

Weekly Media Updates **(19-25 March, 2018)**

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Africa

- **African leaders sign continental free-trade agreement¹**

African leaders have signed an agreement to set up a massive free-trade area to improve regional integration and boost economic growth across the continent. The deal to create the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was signed at an extraordinary summit in Kigali, Rwanda by representatives of 44 of the 55 African Union (AU) member states.

The agreement commits countries to removing tariffs on 90 percent of goods, with 10 percent of "sensitive items" to be phased in later. It will also liberalise trade in services and might in the future include free movement of people and a single currency.

AfCFTA will now have to be ratified by individual countries. By creating a free-trade zone, African leaders hope to boost intra-Africa trade, which stands at around 10 percent of all trade across the continent.

The list of 10 countries that did not sign the agreement include Nigeria, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia, Burundi, Eritrea, Benin, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. Nigeria pulled out of the signing ceremony after President Muhammadu Buhari cancelled his attendance on Sunday. A statement at the time said the decision was made "to allow time for broader consultations". The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) had warned Buhari against signing the agreement, calling it a "renewed, extremely dangerous and radioactive neo-liberal policy initiative". Buhari's decision to postpone signing was a setback for the deal as Nigeria is one of the continent's economic powerhouses.

Mahamat, the AU Commission Chair, said the aim was to have AfCFTA come into force by the end of this year. A second phase of negotiations will be held to cover investment, competition policy and intellectual property.

- **Liberia: UN Hails Peacekeeping Mission As a 'Success'²**

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) will formally wind down its operations in Liberia at the end of March. When the mission began operations in 2003, Liberia had been considered as a failed state. The infrastructure that existed in the country had also decimated.

¹ Aljazeera, 21 March 2017, & BBC <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/african-leaders-sign-continental-free-trade-agreement-180320180017027.html>

² DW, 22 March 2018,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201803230462.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkopt

Fifteen years later, Liberia still enjoys peace and tranquility. UNMIL hails its operations as very successful.

Liberians too are grateful for the impact the UN peacekeeping mission left in the country. The final draw down of the UN Mission leaves the nation's security in the hands of the national government.

Liberia's President George Weah assured the United Nations that peace would prevail in the country. He was addressing UN's Deputy Secretary General, Amina Mohammed, at the formal closing ceremony in Monrovia.

- **Egypt to Host First Intra-African Trade Fair³**

The first-ever Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) is set to be held in Cairo in December 2018, officials announced on 22 March 2018, following the signing of the hosting agreement between the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), the African Union, and the Government of Egypt.

The hosting agreement was signed in Kigali by Benedict Oramah, president of Afreximbank; Albert Muchanga, African Union Commissioner for Trade; and Sherine El Shorbagy, Chief Executive Officer of the Export Development Authority (EDA) of Egypt, on the sidelines of the African Union Heads of State and Government Summit on the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). Oramah said that the Intra-African Trade Fair, being organised by Afreximbank, in collaboration with the African Union and hosted by Egypt, would bring together more than 1,000 exhibitors from across Africa and beyond and would attract more than 70,000 visitors, generating in excess of \$70 billion in trade deals.

In a statement, he explained that the IATF was being promoted by Afreximbank to drive intra-African trade and to support the implementation of the CFTA.

Egypt had emerged host of the 2018 edition of the trade fair (IATF2018) following a competitive bid process. IATF will be a biennial event.

- **Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia Refused to Bail Out Mugabe When the Military Took Over⁴**

³ The New Times, 22 March 2018,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201803220329.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Ainternal&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabafb

⁴ The Zimbabwe Mail, 20 March 2018, <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com/zimbabwe/kenya-mozambique-south-africa-and-zambia-refused-to-bail-out-mugabe-when-the-military-took-over/>

Former Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has just disclosed that he had very few friends towards the end of his reign with most probably regarding his ousting as good riddance. Mugabe told the **Sunday Times** that when the military intervened he called then South African President Jacob Zuma, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenya, former South African President Thabo Mbeki, Zambian President Edgar Lungu and Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi asking them to intervene, but no one took any action. He said South Africa could have done more since it was the chair of the Southern African Development Community but instead Zuma sent junior officials who, Mugabe said, were biased and “turned a blind eye” to what was happening.

- **Farmers in South Africa Claim They Are Being Targeted in 'Horrific' Attacks⁵**

White farmers in South Africa claim they are being targeted in a series of brutal attacks over land that are being overlooked by police and implicitly encouraged by the country’s parliament. Activist groups promoting the rights of white people in the country claim there have been 90 recorded attacks in 2018 so far, with one farmer murdered every five days on average. There is no official data supporting the idea that white farmers are more likely to be victims of attacks in South Africa, and the government strongly denies white people are being deliberately targeted and says farm murders are part of South Africa’s wider violent crime problem. But the sheer brutality of the reported attacks – and the growing anger of a community in South Africa that believes it is being persecuted – are increasingly raising concerns.

- **Gupta Plane Grounded in South Africa after Request from Canada⁶**

A private jet used by a business family at the heart of corruption allegations against the former South African president Jacob Zuma has been grounded by a court order, according to legal documents. The whereabouts of the Bombardier Global 6000 jet are unknown, but on Monday the high court in Johannesburg ordered that it must be landed and kept at Lanseria airport outside the city. The court gave the Guptas 15 days to hand over the jet. “Within 15 calendar days of the date of this order, the [Gupta company] shall deliver the Bombardier” into the custody of Export Development Canada (EDC) at Lanseria international airport, ruled the high court judge Fayeeza Kathree-Setiloane. EDC, Canada’s state-run trade credit agency, had, together with Stoneriver, petitioned the court after the family’s businesses defaulted on paying lease fees for the \$41m (£33m) plane. The court ordered that the South African aviation authorities should cancel the plane’s registration

⁵ Independent, 19 Marcj 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/south-africa-white-farmers-plaasmoorde-cyril-ramaphosa-anc-economic-freedom-fighters-gabriel-stols-a8262306.html>

⁶ The Guardian, 19 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/19/gupta-plane-grounded-in-south-africa-after-request-from-canada>

certificate if the family fails to comply with the order to return the aircraft.

- **Dar, Tel Aviv Ties Under Revival⁷**

Tanzania and Israel yesterday agreed to intensify their collaborations in key defence and security matters, particularly in troops training, cyber and inter-territorial security as well as improved military technology. The Minister for Defence and National Security, Dr. Hussein Mwinyi and his Israel counterpart Avigdor Liberman signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the two countries to share vital intelligence information to weed out all forms of security threats. The two ministers inked the deal at Upanga- based Tanzania People's Defence Forces (TPDF) Headquarters in Dar es Salaam after their closed door meeting, which was preceded by a joint press conference to brief reporters on their deliberations.

- **Ugandan Teachers Expelled Out of Tanzania⁸**

Hundreds of Ugandan teachers working in Tanzania have been silently forced back as the host country cracks the whip on foreigners. The expulsions raise questions about Tanzania's commitment to the East African Community, particularly the Common Market Protocol adopted in 2009. The protocol provides for integrated border management, removal of restrictions on movement of labour and services, and the right of establishment and residence for East Africans. Although many of these have been agreed, a Ugandan representative to the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), Fred Mukasa Mbidde, says two issues: labour movement and residence, are still "under the armpits". We are not yet a country as East Africa. What Tanzania is doing obviously is not in the spirit of cooperation but it is within the current framework. Labour is only permissible to the extent that one has a work permit," Mbidde told *The Observer*.

- **Zambia Accuses First Quantum of Underpaying More than US\$10 billion in Taxes⁹**

First Quantum Minerals Ltd. has been accused by an African tax authority of underpaying its taxes by more than \$10-billion over a period of five years. In a statement circulating online reported to have come from the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA), an assessment of 76.5 billion kwacha (\$10.5-billion) was sent by the ZRA to a "prominent mining

⁷ Daily News, 22 March 2018, <https://dailynews.co.tz/index.php/home-news/56689-dar-tel-aviv-ties-under-revival>

⁸ The Observer, 21 March 2018, <http://observer.ug/news/headlines/57272-ugandan-teachers-expelled-out-of-tanzania.html>

⁹ The Globe and Mail, 20 March 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/energy-and-resources/first-quantum-accused-of-underpaying-more-than-10-billion-in-taxes-by-african-tax-authority/article38312877/>

company" for misclassifying some items at importation for the past five years. In a statement released about a half hour before the close of trading on Tuesday, First Quantum confirmed it is in the cross-hairs of the ZRA.

- **Zambia Opposition Seeks to Impeach President Lungu**¹⁰

Zambia's main opposition party has filed a motion to impeach President Edgar Lungu for violating the Constitution, the presidency said Friday, in the latest development following a disputed 2016 election. The impeachment motion will be put before Parliament on March 28 by the United Party for National Development (UPND). Although it could win support from some members of the ruling Patriotic Front (PF), such as former minister Chishimba Kambwili, a leading Lungu critic who was arrested on Thursday, it looked set to be easily defeated. For an impeachment motion to succeed, the Constitution requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament. The UPND has 58 of the 167 lawmakers. The alleged constitutional violations relate to a legal battle by the UPND over the 2016 election result, as well as corruption and mismanagement allegations raised against Lungu. UPND leader Hakainde Hichilema has rejected the results of the election, which he narrowly lost, and refuses to recognise Lungu as the president.

- **Zimbabwe Changes Majority Black Ownership for Diamond, Platinum Mines**¹¹

Zimbabwe's new government has changed its empowerment ownership laws for the diamond and platinum sectors, in an effort to re-engage international lenders, curb spending and attract investors to revive the country's battered economy. The new rules, *Reuters* reports, limit majority ownership by state entities to only diamond and platinum operations and not the entire mining sector as in previous legislations, which were introduced during the rule of former president Robert Mugabe. Those requirements were intended to increase black Zimbabweans' share of the economy, but were opaque and open to abuse. The new rules introduced by President Emmerson Mnangagwa allow only state-owned miners to hold majority stakes in diamond and platinum firms. But they also let those companies to negotiate a timeline to comply with the new law.

- **Zimbabwe Police Investigate Grace Mugabe over Ivory Smuggling Claims**¹²

¹⁰ Daily Nation, 23 March 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Zambia-opposition-seeks-to-impeach-President-Edgar-Lungu/1066-4354914-11yjxobz/index.html>

¹¹ Mining.com, 19 March 2018, <http://www.mining.com/zimbabwe-changes-majority-black-ownership-for-diamond-platinum-mines/>

¹² Times Live, 25 March 2018, at <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2018-03-24-zimbabwe-police-investigate-grace-mugabe-over-ivory-smuggling-claims/>

Zimbabwean police have launched an investigation into Grace Mugabe over allegations that she headed a poaching and smuggling syndicate that illegally exported tons of elephant tusks, gold and diamonds from the country. President Emmerson Mnangagwa sanctioned an "urgent" investigation into Mugabe's activities after "very strong" evidence was uncovered by Adrian Steirn, an Australian photojournalist. The former first lady was named as the mastermind of the illegal operation by two suspected poachers who were later arrested in a police sting after trying to sell tusks to Steirn. She has not yet been charged. Mugabe did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

- **Botswana Ranks Third On Social Protection, Poverty Eradication**¹³

Botswana has been ranked amongst top three in Africa for spending on social protection services and creating systems that were targeted at poverty eradication and remote area development. This was said by the World Bank senior economist Mr. Victor Sulla during the International Conference on the Fight against Poverty, Exclusion and Inequality in Gaborone on March 20. He noted that the country had good targeted systems in place for reducing poverty and increasing human capital development. These targeted systems, he said included as many people adding that Botswana has very high spending on social protection. "About 4.4 per cent of its GDP is spent on Social Protection," he said adding that when a country spends as much, the figures should correlate with poverty reduction levels and show improvements in people's livelihoods.

- **Namibia Implements SADC Trade Related Facility Project**¹⁴

Windhoek-The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat, based in Windhoek, last week launched the SADC Trade Related Facility (TRF). Officiating at the launch, Minister of Trade, Industrialisation and SME Development, Tjekero Tweya, confirmed that Namibia has already commenced with the implementation of the European Union (EU) SADC Trade Related Facility (TRF) project. "This launch is geared towards improving Namibia's regional disposition and to enhance trade-related activities with the EU. It's for this reason that Namibia signed the Contribution Agreement with EU/SADC as one of the 12 member states to benefit from the SADC TRF Project," said Tweya when launching the project. The TRF project is meant to strengthen the process of regional integration following the commitments undertaken by the SADC member states under the SADC Protocol on Trade (STP). Also, the TRF project seeks to assist with the effective implementation and monitoring of the SADC-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the view to enhance its potential benefits, particularly in terms of

¹³ All Africa, 21 March 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201803220830.html>

¹⁴ New Era, 23 March 2018, <https://www.newera.com.na/2018/03/23/namibia-implements-sadc-trade-related-facility-project/>

improved market access of Namibian goods and services to the European Union.

- **Unexplained Internet Blackout in Ethiopia's Oromia Region**¹⁵

Internet services have been cut off in much of Ethiopia's largest regional state, Oromia, the region's television network reported on Tuesday. According to the Oromia Broadcasting Network (OBN), the blackout which has lasted some two weeks has affected universities and businesses in the region. Ethiopia's internet is in the hands of a state monopoly outfit, Ethio Telecom, the operator has yet to give a reason for the situation. Internet freedom reports have indicated that much of the country is usually stifled with regards to internet access with the capital Addis Ababa enjoying unfettered access. Activists have slammed the government repeatedly for cutting off the internet because they wanted to control the spread of information and materials relating to anti-government protests and human rights abuse.

- **Vice President Takes Over As Mauritius Female Leader Steps Down**¹⁶

The vice-president of Mauritius assumed temporary power on Friday a week after the resignation of President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim over allegations of a credit card scandal. A statement from the presidency said Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory had assumed the functions of the president on 23 March. He will hold the position until he is either confirmed by parliament or someone else is appointed. Gurib-Fakim, Africa's only female head of state, submitted her resignation in the "national interest" following accusations that she used a bank card provided by an NGO to make personal purchases, including jewellery and luxury goods worth at least 25,000 Euros. In a statement, as she handed over power on Friday, Gurib-Fakim said she had "a heavy heart" but insisted that she would be cleared by any investigation.

- **18 New Indian Missions in Africa to be Opened in Next 4 Years**¹⁷

In a major boost to India-Africa relations, the Union cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved the opening of new Indian missions in 18 African countries. The move to start 18 new Indian missions in Africa is seen as a bid to strengthen ties between Asia's third largest economy and the resource-rich continent. The 18 missions will be opened over a four-year period between 2018 to 2021. The new missions will come up in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde,

¹⁵ Africa News, 21 March 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/03/21/unexplained-internet-blackout-in-ethiopia-s-romia-region/>

¹⁶ Channels Television, 23 March 2018, <https://www.channelstv.com/2018/03/23/vice-president-takes-over-as-mauritius-female-leader-steps-down/>

¹⁷ Live Mint, 22 March 2018, at <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/mj927nlKDcH8VLZTGjTeDP/18-new-Indian-missions-in-Africa-to-be-opened-in-next-4-year.html>

Chad, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland and Togo, thereby increasing the number of resident Indian missions in Africa from 29 to 47.

- **Dapchi School Girls: Nigerian Government Reveals Boko Haram's Conditions**¹⁸

The Federal Government on Sunday, revealed that a one-week ceasefire was declared from March 19, which allowed Boko Haram insurgents drop off the abducted Dapchi schoolgirls without attack from the Military. This was disclosed by the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, at a media briefing to give update and clarifications on the release of the schoolgirls. "Unknown to many, we have been in wider cessation-of-hostility talks with the insurgents for some time now. "The talks helped to secure the release of the police officers' wives and the University of Maiduguri lecturers recently. And the talks did not stop thereafter. "Therefore, we were able to leverage on the wider talks when the Dapchi girls were abducted. "As I said earlier, the insurgents decided to return the girls to where they picked them from as a goodwill gesture. "All they demanded was a ceasefire that will grant them a safe corridor to drop the girls. This is not new. However, it has also been reported that some of the girls have not returned as either they did not survive or are still in captivity.¹⁹

- **U.S. targets South Sudan Oil Firms with Sanctions to Choke off War Funds**²⁰

The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on 15 South Sudanese oil operators that it said were important sources of cash for the government, an action aimed at increasing pressure on President Salva Kiir to end the country's conflict and humanitarian crisis. The companies and government bodies would in future require special licenses to do business in the United States, the State Department said. "The South Sudanese Government, and corrupt official actors, use this revenue to purchase weapons and fund irregular militias that undermine the peace, security, and stability of South Sudan," the department said in a statement. The groups on the list "are involved in activities that are contrary to the foreign policy interests of the United States," according to a related Department of Commerce document published on Wednesday. The South Sudanese government was not immediately available to comment.

¹⁸ Daily Post, 25 March 2018, <http://dailypost.ng/2018/03/25/dapchi-school-girls-nigerian-government-reveals-boko-harams-conditions/>

¹⁹ BBC News, 22 March 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43484146>

²⁰ Reuters, 21 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-southsudan-oil-sanctions/u-s-targets-south-sudan-oil-firms-with-sanctions-to-choke-off-war-funds-idUSKBN1GX27N>

- **Sudan, Egypt Form Cooperation Mechanisms to Overcome Bilateral Differences²¹**

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir met his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo Monday where they vowed to cooperate in managing the effects of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which Egypt is concerned might affect its share of Nile water. "We have affirmed our determination to work together, together with our brothers in Ethiopia, to reach a partnership in the Nile River that will benefit all without harming any party," Sisi said during a joint press conference with Bashir on Monday at the Itihadiyya Palace. Tensions between the countries have risen in recent months, after Sudan seemed to be leaning towards Ethiopia's side in the negotiations over the dam, despite Egypt repeatedly stressed its reservations about the dam plans. Ethiopia, however, said it would continue with the dam construction, claiming it is much-needed development for the majority of African countries. Sisi also announced joint efforts to enhance cooperation between Egypt and Sudan in various fields, including transport and infrastructure projects, which will be activated through a number of bodies and committees. Following the stalled negotiations between Egypt and Sudan, relations between the two African countries had soured. Sudan recalled its ambassador to Cairo on January 5 following news reports in Ethiopia claiming that Egypt was seeking to exclude Sudan from the tripartite negotiations over the impacts of the GERD. Another source of tensions between Egypt and Sudan has the dispute over the Halayeb and Shalateen region. Sudan accuses Egypt of occupying the territory, while Egypt says it is rightfully under its sovereignty. During Monday's meeting, Bashir and Sisi vowed to explore opportunities by forming various joint committees, including a special committee for trade promotion, a high joint technical authority for Nile water committee, a military committee, a border crossings committee, and a committee for political consultations at the level of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. "These joint committees are systematically implemented in a way that ensures dual benefits," Sisi added. Bashir said during the presser that he will soon be reviewing the mechanisms of the joint committees proposed by Sisi.

²¹ Egypt Independent, 19 March 2018, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/sudan-egypt-form-cooperation-mechanisms-to-overcome-bilateral-differences/>

North Africa

- **New UN Envoy Reaches Yemen²²**

The newly appointed UN envoy for Yemen, Briton Martin has said that he would not begin from zero to bring peace and stability in Yemen. He hinted that he would resume the dialogue between warring factions from where his predecessor has left. This statement of the envoy came in his first press conference at the Sana airport after he reached there as new UN envoy. Earlier he had visited the war-torn nation but as the director of EU institute for Peace. This is the first visit of the UN envoy since last May when his predecessor's convoy was attacked by Houthi militia after they had accused him of taking side in the peace negotiation with the government. The new envoy showed his pleasure over the response he had received and told the media person that he would seek the opinion and views of all parties on the current crisis and he also informed that he was looking forward to see members of different political groups and members of civil society as well.

He also expressed his plan of meeting the Houthi leadership and the GPC of departed leader Abdullah which has been reconstituted after his death. He told the media person that UN Secretary General wants an early solution to the Yemen crisis and he is really concerned over the current level of crisis. He said that his first priority would be to listen all the voices and he would not be interested to begin from the scratch because a lot has happened in the past on negotiation front.

- **Egypt Going for Poll Today to Elect President ²³**

Egyptian voters would throng to the polling booths on Monday (March 26 2018) to elect the president for next four years and the polling will continue for three days. There are only two contenders for the highest post of the country. One is the serving president El-Sisi and he is facing challenge from Musa Mustafa Musa, leader of the Ghad (Tomorrow) party. The campaign has ended two days ago as stipulated in the election rule of the country. In a press conference, the head of the election

²² Ashrqaal Awsat An Arabic Daily

<https://aawsat.com/home/article/1216191/%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AB-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A4%D9%83%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%87-%C2%AB%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A3-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%B1%C2%BB>

²³ Ashrqaal Awsat An Arabic Daily

<https://aawsat.com/home/article/1216206/%C2%AB%D8%B1%D8%A6%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%C2%BB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%8A%D8%A4%D9%83%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%8B>

commission asked people to participate in the election in large number and present a model before the world community of its political legacy and history. He also said that the time has come to show their strength against rising terrorism across the world by going to the polling station and choosing your leader and stable government. He also exhorted the people to come out in large number and tell the world that they would determine the fate of the nation. There are around sixty millions eligible voters in the country who would be the part of political process. The army in Egypt informed the media persons that all preparation has been done and everything is in place and no miscreants would be allowed to tale law and order in his hand.

China

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

In a continuation of its efforts to boost Chinese investments in India, the Embassy of India in Beijing, in collaboration with the Consulate General of India in Guangzhou, organized an Electronics sector specific India China Business Seminar in Shenzhen on 23 March 2018.

Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Mr. Ajay Sawhney delivered the key note address- making a strong push for Chinese ecosystem of electronics moving to India and taking advantage of the Phased Manufacturing Programme introduced by the Government of India.

The seminar received an overwhelming response with around 400 representatives from more than 350 Chinese companies attending the event.²⁴

- **China plans to impose tariffs on US imports to offset its loss: MOFCOM**

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) announced on 23 March that it will impose tariffs on US imports worth \$3 billion in a bid to offset its loss incurred by the US' decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum imports.

The products include seven categories and cover 128 types of products, according to a statement on the website of the MOFCOM.

The Ministry plans to impose 15 percent tariff on 120 types of products, like fruits, nuts, wine and seamless tubes, worth \$977 million. A 25 per

²⁴ <http://indianembassybeijing.in/India%20-China%20Business%20Seminar.php>

cent tariff will be imposed on products that include pork and recycled aluminum products.

A MOFCOM spokesperson was quoted as saying in the statement that the US is citing the excuse of national security by imposing 25 per cent and 10 per cent tariffs on its steel and aluminum product imports.²⁵

- **CNPC signs offshore concessions with ADNOC**

On March 21, Wang Yilin, Chairman of CNPC, and Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, Minister of State in the United Arab Emirates and the Group CEO of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) signed offshore concessions on behalf of the two sides in Abu Dhabi.

CNPC, through its majority-owned listed subsidiary PetroChina, has been awarded a 10 per cent interest in the Umm Shaif and Nasr stakes concession and a 10 per cent interest in the Lower Zakum concession following the signing of agreement. The agreements have a term of 40 years and the concessions will be operated by ADNOC.²⁶

- **Cambodia, China launch joint drill on anti-terrorism, humanitarian rescue**

Cambodia and China launched the second joint drill on counter-terrorism and humanitarian rescue at a training field in the Maras Prov Mountains on 24 March. 280 soldiers of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) and 216 soldiers of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) are involved in the drill dubbed "Dragon Gold 2018," which will last till March 31.²⁷

- **Chinese air force conducts high-sea training**

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force recently conducted a high-sea training mission in the West Pacific and a joint combat patrol mission in the South China Sea, an air force spokesperson confirmed on 25 March. Shen Jinke, spokesperson for the PLA Air Force, said a formation, including H-6K bombers and Su-30 fighters, carried out a real combat training mission in the West Pacific via the Miyako Strait.

The training aimed to improve high-sea combat ability, and was in line with international law and practice, he said. The PLA Air Force has sent another team consisting of combat aircraft, including H-6K bombers and

²⁵ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0323/c90000-9440944.html>

²⁶ <http://www.cnpc.com.cn/en/nr2018/201803/f35ae1bd5f684142a5e0c0dd81f24796.shtml>

²⁷ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0318/c90000-9438470.html>

Su-35 fighter jets, for a joint combat patrol mission in the South China Sea area, according to Shen.²⁸

- **New bridge set to energize bay area economy**

The opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the first road link to span the Pearl River Estuary, will provide a crucial boost to the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, according to experts.

The 55-kilometer-long structure will connect Hong Kong on the east of the Pearl River Delta with Macao and Zhuhai on the west.²⁹

European Union

- **UK-Russia Relations**

Russia has expelled 23 British diplomats. UK-Russia has been tensed over the poisoning of a former spy. Russia has also ordered the closure of the UK's consulate in St Petersburg and the British Council in Moscow. The Russia Foreign Ministry said that the British diplomats would have a week to leave. The UK has expelled the same number of Russian diplomats.³⁰ The leaders of Britain, the US, Germany and France released a joint statement strongly condemning the Salisbury nerve agent attack as “an assault on UK sovereignty”. The statement said that it is highly likely Russia was behind it.³¹

- **German Foreign Minister Visited Poland**

Newly appointed German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas visited Poland. He met Polish President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, and his Polish counterpart, Jacek Czaputowicz. Polish Foreign Minister Czaputowicz and German Foreign Minister Maas talked about reforming

²⁸ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0326/c90000-9441315.html>

²⁹ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0326/c90000-9441464.html>

³⁰ Max Seddon in Moscow and Laura Hughes in London, Russia expels 23 British diplomats, Financial Times, MARCH 17, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/5e74bbe6-29c2-11e8-a34a-7e7563b0b0f4>

³¹ Peter Walker and Andrew Roth, UK, US, Germany and France unite to condemn spy attack, The Guardian, March 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/15/salisbury-poisoning-uk-us-germany-and-france-issue-joint-statement>,

the EU, the Nord Stream II gas pipeline and the restoration of the Weimar Triangle. Polish Foreign Minister Czaputowicz said that Poland is ready to solve EU's problems jointly with Germany and other countries and "to take responsibility for reforms in the EU." He added, "The main goal in [Poland's] and Germany's foreign policies is a strong EU, a united EU that is not of different speeds or split into different areas." German Foreign Minister said, "Considering the current discussions in Europe, it is important that formulas such as the Weimar Triangle are restored." He added, "Despite divergent points of view on various issues, Poland and Germany are irreplaceable neighbours, friends and important partners".³²

- **India-EU FTA Negotiations**

In a CII event, Commerce and Industry Minister, Suresh Prabhu said, "We have started working on India-EU FTA (free trade agreement) again. We have invited them and are looking at it." He said that after completing 16 rounds of talks, the negotiations between India and the EU had not moved further.³³

- **Former Catalan leader Puigdemont Arrested in Germany**

Former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont was detained in Germany. He had entered Germany from Denmark after leaving Finland. He has been living in exile after an attempt by his regional government to declare independence from Spain. It was reported that an international arrest warrant for Puigdemont has been reactivated a Spanish Supreme Court judge.³⁴

- **Gunman Attacks French Supermarket**

A gunman killed three people in southwestern France. He held up a car, fired on police and seized hostages in a supermarket. Security forces stormed the building and killed him. Sixteen other people were wounded. President Emmanuel Macron called it an act of "Islamist terrorism".³⁵

³² Poland and Germany "irreplaceable neighbours": German FM, RadioPoland, March 17, 2018, <http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/354412,Poland-and-Germany-%E2%80%9Cirreplaceable-neighbours-German-FM>

³³ We have resumed work on India-European Union FTA, says Suresh Prabhu, Financial Express, March 26, 2018, <http://www.financialexpress.com/economy/we-have-resumed-work-on-india-european-union-fta-says-suresh-prabhu/1111040/>

³⁴ Tom Bernes, Carles Puigdemont: Fugitive former Catalan president arrested in Germany, the Independent, March 26, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/carles-puigdemont-catalan-president-arrested-germany-a8272861.html>

³⁵ Johanna Decorse, Islamist gunman attacks French supermarket, kills three, Reuters, March 23, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-security/islamist-gunman-attacks-french-supermarket-kills-three-idUSKBN1GZ1EY>

- **German President Steinmeier Arrived in India**

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier arrived on his first visit to India on 22 March 2018. He would explore possibilities for expanding economic ties between India and Germany. He held wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vice President Venkaiah Naidu. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj also called on the German President. The German President began his trip with a visit to Varanasi.³⁶

East Asia / South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov visits Japan**

On March 21, 2018, Foreign Minister Taro Kono and his visiting Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, agreed to accelerate talks on specifics of planned joint economic activities at the four disputed northwestern Pacific islands so that certain progress can be made when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visits Russia possibly in May.³⁷

- **Japan to host early May summit with China and South Korea**

According to Japanese news reports, Japan, China and South Korea have agreed in principle to hold a trilateral summit in early May, possibly from May 8-9, 2018. The three-way summit was last held in November 2015 in Seoul. At the meeting to be chaired by Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and South Korean President Moon Jae-in are expected to discuss steps to boost cooperation in the fields covering the economy, environment and culture. ³⁸

- **Public support for Abe Cabinet plunges to historic low**

The support rate of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Cabinet has plummeted to a record low 31 percent, while 82 percent of voters believe the prime minister bears responsibility for falsified documents in a land-deal scandal, an Asahi Shimbun survey showed. The support rate was down 13 percentage points from 44 percent in the February poll, while the non-support rate jumped to 48 percent from 37 percent. Survey was

³⁶ PM Narendra Modi, German President discuss ways to strengthen strategic partnership, Times of India, March 24, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-narendra-modi-german-president-discuss-ways-to-strengthen-strategic-partnership/articleshow/63446443.cms>

³⁷ https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/21/national/politics-diplomacy/top-diplomats-japan-russia-keen-promoting-joint-economic-northern-territory-projects/#.WrcogZe_Ooo

³⁸ https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/21/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-host-early-may-summit-china-south-korea-sources/#.WrcogJe_Ooo

conducted the nationwide after the Finance Ministry admitted it had submitted falsified documents to the Diet on the hugely discounted sale of state-owned land to Moritomo Gakuen, a private school operator.³⁹

- **North Korea and South Korea meets to talk on the Summit**

On March 24, 2018, North Korea agreed to high-level talks with South Korea on March 29, 2018, to discuss a summit meeting between the country's leaders in late April. With the North's consent, officials from Seoul and Pyongyang will meet in the Tongilgak Pavilion on the northern side of Panmunjom on Thursday to discuss matters related to what will be the third summit between the two countries and the first since 2007. The North will send a three-member delegation led by Ri Songwon, chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, to the truce village for the meeting. For Seoul, Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon will be the chief negotiator leading a three-member delegation.⁴⁰

- **South Korea's Former President Lee Myung-bak arrested on corruption charges**

On March 22, 2018, former President Lee Myung-bak was taken into custody by prosecutors after a local court issued a warrant to detain him as a suspect in a criminal investigation over corruption allegations. Lee, who served as president from 2008 to 2013, became the fourth former president to be detained on corruption charges. Lee faces at least 18 charges for receiving bribes from businessmen and politicians, misappropriating secret operations funds from the country's main spy agency and generating slush funds using a company registered under his family's name.⁴¹

- **President Moon Jae-in proposes a three way Summit**

On March 22, 2018, South Korean President Moon Jae-in talked about the possibility of a three-way summit for the leaders of the two Koreas and the United States, during a meeting with his aides at the Blue House, stressing that the summit diplomacy of the next few weeks will have to "completely end" the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Moon is expected to meet with Kim Jong-un in late April for his first summit with the North Korean leader, the third of its kind between the two Koreas since 2000 and 2007. Kim is then supposed to

³⁹ <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201803190030.html>

⁴⁰ "Talks on summit to be held soon", The Korea JoongAng Daily, March 26, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3046080

⁴¹ "Former President Lee Myung-bak detained on corruption charges", The Korea JoongAng Daily, March 23, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3045997

meet with U.S. President Donald Trump for what would be a historic summit between the two countries. The timing hasn't been decided.⁴²

North America

Canada

- **Russian embassy calls Trudeau's criticism of Putin 'confrontational'**

The Russian embassy is firing back at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for criticizing President Vladimir Putin at a news conference. But a leading expert on Russia and the Arctic is dismissing the dust-up as the result of a mistaken prime minister, and a junior Russian diplomat with an itchy Twitter finger. Trudeau said on Wednesday during a Toronto press conference that Putin needs to start playing a more positive role in the world on a variety of fronts, from Ukraine, to Syria, to the Arctic, as well as answering for Russia's role in the nerve gas attack in Britain two weeks ago. Trudeau also said on Wednesday that Canada needs to be vigilant about protecting the integrity of its electoral systems from foreign interference. However, the Russian Embassy tweet did not mention election meddling. Trudeau's remarks came after several recent warnings about possible Russian interference in the 2019 Canadian federal election from eastern European diplomats in Ottawa, as well as a top NATO researcher. Trudeau listed some positive behaviour he said he'd like to see from Putin.⁴³

- **The new space race: Canada must champion an international security strategy for artificial intelligence**

Technology experts are sounding the alarm that if authoritarian regimes successfully leapfrog the U.S. and its allies in the AI race, the implications will reshape the western-dominated economic order that has persisted since the end of WWII. Such a development will also upend the geopolitical map, and spell the end of the western-backed security order that has existed since the formation of NATO. Canada can tackle this issue by taking action to link the economic strength of its domestic AI ecosystem to its national security, and the solidification of a lasting western security advantage. It can do this by championing the creation of Sovereign AI Patent Funds amongst NATO allies, designed to spur defence investments in domestic AI research and development ecosystems. Such an initiative should also qualify against NATO's 2% of national GDP spending targets for defence – a threshold called for by the

⁴² "Seoul is proposing a three-way summit", The Korea JoongAng Daily, March 22, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3045909

⁴³ Mike Blanchfield, "Russian embassy calls Trudeau's criticism of Putin 'confrontational'," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/russia-trudeau-putin-1.4588640>, Accessed on 26 March 2018.

security alliance that most members, including Canada, do not currently meet. Canada is a critical player in shaping how the AI arms race unfolds. As a global hub for AI talent and development, we confront this security challenge from a position of economic strength, with world-leading AI hubs in Montreal and Toronto, backed by a philosophical commitment to enabling a pro-growth, entrepreneurial ecosystem.⁴⁴

- **Justin Trudeau defends Canada's arms sales to Saudi Arabia**

Justin Trudeau has defended his government's decision to sign off on the sale of more than 900 armoured vehicles – including dozens described as “heavy assault” and equipped with cannons – to Saudi Arabia, arguing that the deal is in line with Canada's foreign and defence policies. The C\$15bn (\$11.63bn) deal – struck by the previous Conservative government in 2014 and given the green light after Trudeau became prime minister – has been in the spotlight in recent years amid growing concerns about Riyadh's human rights record. Trudeau responded by arguing that his government had little choice but to respect the contract signed by the previous government. “Permits are only approved if the exports are consistent with our foreign and defence policies, including human rights,” said Trudeau. “Our approach fully meets our national obligations and Canadian laws.” Cesar Jaramillo of Project Ploughshares, a Canadian disarmament group, described Trudeau's response as “flawed logic”, as it is up to his government to set out the parameters of Canada's foreign and defence policy.⁴⁵

The United States

- **US sanctions Pakistani companies over nuclear trade**

The United States has imposed sanctions on seven Pakistani companies over suspicion they have links to the nuclear trade, potentially hurting Pakistan's ambitions to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Pakistani government spokesmen could not be immediately reached for comments. Relations between the United States and Pakistan have been strained in recent years over Pakistan's alleged support for Islamist militants waging war in Afghanistan, something Pakistani officials deny. The U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security, Commerce imposed the sanctions on the Pakistani companies on March 22 by placing them on its "Entity List". The companies had been "determined by the U.S. government to be acting contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States", the bureau said in a report on a U.S.

⁴⁴ Ipolitics, “The new space race: Canada must champion an international security strategy for artificial intelligence,” <https://ipolitics.ca/article/canada-must-champion-an-international-security-strategy-for-artificial-intelligence/>, Accessed on 26 March 2018.

⁴⁵ Ashifa Kassam, “Justin Trudeau defends Canada's arms sales to Saudi Arabia,” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/justin-trudeau-defends-canada-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia>, Accessed on 26 March 2018

government website. The Department of Commerce's Entity List does not freeze assets but requires that U.S. and foreign policy interests of the United States", the bureau said in a report on a U.S. government website. The Department of Commerce's Entity List does not freeze assets but requires that U.S. and foreign companies doing business with those on the list first obtain a license. ⁴⁶

- **Donald Trump poised to expel 20 Russian diplomats from the US in wake of spy poisoning in Salisbury**

President Donald Trump is poised to expel more than 20 Russian diplomats from the US in the wake of the poisoning of a former spy in Salisbury. In a significant boost for Theresa May, the US President could take action following the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia. Britain has thrown out 23 Russians that the Government says were using diplomatic cover to spy on the UK. Up to European 20 nations, including Germany, France, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and the Czech Republic are now considering following Britain's lead.⁴⁷

- **Donald Trump removes NSA McMaster, replaces him with John Bolton**

US President Donald Trump fired his National Security Adviser Lt Gen H R McMaster and replaced him with a conservative hawk and former UN Ambassador John Bolton, the latest high-level shakeup in the chaotic White House. The move, which was sudden but not unexpected, signals a more confrontational approach in American foreign policy at a time when the US president faces mounting challenges, including from Iran and North Korea, the New York Times commented. The appointment of Bolton could lead to dramatic changes in the Trump administration's approach to crises around the world, The Washington Post said. His appointment is certain to scramble the White House's preparations for a proposed summit by the end of May between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Bolton, known for his walrus moustache, is a fierce North Korea hawk who, in his prolific writings and television commentary, has said that preemptive war would likely be the only way to stop North Korea from obtaining the capability to attack the US with a nuclear missile. ⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Reuters, "US sanctions Pakistani companies over nuclear trade" <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/us-sanctions-pakistani-companies-over-nuclear-trade/articleshow/63462234.cms>, Accessed on 26 April 2018

⁴⁷ Steven Swinford, "Donald Trump poised to expel 20 Russian diplomats from the US in wake of spy poisoning in Salisbury," <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/03/25/donald-trump-poised-expel-20-russian-diplomats-us-wake-spy-poisoning/>, Accessed on 26 March 2018.

⁴⁸ PTI, "Donald Trump removes NSA McMaster, replaces him with John Bolton," <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/donald-trump-removes-nsa-mcmaster-replaces-him-with-john-bolton/articleshow/63439553.cms>, Accessed on 26 March 2018.

- **Saudi, US must pursue 'urgent efforts' for Yemen peace: Mattis**

Saudi Arabia and America must pursue "urgent efforts" to bring a peaceful end to Yemen's war, US defense secretary Jim Mattis told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The two defense ministers also discussed ways Saudi Arabia might be able to offer or facilitate some sort of a "safe haven" to more moderate Taliban members who are prepared to negotiate for peace in Afghanistan, an official said. Mattis and Prince Mohammed met at the Pentagon as part of Prince Mohammed's tour of the United States, which began this week with a White House visit. Saudi Arabia leads a coalition in Yemen fighting the Iran-backed Huthi rebels. The devastating three-year-old conflict was an early proving ground for the prince, who is also the minister of defense, but it has been beset by allegations of atrocities against civilians, and strategic drift. Just hours after the prince left the White House on Tuesday, the US Senate rejected a bipartisan bid designed to curtail US support for the war, which includes air-to-air refueling of Saudi jets as well as target and intelligence sharing.

Mattis had lobbied Congress to reject the bill, warning that restrictions could increase civilian casualties, jeopardize counterterrorism cooperation, and "reduce our influence with the Saudis."⁴⁹

Mexico

- **Obrador to appoint 'one of Mexico's best economists' to head Nafta talks**

Mexican presidential frontrunner Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he would appoint Jesús Seade Kuri, "one of Mexico's best economists", to head the country's Nafta negotiating team if he wins the July 1 election. Mr Seade Helú, who is currently professor of economics at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, is a former deputy director general of the GATT and the World Trade Organisation. He has also been a senior adviser to the IMF and principal economist at the World Bank and has a doctorate in economics from Oxford. Negotiations on updating the North American Free Trade Agreement are set to resume in Washington next month with much still left to agree, raising the prospect that if no deal can be done, negotiations would have to be put on hold until after Mexico's election.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ AFP, "Saudi, US must pursue 'urgent efforts' for Yemen peace: Mattis," <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/saudi-us-must-pursue-urgent-efforts-for-yemen-peace-mattis/articleshow/63420569.cms>, Accessed on 26 March 2018.

⁵⁰ Jude Webber, "Obrador to appoint 'one of Mexico's best economists' to head Nafta talks," <https://www.ft.com/content/f6d5cc6a-2c72-11e8-a34a-7e7563b0b0f4>, Accessed on 26 April 2018002E

Latin America and Caribbean

Brazil

- **Michel Temer, Brazil's Deeply Unpopular President, Signals Run for a New Term**

Michel Temer, the deeply unpopular president of Brazil, signaled that he intends to seek a full term in October's election, telling a newsmagazine in an interview published this weekend that "it would be cowardly not to be a candidate." Mr. Temer took office in mid-2016 after helping lead the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, for whom he served as vice president. But Mr. Temer, 77, a veteran politician of the center-right, has had a tumultuous presidency, spending much of the past year fending off criminal charges of corruption and obstruction of justice. Winning a new term would allow Mr. Temer to maintain the special legal standing afforded to senior government officials, which has so far shielded him from trial. On two occasions last year, Congress voted to protect him from facing charges before the Supreme Court. Mr. Temer had said as recently as last month that he did not intend to run. But in this weekend's interview with the newsmagazine *Istoé*, Mr. Temer said that he came to believe that he needed to defend his legacy. In the interview, Mr. Temer argued that he hadn't been given credit for the country's advancements since he took office in August 2016. The economy grew 1 percent last year, after shrinking almost 8 percent between 2015 and 2016. But Mr. Temer's agenda, which has included an overhaul of labor laws that has weakened unions, has led critics to charge that he has usurped the will of voters who elected Ms. Rousseff, a leftist.⁵¹

- **Brazil's Lula rallies support, draws protest as prison looms**

With a likely arrest in the coming weeks, Brazil's former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva campaigned Sunday to return to power with promises to unite a divided Brazil and defeat those who he alleges have cooked up false accusations to keep him off the ballot. Da Silva's campaign "caravan" through southern Brazil has drawn admirers but has also been met with protests in recent days, and his supporters and detractors have occasionally tussled. At a rally in Sao Miguel do Oeste, someone threw eggs toward the stage while da Silva and others spoke, prompting his security detail to open umbrellas to create a shield. The tour is occurring in the shadow of a court ruling scheduled, when judges could order that he begin serving his sentence on a corruption conviction. Even if they do, da Silva will remain free at least until early April because he has a habeas corpus petition pending at the Supreme Federal Tribunal, Brazil's top court. But it seems all but certain that da Silva's days as a free man are numbered and that he will be jailed in the

⁵¹ MANUELA ANDREONI, "Michel Temer, Brazil's Deeply Unpopular President, Signals Run for a New Term," Accessed on 26 March 2018.

coming weeks. What comes next for him and for Brazil is less clear: Da Silva is leading polls for October's presidential election, but he is likely to be barred from running because of the corruption conviction. His Workers' Party has so far insisted that da Silva is their candidate, publicly shunning the idea of a Plan B. Da Silva has denied the charges and says that they and a slew of other pending accusations amount to political persecution meant to keep him from regaining the presidency.⁵²

Bolivia

- **Bolivia president wants dialogue with Chile over coastline**

The president of land-locked Bolivia said he is prepared to discuss options with neighboring Chile for gaining access to the Pacific, but said that powerful forces in Chile do not want talks. He spoke after lawyers for Bolivia presented arguments for a second day at the International Court of Justice in the latest attempt to solve a decades-long dispute over granting the country access to the sea. Bolivia lost its only seacoast to Chile during a war from 1879 to 1883. The nation has demanded ocean access for generations. Chile says the issue was settled once and for all in a 1904 treaty. Bolivia is now asking the World Court, the United Nations' highest judicial organ, to order Chile to negotiate access. Morales said that he is keen to end to the dispute that has long strained relations between Bolivia and Chile.⁵³

Chile

- **Chile's Bachelet proposes new constitution in last days in office**

Chile's outgoing President Michelle Bachelet said on Monday that she would send Congress legislation to replace the country's dictator-era constitution with one to guarantee equal pay for men and women and the right to strike for workers. While Bachelet will not likely be able to push the proposal through Congress before her term ends on Sunday, it could force incoming president Sebastian Pinera to reckon with a longstanding aspiration of the leftist and centrist lawmakers with whom he will have to govern. Pinera, a conservative billionaire and former president elected to a new term in December, has said he was open to "perfecting" the

⁵² MARIO LOBAO and SARAH DiLORENZO, "Brazil's Lula rallies support, draws protest as prison looms," https://www.kpvi.com/news/national_news/brazil-s-lula-rallies-support-draws-protest-as-prison-looms/article_7212bcb7-be7b-54da-a4e1-ffff358c0a3d.html Accessed on 26 March 2018.

⁵³ AP, "Bolivia president wants dialogue with Chile over coastline," https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/bolivia-president-wants-dialogue-with-chile-over-coastline/2018/03/20/724a7350-2c9b-11e8-8dc9-3b51e028b845_story.html?utm_term=.4376935fd4b6, Accessed on 26 March 2018.

constitution if a climate of political unity prevailed. Chile's constitution dates from the 1973-1990 right-wing military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Although significant changes have been made since the return to democracy, Bachelet and others have argued that it must be redesigned from scratch. Bachelet said her proposal would allow Chileans to challenge in court any violation of their new constitutional rights, from free education to the representation of indigenous people in Congress.⁵⁴

Russia

- **Russia and India**

On 19 March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has congratulated Russian President Vladimir Putin on his victory in the presidential polls and expressed hope that under his leadership, the Indo-Russia strategic partnership will continue to grow from strength to strength. Thanking the Prime Minister for the call, Putin conveyed his commitment to further strengthen India-Russia relations in all spheres, and also his good wishes for the continued progress of India.⁵⁵

During a Congressional hearing, US Admiral Harry Harris told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee on 16 March that the US cannot expect India to abruptly stop using Russian arms and instead needs a glide path to increase defence trade with New Delhi. India exports 70 per cent of Russian hardware. He further said that India is "a key partner and a great strategic opportunity" for the US. "I think we ought to look at ways to have a glide path, so that we can continue to trade in arms within India," he said.⁵⁶

- **Russia and UK**

Following the death of a former Soviet spy, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter in UK, British Prime Minister Theresa May on 12 March blamed Russia behind the incident and demanded a compelling explanation or face "extensive" retaliation. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova dismissed May's allegations as a "circus show in in the

⁵⁴ Reuters, "Chile's Bachelet proposes new constitution in last days in office," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chile-politics/chiles-bachelet-proposes-new-constitution-in-last-days-in-office-idUSKBN1GI07I>, Accessed on 26 March 2018

⁵⁵"PM Narendra Modi greets Vladimir Putin, hopes Indo-Russia ties will deepen further", *Economic Times*, March 19, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/pm-narendra-modi-congratulates-vladimir-putin-on-re-election/articleshow/63369219.cms> Accessed on March 24, 2018.

⁵⁶"Can't expect India to go cold turkey on Russian arms: Pentagon", *Economic Times*, March 16, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/cant-expect-india-to-go-cold-turkey-on-russian-arms-pentagon/articleshow/63326749.cms> Accessed on March 24, 2018.

British Parliament.” May said British scientists have determined that Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with Novichok, a class of nerve agent developed by the Soviet Union near the end of the Cold War. Skripal was a Russian military intelligence officer when he was recruited to spy for Britain in the 1990s. He was jailed in Russia in 2006 for revealing state secrets before being freed in a spy swap in 2010.⁵⁷ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters in Moscow that his country’s requests to see samples of the nerve agent have been turned down. He insisted that Russia is “not to blame” for the poisoning.⁵⁸ President Putin on 18 March dismissed the accusations, stating that it was “*nonsense and absurd to claim that Russia would do anything like that before the elections and the World Cup.*”⁵⁹ He further sloughed off the notion that Russia was behind the poisoning of a former Russian spy and his daughter, saying “any sensible person would understand that this is delirium and nonsense, it is unthinkable that we would do such a thing.” He added that “the first thing that came to my mind: If it was military grade agent, they would have died on the spot, obviously. Russia does not have any such agents, we destroyed it all.”⁶⁰ On 20 March, 23 Russian diplomats were expelled from UK.

- **Presidential Election in Russia**

President Putin on 19 March won his 4th term as the Russian president. This was his best ever election performance with more than 76 percent of the vote, but the Opposition cried foul⁶¹. After his victory he said that he would address disputes with the West. German chancellor Angela Merkel “warmly congratulated” Putin while stressing in a message she wrote the need to continue dialogue “to address important bilateral and international challenges and find viable solutions.” French president

⁵⁷Jill Lawless and Danica Kirka, “British PM: Russia “highly likely” behind ex-spy’s poisoning”, *Denver Post*, March 12, 2018. <https://www.denverpost.com/2018/03/12/theresa-may-russia-behind-spy-poisoning/> Accessed on March 25, 2018.

⁵⁸Gregory Katz and Nataliya Vasilyeva, ‘Russia calls poisoning accusations by Britain “nonsense”’, *Denver Post*, March 13, 2018. <https://www.denverpost.com/2018/03/13/russia-denies-poisoning-ex-spy/> Accessed on March 25, 2018.

⁵⁹“Dear friends, thank you’: Putin talks to supporters as preliminary results signal election victory”, *RT*, March 18, 2018. <https://www.rt.com/news/421645-putin-kremlin-election-speech/> Accessed on March 25, 2018.

⁶⁰Joe Sterling and Katie Polglase, “Putin calls claims Russia poisoned ex-spy ‘nonsense,’ ‘delirium’”, *CNN*, March 18, 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/18/europe/uk-russia-nerve-agent/index.html> Accessed on March 26, 2018.

⁶¹“Vladimir Putin Cruises to Landslide Victory in Russian Presidential Election as Opposition Cries Foul”, *First Post*, March 20, 2018. <http://www.firstpost.com/world/vladimir-putin-cruises-to-landslide-victory-in-russian-presidential-election-as-opposition-cries-foul-4395591.html> Accessed on March 25, 2018.

Emmanuel Macron wished Vladimir Putin success in "modernising Russia" after his re-election, but urged Moscow to shed light on the "unacceptable" attempted assassination of an ex-spy in Britain. Citing a report by independent observers, Britain's Foreign Office on 20 March noted "restrictions on fundamental freedoms... resulted in a lack of genuine competition in the election". Japanese prime minister Shinzo called Putin to congratulate him on his victory as did Chinese president Xi Jinping.⁶² On 20 March, US President Donald Trump and President Putin discussed the state of bilateral relations and resolved to continue dialogue about mutual national security priorities and challenges. President Trump congratulated President Putin on his March 18 re-election, and emphasized the importance of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. The two leaders confirmed the need for the United States and Russia to continue our shared efforts on strategic stability.⁶³ Alexander Rahr, a political analyst at the German-Russian Forum and acquaintance of Putin, told CNBC on 19 March that the election was a "typical Russian vote," but added that despite Putin's massive win, he would have to listen to growing calls for change, particularly from the young.⁶⁴

South Asia

Bangladesh

- **Dire consequences, if we have another controversial polls**

Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of civil society platform Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), on Saturday (March 24) said that the country would face dire consequences if the upcoming parliamentary election is held controversially. He also said that the Election Commission (EC) will have to play an important role to hold the polls neutrally and inclusively.⁶⁵

⁶²"Russia Presidential Election: After record win, Vladimir Putin says Moscow will address disputes with the West", *First Post*, March 20, 2018. <http://www.firstpost.com/world/russia-presidential-election-after-record-win-vladimir-putin-says-moscow-will-address-disputes-with-the-west-4397147.html> Accessed on March 26, 2018.

⁶³"Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia", *White House*, March 20, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/readout-president-donald-j-trumps-call-president-vladimir-putin-russia-3/> Accessed on March 26, 2018.

⁶⁴Holly Elliyat, "Putin enjoys landslide victory for now, but he and Russia 'will have to change'", *CNBC*, March 19, 2018. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/19/putin-wins-election-but-has-battle-to-win-back-the-young-generation.html> Accessed on March 26, 2018.

⁶⁵"There will be dire consequences for the country if we have another controversial polls'," *Dhaka Tribune*, March 24, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2018/03/24/country-to-face-dire-consequences-if-polls-held-controversially-shujan/>, accessed on March 24, 2018.

- **We'll form next government: Ershad**

Jatiya Party (Japa) Chairman HM Ershad has expressed his hopes that his party would make history by winning the 11th parliamentary polls due in December this year. "People want me to give messages. My first message is we'll create a history by forming the next government through a fair election. We as well as the country are ready for it. We want a fair election and the government will be forced to arrange the election in a credible and fair manner," the over-optimistic military dictator told a rally organized by his party at Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka on Saturday (March 24).⁶⁶

- **PM accuses post-75 rulers of executing Pakistan's agenda**

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday (March 25) accused the post-1975 rulers of implementing the agenda of the then Pakistani junta to appease Islamabad. "They didn't want that the people of Bangladesh will get square meals, houses and pursue study . . . they were executing the agenda of the Pakistani occupation forces in different way," the prime minister told a discussion in the capital.⁶⁷

- **Patrons of war criminals should also be tried: Hasina**

Indicating BNP founder late Ziaur Rahman and incumbent chief of the party Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday (March 25) said the patrons of war criminals should also be tried for their crimes during the 1971 Liberation War since she believes the formers are equally guilty. Both Zia and his wife Khaleda had appointed multiple ministers, who had later been convicted guilty for their crimes against humanity by a special tribunal, in their respective cabinets.⁶⁸

- **20-party alliance to boycott election if Khaleda can't join it**

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led 20-party alliance will boycott the next general election if its chief Khaleda Zia cannot take part in it. Top leaders of the alliance unanimously took the decision at a meeting on Saturday night (March 24).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ "Ershad: Polls-time government should consist of current lawmakers," *Dhaka Tribune*, March 24, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2018/03/24/polls-time-govt-consist-parliament-representatives-parties/>, accessed on March 24, 2018.

⁶⁷ "PM accuses post-75 rulers of executing Pakistani junta's agenda," *Prothom Alo*, March 25, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/173177/PM-accuses-post-75-rulers-of-executing-Pakistani>, accessed on March 25, 2018.

⁶⁸ "PM Hasina: Patrons of war criminals should also be tried," *Dhaka Tribune*, March 25, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2018/03/25/pm-hasina-patrons-war-criminals-also-tried/>, accessed on March 25, 2018.

⁶⁹ "20-party alliance to boycott election if Khaleda can't join it," *Prothom Alo*, March 25, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/173136/20-party-to-boycott-election-unless-Khaleda-can>, accessed on March 25, 2018.

Pakistan

- **Pakistan and Sri Lanka**

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena visited Pakistan on a three day visit on March 22nd. He was the ‘Guest of Honour’ on Pakistan Day parade.⁷⁰ President Mamnoon Hussain and President Maithripala Sirisena agreed to work together for the regional peace, bilateral cooperation and enhancement of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation role on March 24th. President Mamnoon Hussain underlined the need to boost air and maritime linkages so that the cooperation in business and industry besides, other sectors, could be strengthened. President Sirisena expressed his satisfaction over the increasing cooperation in different sectors including defence and expressed the confidence that it would witness further boost in future. He reiterated his country’s support to Pakistan in its efforts against terrorism and expressed his satisfaction over the achievements against it. Both the countries also signed three MoUs to enhance cooperation in the fields of youth development and training of civil and diplomatic personnel.⁷¹

- **United States and Pakistan**

Senior White House aide, Lisa Curtis, while visiting the Pakistan embassy in Washington on Pakistan day (March 23rd) stated that United States and Pakistan have a lot to gain by working with each other. This relationship, she said, should be “based on a shared commitment to defeat all terrorist groups that threaten regional stability and security as well as on a shared vision of a peaceful future for Afghanistan”.⁷² It can be noted here that on March 22nd that the Trump 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. Among the seven Pakistani companies three are listed for “their involvement in the proliferation of unsafeguarded nuclear activities that are contrary to the national security and/or foreign policy interests of the United States”. Two are accused of procuring supplies for nuclear-related entities already on the list and the remaining two are accused of acting as fronts for listed entities. An eighth Pakistani entity is based in Singapore.⁷³

⁷⁰ “Sri Lankan president arrives”, *Pakistan Observer*, March 23, 2018, <https://pakobserver.net/sri-lankan-president-arrives/> accessed on March 26, 2018

⁷¹ “Pak, Sri Lanka to up cooperation for peace”, *Pakistan Observer*, March 25, 2018, <https://pakobserver.net/pak-sri-lanka-to-up-cooperation-for-peace/> accessed On March 26, 2018

⁷² Anwar Iqbal, “US, Pakistan much to gain from cooperation, says Trump aide”, *Dawn*, March 25, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397428> accessed on March 26, 2018

⁷³ Anwar Iqbal, “US sanctions seven Pakistani firms for ‘nuclear trade’”, *Dawn*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397628/us-sanctions-seven-pakistani-firms-for-nuclear-trade> accessed on March 26, 2018

- **Pakistan and Russia**

In a Pakistan-Russia Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism organised in Islamabad on March 21st, both nations expressed “grave concern” over growing threat of the militant Islamic State (IS) group in the region.⁷⁴

नेपाल

संशोधन समझौते के बाद ही सरकार में शामिल होंगे: फोरम

संघीय समाजवादी फोरम की कार्यकारिणी की बैठक में यह निर्णय लिया गया कि पहले सरकार संविधान में संशोधन लाने के समझौते पर लिखित में दे उसके बाद ही हम वाम गठबंधन की सरकार के साथ जुड़ेंगे. फोरम के नेताओं ने कहा कि प्रधानमंत्री ओली के साथ इस बारे में बातचीत हो रही है और अब उनका पहले जैसा कड़ा रुख नहीं है.⁷⁵

नेपाल प्रधानमंत्री को भारत आने का न्योता:

15 फरवरी को नेपाल के नये प्रधानमंत्री के पी शर्मा ओली को भारत भ्रमण का आमंत्रण दिया गया है. ओली 6-8 अप्रैल को भारत की यात्रा करेंगे. अभी यात्रा की औपचारिक रूप से घोषणा नेपाल द्वारा पुष्टि होने की बाद होगी. इस यात्रा के तीन मुख्य कारण बताये जा रहे हैं- पहला, 2-3 फरवरी को विदेश मंत्री सुषमा स्वराज के भ्रमण के बाद नेपाल की तरफ से पारस्परिक उच्च स्तरीय यात्रा होना. दूसरा, पारंपरिक रूप से नेपाल के नए प्रधानमंत्री के सर्वप्रथम भारत की यात्रा करना. भारत द्वारा सामरिक चक्र को विकसित करने की मंशा और ओली सरकार के साथ रिश्ते मजबूत करना और यह देखना कि नेपाल कैसे भारत और चीन के साथ सम्बन्ध विकसित करता है.⁷⁶

ओली ने सभी मुख्यमंत्रियों के साथ बैठक की:

प्रधानमंत्री ओली ने प्रान्तों के सभी मुख्यमंत्रियों और मुख्य सचिवों के साथ बुधवार को बैठक की. यह इस प्रकार की ओली की पहली बैठक थी. इसमें ओली ने कहा केन्द्रीय सरकार सभी प्रान्तों की सरकारों को सहायता देगी. प्रान्तों के प्रतिनिधियों ने शिकायत की कि आधारभूत ढांचे की कमी के

⁷⁴ “Pakistan, Russia concerned over growing IS threat”, *Dawn*, March 22, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1396785/pakistan-russia-concerned-over-growing-is-threat> accessed on March 26, 2018

⁷⁵ “SSF-N to join govt only after charter amendment deal”, *The Kathmandu Post*, 19 March 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-19/1>

⁷⁶ Anil Giri, “Delhi proposes April 6-8 for oli's India visit”, *The Kathmandu Post*, 22 March 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-22/1>

कारण सभी मंत्रालयों को एक ही भवन में चलाया जा रहा है जिसके कारण काफी परेशानी हो रही है.⁷⁷

माओवादी और एमाले के विलय में तेजी:

माओवादी नेताओं ने इस बात पर चर्चा की कि दोनों दलों के औपचारिक विलय की घोषणा जल्द होनी चाहिए. यह कार्य प्रधानमंत्री ओली के भारत जाने से पूर्व होना चाहिए.⁷⁸

West Asia

Israel

- **Probing Facebook**

Israel's Justice Ministry informed Facebook that it is opening an "administrative investigation" into the social media giant following reports of the transfer of personal information from Facebook to data-mining firm Cambridge Analytics, "and the possibility of additional violations of Israelis' personal information," the ministry said on March 22nd.⁷⁹

- **UNHRC and Israel**

The United Nations Human Rights Council passed five anti-Israel resolutions at the end of its 37th session in Geneva on March 24th, under the "Agenda Item 7," a UNHRC mandate that a discussion of Israeli human rights abuses against Palestinians must be part of every council session. One of the resolutions called on Israel to relinquish the Golan Heights strategic ridge to Syria. Passage of such resolutions was criticised by Israel and the United States.⁸⁰

- **The US Peace Proposal Shelved?**

⁷⁷ "PM assures full support to provinces", The Kathmandu Post, 22 March 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-22/1>

⁷⁸ Tika R. Pradhan, "Maoist hasten merger with UML", The Kathmandu Post, 25 March 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-25/1>

⁷⁹ Raoul Wootliff, "Israel to probe Facebook over Cambridge Analytica data breach", *Times of Israel*, March 22, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-to-probe-facebook-over-cambridge-analytica-data-breach/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=97145e316c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_22&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-97145e316c-55556173 accessed on March 26, 2018

⁸⁰ "Israel slams 'sham' UN Human Rights Council after 5 new anti-Israel resolutions", *Times of Israel*, March 24, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-slams-sham-un-human-rights-council-after-5-new-anti-israel-resolutions/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=352ebd5013-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-352ebd5013-55556173 accessed on March 26, 2018

The US administration has reportedly decided to delay indefinitely the announcement of its long-awaited peace proposal after concluding that it cannot impose such a deal on the Palestinians as per a senior Palestinian official told the London-based Al Hayat newspaper in a report published March 22nd. The official said that the US administration had hoped that some of the Arab countries would replace the Palestinians at the negotiating table with Israel after the Trump plan was announced. However, the official said, the Americans haven't been able to find any Arab party willing to accept the plan as long the Palestinians continued to reject it.⁸¹

Iraq and Gulf Cooperation Council

- **39 Indians Captured by ISIS in Iraq dead: Sushma Swaraj⁸²**

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in a *suo moto* statement in the parliament on last Tuesday confirmed that 39 Indians who were kidnapped by the ISIS in Mosul, when the city fell to the militant group in June, 2014, are dead. A team of Indian and Iraqi officials found a mass grave near Badush, a village about six miles from the construction sites where these men were snatched and DNA tests confirmed that bodies belonged to the missing Indians. Harjit Masih, a resident of Punjab who worked as a construction worker in Iraq, had managed to free himself by posing as a Muslim from Bangladesh. Masih, after returning to India in 2015 claimed that his colleagues had been taken to Badush four days after their kidnapping and gunned down. In the absence of concrete evidence about them being dead or alive, for last four years, the government continued to classify them as 'missing person' and had continued with the search efforts.

- **Iraq Rejects UAE Claims of Qatar Funding Shiite Paramilitaries⁸³**

Iraqi foreign ministry has expressed concern over the allegations of UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash, that Qatari government was paying various "terrorist" groups up to \$1bn, naming Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces, Lebanese Hezbollah and al-Nusra Front, now known as Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham.

⁸¹ Khaled Abu Toameh, "Palestinian rejection said to delay US peace plan announcement indefinitely", *Times of Israel*, March 22, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-rejection-said-to-delay-us-peace-plan-announcement-indefinitely/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=b357c16700-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_22&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-b357c16700-55556173

accessed on March 26, 2018

⁸² <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/39-indians-captured-by-is-dead-sushma/article23300278.ece>

⁸³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/iraq-rejects-uae-claims-qatar-funding-paramilitaries-180321132835594.html>

Questioning the validity of these allegations, Iraq' foreign ministry spokesperson Ahmed Mahjoub lamented that that "these remarks come as an obstacle at a time when Iraq is seeking to strengthen its ties with the UAE."

The Arab Quartet including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and Egypt is seeking to counter Iranian influence in Iraq and have since June last year cut ties with Qatar after accusing the wealthy emirate of supporting 'extremism' and developing ties with their regional rival Iran.

Iraq's Shiite government has close security relations with Iran which has trained and advised Shiite paramilitaries that were instrumental in liberating Iraqi territory from ISIS control. Caught in the ethnic and geopolitical fault-lines between Iran and Arab neighbours, Iraq's Prime Minister Haidar al Abadi is seeking to improve its relations with Gulf neighbours with the intentions of drawing aid and investment for reconstruction of Iraq.

- **Turkey's Erdogan says operations begin in Iraq's Sinjar region⁸⁴**

President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday that Turkey had began operations in Iraq's Sinjar region, an area where it has threatened military incursion, two days after sources said Kurdish PKK militants would withdraw from the area. Turkey has been threatening military incursion in Sinjar region along Iraq-Syrian border, to root out Syrian Kurdish Peoples Protection Unit, YPG which is an offshoot of PKK, an insurgent group outlawed by Turkey.

President said "we have told the central [Iraqi] government that PKK is establishing a new headquarter in Sinjar. If you can deal with it, you handle it. But, if you cannot we will suddenly enter Sinjar one night and clear this region of terrorists. If we are friends, you'll make it easy for us. We told all this previous Iraqi governments as well. If things are further prolonged then another 'Operation Olive Branch' will be carried out there."⁸⁵

Notwithstanding Erdogan's statement that operation in Sinjar has started, Iraq's joint operations command denied that any foreign forces had crossed the border into Iraq.

Following threats of attacks, reports emerged of PKK guerrillas withdrawing from the region.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-turkey/turkeys-erdogan-says-operations-begin-in-iraqs-sinjar-region-idUSKBN1H10QX>

⁸⁵ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-is-not-in-afrin-as-an-invasion-force-erdogan-128999>

⁸⁶ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-turkey-iraq/kurdish-guerrillas-withdrawing-in-north-iraq-after-turkish-threat-idUKKBN1GZ220>

Turkey has rarely heeded Iraqi warning about border violations, repeatedly targeting PKK rebel group in northern Iraq, especially since last month. Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari in a meeting with Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister in Bagdad last Wednesday had expressed “absolute rejection” of violation by Turkish forces to Iraqi borders, while underlining the need for the Turkish troops to withdraw from the city of Baasheka.⁸⁷

- **Prime Minister Abadi Vows to Achieve Political Majority in Iraq’s Parliamentary Elections⁸⁸**

In his remarks during a speech on the occasion of Martyrs Day, PM Abadi vowed to achieve a political majority in national elections on May, 12 in which he is pitted against his Dawa Party rival and former PM Nouri-al-Maliki.

Abadi, who has described his Al-Nasr or the Victory Alliance as a “cross-sectarian” list expressed his support for “unity and political consensus that fosters Iraqi interest and citizens, not consensus that fosters personal interests.” Lauding his victory against the ISIS, PM argued that “Iraq today is at the forefront of fight against terrorism on the international arena...the heroes of Iraq have come together to confront terrorism and achieve victory.”

In a country rife with ethnic and sectarian division which are exploited to by a corrupt political elite, political majority has often given way to sectarian consolidation. Abadi, having led his country to victory against ISIS is seeking reconciliation and unity between Shiite majority and Sunni minority which bore the major brunt of ISIS occupation and the three year long fight against it. Assuaging the fears of Sunni minority being dominated by Iran-backed Shiite paramilitaries who liberated Sunni dominated areas from ISIS control, Abadi pledged to return those displaced to their hometowns “without causing any demographic change.”

⁸⁷ <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1213306/iraq-announces-absolute-rejection-turkish-cross-border-infiltration>

⁸⁸ <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1208726/abadi-vows-achieve-political-majority-iraq%E2%80%99s-parliamentary-elections>

- **Qatar Puts 28 Individuals and Entities on First Terror List**⁸⁹

In line with a law on “combating terrorism” issued last July by Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Qatar released its first National List of Terrorist Classification including twenty individuals and eight entities. The list, which included the names of Qatari citizens described the boycotting countries of Saudi led Arab Quartet as the financiers of the Nusra Front in Syria appeared to responding to the allegations signalling a change from its previously defiant attitude of calling the allegations “baseless,” even though official motivation for its publication remained unclear.

UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash Tweeted that “Qatar confirms the evidence against it and that its support for extremism and terrorism is at the core of the crisis.”

Qatar’s reconciliatory overture comes as a time, when Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman is scheduled to meet President Trump on Tuesday and sources at the White House suggest that Trump will press the Saudis “to take a key leadership role in the region and encourage them to help move this dispute forward.”⁹⁰

- **Bahrain Says It Will “Hunt Down” Online Dissidents**⁹¹

Bahraini activists who use social media to voice their opposition to Manama regime will be “tracked down,” authorities warned on Sunday. Online dissidents can expect to face “severe measures” against them, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifa said in a statement published on the state news agency, as Bahrain tightens its crackdown on opposition.

Given that social media was vital to the massive anti-regime protests in 2011 and is used by opposition activists in Bahrain and abroad to relay their opinions critical of the regime, the government is mulling to bring a new legislation to tighten laws against online dissidents “with severe measures to deal with unprecedented chaos by disruptive social media accounts.”

⁸⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-qatar-security/qatar-puts-28-people-and-entities-on-new-terrorism-list-idUSKBN1GY222>

⁹⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-saudi-ties-might-be-at-an-all-time-high-but-trump-and-the-crown-prince-disagree-on-plenty/2018/03/19/6a857bd0-2bb8-11e8-8688-e053ba58f1e4_story.html?utm_term=.f14324d9d745

⁹¹ <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/3/25/bahrain-says-if-will-hunt-down-online-dissidents>

Turkey

- **Erdoğan: Tal Rifaat to be taken soon⁹²**

Syria's Tal Rifaat will be the next target in Turkey's military operation into Afrin, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said.

"God willing, take Tal Rifaat soon and Afrin operation will achieve its goal," Erdoğan said in Trabzon on March 25 during the provincial congress of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The president also urged the United States to transfer control of Syria's Manbij from the People's Protection Units (YPG) to its "real owners."

"There were promises during the [Barack] Obama administration, when the terrorist organization first came to Manbij," Erdoğan said.

"The administration may have changed, but the fundamental principal in a state is continuity. That is why the U.S. should immediately take over Manbij from the YPG and give it to the real owners of the region. We will not of course aim guns at our allies, but we will not forgive terrorists when we see them and we will shoot them down.

- **Ruling party 'ready for election at any time,' says President Erdoğan⁹³**

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan vowed to receive "the highest vote," with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) alliance, stating that "the AKP is a party that works as if there will be an election at any time.

"We are a movement who is always prepared for elections, as if an election will be held at any moment," Erdoğan said, speaking at the AKP congress in the northern province of Giresun on March 25.

His comments came amid the AKP's preparations for triple elections in 2019, to be held for local administrations, parliament representatives and the presidency, according to the changes brought by the constitutional amendment approved in the April 2017 referendum, which prompted rumors the ruling party is preparing for early elections.

Erdoğan has criticized the rumors and has said the ruling party has always made an effort as if there would be an election. He also reminded

⁹² Hurriyet Daily News, 25 March 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-tal-rifaat-to-be-taken-soon-129285>

⁹³ Hurriyet Daily News, 25 March 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ruling-party-ready-for-election-at-any-time-says-president-erdogan-129282>

that the AKP had undergone an organizational reshuffle after he had reinstated his position as the party leader following the constitutional amendment.

- **Turkish, EU leaders to meet in Bulgaria's Varna⁹⁴**

The leaders of the EU and Turkey will meet on March 26 at the Evksinograd residence in Varna, Bulgaria to discuss ways to revitalize longstanding processes between Turkey and the bloc, namely upgrading the Customs Union agreement, requirements of a signed migrant deal, the fight against terrorism and Turkey's accession to the bloc.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will meet European Council President Donald Tusk, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov.

The meeting will build on the previous leaders' meeting that took place on May 25, 2017. High-level dialogues between the EU and Turkey had taken place on issues of transport, economic cooperation, counter-terrorism and foreign policy, but the two sides failed to make a breakthrough agreement on major issues such as visa liberalization and the customs union.

On the Customs Union issue, the council has not given the required mandate to the European Commission to launch technical talks with Turkey as there has not been a consensus yet among the EU members. Germany, primarily, is hesitated to push for the process following a series of disputes with the Turkish government.

“Juncker and Tusk cannot give any promises on behalf of 28 countries regarding the Customs Union issue. Turkey has to convince [German Chancellor Angela Merkel] first in order to launch these talks. Germany has given some positive signals, but sure they will expect Ankara to take some steps with regards to the rule of law in the country,” an EU diplomat told the Hürriyet Daily News on condition of anonymity.

The Customs Union between Turkey and the bloc came into force on Dec. 31, 1995. It covers all industrial goods, but does not address agriculture (except processed agricultural products), services or public procurement right now.

The European Commission on Dec. 21, 2016 had stated that it asked the European Council for a mandate to launch talks with Turkey to modernize the existing EU-Turkey Customs Union.

⁹⁴ Hurriyet Daily News, 25 March 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-eu-leaders-to-meet-in-bulgarias-varna-129232>

The meeting will also revise the implementation of the migrant deal signed by the two sides on March 18, 2016. Turkey has been urging EU countries to meet their pledge for a resettlement agreement as the bloc has lagged behind in admitting Syrian refugees living in Turkey, a Turkish official told Hürriyet Daily News.

The migrant deal envisages a one-for-one formula under which failed asylum seekers in Europe are returned to Turkey while Syrian refugees are resettled in EU states in a quota system.

In return for hosting Syrian refugees on its soil, Turkey was promised to be given the full amount of six billion euros in two parts. The first part, 3 billion euros, is to be fulfilled by 2018.

The European Commission said it will grant another 3 billion euros (\$3.7 billion) in funding for Syrian refugees living in Turkey as part of the refugee deal. A decision is expected to be endorsed by the council on March 23.

Turkey submitted a position paper to the EU in February regarding the benchmarks required to launch talks for visa-free travel for Turkish citizens, including a proposal of an amendment in anti-terror law that has long been urged by Brussels to comply with European standards.

The EU has not responded to its assessment for this position paper and waited for the Varna meeting, the official said.

In Varna, the Turkish leader will ask EU officials to reiterate Turkey's position as being a candidate for full membership to the bloc and give up speculations by some member states for an alternative model of partnership with Turkey, said the Turkish official.

For the EU's side, the bloc has long been calling on Ankara to end the state of emergency that was declared after the July 2016 attempted coup. But Ankara is not keen to end it soon.

Another concern of the EU is the post-coup practices carried out under the state of emergency, the detention of journalists, dissident politicians, academics and civil society representatives.

- **Turkey's indigenously-built warship to be ready in 2019⁹⁵**

The construction of Turkey's first indigenously built "multipurpose amphibious assault ship," the TCG Anadolu, which can be configured as a light aircraft carrier, in Istanbul is gathering pace, according to the head of a Turkish business body.

⁹⁵ ⁹⁵ Hürriyet Daily News, 25 March 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-indigenously-built-warship-to-be-ready-in-2019-129239>

“Approximately 90 percent of the [building] blocks are at the end of production,” Metin Kalkavan, who is the chairman of Istanbul, Marmara, Aegean, Mediterranean and Black Sea Chamber of Merchants, told state-run Anadolu Agency.

“Immediately after the manufacturing phase, fittings will be carried out,” he added.

Kalkavan said the production of the ship, which comprises of 114 blocks, would boost the capacity of the Turkish naval forces.

“We will be the 10th state to have such a ship. There are only five or six producers in the world,” he said.

The highly-anticipated attack ship will increase the operational capability of the Turkish navy, he added.

The ship, which is 68 percent indigenous, is expected to hit the seas in February 2019.

“After that, we will complete the tests and deliver it. The value of the project is over 1 billion euros,” Kalkavan added. TCG Anadolu is an amphibious assault ship of the Turkish navy that can be configured as a light aircraft carrier. The ship is 232 meters in length, 32 meters in width and 55 meters in height.

The construction of the ship began in 2016. The vessel is intended to meet the various needs and requirements of the Turkish Armed Forces, such as sustaining long-endurance, long-distance military combat or humanitarian relief operations, while acting as a command center and flagship for the Turkish navy.
