of annexation brought forth a sharp reprimand from the US Government.<sup>112</sup> US President Donald Trump said in an interview published on February 11<sup>th</sup> that he is “not necessarily sure” Israel is genuinely seeking to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Trump also expressed concerns about Israeli settlement building, although his administration has been far less critical of settlements than that of his predecessor Barack Obama.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1249316/saudi-arabia>

<sup>111</sup> [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Saudi\\_Arabia\\_Feb\\_2016.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Saudi_Arabia_Feb_2016.pdf)

<sup>112</sup> Marissa Newman, “Deputy FM: ‘No doubt’ Israel can reach agreements with Trump on annexation”, *The Times of Israel*, February 12, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/deputy-fm-no-doubt-israel-will-reach-deal-with-trump-on-annexation/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=85f8608530-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_12&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-85f8608530-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/deputy-fm-no-doubt-israel-will-reach-deal-with-trump-on-annexation/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=85f8608530-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-85f8608530-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018; Eric Cortellessa, “White House: PM’s claim US and Israel discussing settlement annexation is false”, *The Times of Israel*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/white-house-pms-claim-us-and-israel-discussing-settlement-annexation-false/> accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>113</sup> “Trump: Not sure Israel truly wants peace, settlements ‘complicate’ peacemaking”, *The Times of Israel*, February 11, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-unsure-israel-genuinely-wants-peace-with-palestinians/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=85f8608530-](https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-unsure-israel-genuinely-wants-peace-with-palestinians/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=85f8608530-)



- **Immigration and Deportation**

At least 1,000 Ethiopian Jews still living in Ethiopia will be able to immigrate to Israel in the coming year, after the Prime Minister's Office and the Interior Ministry said on February 12<sup>th</sup> that they had worked out an initial list of potential immigrants and expected to approve them within four weeks. There are approximately 8,000 Jews in Ethiopia with close relatives in Israel who are waiting to emigrate.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, two hundred Eritrean asylum seekers are facing deportation as early as this February 9<sup>th</sup>, when they must decide between leaving the country or imprisonment in the Saharonim prison.<sup>115</sup>

- **Rising Crisis – Syria, Iran, Lebanon and Israel**

After the downing of an Iranian drone, which was retaliated by the alleged downing of an Israeli F-16 last week, there has been escalation of tension in the region. Lebanese President Michel Aoun on February 12<sup>th</sup> warned that a number of mounting disputes with Israel, including contested rights to offshore natural gas exploration and the construction of a border wall by Israel, could lead to war.<sup>116</sup> A senior Syrian official warned Israel on February 13<sup>th</sup> that it would face “surprises” if it launches any attacks on his country, claiming the Jewish state mistakenly thinks Syrian forces are incapable of defending the country.<sup>117</sup> The Israeli Foreign Ministry fears poison gas

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EMAIL\_CAMPAIGN\_2018\_02\_12&utm\_medium=email&utm\_term=0\_adb46cec92-85f8608530-55556173 accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>114</sup> Melanie Lidman, “Government approves immigration of 1,000 Ethiopian Jews for 2018”, *The Times of Israel*, February 12, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-approves-immigration-of-1000-ethiopian-jews-for-2018/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=85f8608530-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_12&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-85f8608530-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-approves-immigration-of-1000-ethiopian-jews-for-2018/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=85f8608530-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-85f8608530-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>115</sup> Melanie Lidman, “First group of asylum seekers could face deportation by weekend”, *The Times of Israel*, February 12, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/first-group-of-asylum-seekers-could-face-deportation-by-weekend/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=85f8608530-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_12&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-85f8608530-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/first-group-of-asylum-seekers-could-face-deportation-by-weekend/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=85f8608530-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-85f8608530-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>116</sup> Dov Lieber, “Lebanese president warns of ‘new wars’ over multiple disputes with Israel”, *The Times of Israel*, February 12, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/lebanese-pm-warns-of-new-wars-over-multiple-disputes-with-israel/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=5bebe4e5c5-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_13&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-5bebe4e5c5-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/lebanese-pm-warns-of-new-wars-over-multiple-disputes-with-israel/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=5bebe4e5c5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-5bebe4e5c5-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>117</sup> Stuart Winer and Judah Ari Gross, “Syria threatens Israel with ‘more surprises’”, *The Times of Israel*, February 13, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/syria-threatens-israel-with-more-surprises/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=5bebe4e5c5-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_13&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-5bebe4e5c5-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/syria-threatens-israel-with-more-surprises/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=5bebe4e5c5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-5bebe4e5c5-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

may leak into Israel if the Assad regime uses chemical weapons against rebels near the Golan Heights, and has reportedly warned of a punishing response should such a situation unfold. The ministry sent a classified cable to 15 Israeli ambassadors around the world, providing the envoys with guidelines for sending strong messages against Iran, Syria and Hezbollah to their host countries.<sup>118</sup> Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 15<sup>th</sup> said Israel will not accept any limitation on its activities in Syria and will continue to defend its citizens.<sup>119</sup> Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 16<sup>th</sup> told United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, that Israel would not allow Iran to entrench itself in Syria.<sup>120</sup> The Russian Deputy Ambassador to Israel stated on February 12<sup>th</sup> that “In the case of aggression against Israel, not only will the United States stand by Israel’s side — Russia, too, will be on Israel’s side...Many of our countrymen live here in Israel, and Israel in general is a friendly nation, and therefore we won’t allow any aggression against Israel.”<sup>121</sup> Syria’s civil war is in danger of flaring into a regional or even global conflict, but some diplomats hope the high stakes could, paradoxically, pave the way for a peace accord. On February 14<sup>th</sup>, a Security Council meeting on Syria that was initially slated to be public but was ultimately held behind closed doors, suggested a turning point had been reached. The language that emerged was a mix of tension and caution that converged on one point: the need for unity to calm things down.<sup>122</sup> Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 18<sup>th</sup> warned that Israel could strike the Islamic Republic directly and cautioned Tehran not to “test Israel’s resolve”, while brandishing

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<sup>118</sup> “Israel said to fear Assad chemical weapons spillover into Golan Heights”, *The Times of Israel*, February 15, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-to-fear-assad-chemical-weapons-spillover-into-golan-heights/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=f05752ba55-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_15&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-f05752ba55-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-to-fear-assad-chemical-weapons-spillover-into-golan-heights/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=f05752ba55-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_15&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-f05752ba55-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>119</sup> Judah Ari Gross and Michael Bachner, “Ahead of Munich confab, PM says he won’t accept limits on Syria strikes”, *The Times of Israel*, February 15, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/ahead-of-munich-confab-pm-says-he-wont-accept-limits-on-syria-strikes/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=c25611ae8b-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_16&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-c25611ae8b-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/ahead-of-munich-confab-pm-says-he-wont-accept-limits-on-syria-strikes/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=c25611ae8b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-c25611ae8b-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>120</sup> Judah Ari Gross, “Netanyahu to UN chief: Israel won’t allow Iran to establish foothold in Syria”, *The Times of Israel*, February 16, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-to-un-chief-israel-wont-allow-iran-to-establish-foothold-in-syria/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=c25611ae8b-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_16&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-c25611ae8b-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-to-un-chief-israel-wont-allow-iran-to-establish-foothold-in-syria/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=c25611ae8b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-c25611ae8b-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>121</sup> Raphael Ahren, “Russian official: If Iran attacks Israel, we’ll stand with you”, *The Times of Israel*, February 15, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/russian-official-if-iran-attacks-israel-well-stand-with-you/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=f05752ba55-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_15&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-f05752ba55-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/russian-official-if-iran-attacks-israel-well-stand-with-you/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=f05752ba55-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_15&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-f05752ba55-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>122</sup> Philippe Rater, “Fear of Syrian war expanding may paradoxically trigger peace deal”, *The Times of Israel*, February 17, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/fears-of-syrian-war-expanding-might-trigger-peace-deal/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=f733cc8268-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_16&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-f733cc8268-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/fears-of-syrian-war-expanding-might-trigger-peace-deal/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=f733cc8268-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-f733cc8268-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

a fragment of an Iranian drone downed over northern Israel a week ago.<sup>123</sup> Iran's foreign minister on February 18<sup>th</sup> derided Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for staging a "cartoonish circus" at the Munich Security Conference.<sup>124</sup>

- **Israel conducts successful Arrow 3 Test**

Israel carried out a successful test of its long-range Arrow 3 missile defense system February 19<sup>th</sup> morning together, months after two tests were called off at the last minute. The system, which was developed in a joint Israeli-American program, is designed to shoot down intercontinental ballistic missiles outside the atmosphere, taking out projectiles and their nuclear, biological, chemical or conventional warheads closer to their launch sites. It is a more advanced version of the Arrow and Arrow 2 systems.<sup>125</sup>

- **Growing Artificial Bones in Lab**

Haifa-based biotech company Bonus BioGroup has entered the second trial of a clinical study seeking to regrow bones in a lab. The first trial, which began four years ago and comprised 32 patients, was completed successfully. The second trial will consist of over 60 operations, with two groups of patients, cranial and orthopedic, and will be followed by another trial with a larger group of participants. In the next stage of development, the team hopes to focus on regenerating fat and cartilage. The goal is to create "spare parts" for human beings, to be able to heal knees, hips, shoulders and elbows. Regenerating fat would allow them to replace silicon breast implants with actual fat from the patient's body.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Judah Ari Gross and Michael Bachner, "Waving piece of downed drone, PM threatens direct military action against Iran", *The Times of Israel*, February 18, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/waving-piece-of-downed-drone-pm-threatens-direct-military-action-against-iran/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=c4ff6373d4-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_18&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-c4ff6373d4-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/waving-piece-of-downed-drone-pm-threatens-direct-military-action-against-iran/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=c4ff6373d4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_18&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-c4ff6373d4-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>124</sup> "Iranian FM derides Netanyahu speech as 'cartoonish circus'", *The Times of Israel*, February 18, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/iranian-fm-derides-netanyahu-speech-as-cartoonish-circus/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=c4ff6373d4-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_18&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-c4ff6373d4-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/iranian-fm-derides-netanyahu-speech-as-cartoonish-circus/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=c4ff6373d4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_18&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-c4ff6373d4-55556173) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>125</sup> Judah Ari Gross, "After delays, Israel successfully tests Arrow 3 long-range missile interceptor", *The Times of Israel*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-delays-israel-tests-arrow-3-long-range-missile-interceptor/> accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>126</sup> Sivan Geffen, "Israeli biotech company successfully grows bones in lab", *The Times of Israel*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-biotech->

## Cyber Security

- **Korean nuclear crisis, Middle East quagmire eroding global security, UN chief tells Munich summit**<sup>127</sup>

Munich Security Conference was held from 16-18 February 2018. At the opening ceremony, Mr. Guterres in his keynote address described a new kind of global terrorism threat where there was emergence of interconnected conflicts. He raised his concerns regarding Democratic People's Republic of Korea's constant perusal of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. To him, "meaningful pressure over North Korea" should be maintained. Mr. Guterres asked all the participants to have a serious dialogue with regard to cyber security. The Secretary General Pointed the benefits of artificial intelligence for economic and social development and urged for creation of an international legal regime on cyber security. He viewed, "I can guarantee that the United Nations would be ready to be a platform in which different actors could come together and discuss the way forward, to find the adequate approaches to make sure that we are able to deal with the problem of cyber security," addressing that global problems can only be resolved through global solution especially multilateralism.

- **Trump's national security adviser: Evidence that Russia meddled in US election 'incontrovertible'**<sup>128</sup>

At the Munich Security Conference, H.R. McMaster, President Donald Trump's national security advisor blamed Russian involvement in the U.S election 2016. He said, "As you can see with the FBI indictment, the evidence is now really incontrovertible and available in the public domain." U.S has been trying hard to find the origin of espionage. The indictment accused of 13 Russians creating a hidden social media campaign that assisted Republican candidate Trump to defeat Democrat Hilary Clinton with the funding of Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian businessman who had closer ties with the Russian President Putin. However, on the other hand, refuting the statement Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, "There are no official claims, there are no proofs for this. That's why they are just children's statements".

- **There's a gaping hole in India's e-security**<sup>129</sup>

At the State IT Ministers Conclave held on 13 February 2018, senior officials revealed troublesome environment on e-transaction, pointing out security breach of nearly 15

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[company-successfully-grows-bones-in-lab/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=e27ed28ff9-EMAIL\\_WEEKLY\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_02\\_16&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-e27ed28ff9-55556173](https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/theres-a-gaping-hole-in-indias-e-security/article22744957.ece) accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>127</sup> UN News, 16 February 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/02/1003022>

<sup>128</sup> CNBC, 17 February 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/17/trumps-national-security-adviser-evidence-that-russia-meddled-in-us-election-incontrovertible.html>

<sup>129</sup> Business Line, 13 February 2018,

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/theres-a-gaping-hole-in-indias-e-security/article22744957.ece>

crore of the 230 crore e-transactions occurred from 5-11 February 2018 . There is rise of cyber threats such as phishing, ransom-ware attacks on financial and government websites. An official viewed, “The maximum number of breaches happen on Gmail (Google) accounts, as the maximum number of Internet users (500million) have smartphones that are based on Android (again Google) and apps running on them”. Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad maintained that IT secretary of every state should constantly monitor websites, urging them to build a strong cyber security system and data centres. It had also been discussed at the Conclave that centre would send official to audit sensitive centres like nuclear power stations and financial and IT hubs based in states.

## Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

### Pakistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	February 14	Punjab	Pakistan banned two charities linked to Hafiz Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the mastermind behind the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Rana Sanaullah, Law Minister of Punjab, said that Pakistan's Interior Ministry had issued a notification against the Saeed-founded Jama'at-ud-Dawa (JuD) charity, as well as its associated organisation, the Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation (FIF). <sup>130</sup>	JuD and FIF banned	
2	February 14	Balochistan	Four Frontier Corps (FC) personnel were killed during their routine patrol when militants opened fire at their vehicle in Dukkani Baba area of Sariab Road in provincial capital Quetta. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility of the attack. <sup>131</sup>	4	0

<sup>130</sup> Pakistan seizes charities linked to Hafiz Saeed, *Al Jazeera*, February 14, 2018, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/pakistan-seizes-charities-linked-hafiz-saeed-180214140608355.html>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>131</sup> 4 personnel martyred in attack on FC vehicle in Quetta, *Dawn*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1389360/4-personnel-martyred-in-attack-on-fc-vehicle-in-quetta>, accessed on February 19, 2018

3	February 18	Balochistan	<p>The Frontier Corps (FC) Balochistan arrested five suspected terrorists and recovered weapons from their possession during several intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in different areas of the province.</p> <p>A statement issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that the operations were carried out in Bostan, Dera Murad Jamali, Sibi, Pishin, Lehri and Chattar areas.<sup>132</sup></p>	Arrest
4	February 18	FATA	<p>The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has emerged as the region worst hit by terrorist attacks in the country during the last four years.</p> <p>Of the total 6,966 human lives lost all over the country since 2013, FATA's loss stood at 3,062, according to a reply submitted by the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) in the Senate during its ongoing session. Kurram Agency was the worst hit area of the tribal belt with a total of 1,845 deaths in four years, followed by Khyber Agency with 1,055 casualties. Bajaur Agency saw 337 persons killed, while Orakzai Agency 130 persons.<sup>133</sup></p>	FATA worst hit by terrorism

<sup>132</sup> Radd-ul-Fasaad: Five suspected terrorists arrested in Balochistan raids, *The Express Tribune*, February 18, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1638340/1-radd-ul-fasaad-five-suspected-terrorists-arrested-balochistan-raids/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>133</sup> Qadeer Tanoli, Fata worst hit by terrorist attacks, Senate told, *The Express Tribune*, February 18, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1638359/1-fata-worst-hit-terrorist-attacks-senate-told/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

## Afghanistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	February 12	Kandahar	At least 43 Taliban militant were killed and 20 others were wounded during a clash with security forces in Nesh district police headquarters. Matiullah Hilal, deputy spokesman for provincial police confirmed the incident. <sup>134</sup>	43	20
2	February 16	Afghanistan	<p>The US Department of State has said that the Taliban's open letter to the American people does not reflect the group's intention to work for peace.<sup>135</sup></p> <p>Earlier on February 14, Taliban published an open letter, released by the Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, expressing a desire for peace talks and calling on the "American people" and "peace-loving congressmen" to pressurise the Donald Trump administration into negotiations.<sup>136</sup></p>	Peace talks	
3	February 17	Kabul	During a gathering to mark the 29 <sup>th</sup> year of the Soviet withdrawal, the leader of Hezb-e-Islami (HeI) Gulbuddin Hekmatyar said that Taliban cannot win in the battlefield as he insisted on reconciliation process as the only way forward to put an end to ongoing violence.	Reconciliation process	

<sup>134</sup> 43 Taliban Killed, 20 Wounded in Kandahar Battle, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 14, 2018, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/February%2014,%202018/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>135</sup> Taliban Has No Intention to Seek Peace: US, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 17, 2018,

<http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/February%2017,%202018/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>136</sup> Memphis Barker & Julian Borger, Taliban publish letter calling on US to start Afghan peace talks, *The Guardian*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/14/taliban-publish-letter-calling-us-start-afghan-peace-talks>, accessed on February 19, 2018



			He called on the Taliban to join peace process and said “Taliban militants should adopt the same approach as adopted by the Hezb-e-Islami.” <sup>137</sup>		
4	February 18	Kunar	At least seven Islamic State (IS) militants were killed in US drone strike in Chapara Dara district. Acting provincial security chief Zaman Ayar confirmed the airstrike and said at least seven militants affiliated with the terror group were killed. <sup>138</sup>	7	0

### Iraq

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	February 15	Mosul	Security Forces killed 17 IS militants who were travelling in three vehicles at midnight in Badush region of Nineveh.  Separately, the Nineveh police repulsed an IS attack, killing three militants and arresting five others in Makhmur town. <sup>139</sup>	20	0
2	February 17	Mosul	A huge mass grave composed of relics of more than 100 victims, executed by IS, was found, in al-Ramdaniyah village in Qayyarah. <sup>140</sup>	Mass graves	
3	February 18	Kirkuk	Security troops lost communication with 24 paramilitary personnel of		

<sup>137</sup> Taliban Cannot Win in the Battlefield: Hekmatyar, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 18, 2018, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/February%2018.%202018/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>138</sup> US drone strike kills 7 ISIS militants in Kunar province, *Khaama Press*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.khaama.com/us-drone-strike-kills-7-isis-militants-in-kunar-province-04512>, accessed on February 18, 2018

<sup>139</sup> Nehal Mostafa, Twenty Islamic State militants killed as two attacks repulsed in Mosul, *Iraqi News*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/twenty-islamic-state-militants-killed-two-attacks-repulsed-mosul/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>140</sup> Nehal Mostafa, Relics of over 100 victims, executed by Islamic State, found in mass grave in Mosul, *Iraqi News*, February 17, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/relics-100-victims-executed-islamic-state-found-mass-grave-mosul/>, accessed on February 19, 2018



			al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces) on board of eight vehicles in al-Riyad region in Hawija. The incident occurred in the wake of confrontations with IS militants. <sup>141</sup>	24 troops abducted by ISIS
4	February 18	Anbar	Head of Anbar Salvation Council Sheikh Humaid al-Hayes has uncovered a desire by IS to run for the upcoming parliamentary election, scheduled for May.  Hayes said, “Six to eight loyalists and former members of the Islamic State group in Anbar are gearing up to run for the May parliamentary election.” <sup>142</sup>	IS gears up for parliamentary elections

## Syria

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	February 13	Syria	Evidence has emerged that the United States is retraining jihadist militants – most of them surrendered ISIS members as well as fighters of other militant groups with an ideology similar to that of ISIS – in east Syria and re-branding them as ‘democratic forces.’  A video released by the Deir Ezzor-based opposition media outlet		US retrains jihadists

<sup>141</sup> Nehal Mostafa, 24 paramilitary personnel likely to be abducted by Islamic State, west of Kirkuk: Source, *Iraqi News*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/security-loses-communication-24-paramilitary-personnel-west-kirkuk/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>142</sup> Mohammed Ebraheem, IS members, loyalists gear up to run for parliamentary election, says official, *Iraqi News*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/members-loyalists-gear-run-parliamentary-election-says-official/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

			<i>Euphrates Post</i> has confirmed the development. <sup>143</sup>		
2	February 18	Damascus	Led by the Tiger Forces division, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) launched a massive attack last night that targeted several areas under the control of the Islamist forces in the East Ghouta region. <sup>144</sup>	NS	NS
3	February 18	Afrin	<p>Kurdish YPG representative Nuri Mahmud detailed the disposition around the Syrian city of Afrin, where Turkey's Operation Olive Branch is still underway.</p> <p>In the statement, Mahmud observed, "The attacks on Afrin by the Turkish army and groups of the Free Syrian Army, controlled by Turkey, have entered the fourth week – they launch massive airstrikes and employ heavy weaponry. Many countries feel indifferent to Afrin's fate, whereas they should really demonstrate support of the city and help repel the Turkish offensive. If the Syrian regime deems itself landlord of this territory, it must close Syria's airspace for Turkish planes and fulfil its commitments with regard to defending Afrin, which is part of the Syrian state."<sup>145</sup></p>	Afrin offensive: Syria should close air space for Turkish jets.	
4	February 18	Syria	Two major Syrian rebel groups officially merged ranks into a single militia to fight the Syrian Army and rival militant factions.	Two major rebel groups merge into one	

<sup>143</sup> Andrew Illingworth, Confirmed: US retrains ISIS and ISIS-like jihadists in east Syria and re-brands them 'democratic forces' (VIDEO) – Exclusive, *Al Masdar News*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/confirmed-us-retrains-isis-like-jihadists-east-syria-re-brands-democratic-forces-video-exclusive/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>144</sup> Leith Aboufadel, Syrian military conducts massive overnight assault in the East Ghouta, *Al Masdar News*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-military-conducts-massive-overnight-assault-east-ghouta/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

<sup>145</sup> Syria should close airspace for Turkish jets: YPG official, *Al Masdar News*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syria-close-airspace-turkish-jets-ygp-official/>, accessed on February 19, 2018

			The Muslim Brotherhood affiliate group Ahrar al-Shram and the Free Syrian Army-linked Noor al-Din al-Zenki faction official announced (announcement shown below) that they had merged ranks into a new unfed militia called <i>Jabhat Tahrir Souriya</i> . <sup>146</sup>	
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<sup>146</sup> Andrew Illingworth, Confirmed: Two major Syrian rebel groups merge into single militia to fight Syrian Army, *Al Masdar News*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/confirmed-two-major-syrian-rebel-groups-merge-single-militia-fight-syrian-army/>, accessed on February 19, 2018