

Weekly Media Updates **(25 March – 01 April, 2018)**

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Africa

- **Ethiopia Ranked Among Top 10 Investment Destinations in Africa¹**

Ethiopia is ranked among the top 10 most attractive investment destination in Africa in 2017, according to the latest Africa Investment Index 2018. An independent research arm of Quantum Global (QG), reported that Morocco ranks first on the Index, followed by Egypt and Algeria in the second and third places. Botswana ranks 4th, Cote d'Ivoire 5th, South Africa 6th, Ethiopia 7th, Zambia 8th, Kenya 9th, and Senegal 10th.

The bottom 10 African countries in attracting FDI are Central African Republic, Liberia, Somalia, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, and Zimbabwe. According to the Ethiopian Investment Commission, Ethiopia's manufacturing industries and export-oriented sectors are attracting a significant number of FDIs. The extensive infrastructural development and the all-round government's support to investors were among the major factors contributing to better FDI flow to the country.

Ethiopian Investment Commissioner Fitsum Arega told reporters on 28th march 2018, Wednesday that despite the unrest, the country has managed to attract 2.2 billion USD in the first half of this fiscal year, up by 22 percent from that of same period last year.

- **Govt Calls for UN Action Against UAE Base in Berbera²**

Somalia has urged the United Nations Security Council to take action against the construction of a United Arab Emirates (UAE) military base in Somaliland.

Speaking at the Security Council on Tuesday, Abukar Osman, Somalia's ambassador to the UN said the agreement between Somaliland and the UAE to establish the base in the port city of Berbera is a "clear violation of international law". Osman also called on the Security Council to "take the necessary steps" to "put an end to these actions".

He added that "the Federal Government of Somalia strongly condemns these blatant violations, and reaffirms that it will take the necessary measures deriving from its primary responsibility to defend the inviolability of the sovereignty and the unity of Somalia." The UAE began construction of the base last year, under an agreement with

¹ Ethiopian News Agency , 30 March 2018
http://allafrica.com/stories/201803300580.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabmrjk

² Shabelle Media Network, 28 March 2018,
http://allafrica.com/stories/201803280475.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Ainternal&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabafbt

officials in Somaliland, a northern region of Somalia that self-declared independence from the latter in 1991 following a civil war.

- **Revamped UN Strategy Aims to Address Root Causes of Sahel Crisis³**

The United Nations has reset its action plan to address the root causes of the complex crisis in Africa's Sahel, a region now home to one out of five people worldwide requiring humanitarian assistance, the UN deputy chief Amina Mohammed told at a conference being held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, to discuss strategies to tackle the Sahel crisis 28 March 2018.

A largely semi-arid region, the Sahel is plagued by the increasing threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism and its spread in surrounding countries and regions. This is compounded - or caused - by weak development progress in the Sahel and the impacts of climate change on food supplies, migration flows and conflict over land and resources.

These challenges promoted changes to the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel to better meet the needs of the 10 countries in the region. The Deputy Secretary-General said five key priorities on addressing the root causes of the crisis are: inclusive and equitable growth; public good services, including access to basic service, governance and rule of law; climate and energy; gender equality and women's empowerment; and security, including preventing violent extremism, transnational crime and human trafficking. Empowering youth is an overall priority, she added

- **South Africa's Economic Chief Hints at Privatization Drive⁴**

A key figure in charge of South Africa's economy has hinted at his appetite for privatizing the country's ailing state-owned enterprises (SOEs). "Why not?" responded National Treasury Director General Dondo Mogajane, when asked by Reuters Saturday if it was possible for segments of South Africa's publicly-owned firms to be sold. "There have to be new ways of looking at these things. Are we talking privatization? Are we talking equity partnership? Let's give an opportunity for new ministers to unpack what it means," he added. New South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, as part of his drive to revive the economy and stymie corruption, has spoken of reforming the country's more than 700 state-owned enterprises. These include utility firm Eskom, which provides most of the country's electricity, and South African Airways, both of which are loss-making.

³ UN News 29 March 2018

http://allafrica.com/stories/201803290427.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabljpw

⁴ CNBC, 26 March 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/26/south-africa-economy-chief-hints-at-privatization-moodys-upgrades.html>

- **South Africa's Zuma to Appear in Court on April 6 on Graft Charges⁵**

South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma was due to appear in court on April 6 to face charges of corruption in a years-old US\$2.5 billion arms deal, although he will legally challenge the decision to prosecute him, his lawyer said on Monday. The National Prosecuting Authority earlier this month said it would seek to prosecute Zuma on 16 charges, including fraud, racketeering, corruption and money laundering. The case is a dramatic development on a continent where leaders rarely face their accusers in court.

- **South Africa Could Run Out of Water by 2030 – Govt Draft Plan⁶**

South Africa will run out of water in 2030 unless there is a complete mind shift about the true value of water and a R899 billion investment into the sector for the next decade. This is a central message in the draft National Water and Sanitation Master Plan that outlines the dire situation of the country's water and sanitation sector, and lays out a turnaround strategy to avoid the country's demand for water outstripping supply in 12 years' time. The plan, which has had extensive input from a range of stakeholders, is due to be tabled before Cabinet in May. Two key issues that will become the new normal are that the price for water will increase and water demand will have to be cut significantly.

- **Tanzanian Opposition Leader is Charged with Rebellion⁷**

Tanzania has charged the leader of a major opposition party and five party members with inciting hatred and rebellion against the government. The case comes as critics accuse President John Magufuli of being intolerant of dissent in the East African nation. A statement by the court in Dar es Salaam says Freeman Mbowe and the other Chadema party members have been denied bail. The charges are related to their alleged roles in a protest last month during which police allegedly shot and killed a student. Also last month an opposition lawmaker was sentenced to five months in jail after he was convicted of insulting Magufuli.

- **Kenyan President Scraps Visa Requirement for Mozambique⁸**

Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta has told Mozambicans that they will no longer require a visa to visit his country. Kenyatta announced the scrapping of the visa requirement during a state banquet hosted for him and First Lady Margaret Kenyatta by President Filipe Nyusi and the First Lady of Mozambique, Isaura Nyusi, at the Ponta Vermelha Palace in Maputo on Thursday evening. "Our forefathers fought for

⁵ Reuters, 26 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-safrica-politics-zuma/south-africas-zuma-to-appear-in-court-on-april-6-on-graft-charges-idUSKBN1H2252>

⁶ News24, 29 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/south-africa-could-run-out-of-water-by-2030-govt-draft-plan-20180329>

⁷ News24, 28 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/tanzanian-opposition-leader-is-charged-with-rebellion-20180328>

⁸ Africa News, 30 March 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/03/30/kenyan-president-scraps-visa-requirement-for-mozambique/>

political liberation. It falls upon us to ensure economic liberation to ensure the artificial boundaries created by former colonial masters are removed and that our people are free to travel, trade, do business and marry without obstacles,” President Kenyatta said. President Kenyatta added that Kenya will this year open a consulate in Maputo with the aim of having a full mission next financial year.

- **Irresponsible Chinese Mining Operation in Mozambique Threatens to Wipe Out Coastal Village⁹**

An irresponsible Chinese mining operation in Mozambique has put an entire coastal village of more than a thousand people at serious risk of being washed into the Indian Ocean, Amnesty International revealed today in a new report. *Our lives mean nothing: the human cost of Chinese mining in Nagonha, Mozambique*, exposes how the operations of mining company, Haiyu, likely contributed significantly to a flash flood in 2015 in the village of Nagonha, which destroyed 48 homes and left 290 people homeless. The Mozambican authorities’ failure to regulate the industry in the wake of this disaster has also contributed to the risks to the village from the company’s ongoing mining operations. “The devastating flooding in 2015 should have been the catalyst for the Mozambican authorities to address Haiyu’s activities by implementing proper regulation,” said Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International’s Regional Director for Southern Africa. On top of the 48 houses destroyed by the flooding in 2015, local government authorities also recorded 173 more as partially destroyed. Local elders and authorities who had lived in Nagonha for more than 70 years told Amnesty International that they had no record of such floods occurring previously. Haiyu’s mining operations likely significantly contributed to devastating flooding.

- **Mozambique Makes 'Big Strides' in Long-Stalled Talks¹⁰**

Mozambique's three main political parties agreed on Tuesday to go ahead with constitutional reforms that will decentralise power as part of efforts to consolidate peace between the government and former rebels. "We have made significant strides," said Margarida Talapa of the ruling Frelimo party after it signed an accord with rebel force-turned-political party Renamo and another opposition party, the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM). She acknowledged, however, that "we could have done more". Hailing a "consensus document," Talapa's counterpart as the head of Renamo's parliamentary group, Ivone Soares, also said disagreements remained. The reforms being negotiated would see the governors of Mozambique's provinces elected directly, not named by the president as is currently the case. The deal would also require the disarmament of Renamo's armed wing which has been maintained since the end of the civil war in 1992. The process of revising the constitution is set to begin next month. Local elections are planned for October, with general elections to follow in a year.

⁹ Amnesty, 27 March 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/mozambique-china-mining-operation-poses-environmental-risk/>

¹⁰ News24, 28 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/mozambique-makes-big-strides-in-long-stalled-talks-20180327>

- **Zambia Asks Cuba to Recall Ambassador for Backing New Opposition Party¹¹**

Zambia has asked Cuba to recall its ambassador for openly supporting the newly launched opposition Socialist Party, the president's spokesman said on Sunday. Amos Chanda said ambassador Nelson Pages Vilas spoke at the party's launch on Saturday. Political tensions were rekindled in Zambia last month when the country's main opposition party, the United Party for National Development (UPND), filed a motion seeking to impeach President Edgar Lungu over accusations of breaching the constitution.

- **Zambia Postpones Opposition-Backed Impeachment Debate¹²**

Zambia's parliament delayed a debate on Wednesday on a motion seeking to impeach President Edgar Lungu over accusations of breaching the constitution. Zambia's main opposition party, the United Party for National Development (UPND), filed a motion last week. The notice set Wednesday as the date for the parliamentarians' debate and vote on the motion. The motion has rekindled tension in Africa's second-largest copper producer and threatens to derail Commonwealth-brokered talks between the government and opposition after disputed 2016 elections. "In view of the gravity of the motion, the same is being studied and we shall revert to you in due course," a letter read that was sent on Monday from the clerk of the National Assembly to Garry Nkombo, UPND parliamentary chief whip, who filed the motion. UPND spokesman Charles Kakoma said the motion would not be debated until parliament's next session begins in June. Signed by a third of the 166-member house, the motion needs the backing of two-thirds to succeed.

- **New Zimbabwe Political Party Launched¹³**

A new political party Multi People's Democratic Party of Zimbabwe has been launched in the capital with the aim of contesting in 2018 harmonised elections. The new dispensation and the run up to the elections has seen the formation of many political parties as people exercise their rights of participating in Zimbabwe's political terrain. In an interview with the State media on the sidelines of the launch of the party, the President of the political outfit Bishop Emmanuel Moyana said their aim is to address many issues that affect the general populace of Zimbabweans.

- **Angola Charges Son of Ex-President Dos Santos with Fraud¹⁴**

The son of Angola's ex-president, José Filomeno dos Santos, has been charged with fraud relating to a US\$500 million transaction out of an account belonging to the

¹¹ Reuters, 1 April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zambia-politics/zambia-asks-cuba-to-recall-ambassador-for-backing-new-opposition-party-idUSKCN1H817X>

¹² Business Day, 29 March 2018, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2018-03-29-zambia-postpones-opposition-backed-impeachment-debate/>

¹³ The Zimbabwe Mail, 30 March 2018, <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com/politics/new-zimbabwe-political-party-launched/>

¹⁴ CNBC, 27 March 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/27/angola-charges-son-of-ex-president-dos-santos-with-fraud.html>

central bank, the prosecutor general's office said on Monday. In a separate case, prosecutors also charged the head of the Angolan armed forces, Geraldo Sachiengo Nunda, with involvement in a scheme to negotiate a fraudulent international credit line of US\$50 billion. Dos Santos is the highest profile figure to be charged since President Joao Lourenco succeeded longtime leader José Eduardo dos Santos last September pledging to tackle an endemic culture of corruption. British authorities that froze the \$500 million in the UK due to suspicions over the transaction have said the money can now be returned to the oil-producing, southern African country.

- **Angola Rivalry as Veteran Dos Santos Casts Long Shadow¹⁵**

Tensions between Angola's president and his long-serving predecessor have erupted into the open as an anti-corruption drive targets the former ruler's family. President Joao Lourenco has pledged to crusade against entrenched state corruption and nepotism since taking over in September from Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who ruled Angola for 38 years. Battling graft is a cornerstone of Lourenco's promised "economic miracle" that he hopes will halt the oil-dependent country's economic slump caused by stubbornly low crude prices. A once-loyal minister under Dos Santos, Lourenco has purged state-run corporations of leaders appointed by his former boss. Friction spilt into the open at a meeting of the ruling party's central committee earlier this month when Dos Santos - who previously said he would step down from the MPLA's top job this year - said he may stay on until 2019. According to a member of the committee, there were fierce exchanges between old-guard supporters of Dos Santos and members aligned to Lourenco who want him named party leader immediately.

- **Namibia signs China deals¹⁶**

THE Namibia government signed several agreements with China on Thursday. The agreements were signed as part of President Hage Geingob's one week trip to China. The national broadcaster reported that Namibia agreed to renew the deal to allow the operation of China's Aerospace Centre at Swakopmund. "The two countries also included talks on the expansion of the Hosea Kutako International airport road, following signing of the agreement while a protocol on inspection, quarantine and veterinarian and sanitary requirements on beef to be exported to China," the report said. Finance minister Calle Schlettwein also signed an agreement with China's Export-Import Bank, NBC said.

- **Botswana's Khama Steps Down as President after a Decade at Helm¹⁷**

Ian Khama, a retired army general, stepped down as president of Botswana on Saturday, handing the diamond-rich country to his deputy after a decade at the helm. Mokgweetsi Masisi becomes only the third leader to take charge of the southern

¹⁵ News24, 30 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/angola-rivalry-as-veteran-dos-santos-casts-long-shadow-20180330>

¹⁶ The Namibian, 29 March 2018, <https://www.namibian.com.na/65865/read/Namibia-signs-China-deals>

¹⁷ Reuters, 31 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-botswana-politics/botswanas-khama-steps-down-as-president-after-a-decade-at-helm-idUSKBN1H70DO>

African nation outside the Khama political dynasty that has dominated national politics since independence from Britain in 1966. Masisi, 55, inherits a country that has for decades been heralded as a beacon of African democracy and sound economic management but faces a huge task of reducing the country's dependence on diamonds. Masisi, a trained teacher who has also worked for the United Nations Children's Fund as an education project officer for eight years until 2003, was elected lawmaker in 2009. He served in the president's office as a minister of public affairs from 2011 until 2014 when Khama named him minister of education, a post he held until appointed vice president last year.

- **DP World to Splash US\$1 Billion on Greenfield Congo Port¹⁸**

DP World will invest up to US\$1 billion on a greenfield multi-purpose port project at Banana, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), after securing a 30-year concession with an option of a further 20-year extension for the management and development of the facility. The Port of Banana will be the first deep-sea port in the country along its small coastline of 37 kilometres, which currently only has the riverine port of Matadi. DP World will set up a joint venture with 70 per cent control, and the government of DRC holding a 30 per cent share, to manage and invest in the Port of Banana. The first phase of the greenfield project, with an estimated initial investment of US\$350 million, will include a 600-metre quay and 25-hectare yard extension with a container capacity of 350,000 TEU and 1.5 million tonnes for general cargo. Construction is expected to start in 2018 and is expected to take approximately 24 months to complete.

- **Security Council Renews UN Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo¹⁹**

Adopting a unanimous resolution, the 15-member body authorized the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to maintain the troop ceiling of 16,215 military personnel, 660 military observers and staff officers, 391 police personnel, and 1,050 personnel of former police units, until 31 March 2019. Also in the 63-paragraph text, the Council reiterated its appeal to all Congolese actors to work for the preservation of the still fragile gains in the path of peace and stability in the African country, and urged the Government to hold accountable those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law or violations and abuses of human rights, in particular those that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

- **Kenya Opposition Politician Says was Dragged, Assaulted in Forced Deportation²⁰**

¹⁸ Port Technology, 26 March 2018,

<https://www.porttechnology.org/news/dp-world-to-splash-1-billion-on-greenfield-congo-port>

¹⁹ Mareeg, 29 March 2018, <https://mareeg.com/security-council-renews-un-mission-in-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

A Kenyan opposition politician who government authorities deported in contravention of a court order said on Thursday he had been assaulted, drugged and dragged onto a flight to Dubai. Miguna Miguna was put on an Emirates flight late on Wednesday evening, his lawyer Cliff Ombeta said, two days after police detained the politician on his return to the country. His deportation marks a significant escalation in a tussle between the judiciary and the government of President Uhuru Kenyatta, which opposition leaders and other critics say fails to respect the authority of the courts in political matters. Miguna said he had been dragged, assaulted and drugged during the forced deportation. The ministry had denied that Miguna was being held illegally and said he had failed to follow arrival procedures when he landed in Kenya. A Kenyan high court judge on Wednesday found the Interior Minister and the police chief guilty of contempt and told them to appear for sentencing because they failed to obey the court order to release Miguna.

- **Ethiopia Chooses New Leader from Protest-hit Region in Break from**

Past²¹

The council of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, a coalition of four ethnicity-based parties, voted for Abiy Ahmed, an outspoken Oromo member of Parliament, to be its new chairman. That sets the stage for Abiy, who is in his early 40s, to be named prime minister. A Parliament vote confirming his installation is expected within days. Abiy's elevation comes after days of closed-door meetings and six weeks after Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn abruptly announced his resignation, saying it was to further democracy in the country. The resignation prompted the declaration of a nationwide state of emergency. Abiy, who has a Muslim father and a Christian mother, would be the country's first Oromo head of state in modern times. Oromos make up a third of Ethiopia's 100 million people, but they say they have been consistently excluded from having a voice in shaping the country. Abiy's accession to the premiership is expected to calm the persistent protests and violence in the countryside.

- **Nigeria Gov't Seeks Permanent Ceasefire with Boko Haram²²**

Nigeria's government is in talks with Islamist militant group Boko Haram about a possible ceasefire with the ultimate aim of securing a permanent cessation of hostilities, the country's information minister said on Sunday. It is the first time in years the government has said it is talking to Boko Haram about a ceasefire in an insurgency that has killed tens of thousands of people since 2009. President

²⁰ Channel News Asia, 29 March 2018, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/kenya-opposition-politician-says-was-dragged--assaulted-in-forced-deportation-10086712>

²¹ Washington Post, 28 March 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/ethiopia-chooses-new-leader-from-protest-hit-region-in-break-from-past/2018/03/28/58ae9fae-3275-11e8-8abc-22a366b72f2d_story.html?utm_term=.98f828214bdc

²² Africa News, 26 March 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/03/26/nigeria-gov-t-seeks-permanent-ceasefire-with-boko-haram/>

Muhammadu Buhari's administration has repeatedly said it is willing to hold talks with the group.

- **Four Ugandan Peacekeepers Killed in Somalia by al Shabab Extremists²³**

Somalia's al Shabab Islamic extremists launched an attack on African Union troops in the country's south, killing four Ugandan peacekeepers, said Ugandan army spokesman Brigadier Richard Karemore. Four others Ugandans were injured, Brig Karemore said. At least 22 of the attackers were killed and the rest were repelled, he said. The attack started when two suicide car bombs exploded at the entrance to the heavily fortified base in Bulo-Marer, an agricultural town in Somalia's Lower Shabelle region, said Somali army Colonel Ahmed Hassan. Nearly 100 fighters firing propelled grenades and machine guns attacked the base occupied by the Ugandan soldiers.

- **Djibouti Plans New Container Terminal, Seeks Settlement with DP World²⁴**

Djibouti is in talks with French shipping company CMA CGM to develop a new container terminal at an initial cost of US\$660 million as part of the tiny African country's bid to expand into a sea and air transport hub for the continent. Aboubakar Omar Hadi, chairman of the Djibouti Ports and Free Zone Authority (DPFZA), told Reuters on Tuesday that the authority hopes to award the concession in July. The new container terminal project could break ground as early as September with construction expected to take 24 months, Hadi said, speaking on the sidelines of the Africa CEO Forum in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Shipping group CMA CGM declined to comment. Meanwhile, Hadi said that the port authority was ready to end a dispute with DP World over its cancellation of a concession contract for another facility, the Doraleh Container Terminal, by buying out DP World's 33 per cent stake.

North Africa

- **UK Parliamentary Panel Criticizes Poor Treatment to Former Egyptian President in Jail²⁵**

An independent committee of UK parliament has said that the treatment being meted out to the former president Morsi does meet neither the Egyptian nor the intentional standard of human right norms. The report warned that the former Islamist leader

²³ Southern Daily Echo, 1 April 2018,

http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/national/16131335.Four_Ugandan_peacekeepers_killed_in_Somalia_by_al_Shabab_extremists/

²⁴ Africa News, 28 March 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/03/28/djibouti-plans-new-container-terminal-seeks-settlement-with-dp-world/>

²⁵ Rail youm, An Arabic Daily

<https://www.raialyoum.com/index.php/%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84/>

might succumb to the poor treatment in the jail and face an early death. The three-member committee has said that his health is worsening very fast and he is not being given timely and proper medication and Mr. Morsi is suffering from severe diabetes and series of terminal illness. On its part interior ministry has said that there is no discrimination with anyone in the jail on the basis of his or her back ground or lineage and all were give medication as per the manuals of the jail. The statement further said that any criticism on the part of any institution is interference in the internal matters of the country. It is worth mentioning here that this month only the foreign relation committee on Egyptian parliament denied the permission to the delegation of UK parliament to visit the jail. According to a Turkish news agency, the son of deposed former president of Egypt too has said that his father's health in the jail is deteriorating very rapidly and it is a matter of great concern. His post on the face book has said that of late there have been a sudden decline in the health of Mr. Morsi and what makes the matter worse for him is that his family members are not allowed to visit him in the jail. His son held president El-Sisi and interior minister responsible for the present condition of his father and whatever negligence is taking place is because the president and his team members, he said.

Central Asia

- **India, Kyrgyzstan Held Joint Military Exercise**

The forces from India and Kyrgyzstan concluded their 5th joint training exercise 'Khanjar V' on March 29 at the Counter Insurgency Jungle Warfare School, Vairengte Mizoram.²⁶ The exercise started on March 16 and it included operation against terror hideout, understanding tactics of the two forces, developing inter-operability and exchanging best practices.²⁷

- **Kyrgyz Presidential Election Candidate Faces Coup Charges**

Kyrgyz authorities have started a new case against Omurbek Babanov, the opposition leader and former presidential candidate, The Investigation Department has accused him of preparing to forcibly seize power after he lost in the presidential election last year.²⁸ He is already being investigated for public calls for 'violent change of the constitutional system' and the 'incitement of national, racial or religious hatred'.

²⁶ Morung Express, "Joint Indo- Kyrgyzstan training exercise culminates in Mizoram," 29 March 2018, <http://morungexpress.com/joint-indo-kyrgyzstan-training-exercise-culminates-in-mizoram/>

²⁷ Sangzuala Hmar, "Indo-Kyrgyzstan joint training exercise 'KHANJAR V' concludes," *Northeast Now*, 29 March 2018, <https://nenow.in/indo-kyrgyzstan-joint-training-exercise.html>

²⁸ Kabar, "Omurbek Babanov becomes defendant in another criminal case," 29 March 2018, https://24.kg/english/79858_Omurbek_Babanov_becomes_defendant_in_another_criminal_case/

China

- **11th meeting of India-China Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) on Trans-border Rivers**

The 11th meeting of the India-China Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) on Trans-border Rivers was held in Hangzhou, China on 26-27 March 2018. The Indian side was led by Mr. Teerath Singh Mehra, Commissioner (B&B), Ministry of Water Resources, RD&GR and the Chinese side by Mr. Yu Xingjun, Consul, Department of International Cooperation Science and Technology, Ministry of Water Resources.

The meeting was held in a cordial and friendly atmosphere. Both sides reviewed the progress made since the earlier meetings of the ELM and their continued cooperation on provision of hydrological information and emergency management in respect of trans-border rivers. They also reviewed the data utilization report upon provision of hydrological information provided by China to India in flood season on Brahmaputra and Sutlej Rivers.

The institutional mechanism of the ELM was established in 2006 to discuss various issues related to trans-border rivers. Under existing bilateral Memorandums of Understanding, China provides to India hydrological information of Brahmaputra River (Yarlong Zangbo) and Sutlej River (Langqen Zangbo) during the flood seasons.²⁹

- **Chinese publisher releases B&R Initiative annual report**

China's Commercial Press on 1 April released an annual report on the Belt and Road Initiative for 2018 to show the achievements of the cooperation framework.

Zhao Lei, chief editor of the report and a professor with the Party School of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, said the initiative has become the international consensus and demonstrates China's global influence.

Jin Xin, an official with the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, said the report raised suggestions for creating a risk prevention system and improving social integration, which will ensure the initiative's safe and orderly development.³⁰

- **Chinese State Councilor calls for steady, long-term development of China-Vietnam ties**

Visiting Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 1 April called for steady and long-term development of relations between China and Vietnam. Wang

²⁹ Press Release by Embassy of India in Beijing <http://indianembassybeijing.in/trans-border-river.php>

³⁰ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/25/c_137064501.htm

made the remarks when meeting with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh.

The Chinese state councilor urged the alignment of China's Belt and Road Initiative with Vietnam's "Two Corridors and One Economic Circle" plan, advance pragmatic cooperation in various fields, especially in infrastructure, industrial capacity and cross-border cooperation zone.

Noting that the two-way trade between China and Vietnam topped 100 billion US dollars last year, and personnel exchanges exceeded 10 million, he said these figures demonstrate the huge potential for cooperation between the two countries.³¹

- **Indian Defence Minister visit to China**

While replying to a question on Indian Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's likely visit to China to participate in the SCO Defense Ministers' meeting, Senior Colonel Ren Guoqiang, Spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense (MND) of the PRC noted:

"The mil-to-mil relationship between China and India is an important part of the state-to-state relationship of the two nations. China is willing to work with India to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, accumulate strategic mutual trust, promote mutually-beneficial cooperation and ensure the normal development of the relationship between the two militaries. The specific exchange programs between the two militaries are currently under consultation and we will release information in due course."³²

- **China, Namibia agree to establish comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation**

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Namibian counterpart Hage Geingob agreed on 29 March to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation between the two countries. The two heads of state reached the consensus during their talks in Beijing. Mr. Geingob is on a state visit to China from March 28 to April 3 at the invitation of Xi.³³

European Union

- **Russia-UK/Europe Relations**

Currently, Russia-UK relations are tensed over poisoning of former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal. After the UK expelled 23 Russia diplomats, Russia has

³¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/02/c_137081387.htm

³² http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-03/30/content_4808299.htm

³³ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/51365.htm>

also taken counter diplomatic measures to expel same number of British diplomats. Reportedly, Russia asked the UK reduce its diplomatic staff. It is reported that 25 European countries - along with the US, Canada, and Australia - expelled more than 120 Russian diplomats. Russia has expelled 59 diplomats from 23 countries.³⁴ Russia has expelled 60 U.S. diplomats and ordered to close the U.S. consulate in St Petersburg.³⁵

- **Poland Promises to Send More Troops to Afghanistan**

Polish President Andrzej Duda visited to Polish soldiers deployed in Afghanistan. He was accompanied by Defence Minister Mariusz Błaszczak. The Polish President assured Chief Executive Officer, Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah of sending more troops to Afghanistan. Currently 192 Polish soldiers are deployed in Afghanistan under NATO Resolute Support. The Polish leader promised his country would boost the number of troops for training and advising Afghan forces in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission. Polish President Duda said, “We have declared that we will increase our contingent by 50 soldiers by the end of the year.”³⁶

- **Poland and US Signed Missile System Deal**

Poland has signed a \$4.75billion deal with the US to buy Patriot missile defence systems. The deal includes four radars, four combat stations, 16 launchers and 208 PAC-3MSE missiles. As strategic environment in Eastern Europe has changed after Ukraine crisis, Poland has been accelerating process of modernise its armed forces. Polish President Andrzej Duda hailed the deal, as “a unique and historic moment that ushers Poland into a new world of ultra-modern technology and weaponry”. He said, “This is a new chapter in the history of the Polish army, a huge step forward for the entire Polish army.”³⁷

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **South Korea-US begins joint military exercise**

On April 1, 2018, Seoul and Washington began their joint annual military exercise. More than 11,500 service members, including thousands based outside of Korea, will

³⁴ Russia expels diplomats from 23 countries as spy row worsens, AL JAZEERA, March 31, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/russia-expels-diplomats-23-countries-spy-row-worsens-180330192725390.html>

³⁵ Russia expels 60 US diplomats, closes American consulate, AL JAZEERA, March 30, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/russia-expels-60-diplomats-closes-american-consulate-180329185734965.html>

³⁶ Poland to send 50 more troops to Afghanistan: president, Radio Poland, March 27, 2018, <http://thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/355932,Poland-to-send-50-more-troops-to-Afghanistan-president>

³⁷ James Shotter, Poland signs \$4.75bn missile defence system deal with US, March 28, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/fad4cd6a-327c-11e8-ac48-10c6fdc22f03>

participate in the four-week Foal Eagle training, along with around 300,000 South Korean soldiers. Due to Pyeongchang Winter Olympics this year's annual training was delayed by two months. In view of the improving situation in the Korean Peninsula, Seoul and Washington decided to reduce the duration and scale of the exercise. The duration of Foal Eagle has been shortened to a month, with no major U.S. strategic assets such as super carriers and nuclear submarines.³⁸

- **China pledged to end THAAD related retaliation against South Korea**

On March 30, 2018, Yang Jiechi, State Councilor and special envoy of President Xi Jinping during his meeting with South Korean President Moon Jae-in said that Beijing will soon end retaliatory measures related to Seoul's deployment of THAAD missiles. State Councilor Yang was in Seoul to brief about the outcome of the recently concluded visit of North Korea leader Kim Jong-un to China and his meeting with President Xi Jinping.³⁹

- **Two Koreas agree to hold summit on April 27**

On March 29, 2018, North Korea and South Korea agreed to hold the third inter-Korean Summit on April 27. According to the joint statement President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un will meet at the Peace House on the southern side of the border village of Panmunjom. Previous Summits were held in Pyongyang in 2000 and 2007 respectively.⁴⁰

- **North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visits China**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited China during March 25-28, 2018. The visit marked Kim's first foreign travel since he assumed power in 2011. During his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Kim reaffirmed his commitment to denuclearization. Kim was accompanied by his wife Ri Sol-ju and key officials, including de facto No. 2 figure Choe Ryong-hae. The visit was an important step to improve China-North Korea relations ahead of North Korea's upcoming Summits with South Korea and United States.⁴¹

- **India-Japan Strategic Dialogue was held in Tokyo**

On March 29, 2018, India and Japan held the 9th annual bilateral strategic dialogue in Tokyo. The dialogue was co-chaired by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono. During the dialogue Japan pledged India to provide yen loans of up to ¥100 billion (\$940 million) for the construction of Mumbai's

³⁸ "S. Korean, U.S. troops begin joint field training", The Yonhap News, April 1, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2018/04/01/0401000000AEN20180401000600315.html

³⁹ "China vows to end 'retaliatory measures' against THAAD deployment soon", The Yonhap News, March 30, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2018/03/29/0401000000AEN20180329010653315.html

⁴⁰ "Two Koreas agree to hold summit April 27", The Yonhap News, March 29, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2018/03/29/0401000000AEN20180329006853315.html

⁴¹ "Kim reaffirms commitment to denuclearization in first summit with Xi", The Yonhap News, March 28, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2018/03/28/0401000000AEN20180328002253315.html

subway system, and nearly ¥50 billion for other infrastructure projects. During the meeting two countries also agreed to begin a new “Indo-Pacific Dialogue” in order to build on existing bilateral public-private consultation frameworks. Minister Swaraj, who was on a three-day tour to Japan to attend the annual strategic dialogue, also met Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.⁴²

- **Prime Minister Abe seeking Summit with Kim Jong-un and open to trilateral summit with U.S**

On March 25, 2018, Japanese Prime Minister said during a Diet meeting said that Tokyo has been communicating with Pyongyang through “various means” on the possibility of meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, while also voicing a positive note about the prospects of opening a three-way dialogue involving Washington. The reported diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang, if true, signals a significant break from Abe’s adherence to the “maximum pressure” campaign against Kim’s regime.⁴³

Myanmar

- **China ready to promote bilateral ties, Xi tells Myanmar’s new president**

Chinese President Xi Jinping has congratulated U Win Myint on his election as Myanmar's new president, saying China would like to promote the bilateral comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership to a higher level. Xi said China and Myanmar are traditionally friendly neighbours and in recent years, have seen high-level exchanges. They have expanded practical cooperation, promoted people-to-people exchanges and coordinated multilateral ties, contributing to regional peace and prosperity⁴⁴.

- **UN in talks with Bangladesh about relocating Rohingya**

Tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees who fled to camps in Bangladesh from Myanmar must be relocated to avoid floods and other dangers from the monsoon, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. About 150,000 Rohingya are living in flood-prone areas in the crowded camps of Cox's Bazar and could be exposed to health risks

⁴² "Japan pledges ¥100 billion in loans for Mumbai subway", Japan Times, March 30, 2018, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/30/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-pledges-¥100-billion-loans-mumbai-subway/#.WsDCzJe_NXI

⁴³ "Abe says he's in contact with North about meeting Kim, suggests in Diet he'd be open to trilateral summit with U.S", The Japan Times, March 26, 2018, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/26/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-says-hes-contact-north-meeting-kim-suggests-diet-hed-open-trilateral-summit-u-s/#.WsDDxZe_NXI

⁴⁴ China ready to promote bilateral ties, Xi tells Myanmar’s new president, 31st march 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-regional/china-ready-promote-bilateral-ties-xi-tells-myanmar%E2%80%99s-new-president>

such as cholera during the rainy season, expected to start in June, according to the UN⁴⁵.

- **Myanmar historian Thant Myint-U receives Indian Padma Shri award**

Thant Myint-U author and founder and chairman of the Yangon Heritage Trust has won one India's prestigious Padma Shri Award. The award ceremony will be held in New Delhi on April 2⁴⁶.

- **Northern Alliance Seeks Continued Support From China in Peace Process Negotiations**

The northeastern-based ethnic alliance the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) seeks further support from China in Myanmar's peace process, according to a statement it released. The FPNCC stated that China's positive involvement in Myanmar's peace process has become more important and cannot be averted. The alliance will join the upcoming third session of the 21st Panglong peace conference in Naypyitaw – tentatively slated for May – only when it is formally invited, the FPNCC said. It is unclear whether non-signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) will be invited to participate in the Union peace conference and in what capacity⁴⁷.

- **UN chief hits out at Myanmar army chief over comments**

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres criticized Myanmar's army chief after he declared that the Muslim Rohingya had nothing in common with the country's other ethnic groups. Guterres said he was "shocked" at reports of Senior General U Min Aung Hlaing's remarks at a military gathering and urged Myanmar's leaders to "take a unified stance against incitement to hatred and to promote cultural harmony⁴⁸."

- **Myanmar and India hold joint navy exercise**

Two battleships from Myanmar have arrived at Vishakhapatnam, India, to take part in Indian a joint Myanmar Navy Exercise 2018 (IMNEX-18). The exercise is being held off

⁴⁵ UN in talks with Bangladesh about relocating Rohingya, 31st march 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-regional/un-talks-bangladesh-about-relocating-rohingya>

⁴⁶ Myanmar historian Thant Myint-U receives Indian Padma Shri award, 29th March 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-opinion/myanmar-historian-thant-myint-u-receives-indian-padma-shri-award>

⁴⁷ Northern Alliance Seeks Continued Support From China in Peace Process Negotiations, 29th March 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/northern-alliance-seeks-continued-support-china-peace-process-negotiations.html>

⁴⁸ UN chief hits out at Myanmar army chief over comments, 27th March 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/un-chief-hits-out-myanmar-army-chief-over-comments>

the eastern coast of India. The exercise will be carried out in two phases namely the harbour phase (25th-30th March) and the sea phase (31st March-3rd April).⁴⁹

- **State Counsellor calls for unity to face challenges**

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of the ruling administration, called for 'collective strength' to overcome the challenges the country faces, stressing the importance of public support for the National League for Democracy (NLD). The NLD took office in 2016 after sweeping the general parliamentary elections a few months earlier, with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi taking the positions of State Counsellor, minister for foreign affairs and president office. She thanked the people involved in the 'smooth transition' of power from former president U Htin Kyaw to newly sworn-in President U Win Myint⁵⁰.

Russia

Russia

- **Russia and Expulsion of Diplomats**

On 30 March, the Italian Foreign Ministry said in a statement Russia is expelling two Italian diplomats as a tit-for-tat response to Rome's expulsion of Russian diplomats. On the same day, three Czech diplomats were also supposed to be expelled from Russia as a tit-for-tat response to Prague's expulsion of Russian diplomatic workers, the Czech Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Dutch ambassador in Moscow Renee Jones-Bos said after a visit to the Russian Foreign Ministry on 30 March that she had been told two diplomats were expelled from Russia in retaliation for steps taken by The Hague. Russia has also notified Finland of its decision to expel one diplomat from the Finnish embassy in Moscow. In addition to this, four German diplomats will have to leave Russia in retaliation to Berlin's decision to expel four Russian diplomatic workers, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said. He pointed out that Berlin "did not make a hasty decision to expel Russian diplomats." "Our response to the Skripal case was necessary and appropriate," he said. According to Maas, the step was taken "in solidarity with Great Britain and also because Russia refuses to clarify the circumstances of the incident." One Norwegian diplomat will have to leave Russia following Oslo's decision to declare one Russian diplomatic worker persona non grata, Norway's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Three Lithuanian diplomats are supposed to be expelled from Russia in Moscow's retaliatory move. Diplomats from Latvia, Poland, Estonia, Ukraine and Spain were also expelled. In late March, a number of countries announced a coordinated decision to expel Russian diplomats expressing solidarity with Great Britain in connection with the poisoning of former

⁴⁹ Myanmar and India hold joint navy exercise, 26th March 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-regional/myanmar-and-india-hold-joint-navy-exercise>

⁵⁰ State Counsellor calls for unity to face challenges, 1st April 2018, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/state-counsellor-calls-unity-face-challenges.html>

Russian military intelligence (GRU) Colonel Sergei Skripal. On 29 March, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that tit-for-tat measures would be taken against all the countries that had expelled Russian diplomats.⁵¹ Several European countries - Germany, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Romania, the Netherlands, and Ukraine, have announced a decision to expel Russian diplomats in the wake of the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in England.⁵²

Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl on 28 March said the UK Ambassador to Austria has repeatedly voiced his country's official displeasure at Vienna's refusal to expel Russian diplomats over the Skripal saga. The Austrian top diplomat confirmed that the British ambassador had started expressing disapproval ahead of the European Union's summit on 21 March "to force us to take certain measures," and he reiterated his call on 25 March. On 26 March, the Austrian foreign minister and the Chancellor announced that Vienna would not expel Russian diplomats. According to the minister, Vienna's refusal to expel Russian diplomats is not linked to possible Moscow's countermeasures. Ms. Kneissl said that Australia wants to keep the channel of dialogue open during critical times. The Austrian foreign minister said the UK and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had not provided 100% of evidence of Russia's complicity in the Skripal case. Therefore, Austria would refuse to expel Russian diplomats.⁵³

On 26 March, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on the European Union (EU) decisions to expel Russian diplomats could be NATO. She said that it was behind the actions of the EU, using baculine discipline and seeking to demonize Russia. "The task was to demonize Russia and what we are witnessing now is part of a long-term program of unbridled Russophobia. It is a matter of not only Russia as a country, it is a matter of Russians and the Russian people," she said.⁵⁴ On 27 March she said that Moscow has received no reply from London and Washington to its request to provide printed materials on the incident. US Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman said on the same day that the British side had circulated a certain handout on Skripal's poisoning at a briefing for foreign diplomats in Moscow.⁵⁵ Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on 28 March said that London's six-slide presentation entitled the 'Salisbury Incident' allegedly proving Russia's complicity in

⁵¹"Russia expels foreign diplomats in tit-for-tat measure", TASS, March 31, 2018.

<http://tass.com/politics/996939> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁵²"European countries expel Russian diplomats over ex-spy's poisoning", TASS, March 26, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/996120> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁵³"Austria fends off London's pressure over its refusal to expel Russian diplomats", TASS, March 28, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/996528> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁵⁴"Diplomat reveals who might be behind EU's decision to expel Russian envoys", TASS, March 26, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/996208> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁵⁵"Diplomat: No reply from UK, US to Russia's request for information over 'Skripal handout'", TASS, March 27, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/996408> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

the so-called Skripal case fails to stand up to any criticism.⁵⁶ On 29 March, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia will expel 60 US diplomats and close the US Consulate General in St. Petersburg. The Russian foreign ministry said that based on the reciprocity principle, as a retaliatory measure, 58 employees of the US Embassy in Moscow and two staff members of the Consulate General in Yekaterinburg have been declared personae non gratae for the activities incompatible with their diplomatic status. They will have to leave the Russian Federation by April 5, 2018.⁵⁷ On 30 March, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin and permanent members of the national Security Council have discussed a number of foreign policy issues, including the expulsion of Russian diplomats from several countries and Moscow's retaliatory measures.⁵⁸

On 31 March, Russia's Embassy in London has sent a list of 14 questions to the UK Foreign Ministry, demanding that it reveals details of the investigation into the nerve-agent poisoning of former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter. The questions are the following:

1. Why has Russia been denied the right of consular access to the two Russian citizens, who came to harm on British territory?
2. What specific antidotes and in what form were the victims injected with? How did such antidotes come into the possession of British doctors at the scene of the incident?
3. On what grounds was France involved in technical cooperation in the investigation of the incident, in which Russian citizens were injured?
4. Did the UK notify the OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) of France's involvement in the investigation of the Salisbury incident?
5. What does France have to do with the incident, involving two Russian citizens in the UK?
6. What rules of UK procedural legislation allow for the involvement of a foreign state in an internal investigation?

⁵⁶ Kremlin: London's Skripal 'presentation' doesn't stand up to scrutiny", TASS, March 28, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/996477> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁵⁷ "Russia to expel 60 US diplomats", TASS, March 29, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/996796> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁵⁸ "Putin discusses steps against states expelling Russian diplomats with Security Council", TASS, March 30, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/996946> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

7. What evidence was handed over to France to be studied and for the investigation to be conducted?

8. Were the French experts present during the sampling of biomaterial from Sergei and Yulia Skripal?

9. Was the study of biomaterials from Sergei and Yulia Skripal conducted by the French experts and, if so, in which specific laboratories?

10. Does the UK have the materials involved in the investigation carried out by France?

11. Have the results of the French investigation been presented to the OPCW Technical Secretariat?

12. Based on what attributes was the alleged “Russian origin” of the substance used in Salisbury established?

13. Does the UK have control samples of the chemical warfare agent, which British representatives refer to as “Novichok”?

14. Have the samples of a chemical warfare agent of the same type as “Novichok” (in accordance to British terminology) or its analogues been developed in the UK?⁵⁹

- **Russia’s Defence System**

On 2 April, a new Russian upgraded air defense missile has been successfully tested at Sary Shagan range in Kazakhstan. The Russian Aerospace Forces’ missile defense system is designed to protect Moscow from a limited nuclear strike by intercontinental ballistic missiles or accidental launches.⁶⁰

⁵⁹“Moscow confronts London with 14 questions on ‘fabricated’ Skripal case”, *RT*, March 31, 2018. <https://www.rt.com/news/422871-russia-questions-uk-skripal-case/> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁶⁰“Russian Defense Ministry successfully tests new air defense missile – media”, *TASS*, April 2, 2018. <http://tass.com/defense/997176> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

- **Duma’s decision on ex-Soviet Leaders**

On 29 March, the Russian State Duma has refused to pass a draft address describing the activities of former leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, which led to the fall of the Soviet Union, as “destructive and anti-national.” The rejected address was drafted by the nationalist-populist opposition party, the LDPR. *“For the sake of historical justice it’s necessary to give an assessment of political activities of the first Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and first Russian President Boris Yeltsin, recognizing these activities as destructive and anti-national,”* the document read. The lower house committee for regulations and control rejected the draft address. The committee experts wrote that the address lacked particular examples of wrong and harmful decisions made by Yeltsin and Gorbachev or some proof that the dramatic events of this period of Russian history came about as a result of these decisions.⁶¹

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan Set to Begin**⁶²

Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan began on 27 March 2018 in the presence of various regional powers and representatives from U.S, Russia and China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, UK, Germany, France, Italy and Central Asian states. Bringing peace to war torn Afghanistan was the agenda of the conference where international community explored ways to hold direct peace talk between Afghan government and the Taliban ending conflict in Afghanistan that killed more than a 100,000 people following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks and subsequent US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

- **Afghanistan, US, Saudi and UEA Hold Meeting**⁶³

On 24 March 2018 in a four-day quadrilateral meeting, Afghanistan’s National Security Adviser Haneef Atmar met with National Security advisers of Saudi Arabia, UAE and U.S and discussed a range of issues in Washington. Counter terrorism activities, the Afghan peace process, economic development of Afghanistan were also discussed, emphasizing the need for joint efforts and practical steps in order to achieve success. All delegates agreed to hold an international conference in United Arab Emirates on trade and investment and for this purpose, a specific mechanism and a technical team

⁶¹“Duma refuses to denounce ‘anti-national’ Gorbachev & Yeltsin for sparking USSR collapse”, RT, March 29, 2018. <https://www.rt.com/politics/422686-duma-gorbachevs-yeltsin-address/> Accessed on April 2, 2018.

⁶² Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 27 March 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20511

⁶³ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 26 March 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20505

would be created to monitor activities among the four countries. At the meeting, it was also decided that Saudi Arabia would play a leading role in starting a new peace process in Afghanistan that could only bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.⁶⁴

- **Afghan Air Force Drops First Laser-Guided Bomb⁶⁵**

For the first time, the Afghan National Army's (ANA) Air Force dropped a laser-guided bomb on a Taliban stronghold in Farah province, in the west of Afghanistan, signifying Air Force's pledge of targeting Taliban strongholds with new technology. Mohammad Radmanish, spokesman of Defense Ministry said, "This is new and modern technology (for Afghanistan) in which a bomb is dropped by a pilot from inside the aircraft's cabin and is guided by the pilot towards its target". The whole event was a big step in counter-terrorism operations of Afghanistan.

- **Poland Promises Sending More Troops to Afghanistan⁶⁶**

The President of Poland Andrzej Duda met Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Abdullah on 27 March 2018 and assured him that Poland would send more troops to Afghanistan, boosting expansion of bilateral cooperation between two countries. The Polish leader promised his country would boost the number of troops for training and advising Afghan forces in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission. Both Afghanistan and Poland would celebrate its 90th anniversary of their diplomatic and political relations at a special in this year.

- **China to Increase Assistance with Bamyan: Ambassador⁶⁷**

Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan Liu Jingson arrived at Bamyan City on 26 March 2018 and promised that China would increase financial assistance to develop education, infrastructure projects and preservation of historic monuments of central Bamyan province. The Chinese ambassador vowed to expand its relations with Afghanistan in different areas. At present, China has supported two infrastructure projects i.e. Dara Sub road construction and Shakari valley of Bamyan. The ambassador expressed his desire to build a stable and peaceful Afghanistan so that China would invest in Bamyan province. The governor of Bamyan, Mohammad Tahir Zuhir appreciated Chinese government's effort and wanted to create a Chinese language department in the province.

- **IEC Formally Declares New Date for Wolesi Jirga Polls⁶⁸**

⁶⁴ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 1 April 2018,
http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20559

⁶⁵ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 29 March 2018,
http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20537

⁶⁶ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 28 march 2018,
http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20522

⁶⁷ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 28 march 2018,
http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20521

On 1 April 2018, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced that elections to the Wolesi Jirga would be holding on October 20. At a press conference in Kabul, Gulajan Bade Sayyad, chief of IEC stated that the decision to change the date from July 18 to Oct 20 had been taken in line with Article 43 of the Constitution. The main reasons behind this delay were security issues and lack of budget and the decision was made after consultations with political parties and election watchdogs. The chief of IEC urged Afghan citizen to should refer to the nearest voter registration centre with their National Identity Cards (NIC) and assured that election would be held in a transparent manner despite various security challenges. Appreciating IEC's effort, Tadamichi Yamamoto, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan said, "Setting a firm date for elections is a notably positive and important development in the work of the IEC, and will allow progress from the formal planning stages to implementation."⁶⁹

- **India to Provide Afghanistan with Four Mi-24 Choppers⁷⁰**

The Hindustan Times on 28 March 2018 reported that India would supply four gunship helicopters to help Afghanistan in their counterterrorism operations. India would underwrite the delivery of four Mi-24 helicopters by Belarus to Afghanistan. In March 2018, Afghanistan, Belarus and India signed a trilateral pact for the refurbished Mi-24 helicopters. Shaida Abdali, Afghan ambassador said, "We recently were able to sign a trilateral MoU...India will be paying for the four Mi-24s (which will be delivered) in the next few months. All the four helicopters (will be) paid (for) by India". He also added, "No one can shy away from the fact that terrorism continues to spread from within Pakistan. The fact of the matter is terrorist groups still have found the place to live freely, and to cross and to then hurt others. India has been kind enough to agree to that request... Afghanistan will have ready helicopters that will be used in the coming season".

- **Turkey Plans to Open New Consulate in Herat⁷¹**

On 22 March 2018, Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs held that Turkey has decided to increase its diplomatic presence in Afghanistan and would open a new consulate in the country. Turkish ambassador Oguzhan Ertugrul met with acting foreign affairs minister Salahuddin Rabbani, discussing various ways to strengthen bilateral ties between both nations. According to the statement of the Ministry, "Both sides talked regarding political, security and economic issues, Istanbul Process, bilateral relation, and Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting". The opening of new consulate in the Herat province would expand bilateral cooperation, giving Afghanistan an

⁶⁸ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 2 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20568

⁶⁹ Tolo News, 1 April 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/iec-sets-october-20-election-date>

⁷⁰ Tolo News, 28 March 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/india%20provide-afghanistan-four%20mi-24%20choppers>

⁷¹ Tolo News, 26 March 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/turkey-plans-open-new-consulate-herat>.

opportunity to diversify its international trade routes in number of sectors such as mainly construction, medicine, garments and home appliances.

Bangladesh

- **China seeks stronger ties**

China expressed its desire to work with Bangladesh to strengthen relations and jointly carry out the Belt and Road initiative. On the occasion of the 48th Independence Day of Bangladesh, Chinese President Xi Jinping in a message yesterday (March 26) congratulated President Abdul Hamid and said China-Bangladesh relations are on a good momentum. “I attach high importance to the development of China-Bangladesh relations, and will work together to strengthen the alignment of development strategies of our two countries”. In a separate message to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang said China is willing to work together with Bangladesh to deepen the cooperation of mutual benefits.⁷²

- **BNP's return to power means destruction**

Seeking vote for the Awami League in the next general elections, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday (March 29) said BNP's return to power means destruction of the country. “BNP's return to power means destroying the country, burning people to death, indulging in corruption, plundering and terrorism, and creating militancy,” she said while addressing a rally in Thakurgaon.⁷³

- **We do not want BNP-Jamaat's terrorist acts: Hasina**

Describing arson attacks by the BNP-Jamaat clique in the recent past as terrorist acts, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Saturday (March 31) that she does not want to see their recurrence in the country anymore. “These are absolutely terrorist acts. We don't want such terrorist acts to occur again... We want peace in the country,” she told a rally at Chandpur Stadium, organized by local units of her party.⁷⁴

- **BNP smells a rat in news of Khaleda's illness**

The sudden news that BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia has fallen ill in jail has worried the party and it smells a rat in this development. Party senior leaders said the actual state of Khaleda's health is not clear. The party is in the dark and their apprehensions

⁷² “China seeks stronger ties,” *The Daily Star*, March 27, 2018, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/china-seeks-stronger-ties-1554058>, accessed on March 28, 2018.

⁷³ “BNP's return to power means destruction,” *The Daily Star*, March 30, 2018, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/bnps-return-power-means-destruction-1555570>, accessed on March 30, 2018.

⁷⁴ “PM Hasina: We do not want BNP-Jamaat's terrorist acts,” *Dhaka Tribune*, April 1, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2018/04/01/hasina-want-recurrence-bnp-jamaat-terrorist-acts/>, accessed on April 1, 2018.

about the condition of Khaleda's health have been exacerbated by rumours making rounds in the political arena.⁷⁵

- **GDP to grow 7.8pc next fiscal year**

Bangladesh will be able to attain 7.8 percent economic growth in the next fiscal year, said Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday (March 31). The government has set a target of 7.4 percent GDP growth for the current fiscal year of 2017-18. "But we hope it would be 7.5 percent," said Muhith.⁷⁶

Pakistan

- **Pakistan and United States**

The US administration has added seven Pakistani companies to a list of foreign entities that presumably pose a significant risk to the national security and policy interests of the United States by allegedly engaging in nuclear trade and their involvement in the proliferation of unsafeguarded nuclear activities. The move could undermine Pakistan's ambition of joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).⁷⁷ Foreign Office spokesman Dr Muhammad Faisal in a statement on March 26th said the companies in question were private sector firms and added that FO was seeking information from the US as well as these companies to better understand the circumstances which led to the US decision.⁷⁸

- **Iran's Scholar on Pakistan**

Iranian scholar and former foreign minister Dr Kamal Kharazi on March 27th backed a Pakistani proposal for quadrilateral cooperation between Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia. Speaking at a conference at the Islamabad Policy Institute, Dr Kharazi, who is currently leading Tehran-based Strategic Council on Foreign Relations said "The proposal put forward by Pakistan on cooperation between Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia in security and economic realm should be studied."⁷⁹ It can be noted that on

⁷⁵ "BNP smells a rat in news of Khaleda's illness," *Prothom Alo*, April 1, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/173416/BNP-smells-a-rat-in-news-of-Khaleda-s-illness>, accessed on April 1, 2018.

⁷⁶ "GDP to grow 7.8pc next fiscal year," *The Daily Star*, April 1, 2018, <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/gdp-grow-78pc-next-fiscal-year-1556401>, accessed on April 1, 2018.

⁷⁷ Anwar Iqbal, "US sanctions seven Pakistani firms for 'nuclear trade'", *Dawn*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397628> accessed on April 2, 2018

⁷⁸ Kashif Abbasi, "FO cautions detractors against exploiting US listing of Pakistani firms", *Dawn*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397775> accessed on April 2, 2018

⁷⁹ "Iranian scholar backs Pakistani proposal for quadrilateral cooperation", *Dawn*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397981> accessed on April 2, 2018

April 1, former Iranian foreign minister Syed Kamal Kharazi says his country is looking for ways for direct rice import from Pakistan.⁸⁰

- **Pakistan's Second Strike Capability**

Pakistan on March 29th carried out another successful test of the nuclear-capable Submarine Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM) Babur and claimed to have attained 'Credible Second Strike Capability'. ISPR said the 450-km-range Babur missile was test-fired from "an underwater dynamic platform, which successfully engaged its target with precise accuracy, meeting all the flight parameters".⁸¹

- **Pakistan, Afghanistan and Terrorism**

While giving an Interview to Voice of America (VOA), Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar has said that if Pakistan wants, it can end terrorism in Afghanistan by choking the routes that insurgents use for entering the war-ravaged country. Stating to VOA, Pakistan Defence Minister Khurram Dastgir rejected the Afghan claim, while pointing out that nearly half of Afghanistan was under the Taliban's control and they did not need sanctuaries in Pakistan to continue their activities. VOA reported that these fresh recruits were not just joining the Afghan Taliban movement but they were also going over to other terror groups, such as Al Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-i-Mohammad.⁸²

- **Pakistan and India**

Pakistan and India on March 30th agreed to address complaints of harassment of diplomats in accordance with the bilaterally agreed 1992 'Code of Conduct' on treatment of diplomatic and consular staff in each other's country.⁸³ It can be further noted that in the 114th annual meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission which took place in New Delhi on March 29-30, Pakistan sought inspection of the Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai hydroelectric projects India is building in the Chenab river basin in Jammu and Kashmir. As per the Pakistani delegation, India has agreed to the demand but sought time for making arrangements for the purpose in line with the World Bank-brokered pact for sharing waters of six rivers between the two countries.⁸⁴

- **Prime Minister Abbasi in China**

⁸⁰ Iran wants direct rice import from Pakistan, *Dawn*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398949/iran-wants-direct-rice-import-from-pakistan> as accessed on April 2, 2018

⁸¹ "Pakistan says second strike capability attained", *Dawn*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398418> accessed on April 2, 2018

⁸² Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan, Afghanistan trade barbs over terrorist sanctuaries", *Dawn*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398411> as accessed on April 2, 2018

⁸³ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan, India agree to end envoys harassment", *Dawn*, March 31, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398648> as accessed on April 2, 2018

⁸⁴ Pakistan seeks inspection of two Indian projects on Chenab, *Dawn*, March 31, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398686> as accessed on April 2, 2018

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi is likely to lead the Pakistan delegation at the Boao Forum for Asia annual conference being held in South China's island province of Hainan from April 8 to 11. The theme of this year's conference is "An open and innovative Asia for a world of greater prosperity". Participants will be expected to discuss key issues related to globalisation, the Belt and Road Initiative and innovation.⁸⁵

Indian Ocean Region

- **Maldives Pak discuss joint EEZ patrolling in the Indian Ocean**

Maldives and Pakistan have discussed the possibility of joint EEZ patrolling in the Indian Ocean.⁸⁶ The issue of joint EEZ patrolling was raised during the visit of Pakistan army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa to Maldives recently.⁸⁷ "He is the highest ranking foreign visitor to Maldives after the imposition of the state of emergency on February 4 and its subsequent lifting after 45 days."⁸⁸ Pakistan Army chief was invited by Maldives National Defence Force chief Major General Ahmed Shiyam.⁸⁹ The Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, General Qamar Javed Bajwa also called on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, on April 01 at the President's Office in Male. The President welcomed the Pakistani General and conveyed greetings and good wishes to President and Prime Minister of Pakistan. Press Release issued by Maldivian President reads, "highlighting Pakistan's continued assistance and support for the development of the Maldives, the President expressed hope and confidence that the Maldives and Pakistan will continue working together on bilateral and international issues of common concern, to further strengthen the close ties of friendship and cooperation that exist between the two countries."⁹⁰

- **Navy strategic centre in Thiruvananthapuram**

The Indian Navy is looking forward to make a important expansion in the western coast by setting up some of its key installations at Muttathara, near the international airport, Thiruvananthapuram.⁹¹ As Times of India mentioned, "the government has issued orders, to transfer 5.238 acres to the Navy, at a rate of Rs 66,667 per cent, near

⁸⁵ PM may visit China to attend Boao Forum, *Dawn*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1399052/pm-may-visit-china-to-attend-boao-forum> as accessed on April 2, 2018

⁸⁶ India wary as Maldives, Pak discuss joint EEZ patrolling in Indian Ocean, April 02, 2018 http://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/india-wary-as-maldives-pak-discuss-joint-eez-patrolling-in-indian-ocean-118040200418_1.html (Accessed on April 2018)

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan calls on the President, Press Release, The Presidency, Republic of Maldives, April 01, 2018, <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=18947> (Accessed on 02 April, 2018)

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Navy to set up strategic centre in Thiruvananthapuram, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/navy-to-set-up-strategic-centre-in-state-capital/articleshow/63586827.cms>, (Accessed on April 03, 2018)

the installations of the Indian Air Force."⁹² According to a media report, the Indian Navy is planning to include Indian naval armament inspectorate, naval communications centre, coastal security coordination cell, hard landing point, search and rescue coordination cell, emergency medical room and operational personnel residing cum logistic complex and a data centre at the strategic centre at Muttathara.⁹³

- **Pakistan tests nuclear-capable, submarine-launched missile with a range of 450km**

Pakistan has conducted test firing of its indigenously designed and built Submarine Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM) Babur, said Major General Asif Ghafoor, the Pakistani Army spokesperson on March 30, 2018.⁹⁴ This SLCM is a variant of land cruise missile Babur II having a range of 450 km.⁹⁵ As reported in Hindustan Times, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement, "SLCM Babur provides Pakistan credible second strike capability, augmenting the existing deterrence regime."⁹⁶ According to a media report, "the missile is capable of delivering various types of payloads and incorporates advanced technologies, including underwater controlled propulsion and sophisticated guidance and navigation features."⁹⁷

Sri Lanka

- **No-Confidence Motion: Ranil Secures Party Backing**

Amidst whispers of UNP parliamentarians supporting the no-confidence motion against him brought by the Joint Opposition, Prime Minister and leader of the UNP Ranil Wickremesinghe scored a quiet victory when the party's Working Committee passed a resolution on 29th March to defeat the said motion. This support comes in the wake of several moves by President Maithripala Sirisena to humiliate Wickremesinghe ahead of the debate scheduled for April 7, 2018. The President relieved Wickremesinghe of oversight responsibilities with respect to the Central Bank, handing the institution over to Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera.⁹⁸

- **Party reforms soon after defeating no-faith motion: UNP**

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Pakistan tests its indigenously built Submarine Launched Cruise Missile Babur, March 30, 2018, <http://www.financialexpress.com/defence/pakistan-tests-its-indigenously-built-submarine-launched-cruise-missile-babur/1115584/> (Accessed on March 02, 2018)

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Pakistan tests nuclear-capable, submarine-launched missile with a range of 450km, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/pakistan-tests-nuclear-capable-submarine-missile/story-DtqmgA4KQpR5kJmbKPb9IJ.html> (Accessed on March 02, 2018)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ No-Confidence Motion: Ranil Secures Party Backing, 29th March 2018, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/no-confidence-motion-ranil-secures-party-backing/>

The United National Party (UNP) said it would carry out rigorous party reforms no sooner it defeated the no-confidence motion against UNP Leader and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Parliament. MP Kavinda Jayawardena told a news conference held at Sirikotha that they were confident of defeating the no-confidence motion on April 4 and launch its reforms on April 5⁹⁹.

- **President Maithripala Sirisena concludes Visit to Pakistan**

President Maithripala Sirisena concluded a three-day official visit to Pakistan from 22-24 March 2018, where he graced the 78th Pakistan Day Celebrations, as the Chief Foreign Guest, at the invitation of Pakistan President Mamnoon Hussain.

President Maithripala Sirisena had discussions with Pakistan Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on ways and means to further strengthen relations between the two countries. Enhancing trade to reach a target of US \$ 1 billion by 2020 was also discussed. Following bilateral discussions, President Sirisena witnessed the signing of three Memoranda of Understanding covering the Training of Diplomats between the Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute (BIDTI) of Sri Lanka and Foreign Service Academy of Pakistan; in the field of Administration between the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA) and the National School of Public Policy (NSPP) of Pakistan; and on Youth Development between Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The Prime Minister of Pakistan hosted a banquet in honour of President Sirisena¹⁰⁰.

Maldives

- **Pakistan army chief arrives in Maldives**

Pakistan army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa arrived in the Maldives on 30th March for a three-day official visit on the invitation of his Maldivian counterpart. Bajwa will meet with Defence Minister Adam Shareef Umar and other officials during his first visit to the country since taking up the top military post in November 2016, according to the Maldives National Defence Force. The Pakistan chief of army staff is the highest-ranking foreign dignitary to visit the country since a widely criticised state of emergency was lifted after 45 days¹⁰¹.

- **German ambassador claims summer flights to Maldives may be cancelled**

⁹⁹ Party reforms soon after defeating no-faith motion: UNP, 31st March 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/-Party-reforms-soon-after-defeating-no-faith-motion-UNP-148067.html>

¹⁰⁰ President Maithripala Sirisena concludes Visit to Pakistan, 2nd April 2018, <http://www.mfa.gov.lk/index.php/en/media/media-releases/7541-pres-visitp>

¹⁰¹ Pakistan army chief arrives in Maldives, 31st March 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/pakistan-army-chief-arrives-in-maldives-137000>

The German Ambassador for the Maldives, Joern Rohde says that if the nation's current political situation does not subside in time for summer, many major European airlines are rumoured to suspend their flights headed to the Maldives. In a series of tweets by Rohde on Saturday, he alleged, "Despite the end of SoE democratic rights remain curtailed as MPs remain jailed on politically motivated prosecutions. The economy and thus the people suffer since tourists continue to stay away."¹⁰²

- **More than 30 people still in police detention**

More than 30 people arrested since the state of emergency declared last month remain in detention, the opposition has claimed. Hundreds were arrested during protests against the "unlawful" 45-day emergency rule, according to the Maldivian Democratic Party. The state of emergency ended on March 22¹⁰³.

- **Opposition coalition to resume presidential candidate discussions**

The opposition coalition is getting ready to reopen discussions to bring forth a presidential candidate to compete against President Abdulla Yameen in the upcoming presidential elections, Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) Chairperson Hussan Latheef said. According to Latheef, talks of a single candidate from the opposition came to a halt after the declaration of the state of emergency on February 5.¹⁰⁴

- **Minister Shainee meets UN delegation in Maldives**

The envoy from United Nation's Political Affairs met with Minister of Fisheries and chair of all-party talks Dr Mohamed Shainee. The team with leading members of the UN political affairs arrived to the Maldives in an attempt to find a solution to the ongoing political crisis in the country. Senior Political Officer of the UN Department of Political Affairs Mr Shin Umezu, and resident UN coordinator Shoko Noda, along with two members of the UN Department of Political Affairs met with the fisheries minister in order to discuss the concerns around the current political situation in the Maldives¹⁰⁵.

- **Maldives rebukes India's 'unhelpful' call to release prisoners**

The Maldives has flatly rejected calls from India to execute a Supreme Court order for the release and retrial of nine prisoners. Welcoming the revocation of a 45-day state of emergency on 22nd March, the Indian external affairs ministry said concerns

¹⁰² German ambassador claims summer flights to Maldives may be cancelled, 1 April 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/german-ambassador-claims-summer-flights-to-maldives-may-be-cancelled/>

¹⁰³ More than 30 people still in police detention, 28th March 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/more-than-30-people-still-in-police-detention-136920>

¹⁰⁴ Opposition coalition to resume presidential candidate discussions, 29th March, 2-18, <http://en.mihaaru.com/opposition-coalition-to-resume-presidential-candidate-discussions/>

¹⁰⁵ Minister Shainee meets UN delegation in Maldives, 27th March 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/minister-shainee-meets-un-delegation-in-maldives/>

expressed by the international community “still remain to be addressed” in order to restore the independence and proper functioning of the judiciary and legislature¹⁰⁶.

- **Maldives state of emergency lifted**

President Abdulla Yameen has ended a 45-day state of emergency declared last month in response to a Supreme Court order for the release of his jailed opponents. The emergency was lifted on 22nd March despite “a diminished threat to national security, because the nation can now continue without further losses incurred, and upon the advice of the security services and in an effort to promote normalcy”, the president’s office said¹⁰⁷.

West Asia

GCC & Saudi Arabia

- **Missile Attack by Houthis on Saudi Arabia**

On 26 March 2018, rebel Houthis from Yemen fired half a dozen missiles on five major cities of Saudi Arabia, including Riyadh, Khamis, Mushait, Najran and Jazan. The Saudi side successfully intercepted all the missiles. The spokesperson of the Arab Coalition, Col. Turki Al-Maliki accused Iran. He said, “This aggressive and hostile action by the Iran-backed Houthi group proves that the Iranian regime continues to support the armed group with military capabilities”.¹⁰⁸

According to the Saudi sources, in the last one half years, Houthis have fired around 90 missiles on different cities of Saudi Arabia. Initially, Houthis targeted the border regions, but gradually they started targeting the deep cities. This shows, the improving technical and distance capabilities of these missiles. They accuse Iranian hands in Houthi missile capability.

- **Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman Visits US**

Saudi Arabia’s young Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS) paid a three week official tour to United States from 19 March 2018.¹⁰⁹ This was his first visit to the US since he assumed the position of Crown Prince. During his long stay, he met US President Donald Trump, business leaders, including Bill Gates¹¹⁰ heads of the credit

¹⁰⁶ Maldives rebukes India’s ‘unhelpful’ call to release prisoners, 23rd March 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-rebukes-indias-unhelpful-call-to-release-prisoners-136771>

¹⁰⁷ Maldives state of emergency lifted, 22nd March 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-state-of-emergency-lifted-136742>

¹⁰⁸ <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/03/26/Saudi-Arabia-intercepts-missile-above-northeast-Riyadh.html>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/20/us/politics/saudi-crown-prince-arrives-at-white-house-to-meet-with-trump.html>

¹¹⁰ <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1276601/saudi-arabia>

rating agencies such as JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley¹¹¹, and visited several cities such as Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Seattle, Boston and Houston and Texas, the oil and gas city.¹¹² The purpose of his visit is seen as securing three main interests. First, economic and security concerns; second, roping investment in from US companies; and third, portraying a different image of Saudi Arabia and winning the faith of the American elites and common public. In his first objective, MBS was successful in securing more defence deal and full assurance of President Trump on security issues. President Trump supported Saudi Arabia on Yemen despite growing opposition in Congress. Both leaders also agreed to work jointly to contain Iran. President Trump has also showed affirmative interest in increasing relations with Saudi Arabia. Both sides expressed that economic engagement is a new hope of taking their bilateral relation beyond energy and security binary.

MBS made several meetings with important CEOs and invited them to invest in Saudi Arabia, especially in its projects underlined in Vision 2030. He also invited business captains of the US to invest in NEOM City, Red Sea Project. MBS also gave his first TV interview to 60 minutes and answered several questions related to economic reform, women's position and security related issues such as Yemen, Iran and owning of nuclear capability if Iran succeeds in acquiring it. He also termed Ayatollah, the Hitler of Middle East.¹¹³

On Women issues, MBS clarified that he is opposed to strict control of women and said they are absolutely equal to men.¹¹⁴ He is in favour of giving them full freedom which is essential in their progress and development. He also underlined that the Kingdom is ready to harness the economic and social potential of females hitherto remained utilized.

Some news agencies have also portrayed that MBS was not successful in convincing the White House Palestine issues, Middle East peace process.¹¹⁵ Experts think that developing a common understanding Palestine issue was an important aspect of his trip. Leaked itinerary showed that MBS also met with leaders of several right-wing Jewish organizations.¹¹⁶ Along with improving relations with US, one of the major image-building efforts of MBS has been to resolve Israel-Palestine problem and improve his credibility not only in the region but in the entire Muslim world. There is a talk in the region that Iran will continue to sustain its goodwill till Israel-Palatine problem persists.

¹¹¹ <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1276116/saudi-arabia>

¹¹² <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-fg-us-saudi-prince-20180318-story.html>

¹¹³ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/saudi-crown-prince-talks-to-60-minutes/>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/18/world/middleeast/mohammed-bin-salman-saudi-arabia-60-minutes.html>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/20/saudi-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-trump-visit>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/mbs-meets-aipac-anti-bds-leaders-visit-180329091244300.html>

Turkey

- **Turkey to host Syria summit with Russia, Iran on April 4¹¹⁷**

Turkey will host a trilateral meeting on Syria, gathering leaders from Turkey, Russia and Iran next week, the Presidential Press Office said on March 31.

The meeting hosted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 4 will be attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, according to a statement. Besides regional developments and the ongoing Syrian war, the Turkish and Iranian leaders are also expected to hold talks to discuss bilateral relations.

Turkey, Russia and Iran are the guarantor countries who brokered a cease-fire in Syria in December 2016, leading to the Astana talks in the Kazakh capital, which are being held parallel to United Nations-backed discussions in Geneva, to find a political solution to the conflict.

Ankara will also host the seventh meeting of the Turkey-Russia High-Level Cooperation Council with participants from Ankara and Moscow on April 3, the statement read.

During the meeting, the leaders will also exchange views on regional and international issues as well as bilateral relations. As part of his visit, the Russian president will also attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant on April 3.

- **Erdoğan to Israeli PM: You are a terrorist and an occupier¹¹⁸**

Israel is a “terrorist state and occupier,” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said, once again slamming the killing of 16 Palestinians by the Israeli army during a demonstration on March 30.

“He says our soldiers are oppressing people in Afrin. Netanyahu, you are very weak, very poor,” Erdoğan said at a ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) congress in the southern province of Adana on April 1, addressing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“We [Turkey] are dealing with terrorists. But you are not concerned about terrorists because you are a terror state,” Erdoğan said. Calling the Israeli leader “an occupier” in Palestine, Erdogan said Netanyahu has no right to criticize Turkey.

“You are not popular. The step you took regarding Jerusalem at the United Nations is out in the open. The answer you received is out in the open. Stop bragging about

¹¹⁷ Hurriyet Daily news, 31 March 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-host-syria-summit-with-russia-iran-on-april-4-129583>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/israel-is-a-terror-state-president-erdogan-129613>

owning nuclear weapons. The time may come when those weapons don't work," Erdoğan added.

"You are also a terrorist. History is recording what you have done to all those oppressed Palestinians," Erdoğan said, adding that he believes Israelis too are disturbed by Netanyahu's misdeeds.

His harsh language came after thousands of Palestinians marched to Gaza's border with Israel on March 30 and at least 16 Gazans were killed and hundreds of other were injured when Israeli forces opened fire on protesters marking "Land Day."

Land Day is an annual Palestinian commemoration of the deaths of six Arab citizens of Israel killed by Israeli forces in 1976 during demonstrations over government land confiscations in northern Israel.

- **US military build up in Manbij amid Turkey's offensive signal¹¹⁹**

The U.S. is intensifying its military presence in northern Syria's Manbij district, controlled by the PKK's Syrian affiliate, where Ankara said it will launch an offensive to eliminate terrorists posing a threat to Turkey, if they continue to stay in the region. Approximately 300 U.S. soldiers arrived in Manbij, west of the Euphrates River, in a convoy which included many armored vehicles and construction machines, Anadolu Agency (AA) reported, citing local sources. As Operation Olive Branch in Syrian northwestern Afrin, launched on Jan. 20, is coming to a completion, Turkey has vowed to take unilateral action against the terrorist PKK-linked People's Protection Units (YPG) if they continue to remain in Manbij and the eastern parts of the Euphrates River.

On March 18, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and Free Syrian Army (FSA) liberated the town of Afrin, a major hideout for the terrorist organization since 2012. However, the clearing of explosives in the province is currently underway.

The reinforcements were deployed near the Sajur River, which forms the frontline between the Operation Euphrates Shield area and the YPG/PKK invaded area. Several towns in northern Syria were cleared of Daesh terrorists in northern Syria with Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield, launched in Aug. 2016 and ended March 2017.

Also, reinforcements were deployed around Zub'ul Bayn village, west of Manbij.

The additional forces are now patrolling the Sajur River shore daily, the report added. Previously, the patrols occurred weekly. The U.S. forces are also patrolling the Ras al-Ayn area, opposite Turkey's Ceylanpinar border gate, for the last three days.

¹¹⁹ Daily Sabah, 31 March, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/04/02/us-military-buildup-in-manbij-amid-turkeys-offensive-signal>

- **Turkey detains 245 Daesh-linked suspects in anti-terror ops in March¹²⁰**

Security forces arrested 245 Daesh suspects across Turkey and thwarted several terror attacks in March, according to information compiled by Anadolu Agency. The arrests included foreigners who were allegedly involved in the terrorist organization's administrative division. The forces also seized documents, weapons and ammunition. Fifty-one suspects were remanded into custody following a court ruling and some were deported. The others are still being investigated.

The security forces arrested 10 suspects with links to Daesh in northwestern Sakarya, central Nevsehir and southern Gaziantep provinces. Nine of them were remanded into custody. Daesh members M.K. and U.H, identified only by their initials, were handed down jail terms by a court.

In southeastern Şanlıurfa province, out of 41 suspects, 18 were remanded into custody. At least 319 people have lost their lives in Daesh terror attacks in Turkey, where the terror organization has targeted civilians in suicide bomb, rocket and gun attacks.

- **Procurement of Patriots on agenda of US-Turkey defense trade dialogue¹²¹**

Turkish and U.S. officials will have a round table meeting on March 30 in Ankara as part of the 5th gathering of Turkey-U.S. Defense Trade Dialogue with procurement of Patriot missile defense systems are on the agenda of two NATO allies.

U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Tina Kaidanow will be visiting Ankara as part of a regional trip including Iraq.

“In Ankara, Turkey, Ambassador Kaidanow will meet with Turkish officials to discuss bilateral defense trade and security cooperation. She will meet with representatives from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, and the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries to share U.S. perspectives on bilateral and regional security issues as part of the U.S.-Turkey Defense Trade Dialogue, and will hold a roundtable discussion with representatives from major U.S. and Turkish defense manufacturers,” the U.S. State Department said in a written statement.

Washington has for months urged Turkey to revise its decision to procure Russian S-400 missile defense systems, saying they will not be interoperable with NATO systems.

In December last year, Turkey and Russia signed an accord for Moscow to supply Ankara with S-400 surface-to-air missile batteries, finalizing a deal set to deepen military ties between NATO member Turkey and the Kremlin.

¹²⁰Daily Sabah, 31 March, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/04/01/turkey-detains-245-daesh-linked-suspects-in-anti-terror-ops-in-march>

¹²¹Hurriyet Daily News, 31 march 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/procurement-of-patriots-on-agenda-of-us-turkey-defense-trade-dialogue-129522>

Iraq and Gulf Cooperation Council

- **Iraq will prevent militant Kurdish attack on Turkey: PM Abadi¹²²**

A day after Turkish President Erdogan threatened to intervene directly if the Iraqi operation against Kurdish militants in the Sinjar region failed, Prime Minister Abadi, last Tuesday in a phone call with his Turkish counterpart, Binali Yildirim, pledged that Iraqi security forces will not allow the presence of foreign fighters in the border region.

Kurdish insurgent group gained a foothold in Sinjar, close to Syria-Iraq border, after they came to the aid of Yazidi minority community, when it was under the attack from ISIS in 2014.

Following the threats from Ankara, PKK forces withdrew from Sinjar, while Iraq has maintained that there have been no territorial violations by Turkey's anti-PKK operations.¹²³

Iraqi assurances of counter-terror operation in the region aimed to keep Turkey from violating Iraqi sovereignty and embarrass PM Abadi at a time when the elections for National Assembly are not more than a month away.

- **Iraq sets plans to launch cross-border operation against 'terrorists' in Syria, says Abadi¹²⁴**

In his weekly press conference on Sunday night, Prime Minister Abadi said that the Iraqi military has established plans to go beyond its borders and may enter Syria in an attempt to fight against terrorism. "Our project has developed from fighting terror in Iraq to fighting terror in the region," the premier claimed, saying their aim is not to violate other countries sovereignties.

PM Abadi is not only seeking to enforce the sovereignty Iraqi security forces by curtailing the influence of Kurdish forces in the border region, the growing ISIS sleeper cells hit and run attacks near Kirkuk and elsewhere in Iraq, have made it important to secure the Syria-Iraq border region, which has become the focus of Iraqi counter-terrorism operations.

- **Iraq may have twice as much oil, as previously thought, says Minister¹²⁵**

As Iraq plans to hold a bidding round on April 15, awarding service contracts to companies for 11 onshore and offshore oil fields along the borders with Iran and

¹²² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-turkey/iraq-will-prevent-militant-kurdish-attacks-on-turkey-pm-abadi-idUSKBN1H30J1>

¹²³ <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/27032018>

¹²⁴ <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/010420182>

¹²⁵ <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1275391/business-economy>

Kuwait, country's oil minister Jabal Al-Luaibi claimed that Iraq's oil reserves may be double their current estimated level.

The doubling of the country's proven reserves would see Iraq overtake Saudi Arabia to contend with Venezuela for the title of the country with the largest proven reserves.

Iraq has been ramping up crude production and exports over the last few years as the country overcomes decades of conflict and sanctions. Iraq plans to boost crude production to more than 5 million barrels per day from the current level of 4.35 million.

The country has become the second-biggest producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, though it's now bound by the group's agreement with other major producers to keep limits on their output to reduce global inventories.¹²⁶

- **Iraq wants to "Keep Away" from U.S. –Iran Conflict, says Prime Minister Abadi¹²⁷**

Iraq wants to "keep away" from the U.S.-Iran conflict, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Wednesday.

Baghdad wants to maintain a "balance" in its relations with Washington and Tehran, he told an energy conference in Baghdad, explaining that this policy was in Iraq's interest.

Prime Minister Abadi in order to build Iraqi military capacity to fight the ISIS threat and the imperative of reviving its energy sector by inviting Western technology and investment has pursued a centrist foreign policy of cultivating relations with a wide array of regional and international partners, instead of a narrow regional alliance with Iran.

- **Qatar Energy firms to raise Foreign Share Ownership to 49 percent: Qatar Petroleum¹²⁸**

Foreign investors would be able to hold up to 49 percent of Qatar stock-exchange listed shares in three subsidiaries of Qatar Petroleum (QP) after limits on foreign ownership were lifted, the state-owned energy company said on Saturday.

In a statement, QP said shareholder ownership limits in the companies would also be raised, to 1 percent for Qatar Electricity and Water Company (WOQOD) and to 2 percent for Gulf International Services Company and Mesaieed Petrochemical Holding Company.

¹²⁶ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-29/exxon-total-join-majors-interested-in-iraq-april-15-oil-auction>

¹²⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2018/03/28/world/middleeast/28reuters-usa-iran-iraq.html>

¹²⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-qatar-energy-ownership/qatar-energy-firms-to-raise-foreign-share-ownership-to-49-percent-qp-idUSKBN1H706X>

The three firms will take the steps needed to approve the increase in the foreign ownership limit to 49 percent within the coming weeks, the statement said.

The decision comes in line with the vision of Qatar Exchange to enhance the Qatari stock market under which, Industries Qatar (IQ), one of the region's industrial giants with interests in the production of a wide range of petrochemical, fertiliser and steel products, announced on March, 13 the increase of the foreign ownership limit from 25% to 49%.

"We believe this decision will give more strength to Qatar Stock Exchange, and will contribute to its development to be a leading regional financial center and an attractive financial destination to local and global investments," QP president and CEO Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi said in the statement.

- **Kuwaiti Parliamentary Finance Committee Approves Taxing Expat Remittances¹²⁹**

The parliamentary Financial and Economic Affairs Committee has approved four bills on imposing tax on remittances of expatriates, taking into account those with low income.

Committee Chairman MP Salah Khorshid said majority of the panel members approved the bills, indicating they have taken into consideration the possibility of imposing lower tax on those with limited income.

He went on to say that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain are currently applying this law. He argued that banks and exchange companies are collecting fees for remittances, so he wonders why the government is not taking a similar step in the interest of the State.

It was after studies proved that the amount transferred by expatriates exceeded KD19 billion a year, the Kuwaiti government has sought to increase non-oil revenue by taxing both citizens and expatriates. But the committee has insisted that tax will be imposed only on remittances of expatriates and the revenue will be about KD 70 million for remittances estimated at KD 19 billion per year.

Experts have argued that if the recommendations of the committee are converted into legislation by the parliament, it would contravene Article 29 of Kuwaiti constitution which stipulates: All people are equal in human dignity and in public rights and duties before the law, without distinction to race, origin, language, or religion." He also cited Article 24 of the Constitution which states that "social justice shall be the basis of taxes and public imposts."

- **Bahrain, UAE say Qatari jets interfering with their flights, Qatar denies¹³⁰**

¹²⁹ <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/news/parliamentary-finance-committee-approves-taxing-expat-remittances/>

¹³⁰ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/bahrain-uae-qatari-jets-interfering-flights-54034337>

For the third time, since Arab Quartet imposed a land, naval and air blockade on Qatar in June, 2014, Bahraini and UAE authorities accused Qatari military jets of interfering with their flights on last Monday. Qatar, which has complained about Emirati military aircraft violating its airspace, denied the UAE's claims.

Bahrain's state-run news agency said late Monday that Qatari fighter jets passed underneath an Emirati plane with a tail number corresponding to an aircraft flown by the ruling family of Fujairah, one of the UAE's seven emirates.

Separately, the UAE's civil aviation authority issued a statement alleging that "two Qatari fighter jets dangerously approached two UAE-registered commercial airplanes while flying" in Bahrain's airspace.

The chairman of the UAE's General Civil Aviation Authority, Sultan bin Saeed al-Mansouri, said the country would complain again to International Civil Aviation Organisation.

While Qatar has not technically banned the four blockading countries from using its skies, the UAE has reported Qatar to ICAO on two previous occasions for what they call a violation of their airspace.¹³¹

Israel

- **Iron Dome Misfire**

Iron Dome interceptor missiles misfired on March 25th night due to the system's "oversensitivity". The system misidentified automatic gunfire from the Gaza Strip, when Hamas carried out a live military exercise, as incoming rockets heading toward the southern Israeli community of Zikim.¹³²

- **Deportation of African Migrants**

The Population Authority plans to deport only single, male, working-age asylum seekers, and hopes to give some type of permanent status to African women and children migrants. Immigration and Borders Authority director Shlomo Mor-Yosef estimated that approximately half of the 38,000 asylum seekers in Israel fit the profile of unmarried male asylum seekers of working age and should be deported.¹³³ However,

¹³¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/qatar-denies-fresh-uae-accusations-airspace-violations-180327091149837.html>

¹³² Judah Ari Gross, "\$1 million worth of Iron Dome missiles fired at nothing due to 'oversensitivity'", *The Times of Israel*, March 26, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/1-million-worth-of-iron-dome-missiles-fired-at-nothing-due-to-oversensitivity/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=fae8af9831-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_26&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-fae8af9831-55556173 as accessed on April 2, 2018

¹³³ Melanie Lidman, "Population Authority: Half of the asylum seekers can stay if we deport the rest", *The Times of Israel*, March 28, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/population-authority-half-of-the-asylum-seekers-can-stay-if-we-deport-the-rest/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=360d6a99a1-

on March 27th that the deportation of African migrants will be delayed until after Passover.¹³⁴

- **El Al and Air India**

El Al on March 28 said it filed an urgent petition to the High Court of Justice against Air India's new route connecting New Delhi and Tel Aviv, which for the first time ever crosses over Saudi airspace. The airline's president and CEO Gonen Usishkin and chairman Eli Defes argued that by allowing Air India to fly over a country that does not grant El Al the same rights, the government of Israel is violating its commitments to Israel's national air carrier. El Al has taken legal action against the Israeli government, its Civil Aviation Administration, Transportation Minister Israel Katz, and Air India, the airline's spokesperson, Ran Rahav.¹³⁵

- **Commemorating March of Return and Continuing Protest**

More than 30,000 Palestinians gathered for demonstrating near the security fence with Israel as a six-week protest in which Gazans plan to set up camp near the barriers gets underway. Dubbed the "March of Return," the protest is backed by Gaza's ruling regime, Hamas, and marks Land Day, when Palestinians commemorate the Israeli government's expropriation of Arab-owned land in the Galilee on March 30, 1976, and ensuing demonstrations in which six Arab Israelis were killed.¹³⁶ However, The protests were incited and turned violent. The police took recourse to tear gas shelling, rubber bullets and live fire which led to the death of 15 Palestinians and injuring more than 1,100.¹³⁷ The head of Israel's Southern Command accused terror groups of using the March 30th protests of trying to carry out attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians.¹³⁸ Turkey accused Israel of using "disproportionate force" against the

[EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2018 03 28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-360d6a99a1-55556173](mailto:adb46cec92-360d6a99a1-55556173) as accessed on April 2, 2018

¹³⁴ "Israel delays deportation of African migrants until after Passover", *Times of Israel*, March 27, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-delays-deportation-of-african-migrants-until-after-passover/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=81bb632c51-](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-delays-deportation-of-african-migrants-until-after-passover/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=81bb632c51-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-81bb632c51-55556173)

[EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2018 03 28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-81bb632c51-55556173](mailto:adb46cec92-81bb632c51-55556173) as accessed on April 2, 2018

¹³⁵ Raphael Ahren, "El Al sues Israeli government over new Air India route", *Times of Israel*, March 28, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/el-al-takes-legal-action-against-state-over-new-air-india-route/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=81bb632c51-](https://www.timesofisrael.com/el-al-takes-legal-action-against-state-over-new-air-india-route/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=81bb632c51-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-81bb632c51-55556173)

[EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2018 03 28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-81bb632c51-55556173](mailto:adb46cec92-81bb632c51-55556173) as accessed on April 2, 2018

¹³⁶ Jacob Magid, "Abbas declares 'national day of mourning' after violent, fatal Gaza protests", *Times of Israel*, March 30, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-march-30-2018/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=a063455d51-](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-march-30-2018/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=a063455d51-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-a063455d51-55556173)

[EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2018 03 28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-a063455d51-55556173](mailto:adb46cec92-a063455d51-55556173) as accessed on April 2, 2018

¹³⁷ Judah Ari Gross and Khaled Abu Toameh, "15 Gazans said killed, 1,100 hurt in clashes at massive border protest", *Times of Israel*, March 30, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/6-gazans-said-wounded-as-thousands-flock-to-border-to-protest/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=a063455d51-](https://www.timesofisrael.com/6-gazans-said-wounded-as-thousands-flock-to-border-to-protest/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=a063455d51-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-a063455d51-55556173)

[EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2018 03 28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-a063455d51-55556173](mailto:adb46cec92-a063455d51-55556173) as accessed on April 2, 2018

¹³⁸ Judah Ari Gross, "IDF says terror groups using border protests as cover to launch attacks", *Times of Israel*, March 30, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-terror-groups-using-border-protests-as-cover-to-launch-attacks/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=a063455d51-

Palestinians during the protests. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas declares March 31st a “day of national mourning” to commemorate the Palestinians killed.¹³⁹ Later, Israeli tanks and planes bombed Hamas sites in the Gaza Strip March 30 evening after troops came under fire amid intense day-long clashes on the border. The reprisal attack came after troops were shot at by two Gazans approaching the security fence.¹⁴⁰ United States on March 31 blocked a draft UN Security Council statement, presented by Kuwait urging restraint and calling for an investigation of clashes on the Gaza-Israel border.¹⁴¹ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on March 31st stated Israeli action as inhumane attack. The Israeli prime minister rejected Ankara’s “moral lessons” over deadly clashes on the border with the Gaza Strip. On April 1, the Turkish President accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of being “a terrorist”.¹⁴² Netanyahu countered by stating that “Someone who occupies northern Cyprus, invades the Kurdish regions, and slaughters civilians in Afrin — should not preach Israel about values and ethics”.¹⁴³ The protests on the borders continue.

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¹³⁹ Jacob Magid, “Abbas declares ‘national day of mourning’ after violent, fatal Gaza protests”, *Times of Israel*, March 30, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-march-30-2018/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=a063455d51-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a db46cec92-a063455d51-55556173 as

accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴⁰ Joshua Davidovich and Jacob Magid, “Israel hits Hamas sites with tanks, jets after Gazans fire on troops”, *Times of Israel*, March 30, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-hits-hamas-sites-with-tanks-jets-after-gazans-fire-on-troops/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=b3b7d7c947-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a db46cec92-b3b7d7c947-55556173 as

accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴¹ Khaled Abu Toameh, “US blocks UN resolution condemning Israel for deaths in Gaza clashes”, *Times of Israel*, April 1, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-blocks-un-resolution-condemning-israel-for-deaths-in-gaza-clashes/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=6e16004b9b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a db46cec92-6e16004b9b-55556173 as

accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴² “Erdogan calls Netanyahu a ‘terrorist,’ Israel a ‘terrorist state’ over Gaza”, *Times of Israel*, April 1, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/erdogan-calls-netanyahu-a-terrorist-over-gaza-deaths/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=6e16004b9b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a db46cec92-6e16004b9b-55556173 as

accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴³ “Netanyahu steps up war of words with Erdogan: ‘Get used to it’”, *Times of Israel*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-steps-up-war-of-words-with-erdogan-tells-him-to-get-used-to-it/> as accessed on April 2, 2018

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	March 26	FATA	At least two suspected terrorists, identified as Haq Nawaz and Mohsin, were killed during a search operation in Tor Khwar area of Safi <i>tehsil</i> (revenue unit) in Mohmand Agency. According to sources, Security Forces (SFs) jointly conducted the operation after receiving information about the presence of some militants in the area. The SFs also seized rocket launchers, Kalashnikovs, ammunition and explosives from hideout. ¹⁴⁴	2	0
2	March 26	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)	<p>A local journalist, identified as Shah Zaman Mehsud, was abducted from his home in Tank District. Mehsud hails from South Waziristan Agency of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) but has been living in Tank with his family.</p> <p>His brothers, Shah Farman and Ismail, said that that five unknown persons dressed in plain clothes raided their residence and took Zaman away forcefully. They claimed that it is not the first time that Zaman was abducted as he had recently returned home after remaining in captivity for around a month and a half.¹⁴⁵</p>	Tribal journalist abducted	
3	March 28	FATA	Unidentified militants blew up an under-construction government school in Akkakhel area of Tirah Valley in Khyber Agency, injuring three labourers.	0	3

¹⁴⁴ Fauzee Khan Mohmand, Two suspected terrorists killed in Mohmand search operation, *Dawn*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397778/two-suspected-terrorists-killed-in-mohmand-search-operation>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴⁵ Ali Akbar, Local journalist abducted from Tank, family claims, *Dawn*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397866/local-journalist-abducted-from-tank-family-claims>, accessed on April 2, 2018

			According to officials, the militants entered the school building at around midnight and planted explosives in almost all parts of the building being rebuilt by the Frontier Corps. ¹⁴⁶		
4	March 30	KP	At least three policemen were killed when the convoy of District Police Official (DPO) Zahidullah came under attack in a remote-controlled IED explosion on Hathala Road in Kolachi <i>tehsil</i> of Dera Ismail Khan District. ¹⁴⁷	3	0

Afghanistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	March 31	Ghazni	Five Islamic State (IS) militants were killed and six others were injured in Khogyani district. Some of their weapons and ammunition were destroyed. ¹⁴⁸	5	6
2	April 1	Nine provinces	The Afghan military launched a large scale military operation in nine provinces in northern and northeastern parts of the country to suppress the Taliban, ISIS and other militants. ¹⁴⁹	Operation launched	
3	April 1	Badakhshan	At least 27 militants were killed in a military operation that was launched three days ago to clear insecure areas. "Our security forces are advancing step by step and clearing the villages in order to prevent civilian casualties and are creating check posts," said	27	0

¹⁴⁶ Ibrahim Shinwari, School building blown up in Tirah, *Dawn*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398421/school-building-blown-up-in-tirah>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴⁷ Ali Akbar, 3 policemen martyred in attack on DPO's convoy in Dera Ismail Khan, *Dawn*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398519/3-policemen-martyred-in-attack-on-dpos-convoy-in-dera-ismail-khan>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴⁸ ISIS militants suffer casualties in Ghazni airstrike: MoD, *Khaama Press*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.khaama.com/isis-militants-suffer-casualties-in-ghazni-airstrike-mod-04771/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁴⁹ Afghan military launches large scale operations in 9 Northern provinces, *Khaama Press*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.khaama.com/afghan-military-launches-large-scale-operations-in-9-northern-provinces-04767/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

			Bigzad. So far, five villages have been cleared, officials said. ¹⁵⁰		
4	April 1	Jawzjan	At least 10 IS militants were killed and six policemen were wounded during a clash in Dar Zab district. The clash broke after IS fighters attacked a security check-post in the district lasting one hour, said Jawzjan Deputy Police Chief Colonel Abdul Hafeez Khashi. ¹⁵¹	10	0
5	April 1	Logar	Local officials said that Taliban had closed all schools in Charkh district. The District Chief Mohammad Hanif Hanifi said that the Taliban closed the schools in reaction to an Afghan forces operation launched in the area. "After Afghan forces killed Mualvi Mohammad, a Taliban 'commander', during a raid on March 30, 2018, the Taliban in response shut the district's schools," he said. ¹⁵²	Taliban shuts schools	

Iraq

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	March 26	Diyala	<p>Two Iraqi mayors were killed in separate armed attacks believed to be carried out by IS militants.</p> <p>In the first incident, the mayor of Umm al-Henta village was killed along with his son at his home in northeastern Diyala. The mayor's daughter was injured in the attack.</p> <p>Separately, a mayor of al-Arab</p>	3	1

¹⁵⁰ Nematullah Ahmadi, 27 Insurgents Killed In Badakhshan Operation, *Tolo News*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/27-insurgents-killed-badakhshan-operation>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁵¹ Hamid Tamkin, 10 Daesh killed, 6 police wounded in Jawzjan clash, *Pajhwok Afghan News*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2018/04/01/10-daesh-killed-6-police-wounded-jawzjan-clash>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁵² Taliban order closed all Charkh district schools, *Pajhwok Afghan News*, April 1, 2018, https://www.pajhwok.com/en/subscription-required?redirect_from=510783, accessed on April 2, 2018

			al-Kabira village was shot dead by IS militants in northeast of Diyala. ¹⁵³		
2	March 28	Baghdad	<p>Iraq would take a firm action against Turkey if the latter violated international laws and penetrated into northern Iraqi territories to strike Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) fighters, a pro-government coalition said.</p> <p>Abbas al-Bayati, a member of the State of Law Coalition, said that so far there are no confirmed or official reports of "any Turkish penetration into Iraqi territories."¹⁵⁴</p>	Pro-Government coalition warns Turkey	
3	March 28	Baghdad	Three civilians were wounded in a bomb blast near a market in al-Mahmoudiya district. ¹⁵⁵	0	3
4	April 1	Mosul	Nineveh Operations troops confiscated a mass grave containing human remains of 48 civilians was found in al-Midan region of Mosul's Old City. These bodies had signs of torture and were executed in a secret prison. ¹⁵⁶	Mass grave recovered	

Syria

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	March 30	Washington	We're knocking the hell out of ISIS ... Let the other people take [care] of it [Syria] now," US President Donald Trump said while regretting "wasting USD 7 trillion on Middle-East." He said	US President Donald Trump to withdraw from Syria	

¹⁵³ Mohammed Ebraheem, Suspected IS militants kill two Iraqi mayors in Diyala, *Iraqi News*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/suspected-is-militants-kill-two-iraqi-mayors-in-diyala/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁵⁴ Mohammed Ebraheem, Pro-gov't coalition vows firm action against Turkey if northern Iraq threatened, *Iraqi News*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/pro-govt-coalition-vows-firm-action-against-turkey-if-northern-iraq-threatened/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁵⁵ Nehal Mostafa, Three people wounded in southern Baghdad bomb blast, *Iraqi News*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/three-people-wounded-in-southern-baghdad-bomb-blast/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁵⁶ Nehal Mostafa, Mass grave with remains of 48 civilians found in Mosul's Old City, *Iraqi News*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/mass-grave-with-remains-of-48-civilians-found-in-mosuls-old-city/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

			<p>that the United States' troops would withdraw from Syria "very soon."¹⁵⁷</p> <p>In response to Trump's statement, Senator Lindsey Graham on April 2 cautioned him against pulling American troops out of Syria, saying that doing so would be "a disaster in the making." He said, "If we withdrew our troops any time soon, ISIS would come back, the war between Turkey and the Kurds would get out of hand, and you'd be giving Damascus to the Iranians without an American presence, and Russia and Iran would dominate Syria."¹⁵⁸</p>		
2	April 1	Al Anbar	<p>The Iraqi intelligence forces, led by their Falcon group, carried out a special operation and killed the IS's leader of suicide bomb operations, identified as Isma'el Mohammad 'Abboud, in the western part of the Al-Anbar Governorate.</p> <p>'Abboud was reportedly followed by a military drone as he was attempting to cross through the vast desert area of Al-Anbar.¹⁵⁹</p>	1	0
3	April 2	East Ghouta	<p>With their military operations in the East Ghouta coming to an end, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) has been mobilizing their troops in southern Syria for what is expected to be their next major offensive.</p>	SAA mobilises troops for next offensive	

¹⁵⁷ US withdrawing from Syria 'very soon': Trump, *The Hindu*, March 30, 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-troops-withdrawing-from-syria-very-soon-trump/article23389912.ece>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁵⁸ Brett Samuels, Graham: US leaving Syria would be 'single worst decision' Trump could make, *The Hill*, April 1, 2018, <http://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/381188-graham-us-leaving-syria-would-be-single-worst-decision-trump-could>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁵⁹ Leith Abufadel, Iraqi intelligence forces kill ISIS leader near Syrian border, *Al Masdar News*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/iraqi-intelligence-forces-kill-isis-leader-near-syrian-border/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

			<p>Units from the SAA's 5th, 7th, and 9th divisions have already been redeployed to the southern provinces of Dara'a and Al-Quneitra; however, several more troops are expected to head to these governorates in the coming days. According to a military source in Damascus, the Syrian Army's first target in southern Syria will be the Al-Quneitra Governorate.¹</p>	
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International Economic Issues

- **India, China agree to draw roadmap to address trade deficit**

On March 26, 2018, Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu met his Chinese counterpart, Mr. Zhong Shan, in New Delhi as part of the 11th India-China dialogue on economic relations, trade, science and technology. The two ministers discussed ways to address trade imbalance and create an action plan to take trade ties forward. India had a \$51.1 billion trade deficit with the neighbour in 2016-17, which grew to \$52.9 billion in the April-January period of 2017-18. Chinese Minister Mr. Zhong Shan welcomed Indian investment in China and promised to address the trade deficit between the two countries. The Minister highlighted the important issues discussed in the meeting like two-way trade relations, preparation of an action plan, greater focus on Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and e-dialogue. The Mr. Shan said that candid and effective discussions with India on trade relations can serve as the propeller for the growth not only between the two countries but in the entire region.¹⁶⁰

- **Informal World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Meeting held on in New Delhi**

An Informal WTO Ministerial Gathering was held in New Delhi on March 19-20, 2018. Delegations from 52 countries including D.G. WTO, Mr. Roberto Azevedo are participating in the discussions. Ministers and Vice Ministers from 27 countries are

¹⁶⁰ "India, China agree to draw roadmap to address trade deficit", Hindustan Times, March 26, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business-news/india-china-agree-to-draw-roadmap-to-address-trade-deficit-commerce-ministry/story-TcyyjgUjqag4VJUdQJfhMK.html> (accessed on April 2, 2018) and Press Information Bureau Government of India, "Joint Group Most Important Dialogue Mechanism between India and China", March 26, 2018, http://commerce.gov.in/writereaddata/uploadedfile/MOC636578479743553402_Indo-China_JG_26thMarch2018.pdf (accessed on April 2, 2018)

part of the delegations. The Informal WTO Ministerial Meeting was an exercise to create confidence and bring countries together to discuss common issues like food security and agriculture. During the meeting Director General of the WTO, Roberto Azevedo, said that New Delhi was the first opportunity to have a conversation at the political level after Buenos Aires and all the members have realized the seriousness of the situation and have recognized that solutions will have to be worked out by collective effort. The DG WTO went on to say that member countries had frank and manifold dialogue and expressed strong support to the WTO system. He went on to say that although there are tensions in trade relations around the world and there is concern on unilateral decisions taken by some countries which have the probability of escalation, but members are committed to actively engage to find solutions.¹⁶¹

- **China announces imposition of new tariffs on 128 US products**

In a statement released by the Chinese Finance Ministry dated April 1, 2018, and in a direct retaliation against taxes approved by the US President Donald Trump on imported steel and aluminium, China announced the implementation of new tariffs on meat, fruit and other products from the US, heightening fears of a potential trade war between the world's two largest economies. China's Customs Tariff Commission is increasing the tariff rate on pork products and aluminium scrap by 25 percent. It is also imposing a new 15 percent tariff on 120 other imported US commodities, from almonds to apples and berries. The extra tariffs will hit 128 kinds of US products.¹⁶²

¹ Leith Abufadel, Syrian Army eyes Al-Quneitra province in southwest Syria, *Al Masdar News*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-eyes-al-quneitra-province-in-southwest-syria/>, accessed on April 2, 2018

¹⁶¹ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, "Informal World Trade Organisation Ministerial Meeting Begins in New Delhi Today", March 19, 2018, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/pmreleases.aspx?mincode=16> (accessed on April 2, 2018); Press Information Bureau, Government of India "52 Countries Begin Deliberation at Informal World Trade Organisation Ministerial Meeting in New Delhi Today", March 20, 2018, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/pmreleases.aspx?mincode=16> (accessed on April 2, 2018); Press Information Bureau, Government of India, "India Committed to Working Within Framework of WTO – Suresh Prabhu", March 20, 2018, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/pmreleases.aspx?mincode=16> (accessed on April 2, 2018)

¹⁶² [Nyshka Chandran](#) and Everett Rosenfeld, "China announces it's imposing new tariffs on 128 US products", *CNBC News*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/01/china-announces-new-tariffs-on-us-meat-and-fruit-amid-trade-war-fears.html> (accessed on April 2, 2018)