

Weekly Media Updates **(12-18 March, 2018)**

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Africa

- **Kagame - Solar Energy is a Solution to Climate Change¹**

Speaking at the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Conference in New Delhi, India President Paul Kagame has called for increased adoption of solar energy saying that it's part of the answer to climate change. Kagame said that it is an irony that some of the sunniest countries continue to lack energy. It is fitting that more than half of countries that have signed and ratified the International Solar Alliance treaty are African."

Solar as a source of energy, he said, is part of the solutions to climate change as it is a clean energy source. However, to speed up its adoption and uptake, he advised that it has to be affordable and reliable. He also called for further advances in solar technology to add to its relevance and application.

Kagame noted that conversations about fully harnessing the capacity of solar energy come at a time when the African continent is facing a huge demand for energy to meet development goals. He said "To meet the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063 targets, tremendous expansion in energy production is required in almost every African country. The International Solar Alliance's twin mission of facilitating technology transfer and innovative financing is timely."

Rwanda is among nations adopting solar energy solutions as part of the country's energy mix. Among the notable solar installations include an 8.5MW plant in Rwamagana district, and mini-solar energy installations in rural areas. In the current national strategy, off-grid solutions, such as solar, are expected to account for about 48 per cent of national energy provision.

- **Former South African president Jacob Zuma faces corruption trial²**

South Africa's former President Jacob Zuma is to face prosecution for 16 charges of corruption relating to multi-billion-dollar arms deal. The case centres on a 30bn rand (\$2.5bn; £1.7bn) deal to modernize the country's defence in the late 1990s. The charges - which Mr Zuma denies - include counts of fraud, racketeering and money laundering. Mr Zuma, 75, was forced to resign as president last month by his party, the ruling African National Congress (ANC). He was facing his ninth no-confidence vote in parliament before he left office.

Chief Prosecutor Shaun Abraham said he believed there were "reasonable prospects of a successful prosecution" in the case. French arms supplier Thales will also face charges, a prosecutor said. Mr Zuma is alleged to

¹ The New Times, 12 March 2018,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201803120480.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabmrjk

² BBC, 16 March 2018, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/Trials_of_Jacob_Zuma

have sought bribes from Thales to support an extravagant lifestyle. His financial adviser at the time was found guilty of soliciting those bribes in 2005 and Mr Zuma was later sacked as deputy president. Original charges against Mr Zuma were controversially dropped shortly before he became president in 2009. He now faces one charge of racketeering, two charges of corruption, one charge of money laundering and 12 of fraud.

Shaun Abrahams, head of the National Prosecuting Authority, said a trial court was the appropriate place for the matter to be decided. He dismissed representations made by Mr Zuma asking that the charges be dropped. The former ANC chief had argued that the charges against him were characterised by misconduct, "irrational behaviour" and media leaks on the part of prosecutors.

- **Nigeria Skips African Summit in Blow to Free Trade Deal³**

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari will not attend the African Union summit in Rwanda this week, an official statement said Sunday, in a blow to plans to launch a major free trade treaty across 54 countries. The meeting in Kigali is intended to formally launch the African Continental Free Trade Area Treaty, which Nigeria's cabinet endorsed last Wednesday. Buhari was scheduled to leave Abuja on Monday ahead of Wednesday's launch but pulled out to allow for more consultations. "Mr President will no longer be travelling to Kigali for the event because certain key stakeholders in Nigeria indicated that they had not been consulted, for which reasons they had some concerns on the provisions of the treaty," the statement said. "Consequently, Mr President's decision is to allow time for broader consultations on the issue." The organised labour union, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), urged Buhari not to sign the deal. "We at the Nigeria Labour Congress are shocked by the sheer impunity or blatant lack of consultation in the process that has led to this," said NLC President Ayuba Wabba.

- **Nigeria Plans to Negotiate for Release of 110 Abducted Dapchi Girls⁴**

Nigeria's presidency said on Monday it plans to negotiate for the release of 110 girls abducted from a school in the northeastern town of Dapchi last month, rather than use a military operation to free them by force. The kidnapping is one of the largest since the jihadist group Boko Haram abducted more than 270 schoolgirls from the northeastern town of Chibok in 2014. Some of the Chibok girls have been freed after what security sources say were ransom payments; around 100 are still being held. Nigeria is grappling with an insurgency by Boko Haram that has killed at least 20,000 people since 2009. Members of the group are suspected of the latest kidnapping, on February 19, in the state of Yobe.

³ Times Live, 18 March 2018, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2018-03-18-nigeria-skips-african-summit-in-blow-to-free-trade-deal/>

⁴ Reuters, 12 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security/nigeria-plans-to-negotiate-for-release-of-110-abducted-dapchi-girls-idUSKCN1GO2BZ>

- **About 5000 Ethiopians Flee to Kenya after Botched Military Operation⁵**

About 5,000 Ethiopians have crossed into Kenya seeking refuge since March 10, the Kenyan Red Cross Society said, after several civilians were killed in what, the Ethiopian military said, was a botched security operation targeting militants. Ethiopian state media reported on Sunday that soldiers had been deployed to an area near the town of Moyale in Oromiya, a region that borders Kenya, in pursuit of Oromo Liberation Front fighters who had crossed into the country from Kenya. But faulty intelligence led soldiers to launch an attack that killed nine civilians and injured 12 others, the Ethiopian News Agency said.

- **UAE to Train Somaliland Forces amid Somalia Rift⁶**

Somaliland's security forces will be trained by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as part of an agreement to build a military base in the breakaway country. The UAE was given the permission to build the base last year near the airport of Somaliland's Berbera port city. The base can operate for some 30 years, although the agreement is to be finalised within two months. "They have the resources and the knowledge," Muse Bihi Abdi, president of Somaliland, said. The announcement made by Abdi comes a day after Somalia passed a law to ban the UAE from going forward with a controversial US\$422 million regeneration project in Somaliland in a tripartite contract with Ethiopia. Last week Somalia called the deal "null and void" on the grounds that it had not given its consent. Turkey, which is at political tensions with the UAE, also opened a military base in Somalia last year, deploying some 200 troops to train Somalia's security forces. Early this year the Turkish National Security Council finalised a 2022 plan to deploy some 60,000 Turkish troops worldwide.

- **Djibouti Signs New Agreement for Doraleh Container Terminal⁷**

DJIBOUTI'S Ports and Zones Authority announced that the Doraleh Container Terminal has signed a deal with Pacific International Lines (PIL) to raise by a third (300,000 TEUs) the amount of cargo handled at the port. Djibouti had last month ended its contract with DP World to run the 1.6 million-TEU terminal, citing failure to resolve a dispute that began in 2012. The seizure of the terminal was deemed illegal by DP World, which said it had begun new arbitration proceedings before the London Court of International Arbitration.

⁵ Reuters, 13 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-violence/about-5000-ethiopians-flee-to-kenya-after-botched-military-operation-idUSKCN1GP1T4>

⁶ Middle East Monitor, 16 March 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180316-uae-to-train-somaliland-forces-amid-somalia-rift/>

⁷ Steelguru, 15 March 2018, <https://steelguru.com/logistic/djibouti-sign-new-agreement-for-doraleh-container-terminal/504639>

- **IMF Gives Kenya 6-Month Standby Loan Extension**⁸

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved Kenya's request for a six-month extension of a US\$1.5 billion standby credit facility that was due to expire Wednesday. Kenya has in return promised to repeal the law that caps interest rates within the extended six-month window, setting consumers up for a possible steep rise in the cost of loans. IMF had approved the \$1.5 billion credit line on March 14, 2016 for a period of 24 months, as precautionary facility that Kenya could draw should the economy be in distress. The Washington-based institution recently revealed that the credit had been suspended mid last year before the March 14 expiry date, because of Kenya's failure to meet the agreed fiscal deficit reduction targets.

- **Kenya Seeks Ties with Cuba amid Low Trade Volumes**⁹

Kenya is seeking to establish better transport connections with the Caribbean island of Cuba in a bid to boost trade and tourism. Foreign Affairs CS Monica Juma said President Uhuru Kenyatta's inaugural state visit to Havana was using historical connections to cultivate economic benefits. "We are here to strengthen what are historical ties between this country and Kenya but also between Cuba and Africa. "Cuba has a very rich tourist attraction area so we would want to visit and see what they are doing to attract huge numbers of tourists," she said in a statement on the President's visit. President Kenyatta is in Havana for a state visit, a first by a Kenyan President since diplomatic ties were established between the two countries in 2001. Specifically, Kenyan officials say there will be negotiations on aviation connections between the two countries, as well as MOUs on trade. "There is opportunity for the two countries to expand cooperation in Agriculture and education sectors. The relevant agreements are currently being considered by Kenya," Dr Juma said. The Kenyan President seems to be using history to get support to his BIG Four agenda which includes better housing, universal healthcare, manufacturing and food security.

- **57 000 Flee DRC Province to Uganda: UN**¹⁰

More than 57,000 refugees have crossed into Uganda this year after fleeing ethnic strife in the Democratic Republic of Congo's northeastern Ituri province, the United Nations refugee agency said Friday. That rate of flight far surpasses the 44 000 refugees who made a similar journey through all of 2017, UNHCR spokesman Babar Baloch told reporters in Geneva. Refugees are primarily entering Uganda via Lake Albert on makeshift boats, a dangerous crossing that has already proved fatal for "several" people, UNHCR said in a statement. Fighting in Ituri has

⁸ Daily Nation, 15 March 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/business/IMF-gives-Kenya-6-month-standby-loan-extension/996-4342198-w79wb9/index.html>

⁹ Daily Nation, 17 March 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Kenya-seeks-ties-with-Cuba-amid-low-trade-volumes/1056-4345438-15rs2j9z/index.html>

¹⁰ News24, 17 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/57-000-flee-drc-province-to-uganda-un-20180317>

involved the Hema and Lendu communities, respectively cattle herders and farmers who have a long history of violence over access to land.

- **Tanzania President Says He Will Not Bail-Out Struggling Banks**¹¹

Tanzania's President John Magufuli has ordered the country's central bank not to bail out any struggling banks as East Africa's third-largest economy tries to control rising bad debts in the sector. A spike in non-performing loans over the past two years has hit local bank profits and choked off new lending to the private sector, undermining economic growth in the country. Magufuli, who has taken on foreign mining firms since coming to power in 2015, said there would be no state help for lenders, accusing them of misappropriating taxpayers' funds used to bail them out in the past. "It's better to have a few viable banks than dozens of failing banks," he said late on Friday at the inauguration of a new bank branch in northwestern Tanzania.

- **Tanzania-Rwanda Standard-Gauge Line to be Electrified**¹²

THE transport minister of Rwanda, Mr. Jean de Dieu Uwihanganye and his Tanzanian counterpart, Mr. Makame Mbarawa, agreed on March 9 to electrify the planned 407 km standard-gauge line linking Isaka in Tanzania with the Rwandan capital Kigali. The decision will enable the maximum speed for freight trains to be increased from 100 to 120km/h, while passenger trains will be able to operate at 160km/h instead of 120km/h. Mbarawa announced the two governments will complete their review of the feasibility study for the new line within one month and will then launch a tender. Mbarawa says he hopes to lay the foundation stone for the US\$2.5 billion new line in October.

- **Dhlakama Threatens to End Talks with Mozambique Government**¹³

The leader of Mozambique's rebel movement Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, has threatened to end Renamo's negotiations with the government because of alleged fraud committed by the ruling Frelimo Party in Wednesday's second round of the mayoral by-election in the northern city of Nampula. Even before any votes had been cast, Dhlakama was accusing Frelimo of fraud. Interviewed by phone by the independent television station STV, Dhlakama claimed that Frelimo is bussing in supporters from all over the country to vote in Nampula. He said these fake voters came, not only from other districts in Nampula province, but from as far afield as Niassa province in the far north and from Maputo in the far south. Dhlakama said this supposed fraud undermined the talks between the government and Renamo. He threatened to end the talks, renege on agreements already reached and "go back to square one". He

¹¹ Citizen Digital, 12 March 2018, <https://citizentv.co.ke/business/tanzania-president-says-will-not-bail-out-struggling-banks-193383/>

¹² International Railway Journal, 12 March 2018, <https://www.railjournal.com/index.php/africa/tanzania-rwanda-standard-gauge-line-to-be-electrified.html>

¹³ IOL, 15 March 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/dhlakama-threatens-to-end-talks-with-mozambique-government-13828117>

said he had once believed that President Filipe Nyusi was better than his predecessors, Joaquim Chissano and Armando Guebuza, but now Nyusi “has disappointed me”. He menaced that if something was not done to stop the alleged Nampula fraud, he would organise “a revolution of the entire people” to remove Frelimo from power.

- **Mozambique: Renamo Wins Nampula By-Election**¹⁴

The candidate of the rebel movement Renamo, Paulo Vahanle, has won the second round of the mayoral by-election in the northern Mozambican city of Nampula, held on Wednesday. According to observer groups, the results sheets (“editais”) from 360 of the 401 polling stations, showed Vahanle taking almost 60 per cent of the vote, to just over 40 per cent for his rival, Amisse Cololo, of the ruling Frelimo Party. It is quite impossible for Cololo to close that gap from the remaining 41 polling stations. The results from these 360 polling stations, as cited in Thursday's issue of the independent newssheet “Mediafax”, were as follows: Paulo Vahanle (Renamo) 49,928 (59.08 per cent) Amisse Cololo (Frelimo) 34,580 (40.92 per cent).

- **Angola's Ex-Leader Eduardo dos Santos to Quit as Ruling Party Boss**¹⁵

Former Angolan leader Jose Eduardo dos Santos said on Friday he will quit as head of the governing party by 2019 after the ruling MPLA denied tensions with his successor, President Joao Lourenco. Dos Santos ceded the presidency to his former defence minister Lourenco following the ruling MPLA's victory in August elections but held on to the party's top job. The 75-year-old veteran leader who ruled for nearly four decades is battling ill health and said that he would retire from politics entirely by April 2019 at the latest. "I cautiously recommend that the extraordinary congress elects a new party leader in December 2018 or April 2019," he said as he opened a meeting of the MPLA's central committee. His intervention came as Luanda seeks to play down speculation of a rift between Dos Santos and Lourenco which has shaken the MPLA leadership.

- **Angolan Deep Offshore Field Starts Oil Production**¹⁶

Eni and Sonangol have commenced oil production from the Ochigufu project, located in Block 15/06 of Angola's deep offshore. The field, which is located approximately 93 miles west from Soyo, will add 25,000 barrels to current production levels, according to Eni. Production start-up at Ochigufu was achieved one and a half years after the presentation of the plan of development. The project marks the first start-up for Eni and Angola in 2018. The Vandumbu field in the West Hub is also

¹⁴ All Africa, 15 March 2018, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201803160091.html>

¹⁵ News24, 17 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/angolas-ex-leader-to-quit-as-ruling-party-boss-by-2019-20180316>

¹⁶ Rigzone, 16 March 2018,

https://www.rigzone.com/news/angolan_deep_offshore_field_starts_oil_production-16-mar-2018-153904-article/

expected to start production in early 2019, with all three start-ups anticipated to increase overall production by a further 30,000 barrels. Eni has been present in Angola since 1980 through its subsidiary Eni Angola. The company's equity production amounts to 150,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day.

- **Angola Charges Ex-Central Bank Chief in US\$500 Million Fraud Case**¹⁷
Angolan prosecutors have charged former central bank governor, Valter Filipe da Silva, in relation to an alleged US\$500 million fraud attempted against the Angolan government last year (2017), a source familiar with the matter told Reuters on Thursday. The source said the attempted fraud occurred in the final weeks of the presidency of José Eduardo dos Santos when US\$500 million was transferred from the central bank to an account in the United Kingdom. It was, however, flagged as suspicious by British authorities and frozen. Angola's prosecutors' office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Reuters was unable to contact da Silva.
- **Indian Foreign Affairs Minister in Luanda**¹⁸
India's Foreign Minister of State, Shri M.J. Akbar, is on Thursday paying a two-day working visit to Angola, aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation and the prospecting of the African market, as part of his tour to the continent. During his stay in Luanda, the head of Indian diplomacy intends to identify new areas of cooperation, as well as strengthen other sectors with the signing of some cooperation agreements. According to his agenda, Shri Akbar is speaking on Thursday at the Faculty of Economics of Agostinho Neto University, under the motto "India, Africa and the development of the 21st century." The Indian minister will also attend a reception organized by the Angola-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIAI) and on Friday he will be welcomed by members of the Angolan government. The CCIAI was proclaimed in October 2017 in Luanda, with the aim of strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries. India annually offers 30 scholarships for postgraduate courses and 30 vacancies under the Indian technical and economic cooperation program for specialized medical courses for health professionals. By 2013, trade between the two countries amounted to US\$7.5 billion, with the export of Angolan oil, but due to the financial crisis, fell to US\$3.5 billion.

¹⁷ Reuters, 15 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-angola-corruption/angola-charges-ex-central-bank-chief-in-500-million-fraud-case-source-idUSKCN1GR1SH>

¹⁸ ANGOP, 15 March 2018,

http://www.angop.ao/angola/en_us/noticias/politica/2018/2/11/Indian-Foreign-affairs-minister-Luanda,b9491de6-5f54-4704-94a2-7f14f4e05283.html

China

- **AIIB inks natural gas deal with Chinese firm to improve air quality**

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) signed a natural gas project with a Chinese company on 20 March 2018 to improve the air quality in Beijing.

It marks the AIIB's first loan in China for a natural gas project. The 250-million-U.S. dollar loan will fund a project to connect 216,750 households in approximately 510 villages to the natural gas distribution network.

Upon completion and after subtracting the emissions from burning natural gas, the project is expected to reduce annual carbon dioxide emissions by 595,700 tonnes, particulate matter by 3,700 tonnes, sulfur dioxide by 1,488 tonnes and nitrogen oxide by 4,442 tonnes. The project, undertaken by the Beijing Gas Group Company, will entail construction of natural gas distribution networks in villages and low-pressure gas pipelines and household connections.¹⁹

- **China eases market access for foreign payment firms**

China's central bank on 22 March laid out the rules for foreign-invested payment firms over market access and supervision, in a bid to open up its payment service market and encourage competition.

Overseas companies providing e-payment services are required to set up foreign-invested businesses in China and acquire payment services licenses, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in its online statement. These firms are required to have secure, regulated transaction and recovery systems in China with the capacity of processing payment services individually, according to the PBOC. According to the statement, client data and other financial information originated and collected in China must be stored, processed and analyzed within the domestic area. Foreign-invested payment firms should abide by Central Bank regulations in their corporate governance, operation and risk management, according to the PBOC.²⁰

- **Trump-Kim summit possibility hinges on location: Editorial-Global Times**

An editorial of *the Global Times* on 16 March noted that “the world is speculating on the possibility of a US-North Korea summit to take place in Sweden in May. Will a meeting between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump, inconceivable by any stretch of the imagination a month ago, really happen in Sweden?...officials from both countries have pondered the idea of Sweden as a possible summit location. It is not unlikely Kim would travel to Sweden to meet with Trump, but it would be one of the riskiest choices he has ever made.”

¹⁹ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/50578.htm>

²⁰ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/50782.htm>

While exploring options, the editorial noted “Pyongyang's options will probably come down to Panmunjom, Beijing, or Ulaanbaatar. Panmunjom is a village that sits on the 38th parallel north close to the DMZ, where it has strong control. Beijing is the safest city, but Pyongyang might be unwilling because the bilateral relationship is at a low ebb. As for the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, situated between China and Russia, North Korea has long enjoyed a friendly history with Mongolia. This location would minimize US opportunity to ‘take action’ while promising Kim's safety.”²¹

- **PLA Daily: All parties concerned must show goodwill to promote political settlement of Korean Peninsula issue**

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Daily, flagship newspaper of the Chinese military, published an article on March 21 saying that “the current situation on the Korean Peninsula is facing an important opportunity for easing talks. We hope all parties concerned will work hard in a spirit of goodwill to maintain the current positive momentum.” The PLA Daily noted “we should also understand that in order to truly resolve the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, the ‘two wheels’ of the relations between the DPRK and the ROK and the relations between the DPRK and the US must all turn together.”²²

- **China’s central document charts roadmap for rural vitalization**

“Make agriculture a promising industry, farming an attractive occupation and rural areas beautiful places to live and work,” the CPC Central Committee and State Council pledged in the recently released No. 1 Central Document. Outlining a roadmap for agricultural, rural and farmer issues, the policy statement is consistent with the rural vitalization strategy put forward at the 19th CPC National Congress last year.

Issues related to agriculture, rural areas, and rural people are fundamental to China’s national stability and the public’s well-being. The document comes as socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era and the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved, said Tian Yipeng, director of the School of Philosophy and Sociology at Jilin University.²³

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Philippines to withdraw from the International Criminal Court**

President Rodrigo Duterte on March 14, 2018, announced that it will formally began the process to withdraw from a United Nations treaty that

²¹ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1093659.shtml>

²² http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-03/21/content_4807538.htm

²³ http://english.cssn.cn/topstories/201803/t20180305_3866580.shtml

created the International Criminal Court (ICC), citing a concerted effort by UN rights probers to paint him as "a ruthless and heartless violator of human rights". Adopted and signed by 123 states in 1998 at a conference in Rome, the treaty created the ICC and gave it jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The Philippines signed the Rome Statute in 2000, and ratified and endorsed it in 2011. The ICC last month began a preliminary investigation into the controversial crackdown on the narcotics trade which, according to police, has left nearly 5,000 suspects dead in shoot-outs during drug raids since Mr Duterte took office in mid-June 2016. Former solicitor-general Florin Hilbay said it would take a year from the day Mr Duterte notifies the ICC before the Philippines is considered withdrawn as a signatory. He added that withdrawing from the ICC would not stop the case lodged in the court by a Philippine congressman and a lawyer who accuse Mr Duterte of "crimes against humanity" for extrajudicial killings.²⁴

- **ASEAN-Australia Special Summit for greater Trade Integration**

For the first time, the leaders of all the ten ASEAN states met in Australia for the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, on March 16, 2018. Speaking at the ASEAN-Australia Business Summit, Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull said that protectionism is a "dead end", as he and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong made a strong push for countries to continue working together on free trade. Mr Turnbull said Australia will continue to work with its closest neighbours in the region on trade liberalisation. Further ASEAN and Australia will work together on a new Digital Standards Cooperation Initiative. These will be a set of standards to make it easier for businesses to conduct cross-border digital trade. Prime Minister of Singapore Mr Lee welcomed the initiative, saying it is a good first step in developing interoperable digital standards, which will facilitate trade and reduce costs for businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises. He further added that during Singapore's ASEAN chairmanship this year, ASEAN is pursuing an agreement on e-commerce to streamline the varying regulatory systems across member states and make electronic transactions safer and more convenient. Mr Lee noted that ASEAN's growing digital economy is a compelling area of opportunity for Australian businesses.²⁵

²⁴"Duterte to withdraw Philippines from the ICC", *The Straits Times*, March 15, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/duterte-to-withdraw-philippines-from-the-icc>, (accessed on March 15, 2018).

²⁵ "ASEAN, Australia to make it easier for businesses to conduct cross-border digital trade" *The Straits Times*, March 16, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/asean-australia-to-make-it-easier-for-businesses-to-conduct-cross-border-digital-trade>, (accessed on March 16, 2018).

- **Indonesia-Australia Sign Maritime Cooperation**

Indonesia and Australia signed an action plan on maritime cooperation in Sydney on March 16, 2018, at the sideline of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit. According to the Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi, the discussion for this cooperation began in February 2017. The cooperation includes strengthening maritime security, combatting transnational organized crimes and illegal fishing as well as addressing maritime pollution. Meanwhile, Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop said the country was seeking ways to combat drug trafficking.²⁶

- **Indonesia wants Australia to become a member of ASEAN**

Indonesian President Joko Widodo at the ASEAN-Australia Summit stated that Indonesia wants Australia to become a full member of ASEAN, and is keen on Canberra playing a bigger regional role in defence, trade and security matters. Australia has been a dialogue partner of ASEAN since 1974 with the first biennial leaders' summits being held in 2016, in Vientiane. In a report last month, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute argued that Canberra should aim for ASEAN membership by 2024 - its 50th anniversary of being a partner - and use the Sydney summit as a launch pad.²⁷

North America

Canada

- **Canada's new peacekeeping mission to Mali is more about image than national security**

The Canadian military will deploy helicopters and support troops, including medical teams, to the troubled West African nation of Mali later this year. The deployment is in response to a direct request from the United Nations. Details on how many choppers and personnel will be involved are still being worked out, but the official said the UN has been served with formal notice of Canada's participation. When the deployment takes place, it will be the first major step the Liberal government has taken to fulfil its promise to return the Canadian military to peacekeeping. Last fall, at a Vancouver ministerial summit,

²⁶ Anton Hermansyah, "Indonesia, Australia sign action plan on maritime cooperation", *The Jakarta Post*, March 16, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/03/16/ri-oz-sign-action-plan-on-maritime-cooperation.html>, (accessed on March 16, 2018).

²⁷ "Indonesia open to idea of Australia as full ASEAN member", *The Straits Times*, March 16, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-wants-australia-as-full-asean-member>, (accessed on March 16, 2018).

Trudeau reaffirmed an earlier pledge to deliver up to 600 troops and 150 police to UN peace support operations. He laid out a roadmap that included a five-year commitment of helicopters, transport planes, military trainers and a 200-strong rapid reaction force of troops.²⁸

- **Canada's arms deal with Saudi Arabia includes 'heavy assault' vehicles**

Canada's multi-billion dollar arms sale to Saudi Arabia includes a substantial number of "heavy assault" armoured vehicles and a maintenance deal that would see the Ontario-based manufacturer embed teams at multiple locations throughout the kingdom. CBC News has obtained documents that — for the first time — lay out the major elements of the original agreement signed in early 2014 and approved by the previous Conservative government. The \$15 billion agreement was given the further blessing of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government in the spring of 2016 when it began issuing permits for the export of the combat vehicles. Much of the heated public debate about the arms sale has taken place in a vacuum because specific details of General Dynamics Land Systems Canada's (GDLS) contract were sealed under a confidentiality agreement demanded by the Saudi government. Both the Liberals and Conservatives have used the absence of details to downplay the destructive firepower of the vehicles being sold.²⁹

- **Canada's Trudeau says will discuss U.S. steel tariffs at Group of 7 meeting: Seoul**

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said steel tariffs will be discussed at the upcoming Group of 7 summit in June. Trudeau was cited as saying Canada had been granted a temporary waiver on U.S. steel import tariffs and does not believe trade issues involving the United States have been resolved yet, the Blue House said.³⁰

The United States

- **Major retailers to Trump: New China tariffs will hurt American shoppers**

The Trump administration has already imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from most of the world, aimed primarily at curbing

²⁸ Murray Brewster, "Canada sending troops to UN peacekeeping mission in Mali," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canadian-peacekeeping-mission-mali-1.4580482>, Accessed on 21 march 2018.

²⁹ Murray Brewster, "Canada's arms deal with Saudi Arabia includes 'heavy assault' vehicles," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-saudi-arms-deal-1.4579772> ,Accessed on 21 March 2018.

³⁰ Reuters, "Canada's Trudeau says will discuss U.S. steel tariffs at Group of 7 meeting: Seoul," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-canada-steel/canadas-trudeau-says-will-discuss-u-s-steel-tariffs-at-group-of-7-meeting-seoul-idUSKBN1GW0GT>, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

the excess production coming from China. But the White House confirmed to CNN last week that the administration is weighing tariffs on at least \$30 billion worth of other imports from China. The move would be retaliation for alleged intellectual property theft, such as the sale of counterfeit goods and pirated software, as well as stolen corporate secrets. The decision on further action against China is expected soon. A letter signed by 49 of the nation's largest retailers, including Walmart (WMT), Target (TGT) and Costco (COST), argues the tariffs would hurt working families who shop in their stores. A number of business groups are also arguing against further sanctions, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, several tech groups and trade associations that represent retailers, agriculture, telecommunications, clothing and the auto parts industry. A letter signed by industry trade groups says that imposing tariffs would only hurt US businesses and consumers and would not be an effective way to reign in China's worst practices.³¹

- **Pompeo set to meet with Tillerson and Andrew McCabe, former FBI deputy director, fired right before he was to retire**

Donald Trump threw US diplomacy into fresh turmoil on Tuesday by firing his secretary of state, Rex Tillerson – said to have discovered his fate via Twitter – and promoting two officials condemned by human rights groups for endorsing or overseeing torture. Tillerson would be replaced by CIA director Mike Pompeo, a hardliner. Gina Haspel, Pompeo's deputy, would be nominated as the CIA's first female director. Pompeo has been criticised for claiming waterboarding is not torture and opposing the closure of Guantánamo Bay. Haspel has come under scrutiny for her role in CIA torture under George W Bush and the destruction of evidence. Attorney general Jeff Sessions fired the FBI's former deputy director, Andrew McCabe — a favourite target for President Donald Trump and Republicans, two days before he was to retire. Sessions made the politically explosive decision after the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility recommended that McCabe be dismissed for not being forthcoming about authorizing discussions with a reporter about a pending investigation. Sessions said he relied on internal assessments that McCabe lacked candour on multiple occasions. The move by the attorney general appeared to open a new episode in the criminal investigation into Trump being led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller. McCabe responded to the decision with a combative statement saying he was the target of a political attack by

³¹ Chris Isidore, "Major retailers to Trump: New China tariffs will hurt American shoppers," <http://money.cnn.com/2018/03/19/news/economy/trump-business-groups-oppose-china-tariffs/index.html>, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

Trump and that he has knowledge of events that took place after Trump fired FBI director James Comey in May.³²

- **Trump issues action blocking Venezuela cryptocurrencies within US**
President Donald Trump issued an executive order banning any transactions within the United States involving any digital currency issued by, for, or on behalf of the Government of Venezuela. The order applies to U.S. citizens as well as anyone within the United States, and includes cryptocurrency issued on or after January 9. President Trump's order is in response to recent attempts by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's regime to "circumvent U.S. sanctions by issuing a digital currency," the White House said in a statement. Venezuela launched its oil-backed cryptocurrency in February to help pull the country out of a continuing economic crisis. President Maduro said each petro token will be backed by one barrel of the state's national petroleum. Maduro also said roughly 100 million tokens would be issued — estimated to be worth around \$6 billion.³³

- **Mueller Subpoenas Trump Organization, Demanding Documents About Russia**

The special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, has subpoenaed the Trump Organization in recent weeks to turn over documents, including some related to Russia, according to two people briefed on the matter. The order is the first known instance of the special counsel demanding records directly related to President Trump's businesses, bringing the investigation closer to the president. The breadth of the subpoena was not clear, nor was it clear why Mr. Mueller issued it instead of simply asking for the documents from the company, an umbrella organization that encompasses Mr. Trump's business ventures. Mr. Mueller ordered the Trump Organization to hand over records related to Russia and other topics he is investigating, the people said. The subpoena is the latest indication that the investigation, which Mr. Trump's lawyers once

³² David Smith, "Rex Tillerson's firing leaves US diplomacy in turmoil," <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/13/rex-tillerson-fired-latest-news-donald-trump>, and Chris Strohm, "Andrew McCabe, former FBI deputy director, fired right before he was to retire," <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/Q2h6jqG3YeAcAoyxcockYL/Andrew-McCabe-former-FBI-deputy-director-fired-right-befor.html>, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

³³ Kate Rooney, "Trump issues action blocking Venezuela cryptocurrencies within US," <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/19/trump-issues-action-blocking-us-citizens-from-trading-or-financing-venezuela-cryptocurrency.html>, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

regularly assured him would be completed by now, will continue for at least several more months.³⁴

Mexico

- **Mexico leftist says he would try to halt energy auctions if president-elect**

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is a long-time skeptic of Pena Nieto's energy reform, enshrined in 2014, and he and his team have delivered fluctuating messages on what they would do if they win. They have now stated if he wins the July election, he will ask President Enrique Pena Nieto to stop at least two energy auctions scheduled to take place before the new president takes office. Foreign investors and energy companies are paying close attention to what might happen in one of the most important, and recently opened, energy markets in the Americas. There are two official authorized oil auctions - in July and September - that could be threatened by Lopez Obrador's comments, and the energy ministry wants to squeeze in another before Pena Nieto leaves office, although it has yet to be given the green light. Speaking in Mexico City on the 80th anniversary of the nationalization of the country's oil industry, Lopez Obrador also said that within three years of his possible six-year term, Mexico would stop buying foreign fuel, following extensive upgrades of the country's refining sector.³⁵

- **Mexican Candidate Pledges No Mercy as Campaign Heats Up**

Mexican presidential candidate Ricardo Anaya, who's polling in second place ahead of the July vote, said that if elected he'll do everything he can to ensure that incumbent Enrique Pena Nieto and members of his administration are investigated for corruption. The 39-year-old Anaya has enjoyed a surge in support this year since winning the nomination for the business-friendly PAN party. Anaya's promise to go after Pena Nieto and the PRI marks a new contrast with Lopez Obrador, who's suggested that he would leave any investigations to an independent judiciary if he wins, and talked about forgiveness and reconciliation. It's a risky strategy. Anaya's more combative approach could energize voters against a deeply unpopular ruling party -- or could mobilize the PRI's

³⁴ Michael S. Schmidt and Maggie Haberman, "Mueller Subpoenas Trump Organization, Demanding Documents About Russia," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/15/us/politics/trump-organization-subpoena-mueller-russia.html>, Accessed on 21 March 2018

³⁵ Reuters, "Mexico leftist says he would try to halt energy auctions if president-elect," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-oil-election/mexico-leftist-says-he-would-try-to-halt-energy-auctions-if-president-elect-idUSKBN1GU0W5>, Accessed on 21 March 2018 002E

well-oiled machine against him (which may be happening already) in what is increasingly a two-horse race.³⁶

- **Mexican minister ramps up pressure for speedy NAFTA deal**

Mexico's economy minister on Thursday urged officials to push for a speedy renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), saying his country and Canada must be ready to go it alone if the United States pulls out. Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo said if no deal to rework NAFTA could be struck by April 30, then the new political complexion of the region would cast doubt on how incoming lawmakers would view it in Mexico and the United States. Guajardo had previously identified a window for negotiation extending through July, though his comments come a few days after U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer floated the idea of reaching a deal "in principle" in the next few weeks.³⁷

Latin America and Caribbean

Argentina

- **G-20 meeting in Argentina eclipsed by potential trade war**

Finance ministers and central bankers from the 20 leading industrial and developing countries are meeting in Argentina at a summit that has been eclipsed by growing concerns over the potential of a global trade war following U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to slap import tariffs on steel and aluminum. Trump's tariffs — of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum imports — enter into force. Argentina's Treasury Minister Nicolas Dujovne asked U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to exempt the South American country from the tariffs. Trump is temporarily exempting Canada and Mexico.

Other Latin American countries have also reached out to Trump for exemptions, and the European Union's top trade official said Monday that the EU should be excluded as a whole. The EU has already published a list of American products it plans to tax if it is not exempted. The tariffs and the EU threat to retaliate with counter-measures have escalated the risk of a trade war with tit-for-tat tariff boosts that would

³⁶ Nacha Cattan, "Mexican Candidate Pledges No Mercy as Campaign Heats Up," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-12/mexico-candidate-pledges-no-mercy-as-election-campaign-heats-up>, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

³⁷ Daniel Flynn, "Mexican minister ramps up pressure for speedy NAFTA deal," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-mexico/mexican-minister-ramps-up-pressure-for-speedy-nafta-deal-idUSKCN1GR242>, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

harm exporting nations as well as raising prices for consumers in importing nations.³⁸

Brazil

- **Big rallies held after Rio politician is shot dead**

Tens of thousands of people in Rio de Janeiro and other cities across Brazil have taken to the streets to mourn a murdered politician who had campaigned against police brutality. Marielle Franco, a 38-year-old Rio city councillor, was viewed by many as a champion of women's rights. Ms Franco and her driver were both shot dead while in her car. Brazilian President Michel Temer called her murder an attack on democracy and the rule of law.

Public Security Minister Raul Jungmann has said the federal government will use all resources available to find her killers. Ms Franco was elected to the city council in 2016 and presided over the women's commission. She was a councillor for the left-wing Socialism and Liberty Party. Last month, she was chosen to be the speaker of the commission overseeing the deployment of federal security forces into Rio's favelas. President Temer deployed the military in the state of Rio in February after a spike in violent crime during carnival.³⁹

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Afghanistan Signs Helicopter Deal with Belarus⁴⁰**

Afghanistan signed a contract with the Republic of Belarus to acquire four M-30 helicopters. India would provide financial support to Afghanistan in this regard. Representatives of both Afghanistan and Belarus were present in New Delhi, India during process of agreement. Maj. Gen. Dawlat Waziri, spokesman for Ministry of Defense Afghanistan issued a statement that Afghanistan would purchase four choppers from Belarus with the hope of strengthening Afghan Air Forces under the contract. The Afghan Air Force is still emerging with the assistance mostly from U.S. The country has about 150 planes, 35 helicopters. It also purchased four copters from India in the year 2016.

³⁸ Luis Andres Henao, "G-20 meeting in Argentina eclipsed by potential trade war," https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/g-20-ministers-convene-in-argentina/2018/03/19/72b216e4-2ba2-11e8-8dc9-3b51e028b845_story.html?utm_term=.a4d41fd97c93, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

³⁹ BBC, "Brazil: Big rallies held after Rio politician is shot dead," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-43414527>, Accessed on 21 March 2018.

⁴⁰ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 13 March 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20413

- **U.S. Detecting Some Taliban Interest in Afghan Peace Talks: Mattis**⁴¹

On 13 March 2018, Jim Mattis, Defense Secretary of U.S visited Afghanistan and found several signs of interest from Taliban elements in exploring the possibility of talks with Afghan government to end 16-year-old conflict. In 2017, United States as a part of their regional strategy has increased air strikes against the Taliban, forcing the insurgents to be part of negotiation. The President Ashraf Ghani regarded U.S strategy as crucial and said, “It has been a game changer because it has forced every actor to re-examine their assumptions”. Jim Mattis stressed that Afghan government should take advantage of fractured Taliban group where some group of Taliban, although it is small in number wanted to be in the negotiation table. Despite this positive sign, a group of insurgents occupied a district center in western Afghanistan, showing no interest of accepting the offer of Afghan government.

- **Ghani Invites Pakistan Prime Minister to Visit Kabul**⁴²

On 17 March 2018, after meeting a Pakistani delegate led by Pakistan’s National Security Adviser Nasser Khan Janjua, the President Ashraf Ghani officially invited Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi to visit Kabul. Both countries initiated comprehensive talks and discussed measures to avert terrorist activities in the region. According to the statement, the two sides also discussed the importance of connection and regional cooperation particularly between the two countries in a campaign against crime and activities of terrorist networks. They also talked about measures to stop these activities from happening.

- **Ghani Promises to Resolve Kuchis’ Problems**⁴³

On 19 March 2018, President Ashraf Ghani proposed that a high council on nomads would be created to solve nomad’s problems in particular Kuchis. The President met nomads’ representatives from different provinces and asked for their support to the government and their role in defending the country. The representatives shared their demands in areas of education, health, livestock, pastures, shelter, deep wells, nomads’ townships and shared other problems with the president.

⁴¹ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 17 March 2018,
http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20429

⁴² Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 18 March 2018,
http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20451

⁴³ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 20 March 2018,
http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20470

- **Donor Nations Call for Timely, Credible Elections in Afghanistan⁴⁴**

The Election Support Group of Ambassadors consisted of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), NATO and key donor countries, including the European Union, the Governments of Denmark (representing Nordic Plus), Germany, Japan, United Kingdom, and United States issued a statement on 19 March 2018 asking Afghan government to held election on time and warned that any change in the electoral system at this stage would delay parliamentary and district council elections beyond 2018. The support group called for timely parliamentary election in 2018 and presidential elections in April 2019. The statement mentioned, "The international community is encouraged by progress toward implementing reforms, such as the polling centre based voter register, which have the potential to decrease fraud and enhance the integrity of the electoral process. We look forward to robust and concerted efforts to ensure voter registration and preparations proceed unimpeded and on schedule for elections in 2018". The Support Group encouraged civil society, and government institutions to support the electoral management bodies in ensuring the successful conduct of the upcoming elections.

Bangladesh

- **Khaleda gets 4 months' bail**

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday (March 12) secured four months' bail in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case that saw her sentenced to five years' imprisonment. But she could not walk out of jail as she was shown arrested in a case for instigating an arson attack on a bus on Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Comilla's Chauddagam that left seven passengers dead and 25 to 30 others injured on February 3, 2015.⁴⁵

- **Only 374 Rohingyas verified**

Myanmar has only been able to verify 374 Rohingya Muslim refugees for possible repatriation from Bangladesh, blaming their neighbour for not providing the correct information about the refugees. Myint Thu, permanent secretary at Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said officials had checked documents handed over by Bangladesh in February relating to 8,032 refugees. "Out of 8,032, we verified 374. These 374 will be the first batch of the repatriation," Myint Thu said at a news conference in the capital, Naypyitaw. "They can come back when it's convenient for them."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 20 March 2018,

http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20468

⁴⁵ "Zia Orphanage Trust Graft Case: Khaleda gets 4 months' bail," *Daily Star*, March 13, 2018,

<http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/zia-orphanage-trust-graft-case-khaleda-gets-4-months-bail-1547404>, accessed on March 13, 2018.

⁴⁶ "Repatriation: Only 374 Rohingyas verified," *Daily Star*, March 15, 2018,

<http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/repatriationl-only-374-rohingyas-verified-1548400>, accessed on March 15, 2018.

- **Moving Out of LDC Category**

In a major leap forward, Bangladesh has become eligible to graduate to a developing country from a least developed one as it has met all the three criteria for the first time for getting out of the LDC bloc. The Committee for Development Policy (CDP), a United Nations panel, made an announcement on the country's eligibility at a meeting at the UN headquarters in New York, Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the UN Masud Bin Momen said yesterday.⁴⁷

- **Khaleda bail remains suspended**

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's bail granted by the High Court in a graft case will remain suspended until 8 May. The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on Monday (March 19) issued the order maintaining a status of quo of suspending the HC's bail for the former prime minister. The apex court, led by chief justice Syed Mahmud Hossain fixed 8 May for hearing the briefs of appeal petitions filed by the respective parties.⁴⁸

- **Dhaka for strengthening BIMSTEC**

Bangladesh high commissioner to India Syed Muazzem Ali on Monday (March 19) said the BIMSTEC must redouble its efforts to be more effective and result-oriented in integrating the economies of its seven member countries for the welfare of their people, reports UNB. "Time has come for us to seriously re-look at how we want BIMSTEC to be more effective and result-oriented and draw synergies with other groupings," he told an international seminar on 'BBIN and BIMSTEC: Prospects and Challenges' at Sapru House, New Delhi.⁴⁹

Pakistan

- **Iran and Pakistan**

Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Javad Zarif on March 12th invited Pakistan to participate in Chahbahar seaport project and development of its link with Gwadar Port. Dr. Zarif was on a three day visit to Pakistan. He met Pakistani counterpart Khawaja Asif at the Foreign Office and addressed a trade conference. "The two sides agreed to continue engagement for enhancing economic cooperation, including bilateral trade, investments and commercial interaction to promote shared prosperity ... addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers" in addition to concluding FTA on priority.⁵⁰ It can be noted here that there were reports about half a dozen mortar

⁴⁷ Rejual Karim Byron and Wasim Bin Habib, "Moving Out of LDC Category: Bangladesh well on track," *Daily Star*, March 17, 2018, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/moving-out-ldc-category-bangladesh-well-track-1549405>, accessed on March 21, 2018.

⁴⁸ "Khaleda bail remains suspended," *Prothom Alo*, March 19, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/172821/Khaleda-bail-remains-suspended>, accessed on March 21, 2018.

⁴⁹ "Dhaka for strengthening BIMSTEC," *Prothom Alo*, March 19, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/economy/news/172851/Dhaka-for-strengthening-BIMSTEC>, accessed on March 21, 2018.

⁵⁰ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Iran invites Pakistan to participate in Chahbahar project", *Dawn*, March 13, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1394938> accessed on March 21, 2018

shells fired by the Iranian forces into Pakistani territory near the Panjgur in Balochistan province on March 17th.⁵¹

- **Pakistan and Afghanistan**

National Security Adviser retired Lt Gen Nasser Janjua visited Kabul on March 17th where he met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, his counterpart Haneef Atmar and chief of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) Masoom Stanekzai.⁵² During this visit, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on March 17th invited Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi to Kabul to kick-start a ‘comprehensive bilateral dialogue’ with the aim of repairing the fractured relationship between the two countries.⁵³

- **Pakistan and Saudi Arabia**

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has requested Chief Justice Saqib Nisar to take a suo motu notice over what it called the government’s “silence” on the “miserable” working conditions of Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia. PTI MNA Murad Saeed wrote a letter to the chief justice seeking his attention on the issue.⁵⁴

West Asia

- **US Peace Plan**

US President Donald Trump’s peace plan is nearly finished and the White House intends to present to the proposal soon. As per reports, the “ultimate deal” would prevent both sides from falling into the traps that have sunk most other peace proposals. It was stated that it will not call for a two-state solution, but will provide pathways that would lead to the creation of two states.⁵⁵ It can be stated here that Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas criticised the US envoy to Israel, as Ambassador David Friedman criticized the PA on Twitter for failing to condemn a pair of terror attacks.⁵⁶ US President Donald Trump’s envoy

⁵¹ “Iran Shells mortars in Pakistan’s Balochistan”, *APN Live*, March 18, 2018, <http://www.apnlive.com/world-news/iran-shells-mortar-shells-pakistans-balochistan-39762> accessed on March 21, 2018

⁵² “Janjua to hold talks in Kabul today”, *Dawn*, March 17, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1395842/janjua-to-hold-talks-in-kabul-today> accessed on March 21, 2018

⁵³ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Afghan president invites Abbasi for talks to repair ties”, *Dawn*, March 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1395966> accessed on March 21, 2018

⁵⁴ Syed Irfan Raza, “CJP asked to take notice of Pakistani workers’ plight in Saudi Arabia”, *Dawn*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1396357> accessed on March 21, 2018

⁵⁵ Mark Landler, “The Mideast Peace Plan Is Nearly Finished. Is It Dead on Arrival?”, *The New York Times*, March 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/11/us/politics/trump-middle-east-peace-plan.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=first-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news> accessed on March 21, 2018; “Nearly finished US peace plan won’t call for two-state solution — report”, *Times of Israel*, March 12, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/nearly-finished-us-peace-plan-wont-call-for-two-state-solution-report/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=0e3baf40d7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_12&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-0e3baf40d7-55556173 accessed on March 21, 2018

⁵⁶ “Fuming at US, Abbas calls ambassador a ‘son of a dog, settler’”, *Times of Israel*, March 19, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/fuming-at-us-abbas-calls-ambassador-son-of-a-bitch-and->

to the peace process slammed Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on March 19th for having called the American ambassador to Israel a “son of a dog,” urging him to abandon his “hateful rhetoric” and instead focus on improving the lives of his people.⁵⁷

- **Israel and Syria**

Israel on March 21 formally acknowledged that its air force blew up a Syrian nuclear reactor in the area of Deir Ezzor in the pre-dawn hours between September 5 and 6, 2007, in a mission known to much of the world as Operation Orchard. The strike constituted Israel’s second application of the Begin Doctrine, which calls on the Jewish state to destroy any enemy country’s nuclear capabilities. The doctrine was named for prime minister Menachem Begin, who set its precedent by ordering the bombing of Iraq’s nascent nuclear reactor in 1981.⁵⁸

International Economic Issues

- **ISA members pledge to use more solar power, create more jobs**

PM Narendra Modi, French President Emmanuel Macron and other distinguished world leaders jointly inaugurated the Founding Conference of International Solar Alliance (ISA) in New Delhi on March 11, 2018. Member states at the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) pledged to pursue an increased share of solar energy in their overall power consumption thereby realising the huge potential the sector offers to create jobs and empowering poorer communities.

A three-page 'Delhi Solar Agenda' issued at the end of the conference stated that the ISA reiterated its commitment to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development that calls for eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions and for transforming our world in which development and application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity and are resilient.

The Agenda called “to increase their efforts to pursue an increased share of solar energy in the final energy consumption in our respective national energy mix, as a means of tackling global challenges of climate change and as a cost effective solution by supporting and implementing

settler/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=fa563465fb-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_20&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-fa563465fb-55556173 accessed on March 21, 2018

⁵⁷ Raphael Ahren, “US slams Abbas over ‘outrageous’ insult of its Israel envoy”, *Times of Israel*, March 20, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-slams-abbas-over-outrageous-insult-of-its-israel-envoy/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=fa563465fb-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_20&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-fa563465fb-55556173 accessed on March 21, 2018

⁵⁸ Judah Ari Gross, “Ending a decade of silence, Israel confirms it blew up Assad’s nuclear reactor”, *Times of Israel*, March 21, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ending-a-decade-of-silence-israel-reveals-it-blew-up-assads-nuclear-reactor/> accessed on March 21, 2018

policy initiatives and participation of all relevant stakeholders, as applicable, in our respective states”.

The Agenda also called for facilitating affordable finance, access to appropriate, clean and environment friendly technology and undertaking capacity building, including forging mutually beneficial partnerships with reputable international institutions and reputable financial institutions for the benefit of developing countries.

It also called for exploring innovative financing mechanisms that can generate a sustainable market for the deployment of cost effective solar technologies, coupled with constructive policy initiatives to catalyse public and private investments to reduce the cost of solar projects in developing countries.

The member states agreed to facilitate joint research and Development, to consider off-grid solar applications to cater to the energy requirements of poorer and remote communities and to facilitate awareness and skills enhancement of local communities in the monitoring and maintenance of solar technologies.

Launched by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then French President Francois Hollande at the Paris Climate Summit in 2015, the ISA was conceived as a coalition of solar resource-rich countries to address their special energy needs and provide a platform to collaborate on dealing with the identified gaps through a common, agreed approach. It is open to all 121 prospective member countries falling between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Of these, 61 have signed the framework agreement and 32 have also submitted their instruments of ratification.⁵⁹

- **ISA-ADB, NDB, GCF, AfDB and AIIB joint declarations of Financial partnership and ISA-IRENA and IEA joint declarations of partnership.**

On March 10, 2018, the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the African Development Bank (AfDb), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Green climate fund (GCF), and the New Development Bank (NDB) signed Joint financial partnership Declarations. The International Energy Agency (IEA) also signed a Joint partnership Declaration with the ISA. The objective of the agreements is to deepen their cooperation in support of Renewable Energy. The previous three partnerships were signed by ISA with the World Bank, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction

⁵⁹ “ISA members pledge to use more solar power, create more jobs”, *Business Standard*, March 11, 2018, http://www.business-standard.com/article/international/isa-members-pledge-to-use-more-solar-power-create-more-jobs-118031100619_1.html (accessed on March 16, 2018)

and Development.⁶⁰ Further, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) also signed the Joint Partnership Declaration on March 11, 2018.⁶¹

- **Mexican minister ramps up pressure for speedy NAFTA deal**

Mexico's Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo on March 15, 2018, urged officials to push for a speedy renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), saying his country and Canada must be ready to go it alone if the United States pulls out. He said that if no deal to rework NAFTA could be struck by April 30, then the new political complexion of the region would cast doubt on how incoming lawmakers would view it in Mexico and the United States. The regular session of Congress in Mexico ends on April 30, and the country will elect a new president in July who takes office at the start of December. The United States will hold mid-term congressional elections in November. Mexico's government is eager to broker a deal before a change of presidency. Guajardo has stressed that Mexico wants to keep NAFTA tri-partite, but reiterated that both Mexico and Canada needed to be ready for the possibility of a U.S. departure.⁶²

⁶⁰ International Solar alliance, "ISA-ADB, NDB, GCF, AfDB and AIIB joint declarations of Financial partnership and ISA-IRENA and IEA joint declarations of partnership.", *Press Release*, March 10, 2018, <http://isolaralliance.org/docs/Press%20Release%20v2.pdf> (accessed on March 16, 2018)

⁶¹ IRENA, "IRENA Welcomes Establishment of International Solar Alliance", *Press Release*, March 11, 2018, <http://irena.org/newsroom/pressreleases/2018/Mar/IRENA-Welcomes-Establishment-of-International-Solar-Alliance-as-a-Platform-to-Advance--Solar-Energy> (accessed on March 16, 2018)

⁶² Daniel Flynn, "Mexican minister ramps up pressure for speedy NAFTA deal", *Reuters*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-mexico/mexican-minister-ramps-up-pressure-for-speedy-nafta-deal-idUSKCN1GR242> (accessed on March 16, 2018)