

Weekly Media Updates **(05– 11 February, 2018)**

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Africa

- **How Bank of Baroda's misadventures dragged it into South Africa's political crisis¹**

A scandal involving Bank of Baroda's South Africa operations, a cabal of businessmen of Indian origin, and South African President Jacob Zuma, has undermined the reputation of India's second largest bank and resulted in an unprecedented penalty by the South African Reserve Bank.

In June 2017, an anodyne footnote to the Bank of Baroda's (BoB) quarterly results mentioned a fine levied by the South African Reserve Bank (SARB), headquartered in Pretoria. The sum — Rs 5.45 crore — was insignificant for an institution the size of BoB. No further details were given; the penalty passed unnoticed in India.

But in South Africa, the SARB's actions suggested BoB's involvement in the "State Capture" scandal: an avalanche of allegations that President Jacob Zuma was under the sway of three brothers from Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh — Ajay, Atul, and Rajesh Gupta, collectively known as "The Guptas".

As the scandal continues to unfold, BoB's role as the Gupta family's banker of choice for their most controversial deals has attracted increasing attention from South African regulators, investigators and the press.

A joint investigation of thousands of pages of court documents, bank records, SARB records, internal Gupta company correspondence, and interviews with bank officials, by Hindustan Times, South Africa's amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism, Finance Uncovered and the Daily Maverick's Scorpio unit, reveals a laundry list of potential violations, and a seeming disregard for banking ethics and regulations by BoB executives.

An example: As early as 2010, BoB financed the purchase of a luxurious house that was bought in the name of President Jacob Zuma's fourth wife, but paid for by the Guptas through BoB accounts operated by secretive trusts.

And as late as November 2016, an investigation into the Guptas' controversial purchase of a coal mine by the South Africa's Public Protector, a constitutional public ombudsman, found that "the conduct of the Bank of Baroda appears highly suspicious" in the bank's role in underwriting the deal.

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

- **Cfu against SA Farmers Moving Into Zimbabwe**

The Commercial Farmers Union of Zimbabwe (CFU) said it was against people in South Africa who want to cross the border and gain from the country's agricultural opportunities.

CFU called on the government to give preference to its members as the country works to stabilise the economy. More than 4000 white-owned farms were repossessed without compensation in the country and about 300 white commercial farmers remained in Zimbabwe after the massive land invasions that began in 2000.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa's administration has announced that white commercial farmers would be given 99-year leases from the limited five-year contracts they had under ousted Robert Mugabe.

The CFU said its members should be given priority under the new policy and it believes that the country has a potential to recover.

- **China Reacts with Fury to Tibetan Leader's Visit to South Africa²**

A diplomatic row has erupted between South Africa and China, over Pretoria allowing the exiled president of the Tibetan government in exile, Lobsang Sangay, into the country. The Chinese embassy in Pretoria on Thursday strongly protested to the South African government about the visit of the exiled president of the Tibetan government in exile, which it said had "undermined the political trust between China and South Africa" and would discourage Chinese investment.

In an unusually strongly worded statement, the embassy said Sangay's visit had run against the South African government's "long-standing commitment to the One China policy".

The South African government is evidently furious at the Chinese embassy's statement, but has not yet reacted officially. Privately officials are incensed that a "strategic partner" could use such threatening language against South Africa – especially after Pretoria had gone out of its way to be helpful.

But the officials said there was nothing the government could do to stop Sangay entering the country as he was travelling on a US passport and so did not require a visa and had been invited to South Africa by the Inkatha Freedom Party. 47

They said China did not seem to appreciate that South Africa was a democracy where the government did not have total control

² China Maverick, 9February 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201802090761.html>

- **Xinhua Seeks Collaboration with Liberian Media³**

The China News Agency, Xinhua, is seeking to collaborate with the Liberian media. A release from the Liberian Embassy in Abuja says Xinhua, the official news agency of the People's Republic of China (PRC), also intends to facilitate economic information with the National Investment Commission (NIC).

Wang Jida, the General Manager of the Africa Regional Bureau, and Baoping Zhang, Abuja Bureau Chief of Xinhua News Agency, were in Liberia from Thursday, February 8 to Saturday, February 10 to discuss the facilitation of a fruitful cooperation with the local media. They hoped to hold discussions with the NIC with the plan to facilitate the exchange of economic information.

Wang says Xinhua can be the bridge between Liberia and China in helping to deepen the already strong bilateral ties between both countries, the release continues. For Baoping, Xinhua as China's national media wants to push and promote trade and investment between both countries because, according to him, information is very important in the Liberia-China relation, adding, "We will also provide economic information."

- **Japan Invites Zambia to Share of U.S.\$2 Billion Africa Fund⁴**

Japan has asked Zambia to put up a proposal with particular focus on the development of infrastructure to benefit from its US\$2 billion investment destined for selected African countries this year.

A consortium of investors from Japan has also expressed interest to set up industries in Zambia for mining of rare-earth, a key component in manufacturing of electronics such as mobile phones, cameras, computers and television.

Japanese Vice-Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Masaki Ogushi said that Zambia was a beneficiary of the Japanese Pan-African Initiative. Mr Ogushi said the initiative was a funding of \$2 billion his government would invest in Africa and Zambia was one of the targeted countries.

He urged the Government to come up with proposal on infrastructure development citing road and railway sectors so that part of funding could be applied to those areas. Japan was optimistic that with increased investment in Zambia's railway sector to haul copper and other minerals, it could reduce pressure on road infrastructure.

The Mines Minister Christopher Yaluma disclosed this to journalists on the sidelines of *Investing in African Mining Indaba* at Cape Town after Mr Ogushi and a team of Japanese investors held a closed door meeting with him

³ Daily Observer, 8 February 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201802080865.html>

⁴ Times of Zambia, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201802070630.html>, 7 February 2018.

Japan was also interested in building new water infrastructure to increase provision of water especially in Lusaka following on a successful project to connect water from Kafue to Lusaka in the 1980s when Lolanda water works was constructed.

Mr Yaluma said a Japanese investor from Mitsubishi Corporation wants to engage Zambia to supply copper and cobalt for its manufacturing process of electric cars.

- **Merchant Tanker with 22 Indians on Board Released, Company Says it Faced Pirate Attack⁵**

A Panama Flag Merchant Tanker with 22 Indian crew members on board that went missing on February 1 has been released on early Tuesday morning. The owners of the company told that the ship was attacked by pirates but released on Tuesday morning with both its crew and cargo safe. The product tanker was carrying gasoline worth US\$8.1 million when it faced a pirate attack in Benin in West Africa. However, it is not clear if ransom was paid to secure the safety of the crew and the cargo. The incident comes less than a month after a vessel, MT Barrett, with Indian crew on-board was hijacked from the same region and was released only after ransom was paid.

- **Anglo American Swipes at South African Mining Regulation⁶**

Norman Mbazima, the head of Anglo American's assets in South Africa, has slammed the country's regulatory environment. Speaking at the Investing in Africa Mining Indaba in Cape Town he said that the relationship between the industry and the Department of Mineral Resources was at an all time low. The issue is over proposed changes to the mining charter in which the government wants at least 30 per cent of the sector to be owned by black investors under measures to redress sharp economic inequality. Miners will also be forced to raise stakes up to the new limit even after previous black investors have sold out. This move has been opposed by the industry, which has taken legal action, and a judgement is pending on the "once empowered, always empowered principle".

- **South Africa Holds its Breath as Jacob Zuma in Talks to Resign⁷**

The African National Congress left nearly 57 million South Africans in limbo on Saturday as its leaders hashed out a plan for embattled President Jacob Zuma to hand in his resignation. South Africa's ruling party appealed to the nation to "be patient" as Mr. Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa, the deputy president, who is expected to take over, remained locked in negotiations over the terms of the president's exit. On Saturday, the party's top leadership met without Mr. Zuma, ANC National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe reportedly told public broadcaster SABC. "There is

⁵ The Indian Express, 6 February 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/merchant-tanker-with-22-indians-on-board-released-company-says-it-faced-pirate-attack-5053021/>

⁶ Financial Times, 5 February 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/69460ee6-0a58-11e8-8eb7-42f857ea9f09>

⁷ The Telegraph, 10 February 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/02/10/south-africa-holds-breath-jacob-zuma-talks-resign/>

agreement on the end game, what is being discussed is the timing and the process that should be followed," he said.

- **Angola Natural Gas Legislation Being Finalised – Oil Secretary⁸**

Angolan legislation on exploration and production rights for natural gas is "in its final stages," the president's oil secretary, Paulino Jeronimo, said on Friday. Angola does not currently have any legislation covering the rights of companies to explore or produce gas. Jeronimo added to reporters on the sidelines of a government event for the energy industry that the gas rights legislation would be passed to the executive arm of government this month.

- **Angola oil Minister Sees no Further OPEC Cuts, Expects to Become Gold Producer⁹**

Angola sees no further OPEC cuts in 2018 and the No. 2 crude exporter of Africa hopes to join the ranks of gold producers next year as it strives to diversify an economy long based on oil and diamonds, its minerals and petroleum minister said on Tuesday. Angola is a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and it must limit output in line with OPEC's commitment to cut output by about 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) as part of a deal with Russia and others. Angola produces just over 1.6 million BPD, providing it with over 90 per cent of its export revenue.

- **Tanzania Withdraws from UN Refugee Programme¹⁰**

Tanzanian President John Magufuli has announced his country will pull out of the UN's "comprehensive refugee response framework", which provides lasting solutions for refugees, including integration into host communities. Tanzania informed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in January that it was suspending the granting of citizenship to some Burundian refugees and that it would discourage new asylum applications. Tanzania has long been considered a safe haven for refugees, particularly from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to the Tanzanian government newspaper Daily News, Magufuli blames the international community for failing to release funds pledged to help Tanzania integrate refugees.

⁸ Rigzone, 9 February 2018, https://www.rigzone.com/news/wire/angola_natural_gas_legislation_being_finalised_oil_secretary-09-feb-2018-153475-article/

⁹ Reuters, 6 February 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-mining-angola/angola-oil-minister-sees-no-further-opec-cuts-expects-to-become-gold-producer-idUSKBN1FQ1R6>

¹⁰ Vanguard, 10 February 2018, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/02/tanzania-withdraws-un-refugee-programme/>

- **Mozambique Plans Constitution Changes to Bolster Peace¹¹**

Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi vowed on Wednesday to introduce constitutional changes to decentralise power as part of peace efforts between his Frelimo party and the opposition Renamo group. Renamo rebels fought a 16-year war against the ruling Frelimo party until 1992, and unrest again boiled over between 2013 and 2016. Nyusi said changes to how provincial governors are appointed and to provincial elections were a result of "dialogue on peace that I have been maintaining with Afonso Dhlakama, head of Renamo." Nyusi held a meeting with Dhlakama last year in the remote Gorongosa Mountains where Dhlakama has been in hiding since 2015, surrounded by armed loyalists. It remains to be seen whether the hardliners of Frelimo will approve these changes."

- **Mozambique Denies Doing Business with North Korea¹²**

Mozambique is denying allegations that it continues to do business with North Korea in violation of UN sanctions. A CNN report published this month found that North Korea has signed contracts worth millions of dollars in Mozambique, funnelled the money through diplomatic channels and used profits from fishing vessels off the Mozambican coast to fund its nuclear program. But Mozambique's deputy minister of foreign affairs and cooperation, Maria Manuela Lucas, denied that her government has made any agreements with North Korea that violate sanctions. She said Mozambique welcomes outside monitoring.

- **Mozambique Deports over 50 Ethiopians¹³**

Mozambique has deported more than 50 Ethiopians who had entered the country illegally, in some cases after a six-week journey, officials say. According to a statement from the Mozambican Immigration Service (SENAMI), 40 Ethiopians were found in the bush in the central district of Gorongosa, and the others were arrested in other parts of the country. They reportedly told the immigration authority that had made the long overland journey from Ethiopia, via Kenya and Tanzania, seeking economic opportunities in neighbouring South Africa. Mozambican National Immigration Services spokeswoman Cira Fernandes said the Ethiopians had no passports or other documents.

- **More Than 300 Child Soldiers Freed in South Sudan¹⁴**

More than 300 child soldiers were released Wednesday by armed groups in South Sudan, the second-largest such release since the country's civil war began five years

¹¹ News24, 7 February 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/mozambique-plans-constitution-changes-to-bolster-peace-20180207>

¹² Voice of America, 7 February 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/mozambique-says-they-are-not-in-business-with-north-korea/4242503.html>

¹³ Africa News, 9 February 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/02/09/mozambique-deports-over-50-ethiopians/>

¹⁴ The New York Times, 7 February 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/world/africa/south-sudan-child-soldiers.html>

ago. All sides in the conflict have recruited more than 19,000 children as fighters. The “laying down of the guns” ceremony for 87 girls and 224 boys was the first step in a process that should end with at least 700 child soldiers freed in the coming weeks, the United Nations said. The United Nations has helped win the release of almost 2,000 child soldiers in the past few years. More than 10 per cent of them have been younger than 13.

- **Sudan Central Bank Devalues Currency amid Soaring Inflation¹⁵**

Sudan’s central bank has said it will devalue the local currency to an upper limit of 31.5 Sudanese pounds against the US Dollar. The new official exchange rate will take effect on Monday, the central bank added. This is the second such move in weeks amid soaring inflation which currently stands at 34 per cent. The Sudanese pound has fell to record lows on the black market this year after it was devalued to 18 per Dollar from 6.7 following a call by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to let the currency float freely.

- **Russia to Strengthen Sudan's Military, Says Bashir¹⁶**

President Omar al-Bashir announced on Thursday the establishment of a program with Russia aimed at strengthening Sudan’s military capabilities, reported state media. The purpose of the plan is to develop the Sudanese army so that it can face any threat, said the head of state who was addressing officers and soldiers gathered in the coastal city of Port-Sudan. The announcement surprised Washington, especially since it came a few weeks after the United States lifted a 20-year-old trade embargo against Sudan. During his recent trip to Russia, the Sudanese president also reportedly had called for nuclear cooperation between the two countries.

- **Sudan Denies Island to be Used as Turkish Military Base¹⁷**

Sudan has allayed Egyptian fears that the allocation of the historical harbour island of Suakin to Turkey will allow the island to be used as a naval base, Arab News said. Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Ghandour told his Egyptian counterpart in Cairo that “There is no intention to establish a Turkish base, not in Suakin, nor any place in Sudan”.

¹⁵ Africa News, 5 February 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/02/05/sudan-central-bank-devalues-currency-amid-soaring-inflation/>

¹⁶ Africa News, 9 February 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/02/09/russia-to-strengthen-sudan-s-military-says-bashir/>

¹⁷ Ahval, 9 February 2018, <https://ahvalnews.com/suakin/sudan-denies-island-be-used-turkish-military-base>

- **Ethiopia Sentences Opposition Leader to Six Months in Jail for Contempt of Court¹⁸**

An Ethiopian court sentenced a senior opposition leader Bekele Gerba, Secretary General of the opposition group Oromo Federalist Congress, to six months in jail for contempt of court on Monday because he raised his hand when addressed by the judge rather than standing, his lawyer said. The court ruling came despite a government push to release politicians jailed after mass protests broke out three years ago in the Oromiya region over accusations of land grabbing.

- **Ethiopia Pardons 746 Prisoners, Including Journalist, Dissident¹⁹**

Ethiopia will release 746 more prisoners, including a journalist and a senior opposition official who were jailed for conspiracy to commit terrorist acts, the attorney general's office said on Thursday. The decision follows a raft of reforms announced by the government to try to reduce tension in the Horn of Africa country, which has been hit by unrest since 2015. Nearly 6,000 prisoners have been freed since January. Most were detained for alleged involvement in mass protests that broke out three years ago in its Oromiya and Amhara regions over accusations of land grabbing and political marginalisation.

- **Nigeria Has Made it More Difficult for Foreigners to Work in the Country²⁰**

Foreigners looking to work in Nigeria, Africa's biggest economy, might be out of luck. An executive order signed by Nigeria's president Buhari on Monday (February 5) "prohibits the ministry of interior from giving visas to foreign workers whose skills are readily available in Nigeria." It's not a blanket ban though. The executive order states that foreigners will be considered for jobs "where it is certified by the appropriate authority that such expertise is not available in Nigeria." The executive order also tells government agencies to "give preference to Nigerian companies and firms in

¹⁸ US News, 5 February 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-02-05/ethiopia-sentences-opposition-leader-to-six-months-in-jail-for-contempt-of-court>

¹⁹ Eyewitness News, 8 February 2018, <http://ewn.co.za/2018/02/08/ethiopia-pardons-746-prisoners-including-journalist-dissident>

²⁰ Quartz, 6 February 2018, <https://qz.com/1199618/nigeria-visas-restricted-for-foreign-workers-under-new-buhari-order/>

North Africa

- **We Should Permit or Not Air India to Fly Over Our Space: A View from Saudi Arabia²¹**

The most pressing issue in Saudi Arabia's national media nowadays is whether to permit Air India or not to use our air space while flying towards West and taking a halt in Israel. This has created a raging debate in some section of media and has attracted substantial attention of anti-establishment media more these days. They have accused the Saudi government of permitting the Air India to use its space for flying to Israel while the Saudi officials have denied the report and claimed that nothing has been agreed so far in this regard. If we consider the matter in the light of realism and in the perspective of national interest, the whole debate seems meaningless because being the member of the international community we are ideally bound to permit these service unless we have some basic issue with the particular nation like today we have with Iran, Israel and Qatar and we have banned them from flying over our space. These nations cannot fly over our space unless the pending issues are resolved. Our relationship with rest of the world is quite friendly and what is harm in permitting their air service to use our space irrespective of the fact to which country they are flying. If Indian flights are headed towards Athens or New York through our air space and want to halt later in Israel, why should we stop them or not allow them.

We know that Israeli air service, despite the prohibition to use the space of some nations are flying across the world and there is no harm if we permit them that would reduce the travel time by two hours between Israel and India. We know that we have no friendly ties with Israel, but what about Qatar which enjoys high-level of relationship with Israel and how they can dictates us. It is for us to decide how to use our space and waterway. Moreover the philosophy of boycott or ban is old one and the Arab world should know, and they have understood now, the difference between boycotting Israel and boycotting nation like Qatar. Most of those who are calling for banning Israel from crossing our space belong to left school and they in the past have done a lot of damages to our business and trade. Before we decide on Indian request, we should take into considerations all these issues.

²¹ Asharqal Awsat , An Arabic Daily <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1168916/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AF/%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%AD-%D8%A3%D9%88-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%AD-%D9%84%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%9F>

Central Asia

- **PM Modi Meets His Kyrgyz Counterpart in Dubai**

During his visit to West Asia and on the sidelines of the Sixth World Government Summit in Dubai, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held discussions on 11 February 2018 with his Kyrgyz counterpart Mr. Sapar Isakov. The two leaders exchanged views on range of bilateral, regional and international issues.¹ Kyrgyz Prime Minister expressed the country's interest in expanding bilateral cooperation in various areas, including health and tourism. Prime Minister Modi also responded that India is to increase development of cooperation between the two countries.²

Kyrgyzstan is trying to increase its export of organic products to India, including apricots, walnut, apples, ghee and honey.³ India is engaged in providing services to the Kyrgyz people through IT solutions and access to healthcare through telemedicine has become popular among the local people in Kyrgyzstan.

- **Indian Defence Minister Holds Talks with Tajik Counterpart**

Defence Minister of India Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman held talks with her Tajikistan counterpart Lieutenant General Mirzo Sherali on 8 February 2018 in New Delhi. The two Ministers discussed bilateral defence cooperation, regional security scenario and the issues of common interests of the two countries.⁴ India is a strategic partner of Tajikistan and the two countries have a joint working group on counter-terrorism.

China

- **China on the Maldives**

While replying to two questions on the Maldives, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang on February 9, 2018 said:

With regard to your first question, on February 8, Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with President Yameen's Special Envoy, the Maldivian Minister of Economic Development Mohamed Saeed. Minister Saeed briefed on the current situation in the Maldives and said that the Maldivian government is committed to upholding the rule of law and order, independently resolving the issues facing that country and realizing national stability and development. The Maldives has the capability to protect the security of Chinese personnel and institutions in the Maldives with all-out efforts.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China has been following the development of the situation in the Maldives and believes that the Maldivian government and people have the wisdom and capability to properly handle the current problem and resume the

normal national order in accordance with the law. China will not interfere in the internal affairs of the Maldives, and this is also a basic norm governing the international relations enshrined in the UN Charter. We support the Maldivian government in resolving differences with relevant parties in the Maldives through dialogue and negotiation and upholding the independence, sovereignty and legitimate rights and interests of the nation. The international community should play a constructive role in promoting stability and development of that country on the basis of respecting its will. China has provided selfless assistance to the socio-economic development of the Maldives, and the China-Maldives cooperation has delivered benefits to all the Maldivian people. We hope the China-Maldives comprehensive friendly cooperative partnership will keep developing in a sound and steady manner.

Before the meeting, Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou held a talk with Minister Saeed.

On your second question, what happens now in the Maldives falls within that country's internal affairs and should be properly resolved by various parties in the Maldives through dialogue and negotiation. The international community should play a constructive role on the basis of respecting the Maldives' sovereignty and will rather than take actions that may complicate the situation.²²

- **China updates 'sensitive sectors' for outbound investment**

China updated its list of "sensitive sectors" for outbound investment subject to additional regulation on February 11, deleting telecoms and electricity and adding the arms industry and several high-profile sectors.

Effective from March 1, investment in overseas projects of telecoms operation, massive land development, and electric mains and power grids need only complete record filings with authorities like other common sectors, with official approval no longer necessary, according to a statement of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). Those sectors had been considered sensitive according to the previous list published 2014.²³

- **PLA deputies elected to top legislature**

A total of 269 deputies from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have been elected to the 13th National People's Congress (NPC).. The deputies were elected from 23 electoral units, according to PLA Daily dated 12 February 2018. The units include all theater commands, all services, departments of the Central Military Commission, PLA Academy of Military Science, the National Defense University and the National University of Defense Technology, said the newspaper.²⁴

²² http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1533682.shtml

²³ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/48038.htm>

²⁴ http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-02/12/content_4804676.htm

- **8th China-ASEAN defense ministers' informal meeting held in Singapore**

The 8th informal meeting of Defense Ministers from China and member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) convened in Singapore on the afternoon of February 6. The meeting was co-chaired by Singaporean Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen and the Chinese Defense Minister and State Councilor Chang Wanquan. Singapore now has the ASEAN Chairmanship. Chang said at the meeting that China is firmly committed to the path of peaceful development, and always takes China-ASEAN relations as priority in its diplomacy with neighboring countries and keeps to be a good neighbor, good friend and good partner of the ASEAN.²⁵

European Union

- **Coalition Deal in Germany**

The Social Democrats and the Conservatives have agreed in principle on a coalition deal to form government in Germany. However, the SPD members will vote on the deal. Reportedly, the SPD will have finance, foreign affairs and labor portfolios and CDU sister party, the CSU will take over the Interior Ministry. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's party, the CDU will have the Economy Ministry and smaller posts. It will give up the Interior and Finance ministries. After breakdown of coalition talks with the Greens and FDP, the CDU entered into negotiations with the SPD for forming a grand coalition. After relative decline in the federal elections held in September 2017, the SPD refused to join the government and decided to sit in opposition. The Social Democrats revisited their position and entered negotiations with the conservatives after breakdown of talks with FDP and Greens. Finally they decided to form the grand coalition. Now SPD members will vote on the coalition deal.²⁶ It was reported that Martin Schulz wanted the ministerial position- foreign minister – in the next grand coalition government. After criticism from his party, he now abandoned his plan to become next foreign minister of Germany.²⁷

- **France to Increase Defense Spending**

President Emmanuel Macron has decided to increase the military spending of France. He has approved nearly €300 bn in spending for the military by 2025. The decision fulfils Macron's campaign promise to enhance defence spending to 2 per cent of gross domestic product, from 1.7 per cent last year. Increase in defence spending of European countries is also demanded by the US and NATO.²⁸ Defense Minister Florence Parly told, "The world is more uncertain, and the threats are more and more diffuse." She also noted, France needs "intervene where its interests are threatened, and where it's needed for

²⁵ http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-02/08/content_4804503.htm

²⁶ Germany's Angela Merkel finally reaches coalition deal with SPD, DW, February 7, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-angela-merkel-finally-reaches-coalition-deal-with-spd/a-42459353>

²⁷ Germany's Martin Schulz drops bid for foreign minister job after SPD pressure, DW, Feb 9, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-martin-schulz-drops-bid-for-foreign-minister-job-after-spd-pressure/a-42521036>

²⁸ Anne-Sylvaine Chassany i France to increase military spending, Financial Times, February 8, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/fede4e5a-0cb0-11e8-8eb7-42f857ea9f09>

international stability.”²⁹ With increased defence budget, France will reportedly modernize its armed forces – ‘replacing ageing armoured personnel carriers, adding more refuelling aircraft and ships and upgrading France’s nuclear arsenal’.³⁰

- **France and Germany Want Tech Giants to Pay More Tax in the EU**

France and Germany want for US technology giants such as Facebook, Google, Apple, Amazon to pay more tax in the European Union (EU). Reportedly, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire stated that the EU should adopt new rules on taxing digital companies. Political parties in Germany also wanted a new Europe-wide corporate tax system to stop multinational tax avoidance.³¹ Italy and Spain are also in support of such demand, however, Ireland- hub of investment of these companies – opposes such demand. The European Commission did not comment on German Coalition deal, but it said that it would come with new rules for digital taxation.³²

- **Theresa May Visited China**

Prime Minister Theresa May paid a three day visit to China, which ended on 2 February 2018. As uncertainty over Brexit remain, Prime Minister May seeks to enhance partnership with major economies of Asia. It seems that business community wants to see how Brexit negotiations unfold. Chinese President Xi Jinping urged that both sides to build on the past success of the China-Britain relationship. Prime Minister May’s visit was focused on enhancing trade and investment ties and attracting more Chinese investments in the country.³³

- **Holocaust Bill in Poland**

It was reported that Polish President Andrzej Duda said that he would sign a Holocaust bill into law. The bill was criticized for imposition of prison sentences of up to three years for mentioning the term “Polish death camps” and for suggesting “publicly and against the facts” that the Polish nation or state was complicit in Nazi Germany’s crimes. President Duda also said that he would seek Constitutional Tribunal’s clarifications about the bill. Israel and the US have criticized the bill. The US State Department has urged Poland “to reevaluate the legislation in light of its potential impact on the principle of free

²⁹ France to boost military spending, modernize army, Washington post, Feb 8, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/macrons-government-to-boost-military-spending-modernize/2018/02/08/1153745a-0cae-11e8-998c-96deb18cca19_story.html?utm_term=.abb04e906598

³⁰ France to hike defence spending by over 40 percent, France 24, Feb 8, 2018, <http://www.france24.com/en/20180208-france-hike-defence-military-spending-over-40-percent-nato>

³¹ Ingrid Melander, France, Germany want progress on taxing tech giants, Reuters, Feb 7, 2018 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-tax-digital-france/france-germany-want-progress-on-taxing-tech-giants-idUSKBN1FR29K>

³² France, Germany want progress on taxing tech giants, Financial Express, February 8, 2018, <http://www.financialexpress.com/world-news/france-germany-want-progress-on-taxing-tech-giants/1057026/>

³³ Goh Sui Noi, British PM Theresa May’s visit to China succeeds in boosting bilateral ties and trade, Straits Times, Feb 2, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/british-pm-theresa-mays-visit-to-china-succeeds-in-boosting-bilateral-ties-and-trade>

speech.” Israel's foreign ministry said it hoped that ‘changes and corrections’ would be made to the Polish anti-defamation law.³⁴

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Kim Jong-un proposes inter-Korean Summit with Moon**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has asked South Korean President Moon Jae-in to visit Pyongyang at the "earliest date" possible for what will be a third inter-Korean summit. Kim Jong-un's message was delivered to President Moon, when he received Kim Yo-jong, sister of the North Korean leader and his special envoy on February 10, 2018 at the Blue House for a luncheon meeting. According to the Presidential office, "while delivering a letter from Kim Jong-un, chairman of the State Affairs Commission, which stated willingness to improve South-North Korea relations, special envoy Kim Yo-jong orally delivered Chairman Kim Jong-un's invitation (for Moon) to visit the North at a time convenient to him, saying he is willing to meet President Moon Jae-in at the earliest date possible." In his response President Moon cited conditions necessary for an inter-Korean summit. He said, "let us make it happen by creating the necessary conditions in the future." "An early resumption of dialogue between the United States and the North is needed also for the development of the South-North Korean relationship," he added.³⁵

- **Prime Minister Abe meets President Moon**

On February 9, 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in had a meeting. Prime Minister Abe was in South Korea to attend the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. During the meeting Prime Minister Abe urged President Moon not to fall for Pyongyang's friendly gestures and stay aligned with Japan and the United States in maintaining pressure on North Korea. Abe also reiterated the Japanese stance toward the December 2015 agreement with South Korea that was supposed to have served as a "final and irreversible resolution" of the various issues related to former "comfort women" who were forced to provide sex to Japanese soldiers before and during World War II. President Moon said that to completely resolve the issue, there was a need for Japan to offer a sincere apology to the former comfort women. Abe reminded Moon that the "international and universal principle" was to abide by

³⁴ Polish president to sign Holocaust bill, but will ask top court for opinion, Radio Poland, Feb 6, 2018 <http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/347876,BREAKING-Polish-president-to-sign-Holocaust-bill-but-will-ask-top-court-for-opinion>

³⁵ "N. Korean leader proposes inter-Korean summit with Moon", The Yonhap News, February 10, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2018/02/10/0401000000AEN20180210003754315.html

promises made between nations. Abe repeated the Japanese stance that it could not accept the unilateral request made by South Korea for additional measures.³⁶

- **Two Koreas marched together as a ‘unified team’ at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics**

On February 9, 2018, at the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, North Korea and South Korea marched together as a “unified team” under the unification flag. Since the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics, this was the 11th time North and South Korea walked into an opening ceremony of an international event together. The last time was at the 2007 Asian Games in Changchun, China. The 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics was the last time the two Koreas walked in together at the Olympics. At the opening ceremony North Korean and South Korean taekwondo athletes held a joint performance. Both countries have also joined to form a single team in women’s ice hockey.³⁷

- **North Korea’s ceremonial head and Kim Jong-un’s sister visit to South Korea**

Kim Yo-jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s younger sister, landed in South Korea February 9, 2017, as a member of a high-level delegation to the Winter Olympic Games. The delegation was led by Kim Yong-nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly. Other members of the delegation include, Choe Hwi, chairman of the National Sports Guidance Committee and Ri Son-gwon, chairman of the Committee of the Peaceful Reunification. Kim Yo-jong has become the first member of the ruling Kim family to visit South Korea since the division of the peninsula in 1945.³⁸

- **North Korea conducted military parade to celebrate the founding of KPA**

On February 8, 2018 North Korea held a large-scale military parade in Pyongyang to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Korean People's Army. The parade was held on a day before the inauguration of Winter Olympics in South Korea. However, Pyongyang shortened the annual parade compared with previous ones, signaling that it has no intention to spoil the games, which South Korean President Moon Jae-in sees as an opportunity to re-engage with the North and help bring peace to the Korean Peninsula. During the parade, North Korea demonstrated its new intercontinental ballistic missile named Hwasong-15, which it claims can reach the U.S. mainland. It also showcased its previous ICBM model, the Hwasong-14, which can fly up to 9,000km.³⁹

³⁶ "Abe meets Moon, urges S. Korea to keep up pressure on Pyongyang", Asahi Shimbun, February 9, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201802090068.html

³⁷ "Olympics open with pride and theatrics", The Korea JoongAng Daily, February 10, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3044453

³⁸ "Kim Jong-un’s sister arrives with delegation in South Korea", The Korea JoongAng Daily, February 9, 2017, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3044410

³⁹ "North Korea hosts military parade on eve of South's Olympics", The Nikkei Asia Review, February 8, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/Policy-Politics/North-Korea-hosts-military-parade-on-eve-of-South-s-Olympics>

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **US Increasing Sanctions on Cambodia's Government amid Political Crackdown**

US Senator Patrick Leahy's office confirmed that a bipartisan legislation is being drafted to introduce new sanctions against the Cambodian government for controversially dissolving the main opposition, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), in the run-up to this year's election. According to Senator Leahy's foreign policy aide, Tim Rieser, "Senator Leahy and others here are increasingly concerned with the actions of [Prime Minister] Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party, supported by the Chinese government, to dismantle the institutions of democracy in Cambodia which the United States and other countries have spent years helping to build.", thus left with no options but to increase sanctions. In response to the banning of the CNRP late last year, the US reduced funding to the National Election Committee and declared visa sanctions against top Cambodian government officials.⁴⁰

- **ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat**

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat was held on February 6, 2018, in Singapore. The Retreat is the first gathering of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers under Singapore's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2018. Discussions were undertaken on ASEAN's priorities for the year ahead, as well as deep exchanges on regional and international developments as well as the way forward for ASEAN Community building, and the strengthening of ASEAN's external relations.⁴¹

- **ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Retreat**

In a joint statement following the two-day ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Retreat, held on February 6, 2018 at Singapore, defence chiefs from the regional bloc condemned terrorist attacks around the world, noting: "Terrorism is a severe threat to ASEAN's progress, prosperity, and very way of life". The ASEAN defence ministers agreed to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation among its defence establishments, and with its external partners. The ministers also said they would step up practical cooperation, through measures including joint exercises and training, explore new ways to collaborate, and work together to counter terrorist propaganda and "promote positive messages of respect, inclusion, and moderation". After the retreat, the ministers had an informal meeting with Chinese Minister of National Defence General Chang Wanquan. They

⁴⁰ Andrew Nagemson, "More sanctions being drafted to hit Cambodian government over political crackdown, says senator's aide", *The Phnompenh Post*, February 6, 2018, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/more-sanctions-being-drafted-hit-cambodian-government-over-political-crackdown-says>, accessed on February 7, 2018.

⁴¹"Press Statement by the Chairman of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat Singapore", *ASEAN6* February 6, 2018, <http://asean.org/storage/2018/02/Press-Statement-by-the-Chairman-of-the-ASEAN-Foreign-Ministers-Retreat-clean.pdf>, accessed on February 7, 2018.

discussed ways to improve cooperation between China and ASEAN, and said they would conduct an inaugural ASEAN-China maritime exercise at the end of the year.⁴²

- **Annual Vietnam-China Deputy Foreign Ministers' Meeting**

The annual Vietnam-China deputy foreign ministers' meeting was held in Guangzhou Province on February 5 and 6, aimed at reviewing the bilateral ties in 2017 and discussing cooperation plans between the two parties in 2018. During the gathering, Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Le Hoai Trung and his Chinese counterpart Kong Xuanyou agreed that the two nations' relationship had achieved positive development over the past year. In order to further cement the bilateral cooperation for 2018, the two high-ranking officials consented on implement high-level agreements and common perceptions, as well as strengthening political trust by maintaining visits and meetings between senior leaders. Minister Trung and Kong agreed that the maintenance of negotiation mechanisms for sea-related issues has helped intensify mutual understanding and reached specific progress.⁴³

Myanmar

- **Myanmar government declares 2 armed groups non-terrorist organizations**

The Myanmar government declared two ethnic armed groups on 11th February non-terrorist organizations, according to an order issued by the Home Ministry. The two groups, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), were also removed from the list of unlawful organizations, said another order of the ministry. The orders came two days before the government is scheduled to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA) with the two armed groups in Nay Pyi Taw on Tuesday.⁴⁴

- **UK foreign minister raises refugee issue**

The repatriation of Muslim refugees from Bangladesh topped the discussions between State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and visiting UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. Johnson met his counterpart on 11th February morning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw. "In this discussion, both sides discussed latest issues and development in

⁴² "ASEAN defence chiefs to increase cooperation against terrorism, hold maritime exercise with China", *The Straits Times*, February 7, 2018, [http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/asean-defence-chiefs-to-increase-](http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/asean-defence-chiefs-to-increase-operation-against-terrorism-hold-maritime-exercise)

[operation-against-terrorism-hold-maritime-exercise](http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/asean-defence-chiefs-to-increase-operation-against-terrorism-hold-maritime-exercise), accessed on February 8, 2018.

⁴³Duy Khang, "China to boost non-refundable aid for Vietnam", *Tuoi Tre News*, February 7, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180207/china-to-boost-nonrefundable-aid-for-vietnam/44008.html>, accessed on February 8, 2018.

⁴⁴ Myanmar gov't declares 2 armed groups non-terrorist organizations, 12 February, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/myanmar-gov%E2%80%99t-declares-2-armed-groups-non-terrorist-organizations>

Rakhine State, including physical arrangements for the reparation of displaced people,” said a brief statement released by the ministry⁴⁵.

- **Reuters says Myanmar held journalists for probing Rohingya massacre**

Two Reuters journalists detained for two months by Myanmar authorities were arrested over their investigation of a massacre of 10 Rohingya men, the news agency said in a report that detailed the killings. It is the first time Reuters has publicly confirmed what Myanmar nationals Wa Lone, 31, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 27, were working on when they were arrested on December 12 on the outskirts of Yangon. The pair are now facing up to 14 years in prison on charges of possessing classified documents in violation of the colonial-era Official Secrets Act⁴⁶.

- **ASEAN seeks long-lasting solution to Rakhine crisis**

Foreign Ministers of the 10-country Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) repeated its calls for a durable solution to the northern Rakhine crisis in Myanmar, one of its member states. The ASEAN foreign ministers also want a speedy and safe return of the over 650,000 Muslim residents who fled northern Rakhine to neighbouring Bangladesh to escape violence⁴⁷.

- **KIA accused of abducting 19 Lisu, 2 others**

A total of 21 ethnic people were allegedly kidnapped by Kachin Independence Army (KIA) fighters in one of the state’s troubled towns, where fighting between the armed ethnic group and Tatmadaw is raging, a leader of a Myitkyina-based political party said in a statement. Among those seized by the KIA fighters were one Shan and another ethnic, as well as 19 Lisu people from Ka War Pan village in Sumprabum township, according to the Lisu National Development Party (LNDP).⁴⁸

- **Japan affirms military ties with Tatmadaw**

Japan has affirmed its defence cooperation with Myanmar despite international criticism of the country’s government and military over the handling of the northern Rakhine crisis. Kentaro Sonoura, special adviser to the Japanese prime minister on national security, said Japan believes the Tatmadaw “has an important role in consolidating democracy in Myanmar.” “Japan is conducting defence cooperation and exchange by accepting cadets from the Tatmadaw for the National Defence Academy of Japan⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ UK foreign minister raises refugee issue, 12 th February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/uk-foreign-minister-raises-refugee-issue.html>

⁴⁶ Reuters says Myanmar held journalists for probing Rohingya massacre, 10 February 2-018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/reuters-says-myanmar-held-journalists-probing-rohingya-massacre>

⁴⁷ ASEAN seeks long-lasting solution to Rakhine crisis, 8th February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/asean-seeks-long-lasting-solution-rakhine-crisis.html>

⁴⁸ KIA accused of abducting 19 Lisu, 2 others, 7th February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/kia-accused-abducting-19-lisu-2-others.html>

⁴⁹ Japan affirms military ties with Tatmadaw, 9th February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/japan-affirms-military-ties-tatmadaw.html>

North America

Canada

- **Trudeau pitches Canadian globalism to California tech firms**

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pitched Canadian globalism and the country's new fast-track visa as reasons why Silicon Valley companies should consider Canada as a place to do business and spend money. Trudeau brought his charm offensive to the San Francisco Bay Area amid increasing unease over U.S. immigration policy and while talks continue over the North American Free Trade Agreement. The heated debate over immigration since the election of President Donald Trump has provided a clear opening for Canada to promote itself to Silicon Valley. As American employers worry about access to foreign workers, Canada is offering a two-week, fast-track employment permit for certain workers, dubbed the "global skills strategy visa." While much of the attention on the North American Free Trade Agreement has focused on physical commodities such as vehicle manufacturing, dairy and timber, skilled workers have also become increasingly mobile between the U.S., Canada and Mexico.⁵⁰

Trudeau firm as Duterte vows to end Canada, US arms deals

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is undeterred by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's vow to end military purchases from countries including the US and Canada that impose conditions on how the weaponry is used, standing by his country's review of a helicopter sale. Canada ordered a review a day after the agreement was signed amid concern that the aircraft would be used against Filipino rebels. Duterte did not deny that: "We will really use these weapons invariably against the rebels and terrorists," he said, according to a transcript provided by his office. Trudeau said that Canada has a responsibility to look into how equipment it sells, whether military or not, is used. His administration has referred further questions to the Canadian Commercial Corporation, a government agency that handles such sales.⁵¹

The United States

- **House Democrats to 'clean up' Trump-Russia memo in bid for release**

Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee are prepared to black out parts of their memo about the FBI's Russia investigation to ensure there is no harmful spilling of secrets, then try again to get Donald Trump to let it come out. That possible nudge toward progress came as both sides traded recriminations over the matter. Representative

⁵⁰ Juliet Williams, "Trudeau pitches Canadian globalism to California tech firms," <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/trudeau-promote-canadian-tech-market-san-francisco-52934218>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

⁵¹ ----, "Trudeau firm as Duterte vows to end Canada, US arms deals," <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2132905/trudeau-firm-duterte-vows-end-canada-us-arms-deals>, Accessed on 12 February 2018

Adam Schiff of California, the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said Trump was putting his personal interest above the country's in blocking a memo that "completely undermines his claim of vindication" in special counsel Robert Mueller's continuing investigation of the 2016 Trump campaign's relationship with Russian interests and Russia's meddling in the election. The White House legislative director, Marc Short, countered that Democrats padded their memo with sensitive information, knowing Trump would stop its release, in an effort to make him look obstructionist. Trump overrode strong justice department objections when he declassified a Republican memo alleging an abuse of surveillance powers in the FBI's Russia investigation earlier this month. The FBI expressed "grave concerns" about the memo's accuracy and the justice department said in advance that its release, without proper review, would be "extraordinarily reckless". But Trump has blocked the Democratic document, which tries to counter the Republican allegations of surveillance excesses. The president has the authority to keep such information under wraps.⁵²

- **Trump tells Israel it needs to make 'significant compromises' for peace with Palestinians**

Donald Trump has told Israel it will have to make "significant compromises" if it wants to secure a peace deal with the Palestinians. Two months after he angered Palestinians and their supporters by unilaterally declaring the US was recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the US President said both sides would need to work hard to create a deal that might stick. In an interview with the conservative Hebrew-language newspaper Hayom, which is due to be published in full over the weekend, Mr Trump said: "I wanted to make clear that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Regarding specific borders, I will grant my support to what the two sides agree between themselves." Mr Trump's comments came across the backdrop of fresh strains between the Palestinians and the US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, following the killing by a Palestinian of a Jewish settler.⁵³

- **Mattis to Reaffirm Partnerships, Alliances During Trip to Europe**

Speaking to reporters traveling with him on a weeklong trip to Europe, Mattis said the North's decision to hold a recent military parade that highlighted its ballistic missiles confuses any messages of thawing tensions on the peninsula. He said that when he met South Korea's defense minister in January, it was made clear "there is no wedge that can be driven between us by North Korea." Mattis is scheduled to meet in Rome with about a dozen defense ministers who are involved in the coalition fighting the Islamic State group

⁵² Associated Press, "House Democrats to 'clean up' Trump-Russia memo in bid for release," <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/11/house-democrats-to-clean-up-trump-russia-memo-in-bid-for-release>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

⁵³ Andrew Buncombe, "Trump tells Israel it needs to make 'significant compromises' for peace with Palestinians," <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/trump-israel-latest-peace-palestinians-compromise-middle-east-conflict-diplomacy-us-president-a8202816.html>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

in Iraq and Syria. He will then go to a NATO meeting in Brussels and a security conference in Munich.⁵⁴

- **Tillerson kicks off tense Middle East trip in Egypt**

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson arrived in Cairo on 11 Feb, beginning a swing through the Middle East as it grapples with political turmoil and military clashes that threaten to undermine his ability to ease the rising tensions. Tillerson was already facing confrontational talks at almost every stop on his five-country tour. Besides Egypt, Tillerson also will visit Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in coming days, where he will engage with a grab bag of the most complicated and sensitive issues embroiling the region. The Cairo stop underscores the balancing act Tillerson must finesse this week. The United States sees Egypt as an important ally in fighting terrorists, particularly the Islamic State and its potent offshoot in the northern Sinai. But Washington also is concerned about threats to democracy and civil rights in the country, as President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi has quashed any meaningful opponents to his bid for reelection next month. In Kuwait on Tuesday, Tillerson will attend a conference focusing on how to reconstruct a devastated Iraq in the years and decades ahead, relying largely on private-sector companies and international financial organizations. During a brief visit to Beirut, Tillerson is expected to press Lebanese officials to rein in Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed group that threatens neighboring Israel. But the most contentious stop this week is likely to be in Ankara, where a rising tide of anti-Americanism is spurred on by the government's media mouthpieces, which have called the United States an enemy of Turkey.⁵⁵

Mexico

- **Peña Nieto Visits Paraguayan Counterpart to Strengthen Ties**

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto is visiting his Paraguayan counterpart, Horacio Cartes in Asuncion in order to strengthen the bilateral agreements and cultural ties between the two countries. Mexico's president said the two heads of state want to advance the Economic Complementation Agreement, a bilateral agreement between the two nations. They are hoping this agreement will complement the existing Pacific Alliance and Mercosur trade blocs between various Latin American countries. Paraguay belongs to Mercosur, and Mexico, to the Pacific Alliance along with Chile, Colombia and Peru. In their meeting Cartes and Peña Nieto spoke not only about strengthening

⁵⁴ Associated Press, "Mattis says North Korea can't drive wedge between South, US," <https://wtop.com/europe/2018/02/mattis-says-north-korea-cant-drive-wedge-between-south-us/>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

⁵⁵ Carol Morello, "Tillerson kicks off tense Middle East trip in Egypt," https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/tillerson-kicks-off-middle-east-trip-in-egypt/2018/02/11/1340bbde-cf54-4502-9fe6-50be7bbd4d98_story.html?utm_term=.5da0f46743c1, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

economic ties, but about formalizing accords to help each other during natural disasters and to collaborate on scientific investigations.⁵⁶

- **Mexico denies favouring Chinese consortium in bidding for high-speed rail project**

Mexico's foreign ministry has denied allegations that a Chinese consortium was given an inside track in bidding for a lucrative contract to build a high-speed train system. Mexican news outlet Aristegui Noticias reported on Tuesday that officials gave Chinese representatives 11 months' notice about a contract to build a train project linking Mexico City with the wealthy, industrial city of Queretaro, citing a letter from China Railway Construction Corporation. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the foreign ministry said the meeting between Videgaray and Chinese officials was publicised and touched on a wide range of projects, including the Mexico-Queretaro railway, which was already public. The report details a meeting in 2014 between Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray, who was then finance minister, and Chinese officials to discuss cooperation between the countries, which took place 10 days before the international tender was launched. However, questions were raised after 16 firms – including Siemens, Bombardier and Mitsubishi – withdrew from the rail tender, leaving a consortium led by state-controlled by the Chinese corporation as the de facto winner.⁵⁷

Latin America and Caribbean Countries

Argentina

- **Argentina Defends Ties With China, Russia Despite U.S. Objection**

Argentina said that a good trade relationship with Russia and China "does not generate a conflict," days after the United States warned against the growing influence of those countries on Latin America. Before starting a tour of the region, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said last week that Russia's growing presence in Latin America was "alarming." He said the region did not need "new imperial powers," in reference to its fluid commercial relations with both Russia and China. China is Argentina No. 2 trade partner after Brazil, and it is the top buyer of Argentina's main cash crop, soybeans. Argentina's Secretary of International Economic Relations Horacio Reyser told "There is an increase in interest (in China and Russia) and we encourage it because it seems very positive, it does not generate a conflict," "There is an increase in interest (in China and

⁵⁶ ----, "Peña Nieto Visits Paraguayan Counterpart to Strengthen Ties," <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Pena-Nieto-Visits-Paraguayan-Counterpart-to-Strengthen-Ties-20180118-0035.html>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

⁵⁷ ----, "Mexico denies favouring Chinese consortium in bidding for high-speed rail project," <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2132557/mexico-denies-favouring-chinese-consortium-bidding-high>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

Russia) and we encourage it because it seems very positive, it does not generate a conflict,"⁵⁸

Brazil

- **Brazilian president Michel Temer will escape bribery charges, say police**

A bribery investigation into the Brazilian president Michel Temer has found no evidence of corruption and could soon conclude no crime was committed, according to police. Brazilians turn to carnival as an escape from crime and corruption. Police found no proof that a decree signed last year by Temer favored logistics firm Rodrimar SA, which operates services in the Port of Santos, Latin America's busiest container port, Fernando Segovia, head of the federal police, told Reuters on Friday. The bribery probe is the only case pending against Temer, who last year avoided standing trial before the supreme court when allies in congress shielded him from charges of corruption, obstruction of justice and organized crime. The main piece of evidence turned up by the investigation was a wiretap of a conversation between former congressman Rodrigo Rocha Loures, a close aide to the president, and a presidential legal advisor, Gustavo Rocha. But the conversation shows the legal adviser saying the decree could not be changed to favour the company and that Temer opposed such a change, Segovia said.⁵⁹

Cuba

- **Cuba faces its next financial challenge — more than \$1 billion in unpaid commercial debt**

A creditors group wants Cuba to begin talks on more than \$1 billion in unpaid commercial debt from the 1980s — a key hurdle if the country ever hopes to attract large-scale foreign investment. Signaling the seriousness of its intent, the Cuban London Club creditors committee has retained high-powered American attorney Lee Buchheit of the Cleary Gottlieb law firm. Buchheit, who is well known for international debt restructurings such as the one for Greece, said Cuba "will need to clean those Augean stables" before major investors will consider putting money into the island. Cuba accumulated billions in unpaid loans and debts under the late Fidel Castro. Mexico, Canada, Australia, France, Italy, Japan and in particular the former Soviet Union, all lent millions, if not billions to the Castro regime in the '70s and '80s. Much of it went unpaid for four decades. About five years ago, the Cuban government began steadily restructuring those loans with

⁵⁸ Nicolás Misculin, "Argentina Defends Ties With China, Russia Despite U.S. Objection,"

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-02-08/argentina-defends-ties-with-china-russia-despite-us-objection>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

⁵⁹ Reuters, "Brazilian president Michel Temer will escape bribery charges, say police,"

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/11/brazilian-president-michel-temer-will-escape-bribery-charges-say-police>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

creditor countries and received large debt forgiveness. Mexico wrote down 70 percent of nearly half a billion dollars in debt in November 2013. The same year, Russia forgave 90 percent of the \$32 billion it said Cuba owed for financial support provided by the then-Soviet Union during the Cold War. Whether the Cuban government actually wants large-scale foreign investment is unclear. During the thawing of relations between the U.S. and Cuba under the Obama administration, hundreds of international companies, many of them American, went to Cuba looking for opportunities. The number of deals achieved was few; mostly tourism deals that would bring much-needed foreign exchange to the cash-crunched communist regime.⁶⁰

Peru

- **Australia-Peru trade deal to be signed**

Australia will sign a new trade deal with Peru that is expected to lead to more local products - including beef, sugar, almonds and dairy - being sold in the South American nation. Trade Minister Steve Ciobo will sign the pact in Canberra on 12 Feb. after it was finalised last November. He says it will give Australian farmers preferential access to the fast-growing Peruvian economy for the first time. The ratification of PAFTA represents the end of months of work on both sides after negotiations opened in May 2017. The nine-month turnaround from negotiations opening to the deal being closed on makes it the fastest FTA Australia has ever concluded. Under the deal, tariffs on 99 percent of Australian goods exported to Peru will be eliminated within five years. Australia will become one of Peru's biggest suppliers of sugar, exporting 90,000 tonnes of the product to Peru within 18 years; the equivalent of 30 percent of Peru's total sugar imports. Two-way trade between Australia and Peru was worth 461 million U.S. dollars in 2016, a 51.2-percent increase on the previous year.⁶¹

Russia

- **Russia and It's Presidential Election**

Russian opposition presidential hopeful Kseniya Sobchak has taken to Washington DC, advertising her political program and sharing insights on the future of Russia and its relations with the West. On 6 February, Sobchak, TV host and socialite-turned presidential candidate, has visited Washington. Her visit to the US will last two and a half days, and she will hold a number of speeches. The candidate said her desire to participate in the elections was a genuine political ambition as she sees herself as a "voice" for young

⁶⁰ Michelle Caruso-Cabrera, "Cuba faces its next financial challenge — more than \$1 billion in unpaid commercial debt," <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/09/cuba-faces-its-next-financial-challenge-1-billion-in-commercial-debt.html>, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

⁶¹ ---, "Australia, Peru Sign Free Trade Agreement," http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/12/c_136969289.htm, Accessed on 12 February 2018.

Russians. Sobchak firmly denied allegations of being simply a tool to “legitimize” the Russian presidential elections. The presidential candidate said she shared the US “concerns” about Moscow’s policies, pinning the blame for the ongoing nosedive in the bilateral relations between the US and Russia on the Kremlin. “*The so-called Kremlin report issued last week ... pencils a strategy towards Russia,*” Sobchak said. “*I share a deep concern about Russia’s behavior and foreign policy that vigorously revive the worst of Cold War.*” Russia should somehow “embrace” NATO and the EU instead, Sobchak believes, and eventually become a part of these organizations. The presidential hopeful does not see “*NATO as a threat for us,*” despite the massive military buildup on Russia’s borders and its hostile rhetoric, produced on a regular basis by top officials of the alliance. Sobchak, however, has partially put the blame on the EU, which presumably rejected Moscow’s advances.⁶²

On 7 February, the Russian Central Elections Commission (CEC) has officially registered Grigory Yavlinsky of the liberal Yabloko party and Business Ombudsman Boris Titov of the pro-business Party of Growth as presidential candidates. Both candidates are backed by political parties that hold no seats in the federal parliament, which means that to register they had to present signatures from at least 100,000 supporters, collected in various regions of the Russian Federation.⁶³

The opposition politician Yevgeny Roizman, who has been the mayor of Yekaterinburg since he defeated a United Russia candidate in 2013, openly supported opposition leader Alexei Navalny in calling for an electoral boycott of the upcoming presidential elections. He said that there is no political opposition in Russia. Parties like the Liberal Democratic Party and the Communist Party are, in effect, sub-departments of United Russia, the ruling party. He said that that Russian society is not ready for change. Conditions in the country are worsening, but only gradually. All hope lies with the youth. They are free, less scared and less zombied out. They don’t watch television, they get their news online and many speak foreign languages.⁶⁴

- **Russia and US**

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on 5 February warned the US is ill-prepared to prevent Russian interference in the upcoming midterms, as it was in the 2016 general election. He

⁶²“Russian presidential candidate Sobchak takes campaign to Washington DC”, *RT*, February 7, 2018. <https://www.rt.com/politics/418070-sobchak-presidential-campaign-washington/> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁶³“2 more Russians register as candidates in presidential poll”, *RT*, February 7, 2018. <https://www.rt.com/politics/418110-two-more-russian-politicians-registered/> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁶⁴“Yekaterinburg Mayor Yevgeny Roizman on Why Russians Should Boycott the Elections”, *The Moscow Times*, January 28, 2018. <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/-not-voting-is-a-matter-of-principle-60319> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

said that Russia is already attempting to interfere “in the U.S. in 2018” ahead of congressional midterm elections as it did in the 2016 general election.⁶⁵

On 5 February, Russia challenged US compliance with a key nuclear arms control treaty and warned that the Trump administration’s new nuclear strategy lowers the threshold for using atomic weapons. The dire assessment came as Moscow said it has met its own requirements under the New START agreement that was signed in 2010 and entered into force a year later. It restricts both the US and Russia to 1,550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads on a maximum of 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles and strategic bombers. The Russian Foreign Ministry said it now has 527 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles and strategic bombers. It gave a tally of 1,444 strategic nuclear warheads. The US reported it has been in compliance with the limits since August. Russia acknowledged the US position on meeting the targets, but voiced concern about the US reconfiguring some submarines and bombers to carry conventional weapons. The Foreign Ministry said it doesn’t have a way to confirm the reconfigured hardware was rendered incapable of carrying nuclear weapons.⁶⁶

On 6 February, Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan, the second-highest ranking US diplomat, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Russia and Iran might undermine Afghanistan’s central government by supporting the Taliban and other local forces. He explained that Russia is backing “elements” of the Taliban in the region where the United States is carrying out aggressive counter-terrorism airstrikes.⁶⁷

US President Donald Trump has blocked the release of a classified memo written by House Democrats about the FBI’s investigation into alleged Russian election interference. The White House chief counsel Don McGahn later said it could not be released in its current state “because the memorandum contains numerous properly classified and especially sensitive passages.”⁶⁸

- **Russia and Germany**

On 8 February, a regional lawmaker from Germany has called Western sanctions against Russia “counterproductive,” and said accepting the choice that the Crimean people made in 2014 could bring peace to Ukraine. A delegation of nine regional lawmakers from Germany is visiting Crimea on seven-day visit organized by the Alternative for Germany

⁶⁵Rich Edson, “Russians already meddling in US midterms, Tillerson says”, *Fox News*, 7 February 2018. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/02/06/russians-already-meddling-in-us-midterms-tillerson-says.html> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁶⁶Vladimir Isachenkov, “Russia Questions U.S. Compliance With a Key Nuclear Arms Control Treaty”, *Times*, February 6, 2018. <http://time.com/5134735/russia-united-states-nuclear-treaty/> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁶⁷Joel Gehrke, “State Department: Russia, Iran a threat to Afghanistan”, *Washington Examiner*, February 6, 2018. <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/state-department-russia-iran-a-threat-to-afghanistan/article/2648255> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁶⁸Michael Daventry, “Trump blocks release of Democrats’ FBI Russia intelligence memo”, *Euronews*, February 10, 2018. <http://www.euronews.com/2018/02/10/trump-blocks-release-of-democrats-fbi-russia-intelligence-memo> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

political party. They said that Ukraine should accept the will of the Crimean people. They said that Europe is slowly awakening to the fact that Crimea has returned to Russia forever. A public opinion poll conducted in Germany by TNS research in late 2014 showed that 54 percent of German citizens recognized the accession of Crimea to Russia as something that has already happened. Meanwhile, 60 percent of the respondents described the West's reaction to this event as adequate.⁶⁹

- **Russia and Lithuania**

President Dalia Grybauskaitė on 5 February said that Russia has deployed additional nuclear-capable missiles in its Baltic Sea exclave of Kaliningrad on a permanent basis, calling it a threat to Europe. After visiting NATO troops in the central Lithuanian town of Rukla that "Iskander missiles are being stationed in Kaliningrad for permanent presence as we speak." She called it a threat not only to Lithuania but to "half of all European countries."⁷⁰

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **ARG-Jamiat Resume Talks As UNAMA Urges Peaceful Settlement**

After a two week delay, the Presidential Palace (ARG) and Jamiat-e-Islami party of Afghanistan have reportedly resumed their negotiations in a bid to break the stalemate that erupted between the two sides following the dismissal of Atta Mohammad Noor as Balkh governor. Delegations from the two sides entered dialogue for the tenth consecutive round on 06 February 2018 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul. However, sources speaking on condition of anonymity, said the talks ended without any breakthrough. Noor who still insists he is the legitimate governor of Balkh has meanwhile fired Sholgarah district governor from his post. Differences exist on a number of issues such as electronic identity cards, election reforms and the issue of party-based parliament etc. Sources say government has asked the United Nations to undertake a technical assessment of the issue so that it can take a decision based on the UN study. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said the international body wants the government-Jamiat rift to be resolved as soon as possible.⁷¹

⁶⁹"German lawmaker opposes anti-Russian sanctions, urges Ukraine to accept Crimean people's choice", *RT*, February 8, 2018. <https://www.rt.com/politics/418191-german-lawmaker-opposes-anti-russian/> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁷⁰Jari Tanner, "Lithuania: Russia deploying more missiles into Kaliningrad", *ABC News*, February 5, 2018. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/lithuania-russia-deploying-missiles-kaliningrad-52852393> Accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁷¹ Karim Amini, "ARG-Jamiat Resume Talks As UNAMA Urges Peaceful Settlement", *Tolonews*, 06 February 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/arg-jamiat-resume-talks-unama-urges-peaceful-settlement> accessed on 07 February 2018.

- **Iran Offers Support to Afghanistan in Fighting Terrorism**

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has said the presence of US military bases in Afghanistan is fuelling insecurity in the region and in Afghanistan. Rouhani also offered to help Afghanistan in its campaign against terrorism. Meanwhile Iran's top military commander on 06 February 2018 said that the United States is transferring Daesh to Afghanistan now that the terrorists have lost their strongholds in Iraq and Syria. But, US officials also accuse the Iran of supporting the militant groups. In his telephonic conversation with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, President Rouhani said that the US deployed its forces in Afghanistan under the pretext of bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan, but the country continue to suffer from extensive security threats. It was said that recent attacks in Afghanistan's capital Kabul indicate that the security is deteriorating in the country which is backed by the US.⁷²

- **Afghanistan-Indonesia to Open Air Corridor**

Commerce ministry said Afghanistan and Indonesia have formed committees to work on opening an air corridor between the two countries. MoCI spokesman Musafir Quqandi said with the establishment of this air corridor, Afghanistan's exports will increase significantly. Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) meanwhile said Indonesia is a good market for Afghanistan products and by the establishment of the air corridor, Afghan traders will export dried and fresh fruits, carpets and medicinal herbs to Indonesia. Currently Afghanistan has one air cargo corridor with India but wants to establish air corridors with another five countries, including Indonesia. The presidential palace, meanwhile, said since the openings of the air corridor between Afghanistan and India, over 1,000 tons of goods have been exported to India on 65 flights. According to the commerce ministry, currently the trade volume between Afghanistan and Indonesia is about \$6 million USD.⁷³

- **Pakistan-Afghanistan Talks End without Progress**

Afghanistan's two-day dialogue with Pakistan ended on 10 February 2018 without progress on issues dividing the two countries and fuelling bilateral tensions, officials said. Islamabad hosted the meeting of what is named the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, or APAPPS. The inaugural round of the Pakistan-initiated dialogue was held in Kabul on 03 February 2018. Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mohammad Faisal said the two sides held "good" discussions with "some agreements" but said, "further work [was] required". He said Pakistani Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua and Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai led their respective delegations comprising senior civilian and military officials. However, an Afghan Foreign

⁷² Shabeer Ahmadi, "Iran Offers Support to Afghanistan in Fighting Terrorism", *Tolonews*, 07 February 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/iran-offers-support-afghanistan-fighting-terrorism> accessed on 08 February 2018.

⁷³ "Afghanistan-Indonesia to Open Air Corridor", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, 07 February 2018. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20131 accessed on 08 February 2018.

Ministry statement issued in Kabul after Saturday's talks categorically said the discussions made no headway on matters related to deteriorating security in Afghanistan.⁷⁴

Bangladesh

- **AL to capitalise on Khaleda conviction**

The Awami League (AL) is planning to use the graft case judgement against Khaleda Zia during its campaign for the next general election to be held at the year-end. AL insiders said party leaders and workers have already been instructed to create awareness among people that the BNP chief and her son Tarique Rahman were involved in corruption during their past tenure. Now they have been proved as corrupt politicians by the court.⁷⁵

- **JMB launches India chapter**

A new chapter of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) has been formed in India under the banner of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen India (JMI), confirmed Salahuddin Salehin and Jahidul Islam, two terrorists on Bangladesh's most wanted list. Both India and Bangladesh have offered rewards for any information related to the absconding duo.⁷⁶

Myanmar claims jurisdiction over no man's land, threatens Rohingyas Claiming jurisdiction over the no man's land along Bangladesh border, officials of the Myanmar government has asked Rohingya refugees staying in the area to return to their homeland on terms and conditions put forward by Naypyidaw. Sounding a note of warning, the government officials also said hundreds of Rohingyas would be in trouble if they chose to reject this proposal.⁷⁷

- **BNP announces 3-day fresh protest**

The BNP has announced a three-day agitation, including hunger-strike and sit-in, protesting the imprisonment of Khaleda Zia. It will form one-hour human chain on Monday (February 12), stage sit-in on Tuesday (February 13) and organise a seven-hour hunger-strike on Wednesday (February 14) across the country. BNP Senior Joint Secretary General, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, announced the programmes at a press conference at the

⁷⁴ "Pakistan-Afghanistan Talks End without Progress", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, 12 February 2018. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20173 accessed on 12 February 2018.

⁷⁵ Abu Zakir, "AL to capitalise on Khaleda conviction," *The Independent*, February 12, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/136919>, accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁷⁶ "JMB launches India chapter," *Dhaka Tribune*, February 12, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2018/02/12/jmb-launches-india-chapter/>, accessed on February 12, 2018.

⁷⁷ "Myanmar claims jurisdiction over no man's land, threatens Rohingyas," *Dhaka Tribune*, February 11, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2018/02/11/myanmar-claims-jurisdiction-no-mans-land-threatens-rohingyas/>, accessed on February 11, 2018.

party's Naya Paltan headquarters yesterday (February 10), after ending the two-day nationwide protest against Khaleda's imprisonment.⁷⁸

Graft case verdict sends Khaleda Zia to jail for 5 years

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia landed in jail after a Dhaka court found her guilty in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case on Thursday (February 8). The judge read out selected excerpts from the 632-page verdict. She has been sent to the old Dhaka Central Jail in Nazimuddin Road, with only a domestic help keeping her company.⁷⁹

Pakistan

- **Jadhav now facing trial on terrorism, sabotage charges**

Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was last year convicted and sentenced to death by a military tribunal for alleged espionage, is now undergoing trial on terrorism and sabotage charges. A government official explained that Jadhav has multiple cases against him in which he had been indicted on terror- and sabotage-related charges. The cases were progressing, he said, emphasising the one relating to espionage had only concluded.⁸⁰

- **Chinese business in Pakistan**

The US House of Representatives joined the Senate on February 6th in seeking to end US economic aid to Pakistan while the Trump administration has already suspended military aid. The movers say they are seeking the ban because Pakistan “provides military aid and intelligence” to terrorists, a charge Islamabad strongly denies.⁸¹ Pakistani military's top brass on February 7th signalled cooperation with the United States and at the same time reassured the nation that there would be no compromise on national interest while doing so. “National interest shall be kept at premium while cooperating with all other stakeholders for regional peace and stability,” the corps commanders resolved at their monthly meeting chaired by Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa at the General Headquarters.⁸²

- **ADB, Climate Change and Pakistan**

⁷⁸ “BNP announces 3-day fresh protest,” *The Independent*, February 11, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/136775>, accessed on February 11, 2018.

⁷⁹ Ashif Islam Shaon, Md Sanaul Islam Tipu, Kamrul Hasan, “Graft case verdict sends Khaleda Zia to jail for 5 years,” *Dhaka Tribune*, February 9, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/court/2018/02/09/graft-case-verdict-sends-khaleda-zia-jail-5-years/>, accessed on February 9, 2018.

⁸⁰ Baqir Sajjad Syed “Jadhav now facing trial on terrorism, sabotage charges”, *Dawn*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1387502> accessed on February 12, 2018

⁸¹ Anwar Iqbal, “Bill to end US aid to Pakistan moved in House of Representatives too”, *Dawn*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1387821> accessed on February 12, 2018

⁸² Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Commanders show readiness for cooperation with US”, *Dawn*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1388054> accessed on February 12, 2018

A report launched by ADB titled “Climate Change Profile of Pakistan”, prepared by Dr Qamar Uz Zaman Chaudhry, an international climate technology expert and former director general of the Pakistan Meteorological Department anticipated that Pakistan’s greenhouse emissions will double in two years and surge 14 times by 2050 — much higher than the world average. This will pose serious threats to the country’s population, as well as lower agricultural and energy outputs.⁸³

- **Pakistan, Jordan agree to expand trade**

Pakistan and Jordan on February 8th agreed to enhance bilateral trade as King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein opened his two-day working visit to Pakistan. The Jordanian king is visiting Pakistan after 11 years on the invitation of President Mamnoon Hussain. He led a high-level delegation of Jordanian officials.⁸⁴ Pakistan and Jordan agreed on February 9th to enhance cooperation in diverse areas, including education, culture, defence, and through people-to-people contacts and further discussions in this regard would take place during a meeting of the Pakistan-Jordan Joint Ministerial Commission in March. The prime minister briefed the visiting dignitary on the situation along the Line of Control, Pakistan’s counterterrorism efforts and its commitment to regional peace.⁸⁵

- **US Drone attack**

Three suspected militants were killed in a US drone strike at a compound close to the Afghan border in North Waziristan Agency on February 8th. According to an official of the political administration, two missiles were fired at the compound in the Gorwek area across the border near Zero Point.⁸⁶

- **Pakistan Afghanistan Dialogue**

The second round of Pakistan-Afghanistan talks on an engagement plan on peace and security issues ended on February 10th without making any headway on its key elements because the Afghan delegation felt that their priorities were not being addressed. The two sides could not only agree on a joint statement to sum up the two-day proceedings, but gave divergent accounts about the outcome. The Pakistani version came through Foreign Office spokesman Dr Muhammad Faisal’s 12-word tweet that essentially said more needed to be done to bridge the difference of opinion with regards to the proposed Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). The tweet did not even say if the two sides would meet again and possibly when. The Afghan statement, meanwhile, said: “No progress was achieved on specific, result-oriented, time-bound measures in the

⁸³ Khaleeq Kiani, “ADB climate change report paints apocalyptic scenario for Pakistan”, *Dawn*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1387809> accessed on February 12, 2018

⁸⁴ “Pakistan, Jordan agree to expand trade”, *Dawn*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1388285> accessed on February 12, 2018

⁸⁵ “Pakistan, Jordan agree to boost cooperation”, *Dawn*, February 10, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1388495> accessed on February 12, 2018

⁸⁶ Pazir Gul, “US drone kills three ‘militants’ in N Waziristan”, *Dawn*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1388283> accessed on February 12, 2018

APAPPS, particularly in the areas of counterterrorism, reduction of violence, peace and reconciliation to meet the priorities of Afghanistan.”⁸⁷

Indian Ocean Region

- **Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba visited Saudi Arabia from 4 to 8 February to deepen defence ties between the two countries**

To deepen defence ties between with Saudi Arabia, chief of the Indian Navy Admiral Sunil Lamba visited Saudi Arabia from February 4 to 8. During the visit Admiral Sunil Lamba held extensive talks with Saudi's top defence officials including Chief of General Staff of Royal Saudi Armed Forces General Abdul Rahman bin Saleh Al-Bunyan and Commander of Royal Saudi Naval Forces Vice-Admiral Fahd bin Abdulla Al-Ghofaily to further consolidate cooperation between the defence forces of the two countries.⁸⁸ The visiting Navy Chief also held talks with Saudi Arabia's deputy defence minister Mohammad bin Abdullah Al-Aysesh,⁸⁹

- **India to begin first-ever UAE naval exercises in March 2018**

India is looking forward to begin its first ever naval exercise off the shores of Abu Dhabi in March 2018. Indian Ambassador to UAE, Navdeep Surie said,⁹⁰ " it shows recognition that we have a shared interest in maritime security against piracy, in keeping the sea lanes open, in ensuring the freedom of navigation and perhaps also the recognition of what our forefathers knew: that our countries are neighbours separated only by water.”⁹¹

- **Six Indian Navy submarines to be upgraded**

Indian firms have made tie up with Russian, German OEMs for the refit of ships and submarines.⁹² To overcome the deficit in the number of ships and submarines, the Indian Navy has already commenced the course of action to upgrade six of its oldest submarines.⁹³ According to a media report " At ₹1,000 crore per boat, INS Sindhukesari, INS Sindhuraj, INS Sindhuratna, INS Sindhughosh, INS Shishumar and INS Shankush have been identified for the Major Refit and Life Certification (MRLC) programme.”⁹⁴ According to sources (as Business line quoted, “time and cost overruns and controversies

⁸⁷ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Success eludes second round of Pak-Afghan security talks”, *Dawn*, February 11, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1388728> accessed on February 12, 2018

⁸⁸ Navy Chief's Saudi visit to deepen defence ties, February 10, 2018, <http://www.asianage.com/india/all-india/100218/navy-chiefs-saudi-visit-to-deepen-defence-ties.html> (Accessed on 12 February, 2018)

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ India to begin first-ever UAE naval exercises next month, <http://www.uniindia.com/india-to-begin-first-ever-uae-naval-exercises-next-month/world/news/1133425.html#IF2aCdeXQfRctx2v.99> (Accessed on 12 February, 2018)

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Six Indian Navy submarines to be upgraded, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/six-indian-navy-submarines-to-be-upgraded/article22681899.ece> (Accessed on 12 February, 2018)

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

have delayed the induction of the six Scorpene submarines. By the time all the Scorpene join the fleet, the oldest will have completed its tenure. The service life of a submarine typically varies between 25-30 years.”⁹⁵

- **China to develop anti-missile shields for Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean: Experts**

According to some military experts China is developing sea-based anti-missile systems and plans to deploy them in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean,⁹⁶ This assessment came out after Beijing's declaration of successful test of its ground based mid course defence system on February 5, 2018.⁹⁷ A military commentator Song Zhongping said, "China's sea-based anti-missile system aims to defend both its territory and overseas interests, because sea-based defence systems will be set up wherever its warships can go,"⁹⁸ "The first area it will target is the Asia-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean to protect its overseas interests,"⁹⁹ he further said.

Sri Lanka

- **SLPP wins 239 LG bodies, UNP 41**

The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) has secured 239 Local Government (LG) bodies including Municipals Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas. The United National Party (UNP) won 41 LG bodies and the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) won 34 LG bodies. Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) secured 10 LG bodies¹⁰⁰.

- **It's clear country needs a change: MR**

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa who led the new political party, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) to the Local Government election victory, said it was clear that Sri Lanka needs a change. "Thank you to all who supported the vision of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna at the LG election. Your voices have been heard. It's clear that our country needs a change," he said in a tweet.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ China plans sea-based anti-missile shields 'for Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean', February 8, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/08/china-plans-sea-based-anti-missile-shields-for-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean.html> (Accessed on 12 February, 2018)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ SLPP wins 239 LG bodies, UNP 41, 11 February 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/SLPP-wins-LG-bodies-UNP--145619.html>

¹⁰¹ It's clear country needs a change: MR, 11 February 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/It-s-clear-country-needs-a-change-MR-145621.html>

- **SLPP to push for snap General Elections following surprise win**

The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) is to push for a snap General Election following its surprise win at the Local Government (LG) elections. SLPP sources said that the party led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa will ride on the public confidence it had obtained at the LG elections to push for a snap General Election¹⁰².

- **I take full responsibility: President**

President Maithripala Sirisena has told SLFP ministers that he would introduce far reaching changes to the government following the LG polls results in the days to come. “I take full responsibility for the SLFP’s electoral setback. The people of the country have voted for a change and I will respond positively to their message and introduce necessary changes accordingly as soon as possible,” President Sirisena has reportedly told the ministers¹⁰³.

- **EU adds SL to money laundering blacklist**

The European Parliament has confirmed that Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Trinidad and Tobago were on the European Commission’s blacklist of countries at risk for acts of money-laundering. In a statement, the European Parliament on Wednesday said despite intense efforts by some Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), they have failed to achieve the 376-vote absolute majority needed to reject the inclusion of Tunisia, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago in the European Commission’s list of non-EU countries considered to have strategic deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and terrorism financing regimes¹⁰⁴.

Maldives

- **Election body set to obey Supreme Court ruling on lawmakers**

There will be no by-elections for 12 constituencies, the Elections Commission said as it appeared to obey a Supreme Court ruling to reinstate lawmakers who were stripped of their seats. The constituencies are those where lawmakers lost their seats after being expelled from the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM). A Supreme Court verdict on February 1 ordered their reinstatement, giving the opposition a majority in parliament¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰² SLPP to push for snap General Elections following surprise win, 11 February 2018,

<http://colombogazette.com/2018/02/11/slpp-to-push-for-snap-general-elections-following-surprise-win/>

¹⁰³ I take full responsibility: President, 12 February 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/I-take-full-responsibility-President-145622.html>

¹⁰⁴ EU adds SL to money laundering blacklist, 9 February 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/EU-adds-SL-to-money-laundering-blacklist-145480.html>

¹⁰⁵ Election body set to obey Supreme Court ruling on lawmakers, 11 February 2018,

<http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/election-body-set-to-obey-supreme-court-ruling-on-lawmakers-135803>

- **China rebukes Nasheed over Maldives land grab claims**

China rebuked former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed for saying it is on a land grab in the troubled archipelago, calling his claims nonsense. Nasheed last month told reporters the Asian giant was on a shopping spree in the Maldives. “A large, emerging power is busy buying up the Maldives,” he said. “Buying up our islands, buying up our key infrastructure, and effectively buying up our sovereignty. This land grab is very worrying¹⁰⁶.”

- **UN Security Council told Maldives crisis may worsen**

A senior UN official warned the Security Council that the situation in the Maldives where the president has declared a state of emergency may deteriorate even further. The top UN body met behind closed doors to discuss the crisis sparked by President Abdulla Yameen’s decision to arrest judges who had ordered the release of his political opponents¹⁰⁷.

- **State of emergency creates “dangerous concentration of power”: UN Rights Commissioner**

The United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein has said that the declaration of state of emergency in Maldives by President Abdulla Yameen would sabotage the “checks and balances” needed for a fully functioning democracy.

A state of emergency was declared for 15 days on February 5, following the Supreme Court verdict to release nine political leaders and to reinstate 12 suspended parliament members. The declaration suspends several functions of the judiciary and parliament, and allows more power to the state. It also suspends the Criminal Procedure Code. In the statement released from Zeid’s office, he said that the current turn of events creates a “dangerous concentration of power in the hands of the president¹⁰⁸.”

- **Situation in Maldives: MEA Statement**

India issued a press release on 6th February, “we are disturbed by the declaration of a State of Emergency in the Maldives following the refusal of the Government to abide by the unanimous ruling of the full bench of the Supreme Court on 1 February, and also by the suspension of Constitutional rights of the people of Maldives. The arrest of the Supreme Court Chief Justice and political figures are also reasons for concern. Government continues to carefully monitor the situation”.¹⁰⁹

- **President Declares State of Emergency**

¹⁰⁶ China rebukes Nasheed over Maldives land grab claims, 8th February 2018,

<http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/china-rebuked-nasheed-over-maldives-land-grab-claims-135753>

¹⁰⁷ UN Security Council told Maldives crisis may worsen, 9 February 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/un-security-council-told-maldives-crisis-may-worsen/>

¹⁰⁸ State of emergency creates “dangerous concentration of power”: UN Rights Commissioner, 8 February 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/state-of-emergency-creates-dangerous-concentration-of-power-un-rights-commissioner/>

¹⁰⁹ Situation in Maldives, 6th February, http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29415/Situation_in_Maldives

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has declared State of Emergency, under Article 253 of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, for the next 15 days. The state of emergency was declared by a Presidential Decree (No. 2018/3) issued on 5 February 2018. As per the Presidential Decree, the state of emergency was enforced in order to protect the peace and welfare of all citizens and the country, following the events that unfolded in relation to the Supreme Court Order No. 2018/SC-SJ/01, issued on 1 February 2018; which has resulted in; the disruption of the functions of the executive power and the State institutions vested with specific mandates under the Constitution, the infringement of national security and public interest, and if implemented, which would potentially lead to an undermining of the supremacy of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives¹¹⁰.

West Asia

Turkey

- **Turkish, US military officials start daily meetings¹¹¹**

Officials from the Turkish and U.S. military have started conducting daily meetings, with U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis reportedly on his way to Brussels Sunday where he is scheduled to meet his Turkish counterpart Nurettin Canikli amid Turkish operations in Afrin against the U.S. partner force People's Protection Units (YPG).

Mattis said the U.S. was assisting Turkey "in terms of missile defense and counter-terrorism" and acknowledged areas of disagreement on how to take down Daesh as quickly as possible. "But they have a legitimate security concern, and we do not dismiss one bit of that, along their border with Syria," he said. The U.S. partner force on the ground, known as YPG, is the Syrian extension of the PKK, a U.S.-designated terror group.

- **Turkey slams Greek Cyprus over gas drilling works as tensions increase in eastern Mediterranean¹¹²**

Turkey has reiterated its determination in not abandoning its rights and Turkish Cypriots' rights over the rich hydrocarbon reserves off Cyprus to unilateral actions of the Greek Cypriot administration, as news reports suggested Turkish warships have blocked a rig around the island that belongs to Italy's energy firm ENI.

"Despite all our warnings, the Greek Cypriot Administration continues its unilateral hydrocarbon-related activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. It does so in disregard of the

¹¹⁰ President Declares State of Emergency, 9th February, 2018,

<http://foreign.gov.mv/index.php/en/mediacentre/news/4335-president-declares-state-of-emergency>

¹¹¹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/02/12/turkish-us-military-officials-start-daily-meetings>

¹¹² Hurriyet Daily News, 11 February 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-slams-greek-cyprus-over-gas-drilling-works-as-tensions-increase-in-eastern-mediterranean-127132>

inalienable rights on natural resources of the Turkish Cypriot people, who are the co-owners of the Island,” read a written statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Feb. 11.

“Within this context, we have most recently observed that there is an intention to commence activities in block number three in the Greek Cypriot Administration’s so-called exclusive economic zone,” it added.

- **Presidential spokesman Kalın meets Trump’s national security advisor**¹¹³

Turkish Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın met with U.S. President Donald Trump’s national security advisor, H.R. McMaster, in Istanbul on Feb. 11, at a time of tense relations between the two NATO allies.

At the meeting, the two officials discussed Turkey and the United States’ long-term strategic partnership and the priorities and concerns of the two countries, the president’s office said in a written statement.

During the meeting, relations between the two allies were discussed on common strategic challenges and regional developments. “In this framework, the issues that negatively affect bilateral relations have been dealt with in detail and the ways of developing joint action against every kind of terrorism have been investigated,” the statement read.

The meeting came days before a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s visit to Ankara as the countries are at odds on various issues, with the biggest problem being the U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG).

While the U.S. sees the group as an ally in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Turkey considers it as an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), hence a terrorist group.

- **Military operations ‘must be taken seriously,’ İYİ Party leader Akşener says**¹¹⁴

All steps of military operations “must be taken seriously,” said İYİ (Good) Party leader Meral Akşener on Feb. 10, criticizing the ruling Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) “frivolous” approach towards “Operation Olive Branch,” which was launched by Turkey in northwestern Syria.

Speaking in the western city of Denizli, Akşener said the seriousness of this military operation has not been sufficiently realized.

¹¹³ Hurriyet Daily News, 11 February 2018,

¹¹⁴ Hurriyet Daily News, 11 February 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/military-operations-must-be-taken-seriously-iyi-party-leader-aksener-says-127143>

“They are sending soldiers to Afrin with a flourish of trumpets and displaying soldiers and commanders without any seriousness. However, military operations are serious and they need to be taken seriously,” said Akşener.

She also slammed President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for his remarks regarding the military operation.

“He says ‘It is just a warm-up, we are only at the bottom of the ladder.’ You should be ashamed of this statement. It is not a football game. It is about soldiers who struggle with full effort and are ready to die for their country,” she said.

- **Afrin operation should not expand to city center, says CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu¹¹⁵**

The main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) supports “Operation Olive Branch” as it does not want any terrorist groups nesting on Turkey’s borders, CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has said, but added that Turkish forces should not enter the center of Afrin.

Speaking in an interview with daily Hürriyet, Kılıçdaroğlu said his party already deemed the People’s Protection Units (YPG) and the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) as terrorist organizations.

Turkish Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın previously accused some members of the CHP of indirectly supporting the YPG and PYD. “The ruling party hosted PYD leader Salih Muslim in Ankara despite a Supreme Court ruling that designated it as a terrorist organization, and I brought it up to the agenda. That’s why they are accusing the CHP of backing the group,” Kılıçdaroğlu said.

Last week, Kılıçdaroğlu announced that the CHP filed a criminal complaint against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) on the grounds that it engaged with the PYD despite a previous court ruling.

Kılıçdaroğlu also underlined that they support “Operation Olive Branch,” which was launched by Turkey on Jan. 20 in the Afrin district of Syria against the YPG, but added that the government should refrain from pushing Turkish troops into Afrin’s city center to avoid military casualties.

“As we did for Operation Euphrates Shield, we supported the military operation in Afrin, too, as we do not want any terrorist groups nesting on our borders. Indeed, we need to secure our borders,” he said.

“However, it is something else to enter the city center of Afrin. Why would you enter a city center with a population of 500,000 people? How can you distinguish terrorists from others? There can be a bloodbath if we enter the city center,” he added.

¹¹⁵ Hurriyet Daily News, 11 February 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/afrin-operation-should-not-expand-to-city-center-says-chp-leader-kilicdaroglu-127150>

Kılıçdaroğlu also criticized President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's remarks that "it is necessary to go to the east of Manbij and Euphrates to destroy all terror nests."

- **HDP elects Buldan, Temelli as new co-heads¹¹⁶**

The opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) elected Pervin Buldan and Sezai Temelli on Feb. 11 as its new co-leaders in the party's third ordinary convention held in the absence of former HDP co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş and six other lawmakers, who are under arrest.

"We are taking an open stance for peace in the homeland and abroad. We defend peace," Buldan said on Feb. 11 in Ankara in her speech as a candidate.

"The year 2018 will be a year when the HDP will contribute to the struggle of peace and democracy," Temelli said.

Apart from its co-leaders, the party also elected its 100-member party council.

As a coalition of several political parties, HDP elects its co-leaders to represent both Turkey's left and Kurdish political movements, while also carrying out a gender equality policy by electing one man and one woman to the posts.

Buldan has been a lawmaker since 2007 and serves as a deputy parliamentary speaker.

She was a key figure in the peace process between Ankara and outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 2009 and 2015, as a part of the delegation that carried out meetings with PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who is serving a life sentence in the İmralı island prison.

GCC & Saudi Arabia

- **PM Visited three Gulf Countries, Palestine, UAE and Oman, 10-12 February 2018.**

Indian Prime Minister made a three-day visit to three Gulf countries, Palestine, UAE and Oman. His visit to Palestine was important from many dimensions. He was the first Prime Minister of India to visit Palestine and that too was standalone visit. He was received by his counterpart Hamadallah and later on by President Mahmud Abbas. President Mahmud Abbas honored him with the highest civilian award, Grand Collar Award of Palestine. The two countries signed six MoUs and the Indian PM donated US\$ 50 million to build multispecialty hospital, women empowerment centre, opening of

¹¹⁶Hurriyet Daily News, 11 February 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hdp-elects-its-new-co-leaders-127145>

schools at two places and for building Palestine Diplomatic Institute.¹¹⁷ All these are in the direction of capacity building of Palestinians.

Thereafter, PM departed to UAE to address the sixth World Government Summit. Here he spoke on Technology for Development and explained how India under his vision, which is based on technology-driven order, has made progress. In UAE, the two sides signed five agreement related to energy, institutionalizing the collaborative administration of contractual employment of Indian workers in UAE, technical cooperation in railways, agreements between stock exchanges of the two countries for easy financial transactions, and DP World signed agreement with J&K on warehouse and specialized storage solution.¹¹⁸ ONGC Videsh also signed an agreement with Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ANDCO) to own 10 per cent oil share in lower Zakum.¹¹⁹

After UAE, PM Modi finally visited to Oman. There too, both countries signed eight agreements. These agreements are related to judicial cooperation in Civil and Commercial matter, MoU in health, special use of oyster space, cooperation between Foreign Service Institute of MEA and Oman Diplomatic Institute, MoU between IDSA of India and Oman's national Defence Collage, cooperation in the field of tourism and military cooperation.¹²⁰

Israel

- **Israel Palestine Conflict and Jordan**

King Abdullah II of Jordan said on February 4th that the United States remains essential to any hope of a peaceful solution between Israel and the Palestinians, despite criticism of the new US stance on Jerusalem by Arab states and the Palestinians. He stated that “We cannot have a peace process or a peace solution without the role of the United States”.¹²¹ Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's spokesman blamed US Ambassador to

¹¹⁷ <http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29474/English+Translation+of+Press+Statement+by+Prime+Minister+during+his+visit+to+Palestine+February+10+2018>

¹¹⁸ <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29473/List+of+MoUs+signed+during+Prime+Ministers+visit+to+United+Arab+Emirates>

¹¹⁹ <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29476/IndiaUAE+Joint+Statement+during+State+Visit+of+the+Prime+Minister+of+India+to+UAE+February+10+2018>

¹²⁰ http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29478/List_of_AgreementsMoUs_signed_on_the_occasion_of_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Oman_February_11_2018

¹²¹ “Jordan king says no Israeli-Palestinian peace without US role”, *The Times of Israel*, February 4, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordan-king-says-no-israeli-palestinian-peace-without-us-role/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=7604cdbe27-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_04&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-7604cdbe27-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

Israel David Friedman on February 8th for the “crisis in US-Palestinian relations.”¹²² US President Donald Trump said in an interview published February 9th that recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital was a “high point” of his first year in office, but that Israel will have to make “hard compromises for peace” in return.¹²³ Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is expected to ask Russian President Vladimir Putin to help form an international multilateral mechanism for sponsoring the peace process between the Palestinians and Israel when he met President Putin on February 11th to sideline US.¹²⁴

- **Israel and African Migrants**

Several thousand Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers protested outside the Rwandan embassy in Herzliya on February 7th over the country’s agreement with Israel allowing them to be forcibly deported there. Israeli authorities have launched a major drive to deport the vast majority of the 38,000 African asylum seekers and migrants still in the country, most of whom are from Eritrea and Sudan. Thousands of the migrants have been told they have 60 days to accept an offer to leave the country for an unnamed African destination (Rwanda or Uganda) in exchange for \$3,500 and a plane ticket. Those who don’t leave by April 1 will be incarcerated indefinitely.¹²⁵ African migrants facing deportation say they would rather be imprisoned than sent to a country they know nothing about.¹²⁶ It has been reported that Israel is in negotiations with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees to resettle a portion of African asylum seekers in third countries deemed by the UN to be “safe,” possibly including Western countries, in exchange for some of the refugees to be given permanent residency in Israel.¹²⁷

¹²² “Abbas spokesman blames US envoy for ‘crisis’ in US-Palestinian relations”, *The Times of Israel*, February 8, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-spokesman-blames-us-envoy-for-crisis-in-us-palestinian-relations/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=6714822176-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-6714822176-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

¹²³ Sue Surkes, “Trump tells Israel it will also have to make ‘hard compromises for peace’”, *The Times of Israel*, February 9, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-tells-israel-it-will-have-to-make-hard-compromises-for-peace/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=6714822176-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-6714822176-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

¹²⁴ Khaled Abu Toameh, “Abbas heads to Moscow in bid to sideline US from peace process”, *The Times of Israel*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-heads-to-moscow-in-bid-to-sideline-us-from-peace-process/> accessed on February 12, 2018

¹²⁵ “Thousands of African migrants protest deportations at Rwandan embassy”, *The Times of Israel*, February 7, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/thousands-of-african-migrants-protest-deportations-at-rwandan-embassy/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=b9f46f5b28-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_05&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-b9f46f5b28-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

¹²⁶ Jonah Mandel, “African migrants in Israel opt for jail over deportation”, *The Times of Israel*, February 7, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/african-migrants-in-israel-opt-for-jail-over-deportation/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=b9f46f5b28-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_05&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-b9f46f5b28-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

¹²⁷ Melanie Lidman, “UNHCR in talks to send African migrants to ‘safe’ countries, let others stay”, *The Times of Israel*, February 7, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/unhcr-in-talks-to-send-african-migrants-to-safe-countries-let-others-stay/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=5a9b6017d8-EMAIL_WEEKEND_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-5a9b6017d8-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

- **Israel, Syria and Iran**

An Israeli F-16 was downed February 10th morning after Israel intercepted an Iranian drone launched from Syria into Israeli territory. According to the Israeli army, Syrian anti-aircraft missiles targeted the jet after Israel responded to the infiltration of the drone with a strike in Syria. The two F-16 pilots ejected as the plane went down in northern Israel. IDF Spokesman Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis said Israel “identified an Iranian drone which took off from Syrian territory. The drone was identified by IAF systems and was downed by an IAF helicopter. The Iranian drone fell in our territory and is in our possession”.¹²⁸ Iran and Syria on Saturday denied that an unmanned drone Israel said it shot down violated the Jewish state’s airspace, calling Israeli allegations “lies” and saying the drone was on a regular mission gathering intelligence on Islamic State.¹²⁹ Israel appealed to Russia to intervene and prevent further escalation after the present escalation of tensions, leading to “large-scale” Israeli strikes in Syria and heavy Syrian counter-fire. Moscow, in a statement, called for “restraint” of all parties in Syria and said it considered risking the lives of Russian soldiers “absolutely unacceptable” following large-scale Israeli air strikes inside Syria.¹³⁰ On February 8th the International Crisis Group think tank and advocacy firm warned in a new comprehensive report that Israel and Iran (plus its proxies) were barreling toward open conflict in Syria.¹³¹

- **Lebanon and Israel**

Lebanon on February 9th signed its first contract to drill for oil and gas off its coast with a consortium comprising energy giants Total, ENI, and Novatek, including in a block disputed by Israel. Israel says one of two blocks in the eastern Mediterranean where Lebanon wants to drill for oil belongs to it, and denounced any exploration by Beirut as “provocative.”¹³²

¹²⁸ Yaniv Kubovich, Jack Khoury, Noa Landau and Noa Shpigel, “Israel Downs Iranian Drone, Strikes Syria; Israeli F-16 Shot Down”, *Haaretz*, February 10, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/red-alert-sirens-sound-heavy-aerial-activity-in-northern-israel-1.5806508> accessed on February 12, 2018

¹²⁹ “After downing of Israeli F-16, Iran warns: ‘Era of Israeli strikes over’”, *The Times of Israel*, February 10, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-syria-deny-israeli-lies-that-drone-entered-its-territory/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=3b0f5475bc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-3b0f5475bc-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

¹³⁰ “Israel urges Russia to prevent further escalation in Syria”, *The Times of Israel*, February 10, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-urges-russia-to-prevent-further-escalation-in-syria/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=3b0f5475bc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-3b0f5475bc-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

¹³¹ Judah Ari Gross, “No longer shrouded by ‘foreign reports,’ Israel-Iran fight steps into the open”, *The Times of Israel*, February 11, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-iran-fight-once-waged-according-to-foreign-reports-enters-limelight/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=bf390a87b6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-bf390a87b6-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

¹³² “Lebanon signs offshore drilling deal amid dispute with Israel”, *The Times of Israel*, February 9, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/lebanon-signs-offshore-drilling-deal-amid-row-with-israel/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=3b0f5475bc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_02_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-3b0f5475bc-55556173 accessed on February 12, 2018

Cyber Security

- **National Meet on Grassroot Informatics: VIVID 2018: Weaving a Digital India**¹³³

Information revolution has altered every aspect of modern life, empowering society and knowledge economy. A three day event 'National Meet on Grassroot Informatics- VIVID 2018' took place in Delhi on 8-10 February 2018 inaugurated by Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad, Hon'ble Union Minister of Electronics & Information Technology and Law & Justice in the presence of various eminent public figures. The event was in sync with government's vision of transforming India digitally, held by National Informatics Centre (NIC). Since 1976, NIC have been quite actively promoting e-governance application within all departments of government bringing wider transparency and accountability. VIVID 2018, under the theme of 'Cyber Security and Innovation' empowered 240 NIC officials, exchanging each other knowledge and experiences. Amidst of rising cyber attacks, due to the greater use of cloud services and internet of things, this national event demonstrated various schemes of NIC in upgrading digital infrastructure to create better security in keeping confidential information of cyber space. At the event, the NIC launched two new innovative services i.e. Centre of Excellence for Application Security' (CoEAS) and 'Secure, Scalable & Sugamya Website as a Service' (S3WaaS).

- **Plastic or PVC Aadhaar Smart Card is not usable: UIDAI**¹³⁴

Dr. Ajay Bhushan Pandey, CEO, UIDAI in a statement on 6 February 2018 spoke about non significance of Plastic or PVC Aadhaar smart cards and said, "So-called Aadhaar Smart card is totally unnecessary and a waste as during such printing its QR code often becomes dysfunctional. The Aadhaar card or the downloaded Aadhaar card printed on ordinary paper or mAadhaar is perfectly valid for all kind of uses. There is no concept such as smart or plastic Aadhaar card". The statement came at a time when some vendors and shops issued Aadhaar smart cards for Rs 50 to Rs 300. In addition, the CEO asked citizen to protect the information available on Aadhaar card and not to share personal details to any organisation.

- **Cyber attack hits Olympics: Organisers confirm heist, don't reveal source**¹³⁵

It has been reported that the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang witnessed cyber attacks on 9 February 2018. Sung Baik-you, a spokesman for the Pyeongchang Organising Committee said that although the attack crashed the internal system, but it did not disrupt the main event that was attended by the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, and US Vice-President Mike Pence. The investigation began but it did not reveal the sources. According to the spokesman for the International Olympic Committee, Mark Adam, "At the moment we are making sure that our systems are secure, which they are, so discussing details of it is not helpful. I certainly don't know

¹³³ Public Information Bureau, 7 February 2018, <http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1519436>.

¹³⁴ Public Information Bureau, 6 February 2018, <http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1519253>

¹³⁵ Business Standard, 12 February 2018, http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/olympics-hit-by-cyberattack-source-not-revealed-118021100350_1.html

who it is, and best industry practice is that you don't talk about an attack at this stage". Cyber security experts suspected the hands of Russia and North Korea in the attack. Both North Korea and Russia slammed the accusation and regarded the allegation as absurd.

International Economic Issues

- **India invites over 40 WTO members for mini-ministerial meet**

According to a Commerce Ministry official India has sent out invitations to more than 40 World Trade Organisation (WTO) members, including the US, the EU, Brazil, Australia and several countries from across Asia and Africa, for an informal mini-ministerial gathering from March 19-20, 2018, where trade ministers are to deliberate upon ways to keep the multilateral organisation relevant and map the way ahead.¹³⁶

- **Indonesia strives for conclusion of RCEP talks**

At the 21st round of RCEP negotiations in Yogyakarta on February 2-9, 2018, Indonesian Trade Minister Enggartiasto Lukita said, "Indonesia is committed to accelerating negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)." Adding that Indonesia aimed to complete the talks in 2018, Enggartiasto said in a press statement on February 6, 2018, "The RCEP is our priority because it will greatly contribute to the growth of exports and investment in its member countries."¹³⁷

- **US blocks India's request for WTO compliance panel on solar dispute**

The US, on February 9, 2018, blocked India's first-time request for the establishment of a panel to settle a dispute on whether the country complied with a World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruling against domestic sourcing of solar cells and modules mandated in its national solar power generation programme. "The US continued to disagree with India's claims of compliance and reiterated its right to use WTO procedures for retaliation while also noting it remained open to work with India for a bilateral resolution", according to a Geneva-based trade official. At the Dispute Settlement Body's

¹³⁶ Amiti Sen, "India invites over 40 WTO members for mini-ministerial meet", BusinessLine, February 5, 2018, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/macro-economy/india-invites-over-40-wto-members-for-mini-ministerial-meet/article22661302.ece> (accessed on February 12, 2018)

¹³⁷ "Indonesia strives for conclusion of RCEP talks", The Jakarta Post, February 7, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/02/07/indonesia-strives-for-conclusion-of-rcep-talks.html> (accessed on February 12, 2018)

(DSB) meeting on February 9, Canada and the EU supported India's call for a compliance panel. "While Canada said that India's proposal was useful and appropriate given the procedural trend observed in other disputes, the EU pointed out that suspension of concessions may happen only after the WTO took a decision on compliance." India had called for a compliance panel to examine the matter and sort out the disagreement as it claimed that it had brought about changes in rules and procedures under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission and power purchase agreements no longer mandated domestic sourcing of cells and modules.¹³⁸

¹ Financial Express, "PM Narendra Modi meets Kyrgyz counterpart Sapar Isakov in Dubai," 11 February 2018, <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/pm-narendra-modi-meets-kyrgyz-counterpart-sapar-isakov/1061830/>

² Kabar, "Isakov and Modi discuss Kyrgyz-Indian cooperation," 11 Feb 2018, <http://kabar.kg/eng/news/isakov-and-modi-discuss-kyrgyz-indian-cooperation/>

³ Trend, "Kyrgyzstan to export seven kinds of products to India," AzerNews, 7 February 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/126737.html>

⁴ Business Standard, "Sitharaman holds talks with Tajik defence minister," 9 February 2018, http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/sitharaman-holds-talks-with-tajik-defence-minister-118020900136_1.html

¹³⁸ Amiti Sen, "US blocks India's request for WTO compliance panel on solar dispute" BusinessLine, February 9, 2018, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/us-blocks-indias-request-for-wto-compliance-panel-on-solar-dispute/article22708002.ece> (accessed on February 12, 2018)