

Weekly Media Updates **(5-11 March, 2018)**

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Africa

- **Ethiopia, Russia to Reinforce Ties¹**

Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, on 8 March 2018, a day after his United States' counterpart Rex Tillerson did so. Ethiopia and Russia through their foreign ministers agreed to reinforce diplomatic and economic relations to heighten the level of their partnership. Foreign ministers of both countries discussed on a number of issues that would further bolster the over 100-year ties. Enhancing ties in the economic area including trade and investment as well as peace and security was among the agenda of the ministers. Russia sought to enhance engagement in the development of nuclear energy facility in Ethiopia and resume daily flight from Addis Ababa to Moscow. Ethiopia's Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu during the joint press conference said both countries have a desire to improve their multi-faceted relationships.

- **Tillerson visit to Ethiopia**

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was welcomed to Ethiopia on Wednesday, 7 March 2018, by Foreign Minister Workneh Gebeyehu on the first stop on his official visit to Africa.

Hours before leaving the U.S, in a speech outlining the Trump administration's Africa policy Tillerson said the U.S. is committed to building on a "strong foundation of U.S.-Africa relations" and accused China of "encouraging dependency" in its approach to the continent. He said the United States is "eager" to lower barriers to trade and investment in Africa, whose largest trading partner by far is China. The secretary of state added the U.S. approach of "incentivizing good governance" contrasts sharply with China, "which encourages dependency, using opaque contracts, predatory loan practices and corrupt deals that mire nations in debt and undercut their sovereignty."

He further added "Chinese investment does have the potential to address Africa's infrastructure gap, but its approach has led to mounting debt and few, if any, jobs in most countries,"..."When coupled with the political and fiscal pressure, this endangers Africa's natural resources and its long-term economic, political stability."

In Ethiopia speaking at a news conference Tillerson said that the US recognized concerns over incidents of violence in Ethiopia but "we do firmly believe that the answer is greater freedom." ..."While we appreciate the government's responsibility to maintain control it is important that country moves on past the state of

¹ Ethiopian News Agency, 10 March 2017, http://allafrica.com/stories/201803100033.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkopt

emergency as quickly as possible." The focus of Tillerson's one-week, five-nation trip to Africa was on counterterrorism, promoting peace, good governance, trade and investment.

- **Somalia Govt Welcomes Arab League Statement on Berbera Port Deal**

Somalia's Minister of foreign affairs Ahmed Awad has welcomed the Arab League statement over the controversial tripartite agreement between Somaliland, DP World, and Ethiopia .The Minister said the Arab League decision is very significant and called for to respect the sovereignty and unity of Somalia.The four-point Arab League statement urged both sides to continue to resolve matters that are between them on the future of the country. The Arab League has also expressed its support for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in support of the restoration of peace and stability in Somalia.

The Federal Government of Somalia asked the Arab League to step in and mediate in the controversial Berbera port agreement as relations drastically deteriorated in the once unified country.

The federal government has argued that the agreement between Somaliland, DP World and the Ethiopian government over the port of Berbera is an illegal roadmap that has not been implemented according to the law and was not approved by the constitutionally mandated institutions of Somalia. Senior government officials said that a similar complaint will be launched with the African Union, ostensibly directed at Ethiopia.The League of Arab States also said that it will continue to support Somalia's constitutionally mandated institutions, particularly in the areas of peace and reconstruction of the nation.

- **ANC Would Be Better Off With Malema Inside the Fold' - Mabuza**

The Deputy President of South Africa David "DD" Mabuza said that the ANC would be better off with Julius Malema inside rather than being a leader of an opposition party. Speaking to reporters during the party's registration drive in Mamelodi, Tshwane, Mabuza said he would do his best to bring the EFF's commander-in-chief Julius Malema back to the governing party.

Malema was expelled from the ANC in 2012 and has since established the Economic Freedom Fighters, which garnered 6% of the electoral support in the 2014 elections in 2014.

The political party has also gone on to play a central role in South Africa's politics, having had a hand in forcing former President Jacob Zuma to pay for non-security upgrades to his Nkandla home, demonstrations for free higher education and more recently for bringing a historical motion to expropriate land without compensation in Parliament.

- **Sierra Leone Launches U.S.\$318 Million Chinese-Funded Airport²**

Sierra Leone has started the construction of its \$318 million Chinese-funded second airport. The proposed Mamamah International Airport, named after its host community, will be constructed by the China Railway Seventh Group, with the work planned to last for four years.

The project, which has drawn huge criticism from international lending institutions, also entails the construction of a new city in the vicinity and an exclusive economic zone.

President Koroma revealed plans to build a new State House, parliament and ministerial buildings to provide an alternative work environment in the new city, away from overcrowded Freetown.

He hailed his development achievements, noting that the airport was one of three major projects his government was implementing with the aim of transforming Sierra Leone to a Middle Income state by 2035.

Critics say the new airport was an unnecessary economic burden on the West African country struggling to recover from the effects of war, epidemic and a deadly mudslide last year.

The Chinese Exim Bank is providing the funds for the Mamamah International Airport, through a loan agreement the World Bank and IMF criticised. In the face of the Western opposition to the project, the Chinese government appeared determined to push on with it. China's ambassador in Freetown Wu Peng said the project should not just be seen as a new airport, but that its overall effect on the economy should be considered. He announced that the Chinese government had agreed on a favourable repayment plan to lessen the burden on Sierra Leone. China will provide \$30m grant to cushion the effect of the interest rate on the life of the project.

- **China's Growing African Footprint Could Lock the US out from its Lone Africa Base³**

Testifying in front of the US armed services committee on March 6, the top US general for Africa Thomas Waldhauser said they were "carefully monitoring Chinese encroachment and emergent military presence" in Djibouti. The Horn of Africa nation is home to the only permanent US military installation in Africa. But last year, China opened its first overseas naval base there too, provided loans to the country, and built a railway connecting its seas to the Ethiopian hinterland to improve regional trade. But the recent US unease was linked to Djibouti terminating the contract of one the country's biggest port operators, the Dubai-

² News 24 wire, 11 March 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201803120254.html>

³ Quartz Africa, 10 March 2018, <https://qz.com/1226148/rex-tillerson-in-africa-chinas-increasing-footprint-in-djibouti-worries-us-camp-lemonnier/>

owned DP World. The company called the move an illegal seizure, prompting US officials to speculate if President Ismail Omar Guelleh could also kick them out at will in the future and if he could hand over the port to China. “If they did [give the port to China], down the way that restricts access, that restricts the [US] navy’s ability to get in there and offload supplies,” Waldhauser warned. The deal to manage the port eventually went to a Singapore-based company that works with China Merchants Port Holdings, which already has a stake in the Djibouti port.

- **South Africa's Ramaphosa Assures Moody's on Land Reform⁴**

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa told ratings agency Moody’s on Wednesday that a drive to expropriate land without compensation would be done in a way that would not harm the economy or food security, the presidency said on Wednesday. Land ownership remains a highly emotional subject more than two decades after apartheid’s demise. Now the ruling African National Congress (ANC) is aiming to change the constitution to allow white-owned property to be taken without payment, for redistribution to landless blacks. Ramaphosa also told Moody’s that failure to create jobs was the biggest threat to the South African economy.

- **Africa Eats up Lion’s Share of Chinese Lending⁵**

Africa attracted more Chinese state lending for energy infrastructure than any other region last year, highlighting Beijing’s view of the continent’s growing economic and strategic importance. A study by Boston University academics shows that nearly one-third, or US\$6.8 billion, of the US\$25.6 billion that China’s state-owned development banks lent last year to energy projects worldwide went to African countries. This was ahead of south Asia, with US\$5.84 billion. The loans bring total Chinese energy finance in Africa since 2000 to US\$34.8 billion. While this is well behind the US\$69 billion lent in Europe and Central Asia, the US\$62 billion in Latin America and the US\$60bn in Asia over the same period, the 2017 data illustrate Africa’s growing importance. “China is trying to replicate its model of development in Africa to show the world that the Chinese economic model really works,” said Yu Jie of LSE Ideas, a think-tank based at London School of Economics. All the US\$6.8 billion in 2017 lending to Africa was for power projects. Geographically, the lending has been concentrated into six countries, with Angola, Nigeria, Zambia, Uganda, South Africa and Sudan getting US\$23.8 billion of the total US\$34.8 billion since 2000.

⁴ Reuters, 8 March 2018, <https://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFKCN1GK0TY-OZATP>

⁵ Financial Times, 11 March 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/668968e8-23b6-11e8-add1-0e8958b189ea>

- **Angola Faces Oil Industry Crisis⁶**

Angola has been OPEC's second most compliant member with regard to the 2016 oil production cut deal, but just like the number-one compliant member, Venezuela, this prestige does not come from the country's willingness to help bring down global supply of crude, at least not entirely. Angola's oil fields are maturing and are nearing depletion. Unless new investments are made in new discoveries, things will continue getting worse, the International Energy Agency warned in its Oil 2018 report this week. Without measures to stimulate new investment, Angola's oil production capacity will drop to just 1.29 million bpd over the next five years. Currently, the West African country pumps around 1.67 million bpd in line with the quota assigned it by OPEC. There have been oil investments in recent years. In fact, three oil majors have invested in new production in Angola, Bloomberg's Rupert Rowling notes in a recent story. These are Chevron, Eni, and Total. But their discoveries, which have added some more crude to daily production and exports, are not enough to compensate for the decline of Angola's more mature fields.

- **After 34 Years, Angola and DRC Resume Rail Links⁷**

Rail traffic between the Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbour Angola has resumed after a 34-year break, providing a vital boost for DRC's mining exports, officials said. "The first train left DRC on Monday hauling 50 containers and arrived at Luau station in Moxico province" in eastern Angola, the Congolese presidency said on Tuesday. The train, which left from the border town of Dilolo in southeastern DRC, is heading for the Angolan port of Lobito, on the Atlantic coast, it said. The line was closed during the height of the Angolan civil war (1975-2002) and remained in disuse afterwards because equipment and track had deteriorated. In the absence of the link to the Atlantic, DRC's mineral ore was exported by truck via Zambia - a 900km trek on poor roads that greatly increased shipping costs and time.

- **AfDB Approves US\$100-million Trade Finance Facility in Angola⁸**

The Board of Directors of the African Development Bank has approved a US\$100-million Trade Finance Line of Credit to Angola's Investment Bank (Banco Angolano de Investimentos, BAI). The funding will support international trade transactions of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and local corporates in identified transformative sectors in Angola. In addition, a number of indirect benefits from this facility are expected to accrue to BAI's subsidiaries in Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe through the strengthening of correspondent banking relationships by providing guarantees on their international trade

⁶ Oilprice.com, 7 March 2018, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Angola-Faces-Oil-Industry-Crisis.html>

⁷ News24, 6 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/after-34-years-angola-and-drc-resume-rail-links-20180306>

⁸ Invest Advocate, 6 March 2018, <https://investadvocate.com.ng/2018/03/06/afdb-approves-100-million-trade-finance-facility-angola/>

transactions. This intervention is well aligned with the Bank's Ten Year Strategy 2013-2022, as well as the High 5 strategic priorities, including, Light up and power Africa, Feed Africa, Industrialize Africa, and Integrate Africa.

- **UN Criticizes Angola for Forcing Refugees to Return to Violent Congo⁹**

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) is deeply concerned about rekindled tension in the violent Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo and criticized the Angolan government for forcing some 500 refugees to return. Angola's government forced 530 Congolese to return to Congo between February 25 and 27, UNHCR said in a statement on Tuesday. Of those sent back, 480 were unregistered refugees staying at the Cacanda center managed by aid agencies in the frontier town of Dundo, the statement said.

- **Tanzania Criticises Moody's for Negative Rating Outlook¹⁰**

Tanzania criticised Moody's decision to impose a negative outlook on the country's first international credit rating, saying the agency's concerns about the business climate were misleading. Moody's on Friday assigned Tanzania a "B1" credit rating with a negative outlook, the first time the country has been given a rating by any of the big international agencies. Moody's said the negative outlook was justified by unpredictable policymaking, which could affect economic growth and the ability to attract foreign investment. The government in the East African nation has tussled with mining and energy firms, as it sought to renegotiate their contracts, alarming foreign investors.

- **Tanzania's Magufuli Warns of Crackdown on Protesters¹¹**

Tanzanian President John Magufuli warned on Friday of a crackdown on anyone who participates in illegal demonstrations, vowing not to let his economic reforms be derailed by street protests. Magufuli, nicknamed "the Bulldozer" for his forceful leadership style, has introduced anti-corruption measures and tough economic reforms, including cuts to wasteful government spending, since taking office in November 2015. Critics say his cost-cutting measures and policy changes are excessive and undermine growth in East Africa's third-biggest economy by stifling foreign investment in critical sectors such as mining.

⁹ Reuters, 7 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-angola-refugees/u-n-criticizes-angola-for-forcing-refugees-to-return-to-violent-congo-idUSKCN1GJ1R4>

¹⁰ Reuters, 5 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/tanzania-ratings/tanzania-criticises-moodys-for-negative-rating-outlook-idUSL5N1QN4U8>

¹¹ Reuters, 9 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tanzania-politics/tanzanias-magufuli-warns-of-crackdown-on-protesters-idUSKCN1GL29E>

- **OVL, OIL Win Mozambique Nod for Gas Field Development¹²**

In a press statement, state-owned Oil India Ltd said the Mozambique government has "accorded approval for the development plan for the Golfinho-Atum natural gas field in the Area-1 block located in the Rovuma offshore basin of Mozambique". ONGC Videsh Ltd, Oil India Ltd and their partners have received the Mozambique government's nod for bringing to production a giant gas field in the prolific Rovuma Area-1, off the coast of the African nation. Partners in the block plan to turn the gas into LNG for exports. The Area 1 block is estimated to hold recoverable gas resources of about 75 trillion cubic feet, more than the combined resource in all of the gas fields in India. The Golfinho-Atum project will be Mozambique's first onshore LNG development. ONGC Videsh Ltd, the overseas arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), holds 16 per cent stake in the block while OIL has 4 per cent. US energy major Anadarko Petroleum Corporation is the operator with 26.5 per cent interest while Mitsui of Japan has 20 per cent, Bharat Petro Resources Ltd (a unit of state-owned BPCL) 10 per cent and ENH 15 per cent.

- **Russia Boosts Military Cooperation with Mozambique after Attacks¹³**

Russia will boost its military cooperation with Mozambique, where suspected Islamist militants have carried out attacks in the gas-rich African nation's north. The two countries will form a working group to develop collaboration, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters Wednesday in the Mozambican capital, Maputo. Lavrov is on a five-nation tour of Africa and spoke after talks with his counterpart Jose Pacheco and Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi. Mozambican police have arrested more than 300 people since October after raids in Mocimboa da Praia in northeast Mozambique, the first of which targeted police stations and the government blamed on a "radical Islamic sect." Sporadic attacks have continued, including raids on a health center and a government building in January, although authorities haven't said they're linked. The attacks have occurred near the Rovuma basin, where companies including Exxon Mobil Corp., Eni SpA and Anadarko Petroleum Corp. have gas projects. Rosneft PJSC, Russia's largest oil producer, was awarded three licenses for offshore blocks in partnership with Exxon Mobil in 2015. Russia's relations with Mozambique date back to the 1960s, when the Soviet Union backed the Marxist Mozambique Liberation Front's fight against Portuguese colonial rule.

- **Kenya President, Opposition Leader Strike 'Common Understanding'¹⁴**

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga on Friday promised to resolve their differences and create a "new beginning" for a country

¹² Money Control, 5 March 2018, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/ovl-oil-win-mozambique-nod-for-gas-field-development-2520855.html>

¹³ Bloomberg, 7 March 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-03-07/russia-boosts-military-cooperation-with-mozambique-after-attacks>

¹⁴ Financial Times, 9 March 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/5cee6cfe-2387-11e8-add1-0e8958b189ea>

that has been mired in its deepest political crisis for a decade. After a two-hour meeting at Mr Kenyatta's office, the president said the leaders had come "to a common understanding ... to begin a process of bringing our people together". The aim will be to "build together a harmonious stable nation where no individual feels left out or left behind", he added. The two leaders have been under intense domestic and international pressure to meet following a disputed presidential election last year that triggered deadly protests and significantly contributed to a slowdown in east Africa's dominant economy. The country was plunged into crisis after the Supreme Court nullified the result of last August's presidential election and ordered a rerun. Mr Odinga boycotted the second vote, arguing the electoral commission was biased against him, and refused to recognise Mr Kenyatta's victory. In January he swore himself in as the "people's president" and promised to campaign for electoral justice.

- **Seychelles Government Orders Inquiry into Online Leak of Top Secret India-Seychelles Agreement¹⁵**

Even as Seychelles ordered an inquiry into the leak of a highly classified agreement signed with India, the opposition has decided not to ratify the pact in the national assembly which puts a question mark on the implementation of the project to develop military infrastructure on the remote Indian ocean island of Assumption. The illegal leak is certainly likely to feature in the bilateral talks between Seychelles President Danny Faure and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday afternoon. Faure is arriving on Saturday to take part in the first International Solar Alliance summit in Delhi. Following the publication of the report, Seychelles vice president Vincent Meriton addressed the media at the State House in Victoria about launching an investigation on Thursday.

- **120 Somali 'Pirates' Freed From India¹⁶**

The last batch of 120 Somalis touched down at Mogadishu's international airport yesterday after serving up to seven years in jail for piracy offenses. Seventy-five Somali men received a warm welcome from Mahdi Mohamed Guled Khadar, deputy prime minister, and other government officials. All the men knelt to kiss Somali soil as they got off the plane, the site reported. India's navy captured the men off Somalia's coast and they were charged with piracy. In early January this year, Somalia received the first batch of 41 returnees, some of them having completed their jail terms. Two Somali prisoners died in Indian custody since being captured seven years ago. The men died from diseases including tuberculosis due to the lack of health care, according to *Garowe Online*. The incident comes off the back of an agreement signed in August last year between India and Somalia to transfer convicted pirates.

¹⁵ The Wire, 9 March 2018, <https://thewire.in/230987/seychelles-government-orders-inquiry-into-online-leak-of-top-secret-india-seychelles-agreement/>

¹⁶ Middle East Monitor, 5 March 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180305-120-somali-pirates-freed-from-india/>

- **US Military Presence in Africa Grew Again**¹⁷

US military presence in Africa grew by more than a thousand troops over the past year, Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, the US's top commander in Africa, acknowledged Tuesday. Speaking to the House Armed Services Committee, Waldhauser, the head of US Africa Command, said on any given day the total American force rounded out to roughly 7,500 troops, including 1,000 contractors. In 2017, the US had roughly 6,000 troops in Africa on a given day. Waldhauser said the majority of these U.S. personnel were concentrated in two areas: in the East Africa region — namely Djibouti, Kenya, and Somalia— and in the west of the continent. The new numbers are the latest indication that the US war on terror on the African continent shows no signs of slowing. Waldhauser said the U.S. was focused on fighting violent extremist groups like ISIS affiliates in the Sahel, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and al-Qaida. The U.S. has 1,800 personnel fighting joint missions across 13 nations, the size of the continental US, according to the annual statement. Waldhauser specified that the bulk of U.S. forces — more than 4,000 service members— centered on the East Africa region, where US troops are focused on the escalating conflict in Somalia.

- **Djibouti Downplays China Debt as US Fears Loss of Critical Port**¹⁸

Djiboutian Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Youssouf on Friday brushed off US fears that his nation's indebtedness to China could make it less of an ally to the US, which is increasingly alarmed about the possibility of losing a critical military port there. "China is... a very good partner," Youssouf said. "Of course, the burden of debt is there, we are aware of it. But let me tell you that it is so far manageable." Youssouf confirmed that he and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson talked about China during Tillerson's visit there this week. Tillerson is on a multi-state swing through Africa to strengthen economic and counterterrorism relations in the region.

- **South Sudan Suspends UN Miraya radio**¹⁹

South Sudanese government broadcasting agency Friday has suspended the UN-sponsored Radio Miraya FM for "refusal to be regulated under media laws". South Sudan Media Authority Managing Director, Elijah Alier Kuai, told reporters in Juba that the government has ordered to withdraw the radio's frequency effective March 9, as it failed to obtain a valid broadcasting license. In a separate press statement, the authority said they reminded the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) supported radio about the need to renew their licence in different notifications in June 2017, September 2017, November 2017 and February 2018. The suspension is effective from Friday 9 March 2018. The South Sudanese official

¹⁷ Vice News, 7 March 2018, https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/j5b3pb/us-military-presence-in-africa-grew-again-but-were-not-at-war-top-us-commander-says

¹⁸ Washington Examiner, 9 March 2018, <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/djibouti-downplays-china-debt-as-us-fears-loss-of-critical-port/article/2651182>

¹⁹ Sudan Tribune, 9 March 2018, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64902>

stressed that the shot down does not intend to censor the media outlet but they have to observe the law.

- **Sudan Central Bank Signs US\$2 billion Loan with Turkish Firm²⁰**

Sudan's central bank has said it agreed a US\$2 billion loan from a Turkish company to provide banking facilities and to import petroleum products and wheat. The African nation's economy has deteriorated in recent months after Khartoum devalued the pound currency and slashed its wheat price subsidies, leading to riots across the country in January. The central bank announced the agreement in a statement late on March 8 but did not name the Turkish company involved. Sudan's state news agency SUNA named the company as Öztürk. It said the deal would "facilitate imports," without providing further details. The central bank said in its statement on March 8 that the loan was part of expanding economic and trade cooperation with Turkey.

- **Mauritius President to Resign after Credit Card Expenditure Row²¹**

Mauritian President, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, will step down next week, the Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, said on Friday. Mr. Jugnauth said Mrs. Gurib-Fakim would resign after she was accused of using a credit card issued by an international Non-Governmental Organisation to buy clothes and jewellery. The prime minister added that the president would resign after the March 12 celebration of the country's 50th anniversary. The prime minister, who did not comment on the row over credit card expenditure, had previously said that everyone involved would shoulder his or her responsibility when asked about the issue by reporters. Mrs. Gurib-Fakim, a chemistry professor, appointed to the largely ceremonial post in 2015 as the island nation's first female president had denied any wrongdoing, saying she had refunded the money in question.

- **International Aid Group Withdraws its Workers from NE Nigeria²²**

An international humanitarian aid group on Monday said it has withdrawn workers from a major camp of displaced persons in northeast Nigeria, following the attack by Boko Haram militants. "Following a violent attack in Rann, Borno state, on 1st March, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) suspended its medical activities in the town and evacuated 22 national and international staff," the group, also known as Doctors Without Borders, said in a statement. The move came two days after the Red Cross pulled out its staff from the town citing the same reasons. At least four aid workers and eight security officials were killed in the attack last Thursday. Last year, nearly 100 persons including relief workers were killed in an

²⁰ Hurriyet Daily News, 9 March 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/sudan-central-bank-signs-2-bln-loan-with-turkish-firm-128531>

²¹ Premium Times, 9 March 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/261290-mauritius-president-resign-credit-card-expenditure-row.html>

²² Anadolu Agency, 5 March 2018, <https://aa.com.tr/en/africa/int-l-aid-group-withdraws-its-workers-from-ne-nigeria/1080457>

air raid after the Nigerian Air Force mistook the camp for a gathering of Boko Haram militants. Outcome of the probe into the incident remains secret.

- **Over 2,500 Burundi Refugees in DRC Seek Shelter in Rwanda²³**

A Rwandan official says more than 2,500 Burundian refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo are seeking shelter in Rwanda amid fears they could be forcibly repatriated back home by Congolese authorities. Jean Claude Rwahama, a refugee official in Rwanda, said on Thursday that most of the refugees had lived in DRC since 2015, when political violence erupted in Burundi over the president's decision to seek a disputed third term. He said Rwanda was temporarily sheltering them at Bugarama refugee center near the Burundi border. Francoise Ndayisenga, a leader among the refugees, said they were seeking asylum in Rwanda because they don't want to be forcibly sent back to Burundi. The refugees' arrival in Rwanda coincides with a rise in militia violence in DRC's restive east.

Central Asia

- **Visit of Uzbekistan President Mirziyoev to Tajikistan**

Visit of President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoev to Tajikistan (9-10 March) and his meeting with President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon is a significant development not only from bilateral perspective; rather, it is bound to have positive regional ramifications. This is probably for the first time in the history of two countries since their independence in early 1990 that the President of Uzbekistan is making a standalone visit to the neighbouring Tajikistan.

The new administration under President Mirziyoev has been actively implementing the policy of 'neighbourhood priority' and it is making efforts to improve ties with the regional countries in all areas. The Uzbek President had earlier visited all its Central Asian neighbours and also hosted the President of Afghanistan. Only visit to Tajikistan was remaining.

In fact, with Tajikistan the Uzbek people share quite deep cultural affinity. The distance between the two countries was more due to political and security situation but at the popular level there has always been much more considerations between their peoples. They aspired for the closer interaction and fruitful engagement.

The breeze of change must be a welcome development not only for the Tajiks and Uzbeks but for the whole region. The relationship between two countries can be

²³ News24, 8 March 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/over-2-500-burundi-refugees-in-drc-seek-shelter-in-rwanda-20180308>

seen to be quite challenging in the region and its improvement will definitely ignite energy for greater intra-region engagement. Uzbekistan can be a 'lynchpin' in Central Asia's cultural, economic and political integration. Apart from increasing trade and commerce the visit will help in the development of a common approach in facing the challenges in the region.

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to hold Summit**

On March 8, 2018, US President Donald Trump accepted an invitation from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to meet for talks about denuclearization, and a summit will be held by May. The announcement was made by South Korea's national security advisor Chung Eui-yong after briefing President Trump about his meeting with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang on March 5, 2018. Chung said, "I told President Trump that, in our meeting, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said he is committed to denuclearization... pledged that North Korea will refrain from any further nuclear or missile tests.. Understands that the routine joint military exercises between the Republic of Korea and the United States must continue". Chung added that Kim "expressed his eagerness to meet President Trump as soon as possible." "President Trump appreciated the briefing," Chung said, "and said he would meet Kim Jong-un by May to achieve permanent denuclearization." The White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement later that the President Trump "greatly appreciates the nice words of the South Korean delegation and President Moon and "will accept the invitation to meet with Kim Jong-un at a place and time to be determined." But she added, "In the meantime, all sanctions and maximum pressure must remain."²⁴

- **South Korea and North Korea to hold Summit in late April**

On March 6, 2018, President Moon Jae-in's top security adviser Chung Eui-yong announced on the outcome of his trip to Pyongyang that South Korea and North Korea have agreed to hold a summit of their leaders late April. The third inter-Korean summit between President Moon and the North's leader Kim Jong-un will be held at the joint security area of Panmunjeom, Chung said. Chung and four other South Korean envoys travelled to Pyongyang on March 5-6, 2018, on a special mission to meet North Korean leader Kim jong-un. During Chung's mission to

²⁴ "Trump, Kim to hold summit by May", Korea JoongAng Ilbo, March 10, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3045438 (accessed on march 11, 2018)

Pyongyang, North Korea and South Korea agreed to establish a hotline between their leaders to allow close consultations and a reduction of military tension. Chung stated that North Korea has also restated its commitment to rid itself of nuclear weapons and also expressed its willingness to hold "candid" talks with the United States on ways to realize the denuclearization of the peninsula and normalize the countries' bilateral ties.²⁵

- **Prime Minister Abe to visit Washington in April to coordinate North Korea policy**

On March 9, 2018, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, he and U.S. President Donald Trump agreed to meet in the United States in April, following Trump's acceptance of an invitation to hold talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Speaking after a telephone call with Trump, Abe hailed the "change" in North Korea's stance, seen in its decision to "begin dialogue on the basis that it will denuclearize." "I agreed with President Trump that (this development) is the result of Japan, the United States and South Korea, together with the international community, having continued to put a high level of pressure on North Korea," Abe said. "The solid position of Japan and the United States -- that we will continue to put maximum pressure on North Korea until it takes concrete actions toward the complete, verifiable and irreversible abandonment of its nuclear (weapons) and missiles -- is absolutely unwavering," he said. The recent development has alarmed Japan of being sidelined in denuclearization talks. It is worried that progress without its involvement could allow Pyongyang to retain its short- and intermediate-range missiles, which are capable of hitting Japan — or preclude a resolution to the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea. Abe's decision to meet President Trump before US-North Korea Summit is to avoid such outcomes by closely cooperating with the United States.²⁶

- **Moritomo scandal resurfaced to haunt Prime Minister Abe**

The Moritomo scandal that has dogged Abe for more than a year, with questions being raised about whether his wife's connection to the school meant its operator was able to buy government land cheaply has resurfaced again. It came to the fore again after Japanese new paper Asahi Shimbun reported a week ago that Finance Ministry documents relating to the sale had been altered before being submitted to the Diet for inspection. Kyodo news agency reported on March 10, 2018 that the Finance Ministry has decided to admit that documents related to the shady 2016 land deal struck with Osaka-based school operator Moritomo Gakuen were secretly revised and that key parts were dropped from the version released to

²⁵ "Koreas agree to hold third summit in April, reaffirm resolve to denuclearize ", *The Yonhap News*, March 6, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2018/03/06/0401000000AEN20180306013053315.html (accessed on March 7. 2018)

²⁶ "Abe to visit US in April to discuss N. Korea with Trump", *The Mainichi*, March 9, 2018, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180309/p2g/00m/0dm/037000c> (accessed on March 11, 2018)

lawmakers last year. The admission is certain to deal a major blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet, which is already reeling from Friday's resignation of the chief of the National Tax Agency, who was under intense scrutiny over his involvement in the deal. It could also strengthen calls even within the ruling coalition for Abe and Aso to be held to account.²⁷

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **USS Carl Vinson, makes a port call in Da Nang, Vietnam**

The USS Carl Vinson arrived at the Vietnamese city of Danang on March 5, 2018. The 103,000-tonne aircraft carrier and two other US ships began its five-day visit. The arrival of the aircraft carrier marks the biggest US military presence in Vietnam since 1975. Though US ships have regularly docked in Vietnam in the past, this is the first time an aircraft carrier will make a port call to the country. The USS Carl Vinson will make a four-day port call to the central city of Danang for a highly symbolic trip that will include a visit to a centre for victims of Agent Orange, the toxic defoliant sprayed over large swathes of land by the US during the Vietnam war. The visit is also being touted as a key landmark between the former bitter enemies, whose relations have seen an extraordinary turnaround since the end of the war in 1975. Vietnam's foreign ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang said the visit will "contribute to maintaining peace, stability, security, cooperation and development in the region".²⁸

Myanmar

- **Lashio bomb attacks damaging national reconciliation – State Counsellor**

Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi said the deadly bomb attacks at two banks in Lashio, Shan State on 21 February affected government's efforts for national reconciliation, according to a Xinhua report. The explosion hit Yoma bank, affecting nearby AYA bank, killing two female staffs of the former bank,

²⁷ "Finance Ministry to admit Moritomo documents were secretly altered", *The Japan Times*, March 10, 2018, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/10/national/politics-diplomacy/finance-ministry-admit-cover-moritomo-land-scandal/#.WqUkZue_PIV (accessed on March 11, 2018)

²⁸ "Aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in Vietnam for historic visit", *The Straits Times*, March 5, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/aircraft-carrier-uss-carl-vinson-in-vietnam-for-historic-visit> (accessed on March 6, 2018).

injuring 21 others. The state counselor condemned the bomb attacks targeting public areas and innocent civilians.²⁹

- **Bangladesh Police Free Detained Foreign Aid Workers**

The Bangladesh police authority has freed all the foreign aid workers who had been detained near the city of Cox's Bazar after failing to show their passports, visas or work permits, a senior police official said. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the elite force of the Bangladesh police, had on 24 February detained 11 aid workers with a number of different non-government organizations (NGOs) and handed them over to local police³⁰.

- **Four Rohingya Sentenced to Death for Deadly 2016 Attack in Rakhine**

Four Rohingya involved in an attack on a police outpost in northern Rakhine State in October 2016 were sentenced to death by a special court in the state's Maungdaw District. The four were among 30 people found guilty of involvement in an attack on Nga Khura Police outpost in northern Maungdaw Township on Oct. 9, 2016 that killed two security officials. The other 26 convicts earned prison sentences ranging from 10 to 20 years. Another 15 suspects were released, according to Deputy District Judge U Nyo Lwin Oo³¹.

- **Repatriation of refugees likely to start in two weeks: Minister**

The Myanmar government needs about two weeks to verify the first list of more than 8000 refugees sent by the Bangladeshi government, said U Win Myat Aye, Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. We will repatriate [the refugees] immediately after we complete verification," he said. He added Myanmar is ready to accept as many as 300 refugees a day on both land and river routes once verification is completed.³²

- **Myanmar and India to increase drug control cooperation**

Myanmar and India have vowed to cooperate in drug control. The two countries made their pledge at the third bilateral meeting of director-general level on drug

²⁹ Lashio bomb attacks damaging national reconciliation – State Counsellor, 24 February 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/lashio-bomb-attacks-damaging-national-reconciliation-%E2%80%93-state-counsellor>

³⁰ Bangladesh Police Free Detained Foreign Aid Workers, 26th February 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/asia/bangladesh-police-free-detained-foreign-aid-workers.html>

³¹ Four Rohingya Sentenced to Death for Deadly 2016 Attack in Rakhine, 23 February 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/four-rohingya-sentenced-death-deadly-2016-attack-rakhine.html>

³² Repatriation of refugees likely to start in two weeks: minister, 22nd February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/repatriation-refugees-likely-start-two-weeks-minister.html>

control in Yangon. The talks reviewed the drug control work to be carried out as decided at the second director-general meeting³³.

- **USAID funds \$48m project in Southeastern Myanmar**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced a US\$48-million (K64.32 billion) development project in Southeastern Myanmar aimed at improving basic services. Kayah State is the least developed state in Myanmar and has a history of armed conflict between armed ethnic groups and the Tatmadaw. One armed ethnic group in the state, the Karenni National Progressive Party, has not signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.³⁴

North America

Canada

- **Canada won't bend to U.S. pressure tactics in NAFTA talks, Freeland says**

As the United States tries to light a fire under NAFTA negotiations, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland says Canada will not be bullied or pressured by the United States as part of those talks. Freeland is coming off a tense week which started with the seventh round of NAFTA negotiations making little progress toward an agreement but ended with a sigh of relief when Canada and Mexico secured an exemption from new U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. The steel tariff threat was seen by many to be an attempt by the Trump administration to pressure Canada and Mexico to complete the NAFTA talks — giving in to other U.S. demands or giving up some of their own — rather than risk the punishing steel and aluminum duties. The steel tariff investigation was launched to see the impact of steel imports on U.S. national security.³⁵

- **Canada to closely watch meeting between Donald Trump, Kim Jong-un**

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland says Canada will be closely watching any upcoming meetings between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. It's a development the international community would have deemed unthinkable a few months ago, as tweets and insults were flying between the two leaders. But Canada has laid a lot of the groundwork leading up to this point, Freeland stated. In January, Canada co-hosted a summit in Vancouver to

³³ Myanmar and India to increase drug control cooperation, 25th February 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/myanmar-and-india-increase-drug-control-cooperation>

³⁴ USAID funds \$48m project in Southeastern Myanmar, 23 February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/usaaid-funds-48m-project-southeastern-myanmar.html>

³⁵ Mia Rabson, "Canada won't bend to U.S. pressure tactics in NAFTA talks, Freeland says," <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/03/11/canada-wont-bend-to-us-pressure-tactics-in-nafta-talks-freeland-says.html>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

discuss the growing tensions with North Korea. The gathering of Canada, the U.S., U.K., Australia and 13 other countries placed a heavier focus on sanctions than diplomacy. While she kept tight-lipped on the specifics of Canada's involvement in the upcoming meeting, she said it's important to keep open communication between countries — especially when it comes to North Korea. "It directly touches the security of Canadians," Freeland said.³⁶

- **Canada being invited to take 'greater role' in Iraq mission, says NATO general**

NATO's chief military policy adviser is sounding out Canada on the kind of commitment the country will make to the alliance's expanded training mission in Iraq. Gen. Petr Pavel held meetings in Ottawa with senior officials, including the chief of the defence staff. The Canadian military has a handful of combat engineers in the war-ravaged country under the NATO banner, training Iraqi soldiers in the finer points of bomb disposal. Separately, it has a larger contingent — including special forces troops, helicopters, intelligence officers and a combat hospital — contributing to the U.S.-led coalition. The decision to proceed with the expanded training mission was given the green light by NATO defence ministers in Brussels last month. The expanded NATO mission will be headquartered in Baghdad, but some elements are expected to operate in Erbil, the capital of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq. Initial estimates say the overall deployment could involve up to 200 troops. Much of the training of Iraqi and Kurdish forces, to this point, has involved conventional fighting skills and tactics. He also stated, Growing worries about Russian military activity in the North Atlantic have prompted NATO to start examining ways to better secure the region — which could have direct implications for Canada. That is why the alliance is drawing up plans for the establishment of what's known as a joint force command for the North Atlantic, Pavel said, which would specifically prepare for, plan and conduct military operations in the region.³⁷

The United States

- **Trump-Kim talks show US strategy is working - VP Pence**

North Korea's decision to meet US President Donald Trump proves the US strategy of isolating North Korea is working, US Vice-President Mike Pence says. The US has made "zero concessions", he said, and would maintain pressure until denuclearisation was achieved. The agreement to hold an unprecedented summit

³⁶ Elise von Schee, "Canada to closely watch meeting between Donald Trump, Kim Jong-un," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-trump-jong-un-meeting-north-korea-1.4571095>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

³⁷ Murray Brewster, "Canada being invited to take 'greater role' in Iraq mission, says NATO general," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-iraq-pavel-1.4569545>, and The Canadian press, "NATO's 'increased concern'," <https://www.castanet.net/news/Canada/220743/NATO-s-increased-concern>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

stunned observers. But the White House later said North Korea would have to take "concrete steps" before any meeting. Mr Trump has agreed to the summit following an invitation delivered by South Korea. No sitting US president has ever met a North Korean leader. President Trump tweeted that a "deal with North Korea is very much in the making". Earlier he has hailed the move as "great progress", but he said sanctions would remain in place until a denuclearisation deal was reached. The North has halted missile and nuclear tests during previous talks, only to resume them when it lost patience or felt it was not getting what it demanded, analysts say. Some expressed concern the Trump regime could "fall into the North Korean trap" of granting concessions with nothing tangible in return.³⁸

- **Donald Trump signs order for metals tariff plan, prompting fears of trade war**

Donald Trump pushed forward with plans to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium imports on Thursday, arguing the levies were necessary for national security and to stop the "assault on our country". Flanked by steel and aluminium workers and key staff, Trump said he had to act to stop the "decimation of entire communities" and insisted there would be a very fair process as the administration used the next 15 days to negotiate exemptions with allies. Canada and Mexico will be exempted. Trump campaigned on saving US steel and aluminium jobs, which have been lost to cheap foreign imports. But the tariffs threaten to undermine decades of detente in international trade and have split the Republican party – no congressional members of his own party were present for the White House announcement. Officials from China and Europe have threatened retaliation if Trump goes ahead with his plan.³⁹

- **Mattis warns Syria on chemical weapons, doubts Russian missile claims**

US Defense Secretary James Mattis on Sunday warned Syria against using chemical weapons, implying it would prompt military consequences, as it did last year when President Donald Trump ordered a strike on a Syrian air base. Mattis blamed Russia for Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, which Russia said it would help eliminate as part of an agreement in 2013, but which the US and international observers said Syria used on civilians last year. Mattis also expressed skepticism at the much vaunted roll-out of supposedly new, high tech Russian missiles, which Russian President Vladimir Putin has claimed are "invincible" and have unlimited range.⁴⁰

³⁸ BBC, "Trump-Kim talks show US strategy is working - VP Pence," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43345209>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

³⁹ Dominic Rushe, "Donald Trump signs order for metals tariff plan, prompting fears of trade war," <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/08/donald-trump-metal-tariffs-trade-war>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

⁴⁰ Eli Watkins, "Mattis warns Syria on chemical weapons, doubts Russian missile claims," <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/11/politics/james-mattis-syria-russia/index.html>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

- **Mattis in Oman to meet with Sultan Qaboos**

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis arrived in Oman on Sunday ahead of a meeting with Sultan Qaboos to discuss ongoing security concerns, including the situation in neighboring Yemen. Mattis's visit, his first as Pentagon chief, comes amid regional strains over the Yemen conflict and a diplomatic rift between Qatar and Gulf and Arab countries Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.⁴¹

- **Kushner heads to Mexico following Trump-Peña Nieto dispute**

Jared Kushner met with Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico City, but did not include the US Ambassador in the meetings. As the point person at the White House for bilateral relations, adviser, and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Mr Kushner was there to do damage control after a phone call between Mr Trump and Mr Peña Nieto two weeks went badly. Tensions rose as the proposed border wall and the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) were discussed on the call, which took place just days after the US Ambassador Roberta Jacobson announced her departure. The ministry issued a short statement saying that Mr Kushner had discussed issues such as the fight against drug trafficking, border security, migration, jobs and Central America with his Mexican counterparts. It made no mention of the border wall or how progress might be measured.⁴²

Mexico

- **Crude bomb caused ferry blast; terrorism ruled out**

Authorities said that a crude explosive device caused a ferry blast that injured more than two-dozen people last month in Playa del Carmen, where the U.S. Embassy has warned travellers to stay away from the ferries and parts of the Caribbean resort city. Prosecutors said they believe there is no motivation for a terrorist group to have carried out the attack and also think criminal gangs would not have done it, knowing it would draw unwanted attention and increased security. The federal Attorney General's Office said via twitter that on Feb. 19 a person it did not identify went to the naval station on Cozumel to turn in a device consisting of a length of white PVC pipe containing cardboard tubes with cables connected to a black box. On March 2, another object said to be a possible bomb was found attached to the underside of a ferry belonging to the same company whose boat was bombed earlier. Investigators are pursuing multiple lines of

⁴¹ AFP, "Mattis in Oman to meet with Sultan Qaboos," <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/03/11/Mattis-in-Oman-to-meet-with-Sultan-Qaboos-.html>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

⁴² Mythili Sampathkumar, "Jared Kushner meets Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, but departing US ambassador is left out," <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/jared-kushner-mexico-us-ambassador-trade-nafta-border-wall-a8246826.html>, Accessed on 12 march 2018.

inquiry but have not made any arrests or advanced a definitive theory about a motive for the explosion.⁴³

- **MX among 11 nations in new trading bloc**

Mexico was one of 11 Pacific Rim countries that formally entered into a revised trade pact in Chile yesterday that will slash tariffs between the participating nations. The signing of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP11, contrasted sharply with United States President Donald Trump's formal announcement that the U.S. is introducing tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. Economy Secretary Ildefonso Guajardo represented Mexico in the signing ceremony in Santiago that was presided over by Chilean President Michelle Bachelet and attended by trade ministers from the member nations. In a statement, the Economy Secretariat said that "Mexican products will have access to six new markets: Australia, Brunei, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam" as a result of the TPP11. It also said that "it will enable Mexico to deepen its access to the agri-food market in Japan and consolidate preferential tariffs with Canada, Chile and Peru."⁴⁴

Latin America and the Caribbean

Argentina

- **Argentina's Macri calls for labor amnesty, defends gradual approach**

Argentine President Mauricio Macri said he would propose an amnesty law for informal workers in a speech to Congress, a sign his administration is scaling back a previously proposed labor reform that met fierce resistance from unions. In the speech marking the opening of this year's legislative session, Macri defended his business-friendly government's so-called "gradualist" approach to economic reforms from critics who argue he should move faster to cut government spending and lower taxes in order to boost growth and attract investment. Since taking office in December 2015 after more than a decade of populist rule, Macri has reached a deal with creditors to allow Argentina to exit default, cut grains export taxes, and reduced utilities to lower the fiscal deficit to the government target of 3.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) this year. Despite his "Let's Change" coalition's strong performance in last October's legislative elections, it still lacks a majority, and reforms Macri has proposed since then have generated vocal

⁴³ Peter Orsi, "Mexico: Crude bomb caused ferry blast; terrorism ruled out," <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/mexico-crude-bomb-caused-ferry-blast-terrorism-ruled-out-1.3838533>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

⁴⁴ Mexico News Daily, "MX among 11 nations in new trading bloc," <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/mx-among-11-nations-in-new-trading-bloc/>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

opposition. A reform to the country's pension system passed last December only after violent clashes outside Congress.⁴⁵

Brazil

- **Brazil's angry millennials are forming their own tea party and Occupy movements**

Millennial are forming a coalition of political “start-ups,” groups that operate independently from Brazil's parties and have been proliferating in the run-up to national elections in October. Dozens of these groups have arisen since a giant corruption scandal tarred the political class in South America's largest country. Sustained by rage-filled Facebook pages and a growing distrust of the political establishment, these civic movements are introducing a new element to Brazil's election campaigns. So far, they've resulted in 500 candidates running for office at the municipal, state and presidential levels in elections this fall — an estimated 2 percent of prospective competitors. These movements hope to translate Brazilians' outrage into the kinds of political action seen in the United States and France, where outsiders such as President Trump and President Emmanuel Macron used popular support to outmaneuver the political systems. The new groups span the political spectrum, from the libertarian Movimento Brasil Livre, known as the Brazilian version of America's tea party, to the leftist Bancada Ativista, whose focus on social justice resembles that of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Many of the Brazilian groups trace their roots to 2013, when a protest over a hike in bus fares morphed into a countrywide popular upheaval that shook the political establishment.⁴⁶

Colombia

- **Peace deal backers suffer in Colombia congress elections**

Colombian voters turned to right-wing parties critical of the country's peace deal with the main leftist rebels and knocked the current president's party down in congressional elections, raising questions about the future of the accord. The vote was seen as a barometer for a fiercely contested presidential election in May. It was also the first time former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, competed politically since disarming under the 2016 peace

⁴⁵ Reuters, “Argentina's Macri calls for labor amnesty, defends gradual approach,” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-politics-macri/argentinas-macri-calls-for-labor-amnesty-defends-gradual-approach-idUSKCN1GD5RF>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

⁴⁶ Marina Lopes, “Brazil's angry millennials are forming their own tea party and Occupy movements,” https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/brazils-angry-millennials-are-forming-their-own-tea-party-and-occupy-movements/2018/03/01/a4c864e4-18ce-11e8-930c-45838ad0d77a_story.html?utm_term=.073a77533307, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

deal to end a half century of conflict. As expected, support for their radical agenda was soundly rejected, with FARC candidates getting less than 0.5 percent of the overall vote. That means their political party will get only the 10 seats guaranteed them by the peace accord. President Juan Manuel Santos' coalition, which supported the peace deal, struggled. His own Party of National Unity, which was the biggest political movement in the outgoing congress, finished fifth overall. The results are likely to lead to a last-minute scramble among presidential candidates to form coalitions to better position themselves ahead of what is seen as a wide-open presidential race.⁴⁷

Chile

- **Sebastián Piñera Takes Office as President of Chile, Again**

Sebastián Piñera, a political conservative, returned to Chile's presidency on Sunday, vowing to revive an economy that slumped under the departing center-left leader Michelle Bachelet. Mr. Piñera, a billionaire entrepreneur, oversaw growth that averaged 5.3 percent a year during his first term from 2010 to 2014, aided by pro-business policies, rising prices for Chile's chief export, copper, and a giant rebuilding effort following a magnitude 8.8 earthquake that hit just before he took office. A slump in copper prices helped sour Ms. Bachelet's second round as president, with the economy — and the president's popularity — slipping badly in 2014 and 2015. Ms. Bachelet, the first woman to lead the country, had been wildly popular when she ended her initial term and handed power to Mr. Piñera. Mr. Piñera's first administration was marked by major street demonstrations demanding reforms in education and other services, as well as by the start of softening copper prices.⁴⁸

Venezuela

- **Venezuela Opposition Calls for Protest Against Presidential Election**

Venezuela's opposition is calling for a national protest later this month against a "fraudulent" election it says is stacked in favour of President Nicolas Maduro, the first major mobilisation since last year's wave of street protests. A recently-formed umbrella group called the Broad Front For A Free Venezuela, which includes opposition parties as well as students, union activists and university professors,

⁴⁷ Manuel Rueda, "Peace deal backers suffer in Colombia congress elections," https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/congress/critics-of-peace-deal-dominate-colombia-election/2018/03/11/bdba01fc-2598-11e8-a227-fd2b009466bc_story.html?utm_term=.c0a1895f2917, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

⁴⁸ The Associated Press, "Sebastián Piñera Takes Office as President of Chile, Again," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/11/world/americas/chile-sebastian-pinera-michelle-bachelet.html>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

called for the March 17 demonstration at a Thursday gathering. The country's main opposition parties, which are boycotting the May 20 vote, stopped calling protests last year after four months of street clashes with security forces left more than 120 people dead but failed to force Maduro's resignation. Most opposition parties are boycotting the election on the grounds that it does not provide conditions for a fair vote. They note that the two most popular opposition leaders are barred from holding public office, various parties have been outlawed and the election board has consistently favored the ruling Socialist Party. However, former opposition governor Henri Falcon is running in defiance of the boycott, spurring criticism that he is a Trojan horse for Maduro. Falcon insists he will win and denies that he is colluding with the government. Venezuela is suffering an unprecedented crisis as its socialist economic system collapses, leading hundreds of thousands to flee the country as hyperinflation and chronic shortages leave citizens unable to eat or get medical attention.⁴⁹

Russia

- **Russia's Presidential Election**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on 6 March took his campaign to one of Russia's leading industrial companies (town of Nizhny Tagil in the Urals to visit Uralvagonzavod), vowing to bolster high-tech industries and improve living standards. The Uralvagonzavod plant was emblematic of Putin's 2012 campaign, when he relied heavily on support from blue-collar workers amid large rallies against his rule in Moscow. Back then, Putin cast the mostly urban middle class protesters as Western stooges, part of a spoiled elite at odds with the country's majority.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, barred from running against President Vladimir Putin, Russia's opposition leader Alexei Navalny is training a nationwide network of volunteers who will act as election observers for the March 18 presidential election.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Reuters, "Venezuela Opposition Calls for Protest Against Presidential Election," <https://thewire.in/230977/venezuela-opposition-protest-presidential-election/>, Accessed on 12 March 2018.

⁵⁰Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia's Putin takes his campaign to leading industrial town", *Sacbee*, March 6, 2018. <http://www.sacbee.com/news/business/article203678324.html> Accessed on March 7, 2018.

⁵¹"Russia's Opposition Leader Is Organizing Volunteers To Act As Election Observers", *NPR*, March 9, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/09/592423895/russias-opposition-leader-is-organizing-volunteers-to-act-as-election-observers> Accessed on March 12, 2018.

- **Russia's Defence Capabilities**

On 4 March, Russian military sources said that Russia has completed the trials of a miniaturized nuclear power unit to be installed on cruise missiles and underwater drones.⁵²

Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said in Andrei Kondrashov's new [film](#) dubbed Putin on 11 March that Russia has tested 210 weapons in Syria. Rostech's Head Sergei Chemezov stressed many Russian weapons nowadays are better than the analogues in the EU or the US.⁵³

- **Russia and Crimea**

Answering a question on the return of Crimea to Ukraine, President Putin on 11 March said that "returning Crimea to Ukraine would be impossible under any circumstances".⁵⁴

- **Russia and the US**

On a question regarding Russia meddling in 2016 US presidential election, President Putin in an interview on 10 March said that he "would not care less" if some Russian citizens sought to meddle in the American elections. America's leading intelligence agencies concluded last year that Putin himself had directed a broad intelligence effort to influence the US election to undermine Clinton's campaign and boost Trump's chances. He rejected the assessments.⁵⁵

Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, head of U.S. European Command, during a meeting with the lawmakers on 8 March said that the **Russian military may surpass** U.S. military capability in Europe by 2025. He said that Russia is advancing in key military technology areas and shows no deceleration in efforts to destabilize the West. He emphasized that keeping up EUCOM's modernization was key to keeping up and maintaining superiority.⁵⁶

⁵²“Russia completes trials of miniaturized nuclear reactor for missiles, underwater drones”, *TASS*, March 4, 2018. <http://tass.com/defense/992666> Accessed on March 12, 2018.

⁵³“Russia tested 210 weapons in Syria - Defense Minister”, *TASS*, March 11, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/993464> Accessed on March 12, 2018.

⁵⁴“Returning Crimea to Ukraine 'impossible under any circumstances', Putin states”, *TASS*, March 11, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/993458> Accessed on March 12, 2018.

⁵⁵“Vladimir Putin 'couldn't care less' about US election interference”, *Economic Times*, March 10, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/putin-couldnt-care-less-about-us-election-interference/articleshow/63244246.cms> Accessed on March 12, 2018.

⁵⁶Patrick Tucker, “Russia Will Challenge US Military Superiority in Europe by 2025: US General”, *Defence One*, March 8, 2018. <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2018/03/russia-will-challenge-us-military-superiority-europe-2025-us-general/146523/> Accessed on March 12, 2018.

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Afghans Celebrate TAPI Inauguration⁵⁷**

Afghani population was in jubilant mood on 23 February 2018 with the launch of the work on Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project. The joy of people especially residents of Herat and eastern provinces knew no bound since they viewed this project as the stepping stone for the country's economic development, leading to security and social welfare and they would leave no stone unturned to provide speedy implementation of this project. According to Hedayatullah Zahir, head of Watanpal Civil Society Organization in Nangarhar, "We announce our supports to this project and will try to make this project successful. We urge government to implement other projects here too. Our message to the world is that we as a nation want peace, not war." The 1,840 km pipeline would start from Turkmenistan supplying natural gas via Herat, Farah, Helmand and Nimroz provinces of Afghanistan and Quetta and Multan in Pakistan and would finally reach Indian town Fazilka. Afghanistan is expected to earn around \$400 million as a transit fees annually from this mega project.

- **Work on 60m Afs Projects Begins in Kandahar⁵⁸**

The deputy governor of Kandahar province, Abdul Hanan Munib in the presence of sectoral directors and local leaders inaugurated three construction projects costing around 60 million Afghanis on 21 February 2018 in Dand district. The three projects consisted of construction of a 6.5 kilometer road from Haji Baba Zirat to Mansur Ghundi in the district, building of a 500-meter retaining wall along Trang Rod that would cost 13 million afs and renovation of ten schools with the help of US forces. The Governor added that education, health and agriculture sector in Southern province needs special attention and these three projects in the Dand district would lead to uniform development in the Province.

- **Saudi Prince Comes Out In Support Of Peace Process⁵⁹**

On 18 February 2018, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, National Security Advisor (NSA of Afghanistan visited Saudi Arabia on the special invitation by the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman. During his visit, the NSA met the Crown Prince who expressed his total commitment and full support to Afghanistan's peace and reconciliation process. In an official statement, NSA Atmar's office declared that Saudi Crown prince Mohammed bin Salman called upon for collective efforts from all parties to avert terrorism and restore peace in the country. This statement has a

⁵⁷ Tolo News, 23 February 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghans-celebrate-tapi-inauguration>

⁵⁸ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 22 February 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20258

⁵⁹ Tolo News, 26 February 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/saudi-prince-comes-out-support-peace-process>

greater significance for the forthcoming Kabul Process peace meeting that would occur at the end of February 2018. Reacting to this, Shahhussain Murtazawi, the President's spokesperson said, "At the (last) Kabul Process meeting, the world decided that the peace process must be an Afghan-owned process, however we welcome all countries who are willing to cooperate with us on this issue." The cooperation from other countries would expect to provide technical assistance to an Afghan-led peace process which was not present earlier.

Bangladesh

- **Rules bent to keep Khaleda behind bars**

The BNP yesterday (March 9) alleged that the government jailed Khaleda Zia to keep the party away from the next parliamentary election. "Those who are thinking of holding an election keeping Khaleda Zia behind bars are living in a fool's paradise," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said at a discussion. "Criticising the Election Commission, Fakhrul said it was "serving the government's agenda". "This Election Commission has been formed to reinstate Awami League in power."⁶⁰

- **Rohingya Refugees: \$950m needed in next 10 months**

The United Nations and the Bangladesh government have prepared a plan to provide an assistance of \$950 million to the Rohingya refugees and the vulnerable locals in Cox's Bazar for 10 months until December. The move comes amid concerns that the repatriation of the refugees would take time. The amount is more than double the money (\$434 million) initially planned for the Rohingyas as emergency humanitarian aid for six months till February.⁶¹

- **AL to put further pressure on BNP**

The ruling Bangladesh Awami League is determined to make politics difficult for its archrival and country's main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The AL is tossing up ideas to pin the BNP in such a manner which will eventually force BNP to participate in the next general elections even with its chairperson Khaleda Zia in jail. A number of AL policymakers have dropped hints to this effect. They say the five-year jail term Khaleda has been handed recently has made it

⁶⁰ "Rules bent to keep Khaleda behind bars," *Daily Star*, March 10, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/rules-bent-keep-khaleda-behind-bars-1546048>, accessed on March 10, 2017.

⁶¹ "Rohingya Refugees: \$950m needed in next 10 months," *Daily Star*, March 10, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/rohingya-refugees-950m-needed-next-10-months-1546075>, accessed on March 10, 2017.

almost impossible for the former prime minister to contest the next general election in December next.⁶²

- **Khaleda jailed as govt wants another lopsided election**

BNP on Saturday (March 10) alleged its chairperson Khaleda Zia has been put in jail as part of an 'evil design' of the government to hold another lopsided election to hang on to power. "The government wants to hold another one-sided election as it did in 2014. That's why they sent Khaleda Zia to jail as part of their blueprint," said BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.⁶³

- **Trying to resolve Teesta issue: Modi**

Indian Prime Minister yesterday (March 11) said that they were trying to resolve the hurdles to the signing of the Teesta water-sharing deal with Bangladesh 'keeping all concerned on board.' He made the remarks during a meeting with President Abdul Hamid on the sidelines of the International Solar Alliance founding conference 2018.⁶⁴

नेपाल

पाकिस्तान प्रधानमन्त्री अब्बासी नेपाल यात्रा पर:

पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री शाहिद खकान अब्बासी हाल ही में 5 और 6 मार्च को नेपाल की दो दिवसीय यात्रा पर रहे. पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमन्त्री ने नवनिर्वाचित प्रधानमंत्री ओली को नेपाल में एक स्थिर सरकार बनने पर बधाईयाँ दी और विभिन्न प्रकार के द्विपक्षीय मुद्दों पर बातचीत की. पाकिस्तान की तरफ से इस यात्रा का मुख्य उद्देश्य सार्क सम्मलेन को पुनः सशक्त करना बताया गया.⁶⁵

संघीय समाजवादी फोरम सरकार के साथ:

तराई क्षेत्र की पार्टी संघीय समाजवादी फोरम ने यह निर्णय लिया है कि वह सत्तारूढ़ एमाले के साथ सरकार में जुड़ेगी. फोरम के पास 16 सांसद है और इसके बाद सरकार को पूर्ण रूप से संसद में दो तिहाई का बहुमत मिल जायेगा.⁶⁶

⁶² "AL to put further pressure on BNP, *Prothom Alo*, March 11, 2017, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/172409/AL-to-put-further-pressure-on-BNP>, accessed on March 11, 2017.

⁶³ "Khaleda jailed as govt wants another lopsided election," *Prothom Alo*, March 11, 2017, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/172368/Khaleda-jailed-as-govt-wants-another-lopsided>, accessed on March 11, 2017.

⁶⁴ "Trying to resolve Teesta issue: Modi," *The Independent*, March 12, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/141079>, accessed on March 12, 2017.

⁶⁵ Anil Giri, "Nepal and Pakistan agree to revive saarc", *The Kathmandu Post*, 6 March 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-06/1>

⁶⁶ "SSF-N decides to join government", *The Kathmandu Post*, 7 March 2018,

संभवतया भंडारी आगे भी राष्ट्रपति रहेंगी:

13 मार्च को राष्ट्रपति के चुनाव के लिए एमाले की तरफ से बिद्या देवी भंडारी और नेपाली कांग्रेस की तरफ से कुमारी लक्ष्मी राय उम्मीदवार हैं. जिसमे सत्तारूढ़ दल एमाले की उम्मीदवार भंडारी की जीतने की सम्भावना है, अभी वर्तमान में भंडारी राष्ट्रपति हैं.⁶⁷

ओली ने संसद में तीन चौथाई बहुमत प्राप्त किया:

1990 के बाद 275 सदस्यीय प्रतिनिधि सभा में तीन चौथाई का बहुमत लाने वाले शक्तिशाली प्रमुख के रूप में के पी शर्मा ओली पहली बार आये हैं. ओली को 208 मत प्राप्त हुए जिसमे, एमाले के 121, माओवादी के 52, राजपा के 16, संघीय समाजवादी फोरम के 16 तथा स्वतंत्र 3 मत ओली पक्ष में रहे. नेपाली कांग्रेस के 60 वोट ओली के विरोध में रहे.⁶⁸

Indian Ocean Region

- **India France Joint Strategic Vision for Indian Ocean Region**

India and France on March 10, 2018 in New Delhi announced broadening of their ties in the Indian Ocean region through a joint strategic vision for cooperation in the region.⁶⁹ Both, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron said India and France will play key role in ensuring peace, security and stability in the region.⁷⁰ Both were agreed on the need to establish open, inclusive and transparent cooperation architecture for peace, security and prosperity in the region.⁷¹ Welcoming "Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region"⁷² as a guiding principle for such partnership, both leaders "reiterated that this cooperation will be crucial in order to maintain the safety of international sea lanes for unimpeded commerce and communications in accordance with the international law, for countering maritime terrorism and piracy, for building maritime domain awareness, for capacity building and for greater coordination in regional/international fora in the region."⁷³ "The leaders reiterated their support to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the values it promotes. They shared their commitment to

<http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-07/1>

⁶⁷ "Prez Bhandari likely to continue", The Kathmandu Post, 8 March 2018,

<http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-08/1>

⁶⁸ Binod Ghiemere/ "PM secures three fourth votes", The Kathmandu Post, 12 March 2018,

<http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-03-12/1>

⁶⁹ India, France release Strategic Vision for enhanced ties in Indian Ocean Region, March 10, 2018,

<https://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20180310/3295335.html> (Accessed on 12 March 2018)

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ India, France release joint strategic vision for IOR, March 10, 2018, <https://www.thequint.com/news/hot-news/india-france-release-joint-strategic-vision-for-ior> (Accessed on 12 March 2018)

⁷² India-France Joint Statement during State visit of President of France to India (March 10, 2018),

<http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral->

<documents.htm?dtl%2F29596%2FIndiaFrance+Joint+Statement+during+State+visit+of+President+of+France+to+India+March+10+2018n> (Accessed on 12 March 2018)

⁷³ Ibid.

proactively contribute towards the priorities of IORA."⁷⁴ India and France also signed a strategic pact which will allow the use of each other's military facilities including opening naval bases to warships.⁷⁵

- **CSIR signed MoU with IORA-RCSTT**

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) Ocean Rim Association's (IORA) Regional Centre for Science and Technology (IORA-SCTT) for designating Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP), Lucknow as the coordinating centre on medicinal plants.⁷⁶ Director CSIR-CIMAP and Director IORA-RCSTT signed the MoU in Tehran in the presence of IORA Secretary General Nomvuyo Nokwe.⁷⁷

The IORA Centre at CSIR-CIMAP is planning to "establish a database on the important medicinal plants, their value added products, related experts and industries of the IORA member states and organise meetings and training programmes to promote trade, commerce and scientific exchanges to complement the strength and limitation of the member states."⁷⁸

- **India, Mauritius signed MoUs for reviving Nalanda University,**

Ayurveda chair at University of Mauritius

On the visit of President of India Sri Ram Nath Kovind to Mauritius on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, India and Mauritius signed a number of MoUs. In a media statement, President Kovind said, "India has signed an MoU to revive the Nalanda University which was a global seat of learning in what is today Bihar, from where ancestors of many Mauritians came. Also, the ministry of AYUSH India will institute an academic chair for Ayurveda at the University of Mauritius to help promote the science for the benefit of the people of Mauritius. India and Mauritius share deep historical links and people to people ties. We have now entered a new era of cooperation with 25 priority projects being implemented in Mauritius with Indian assistance."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ India, France sign strategic pact on use of each others military bases, <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/india-france-sign-strategic-pact-on-use-of-each-others-military-bases-1186712-2018-03-10> (Accessed on 12 March 2018)

⁷⁶ CSIR inks MoU with IORA-RCSTT, <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/csir-inks-mou-with-iorarcstt/1261459>, <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/csir-inks-mou-with-iorarcstt/1261459> (Accessed on 12 March 2018)

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ India, Mauritius sign MoUs for reviving Nalanda University, instituting Ayurveda chair at University of Mauritius, <http://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/travel-tourism/india-mauritius-sign-mous-for-reviving-nalanda-university-instituting-ayurveda-chair-at-university-of-mauritius/1095755/> (Accessed on 12 March 2018)

President Sri Ram Nath Kovind commenced his six-day visit to the island nations of Mauritius and Madagascar in the Indian Ocean on 11 March 2018, a vital to India's security interests.⁸⁰

Sri Lanka

- **UN Under-Secretary General meets Defense Secretary Featured**

The visiting Under-Secretary General I (USG) for Political Affairs Mr. Jeffrey Feltman met the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense Mr. Kapila Waidyaratne PC at the Ministry on March 9th. During the ensuing discussion matters relating to the national reconciliation process including land release was taken up for discussion. The Under-Secretary General was briefed on the progress of the reconciliation process and its current status. Mr. Feltman was pleased with the actions taken in this regard.⁸¹

- **Inciting racial violence must be made non bailable offence - Minister**

Finance and Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera said that inciting racial violence must be made a non bailable offence. Minister Samaraweera in a Tweeter message following the unfortunate incident that took place in Digana said that politicians who give leadership to such racial violence should be deprived of their civic rights. "Enough is enough. Inciting racial violence must be made a non bailable offence and politicians who give leadership to such violence should be deprived of their civic rights," he message said.⁸²

- **China should assure OBOR won't threaten other countries: MS**

President Maithripala Sirisena has said that China should make it clear that its 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) initiative will not pose any threat to other countries, NHK World reported. President Sirisena has made these remark in an interview with NHK ahead of his visit to Japan on 12th March. He will meet Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his stay⁸³.

- **Facebook supports efforts in Sri Lanka to curb hate speech**

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ UN Under-Secretary General meets Defense Secretary, 9th March 2018, <https://www.news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/19756-un-un-under-secretary-general-meets-defense-secretary>

⁸² Inciting racial violence must be made non bailable offence - Minister, 6th March 2018, <https://www.news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/19706-inciting-racial-violence-must-be-made-non-bailable-offence-minister>

⁸³ China should assure OBOR won't threaten other countries: MS, 12 March 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/China-should-assure-OBOR-won-t-threaten-other-countries-MS-147170.html>

Facebook says it supports efforts in Sri Lanka to curb hate speech, following incitement to violence and work hard to keep it off our platform. We are responding to the situation in Sri Lanka and are in contact with the Government and non-governmental organizations to support efforts to identify and remove such content,” Facebook has said in an emailed statement to CNBC⁸⁴.

- **India announces financing for solar projects in Sri Lanka**

India has announced US\$ 100 million concessional financing for solar projects in Sri Lanka, the Indian High Commission in Colombo said. President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena visited New Delhi from 10-11 March 2018 to attend the Founding Conference of the International Solar Alliance⁸⁵.

- **Pakistan wants to work with Sri Lanka to revive SAARC Forum**

Pakistan wants to work with Sri Lanka to revive the SAARC Forum, the Pakistan Prime Minister’s office said. The High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Pakistan, Major General (Retired) L.K. Jayanath C. Perera, paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi at the Prime Minister’s Office. This was the High Commissioner’s first call on the Prime Minister⁸⁶.

- **Human rights commission finds outside elements behind violence**

The National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (NHRCSL) says it has found that outside elements had instigated the violence in Kandy. In separate letters to President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, the NHRCSL said that investigations carried out by the commission found that a group of outsiders had created tensions between Muslims and Sinhalese communities in parts of Kandy. The NHRCSL said that even incidents in the recent past targeting Muslims had been instigated by groups from outside the respective areas⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ Facebook supports efforts in Sri Lanka to curb hate speech, 12 March 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/03/12/facebook-supports-efforts-in-sri-lanka-to-curb-hate-speech/>

⁸⁵ India announces financing for solar projects in Sri Lanka, 12th March 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/03/12/india-announces-financing-for-solar-projects-in-sri-lanka/>

⁸⁶ Pakistan wants to work with Sri Lanka to revive SAARC Forum, 10th march 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/03/10/pakistan-wants-to-work-with-sri-lanka-to-revive-saarc-forum/>

⁸⁷ Human rights commission finds outside elements behind violence, 7th march 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/03/07/human-rights-commission-finds-outside-elements-behind-violence/>

Maldives

- **Over 40 countries to UN Human Rights Council over Maldives govt 'regrettable' decision not to engage**

A joint statement endorsed by over 40 countries, delivered at the 37th Session of the UN Human Rights Council have addressed the ongoing political crisis in the Maldives and expressed “grave concern” that the human rights situation in the country is deteriorating significantly. The statement narrated by the UK Mission to UN Geneva on Thursday stated that it was “regrettable that the Government of Maldives has not chosen to engage constructively with [the UN] body and its mechanisms.” At the UN Human Rights Council session on June 2017, 34 states had supported a statement on the Maldives that underlined the importance of allowing the opposition its freedom of expression, the importance of an independent judiciary, and emphasized the need to uphold constitutional guarantees for human rights.⁸⁸

- **PPM leadership confident opposition will not be successful in impeaching President**

Ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) Thursday claimed that despite the numerous efforts made by the opposition, securing the 57 votes required to impeach President Abdulla Yameen would be impossible. The Constitution of the Maldives states that the president can only be impeached after a resolution to remove the president is passed from the parliament with a two-third majority of the total membership of the parliament. With the current membership of the current parliament, the required number of votes to oust the president would be 57 votes⁸⁹.

- **Instilling patriotism a national duty: President Yameen**

President Abdulla Yameen stated that it is an important national duty to instill patriotism in all our hearts. In the address he gave on the occasion of the National Patriotism Day, he declared that the future belonged to the youth and highlighted the importance of ensuring they were a patriotic and freedom-loving generation that would defend the Maldivian individuality. He noted that this would flourish the national spirit amongst the youth and children, and produce a loyal generation to serve the nation⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ Over 40 countries to UN Human Rights Council over Maldives govt 'regrettable' decision not to engage, 10th March 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/over-40-countries-to-un-human-rights-council-over-maldives-govt-regrettable-decision-not-to-engage/>

⁸⁹ PPM leadership confident opposition will not be successful in impeaching President, 10th March 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/ppm-leadership-confident-opposition-will-not-be-successful-in-impeaching-president/>

⁹⁰ Instilling patriotism a national duty: President Yameen, 7th march 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/instilling-patriotism-a-national-duty-president-yameen/>

West Asia

Turkey

- **Turkish forces, FSA clear 16 more villages from YPG, Afrin within eyesight⁹¹**

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and Free Syrian Army (FSA) liberated thirteen more villages in Syria's northwestern Afrin region as of Sunday.

According to Anadolu Agency correspondents on the ground, Turkish troops and the FSA cleared the villages of Qeretepe and Qastel Kisk in Sharran, northeast of the city of Afrin, as well as the villages of Khalidiah and Jalbul near the region's center, and the village of Ka'n Kurk in the Jindires district. The latest advancements of Turkish troops and FSA fighters brought the front line only two kilometers away from Afrin's town center.

During their advance, YPG/PKK terrorists also captured the base of the terrorist group's so called special forces known as the HAT after brief clashes. The base, located two kilometers northeast of Afrin town center, was formerly used as a Syrian Army base before regime forces withdrew from the region without a fight in 2012.

HAT elements are known to have been trained by the U.S. in bases west of Euphrates River.

Later on Sunday, 13 more villages - Khujamanli, Savan Kabir, Chencheylan, Jagmaq Saghir, Alamdar and Kafr Batrah in the northwestern Rajo district, along with strategic Mount Bocite, Tallaf and Qujaman in the southwestern Jandarid district, Sulqli and Alibey in the northern Bulbul district, and Kawkabah near Afrin's center -- were cleared of terrorists.

"To date 950 square kilometers have been taken under our control," President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told the 6th provincial congress of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in the Black Sea province of Bolu.

- **11 dead, no survivors in Turkish private jet crash in Iran: Authorities⁹²**

A Turkish private jet flying from the United Arab Emirates to Istanbul carrying a group of young women crashed on late March 11 in a mountainous region of Iran during a heavy rain, killing all 11 people on board, the Associated Press reported, citing authorities. The aircraft days earlier carried a bachelorette party bound for Dubai.

Search and rescue teams were deployed to the area of the incident, Kerem Kınık, the head of the Turkish Red Crescent said on Twitter on March 11.

⁹¹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/03/11/turkish-forces-fsa-clear-16-more-villages-from-ypg-afrin-within-eyesight>

⁹² <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/11-dead-no-survivors-in-turkish-private-jet-crash-in-iran-authorities-128591>

The three crew members as well as the eight passengers on board were also identified as female.

"A plane belonging to Turkey has crashed near Iran's western city of Shahre Kord. Iranian Red Crescent Society has dispatched 10 teams to the disaster area in ChaharMahal and bakhtiari province to search for possible survivors," Kınık said in his tweet.

Iranian state television quoted Mojtaba Khaledi, the spokesman of the country's emergency management organization, as saying the plane hit a mountain in Shahr-e Kord and burst into flames.

- **Felicity Party leader rules out election alliance, criticizes ruling AKP⁹³**

Felicity Party (SP) leader Temel Karmollaoğlu has ruled out any possibility joining the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party's (MHP) "People's Alliance," saying the AKP government is "not engaging with Turkey's serious problems."

"Those who speak against the government are being sent to jail one day later or being dismissed from their jobs. The country should not be like this. They say: 'Come and join the People's Alliance.' I would not be so crazy," Karamollaoğlu said on March 9 at his party's provincial congress in Ankara.

"[They ask] us what we expect, or how many ministries we want, or how many lawmakers. But this nation cannot be sold for 20, 120 or even 250 lawmakers. Everyone should know that," he added.

Karamollaoğlu's fringe conservative party, which received less than one percent of votes in the November 2015 election, has recently come into focus in Turkey, drawing attention from both the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and ruling "National Alliance" ahead of crucial elections in 2019, after which the executive presidential system is due to fully go into effect.

The SP opposed to the shift to an executive presidency in the April 2017 referendum, with Karamollaoğlu saying he favored a strengthening of the democratic parliamentary. The CHP has recently held meetings with the SP leader within the framework of its bid to form an "alliance of principles" against the system change.

The AKP and the MHP, meanwhile, are seeking to unite all conservative parties in the country, with the religious ultra-nationalist Grand Union Party (BBP) already pledging their support to the alliance.

Karamollaoğlu has repeatedly stated that his party will not take part in any alliance, criticizing the AKP for "not prioritizing the problems of the country."

⁹³ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/felicity-party-leader-rules-out-election-alliance-criticizes-ruling-akp-128580>

“Our country is going through very tough times. We are facing very serious problems. But when we look at those who are governing the country, none of these problems is on their agenda,” he said.

- **Great Unity Party Chair Mustafa Destici: People's Alliance aiming for over 60 pct votes, not just simple majority⁹⁴**

The amendment that will allow political parties to form alliances in the 2019 presidential elections is expected to be ratified at the general assembly of Parliament this week.

Besides the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the Great Unity Party (BBP), which does not hold any seats in Parliament, has announced its support for the amendment.

Daily Sabah spoke with BBP Chairman Mustafa Destici about a range of topics including their reason for supporting the "People's Alliance" and the BBP's core political principles.

Expressing that their support for the alliance is not something new, Destici reminded that they were always against the political system and the constitution drawn up after the 1980 coup. He added that they supported the referendum held on April 16, 2017 for this reason.

According to Destici, who asserted that his party is supporting the alliance because of overlapping principles, the People's Alliance could gather around 60 percent of the votes in the 2019 presidential election.

- **Turkish military jets hit 18 PKK targets in northern Iraq⁹⁵**

Turkish warplanes destroyed at least 18 targets belonging to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in northern Iraq over the weekend, the state-run Anadolu news agency said on March 11.

The strikes, carried out on March 10 and 11, targeted the Hakurk, Zap, Metina, Gara and Avaşin-Basyan regions of northern Iraq, Anadolu said, citing the Turkish military.

The General Staff statement said that the PKK militants were plotting an attack on the Turkish military and their bases in the region.

Turkey regularly carries out airstrikes against PKK targets in northern Iraq, where the group is based in the Qandil mountains.

⁹⁴ <https://www.dailysabah.com/elections/2018/03/12/great-unity-party-chair-mustafa-destici-peoples-alliance-aiming-for-over-60-pct-votes-not-just-simple-majority>

⁹⁵ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/3-291-militants-neutralized-so-far-in-turkeys-afrin-operation-128541>

Turkey and Iraq are in close talks for a potential joint struggle against the presence of the PKK in Iraqi territories, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said on March 9, a day after Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu announced that Iraq was the Turkish military's next target after the ongoing Afrin operation.

"[Cross-border] operations will be conducted in northern Iraq when necessary. We are in close contact with the Iraqi government on this," Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım told reporters on March 9.

- **Turkey's religious head to appoint more female deputy clerics⁹⁶**

The head of Turkey's religious affairs said Sunday they will select and appoint female deputy muftis (Muslim clerics) in all provinces.

Speaking during a news briefing in the capital Ankara, Ali Erbaş, head of Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), said they are taking steps to include more women in the presidency.

"We will select and appoint female deputy muftis in all our provinces as soon as possible," he said.

He added that they will also appoint female supervisors in all provinces of Turkey.

Erbaş said that they will hold a consultation meeting "Islam and Woman" with women theologians.

He added that for the first time in the history of Presidency of Religious Affairs, a female deputy president is currently holding office and there are also six to seven female heads of departments.

- **Northern Cypriots vow to launch gas search unless Greek side pulls back⁹⁷**

The Northern Turkish Cypriots has threatened to start their own exploration for oil and gas around Cyprus if Greek Cypriots persist with their own plans, their foreign minister said on Friday, as an uneasy standoff lingered over offshore resources. Kudret Ozersay, Foreign Minister of Northern Cyprus, speaks during an interview with Reuters in his office in northern part of Nicosia, Cyprus March 9, 2018.

Greek Cypriots, who run Cyprus's internationally recognized government, have licensed several offshore blocks to multinationals for oil and gas exploration. But Italy's Eni abandoned a scheduled drill last month because of the presence of Turkish military vessels. A division of ExxonMobil is due to launch an exploration attempt this year.

⁹⁶ <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2018/03/11/turkeys-religious-head-to-appoint-more-female-deputy-clerics>

⁹⁷ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-cypriots-vow-to-launch-gas-search-unless-greek-side-pulls-back-128568>

“Either we will do it together - by discussing, agreeing and moving together - or things will stop, or, we (Turkish Cypriots) will do the same thing: we will start exploiting and drilling as well,” said Kudret Ozersay, foreign minister of Northern Cyprus, a breakaway state recognized only by Turkey.

Turkey has vowed to prevent what it sees as a unilateral move by Greek Cypriots, but EU member Cyprus has shown no signs of backing down. Brussels has urged Turkey to avoid threats and refrain from actions that could damage relations with the bloc.

Torn apart in a Turkish invasion in 1974 after a Greek-inspired coup, seeds of division were sown earlier, when a power-sharing arrangement between Greek and Turkish Cypriots crumbled amid violence just three years after the former British colony gained independence. Greek Cypriots were left running the internationally recognized government.

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1.	March 7	Balochistan	Two policemen, including a senior officer, were shot dead and another was injured other in Hazarganji vegetable market located in provincial capital Quetta. These policemen were guarding the fruit and vegetable sellers of Shia Hazara community. ⁹⁸	2	1
2.	March 8	Balochistan	Four militants, including a commander of the Baloch Republican Army, laid down their arms and announced that they have abandoned armed struggle against the state and would join mainstream. ⁹⁹	Militants surrender	
3.	March 9	Balochistan	At least two Frontier Corps (FC) personnel were injured in a roadside blast near FC camp in	0	2

⁹⁸ Two policemen gunned down in Quetta, *Dawn*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1393847/two-policemen-gunned-down-in-quetta>, accessed on March 12, 2018

⁹⁹ Abdil Wahid Shahwani, Four militants surrender in Hub, *Dawn*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1394086/four-militants-surrender-in-hub>, accessed on March 12, 2018

			Perak area of Hub <i>tehsil</i> (revenue unit) in Lasbela district. ¹⁰⁰		
4.	March 9	Balochistan	Four suspected militants, including a ‘commander’, identified as Jamil Ahmed, were killed in an exchange of fire during an operation in Shadi Kour and Paidarak areas of Kech district. ¹⁰¹	4	0

Afghanistan

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	March 9	Kabul	A suicide bomber killed 10 people and injured 22 others in a crowd of Shiite Muslims near a mosque complex in Kabul. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the strike. However, a government spokesman blamed Pakistan-based Haqqani network for the attack. ¹⁰²	10	22
2	March 10	Washington-Kabul	The United States (US) ruled out a recent request from the Taliban for a direct talk with the White House, unless it engages with the elected government of Afghanistan. “We are not in Afghanistan to acquire its natural resources to impose our own form of government to prevent the free practice of Islam or to destabilize the region,” said diplomat Alice Wells. ¹⁰³	US rules out any possibility on direct talks with Taliban	
3	March 11	Laghman / Nangarhar /	At least 22 militants were killed in ground and air operations conducted by the Afghan forces across the country. Ministry of Defence (MoD) as said that	22	0

¹⁰⁰ Ismail Sasoli, 2 FC personnel injured in roadside blast in Hub district, *Dawn*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1394203/2-fc-personnel-injured-in-roadside-blast-in-hub-district>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹⁰¹ Four ‘militants’ killed in Pasni, *Dawn*, March 10, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1394285/four-militants-killed-in-pasni>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹⁰² Andrew E. Kramer, Hazaras Protest After an ISIS Attack Kills 10 in Kabul, *The New York Times*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/world/asia/suicide-attack-kabul-hazaras.html>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹⁰³ No direct talks with Taliban unless it engages with Afghan: U.S., *The Hindu*, March 10, 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/no-direct-talks-with-taliban-unless-it-engages-with-afghan-us/article23023797.ece>, accessed on March 12, 2018

		Helmand	the operations were carried out in the vicinity of Basram in Mihtarlam, Laghman's provincial capital, Kama, Nazyan districts of Nangarhar province, Nahar Saraj, Nad Ali and Washir districts of Helmand province. ¹⁰⁴	
4	March 11	Maidan Wardak	At least five Haqqani Network terrorists were arrested during an operation of the Afghan national defense and security forces in Sayed Abad district. "Five Haqqani Terrorist Network Group members were arrested including two key commanders of the group during overnight special operation conducted by the General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU) in Tangi Wardak region, Sayed Abad district of Maidan Wardak province," Ministry of Interior (MoI_ said in a statement. ¹⁰⁵	Five Haqqani Network terrorists arrested
5	March 12	Farah	The Provincial Council officials warned that Anar Dara district on the verge of collapse. Dadullah Qane, a member of the Provincial Council said that the Taliban attacked the centre of Anar Dara on March 12 and took control of the police headquarters. He warned that "if reinforcements are not deployed to the district, Anar Dara will fall completely to the Taliban." Until now, Anar Dara was one of the peaceful districts of the province. ¹⁰⁶	Anar Dara on verge of collapse

¹⁰⁴ 22 insurgents killed in Afghanistan, *ANI*, March 11, 2018, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/22-insurgents-killed-in-afghanistan201803111609030004/>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹⁰⁵ Key Haqqani network commanders arrested in Maidan Wardak province, *Khaama Press*, March 11, 2018, <https://www.khaama.com/key-haqqani-network-commanders-arrested-in-maidan-wardak-province-04623/>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹⁰⁶ Farah's Anar Dara on Verge of Collapse: Officials, *Tolo News*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/farah%E2%80%99s-anar-dara-verge-collapse-officials>, accessed on March 12, 2018

Iraq

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	March 6	Kirkuk	<p>Federal Police forces killed three IS militants during an encounter in Altun Kupri, northwest of the province.</p> <p>Iraq declared victory over Islamic State militants and the recapture of all of the group's strongholds in December, but forces continue to hunt for remnant militants hiding at desert areas.¹⁰⁷</p>	3	0
2	March 9	Nineveh	<p>An IS militant, who was in charge of confiscating houses and weapons of police conscripts, was arrested. Lieutenant General Hamad Names al-Jabouri, commander of Nineveh police, said troops "managed to arrest IS member called Ahmed Hussein Khalaf Ibrahim, who is from a village in Nimrud region."¹⁰⁸</p>	Arrest	
3	March 11	Baghdad	<p>Two people were killed, while five others were injured in a bomb blast, targeting a restaurant in al-Yusufiya region.</p> <p>According to the monthly report issued by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), "a total of 91 Iraqi civilians were killed and 208 others were injured in acts of</p>	2	5

¹⁰⁷ Mohamed Mostafa, Source: Iraqi forces kill 3 Islamic State fighters in Kirkuk, *Iraqi News*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/source-iraqi-forces-kill-3-islamic-state-fighters-kirkuk/>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹⁰⁸ Nehal Mostafa, Islamic State member in charge of seizing conscripts' houses, weapons arrested in Nineveh, *Iraqi News*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/islamic-state-member-charge-seizing-conscripts-houses-weapons-arrested-nineveh/>, accessed on March 12, 2018

			terrorism, violence and armed conflict in February.” ¹⁰⁹		
4	March 11	Mosul	<p>Eight IS militants were arrested in a military operation in Mosul city as Iraqi troops continue to hunt for IS scattered across the country in the aftermath of their crushing defeat in December.</p> <p>Colonel Hassan Emad said, “The Islamic State militants were arrested at al-Ba’aj district, 70 km north west of Mosul, after receiving accurate intelligence reports on their locations.”¹¹⁰</p>	Arrest	

Syria

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	March 12	Russia-Syria	The Russian centre for Syrian reconciliation demanded that the Faylaq al-Rahman militant group in Syria cut ties and separate from the Jabhat Fatal al-Sham terror group as a condition for its withdrawal from the besieged East Ghouta, the centre’s spokesman Major General Vladimir Zolotukhin said. ¹¹¹		Russia demands of cutting ties between terrorist groups
2	March 11	Ghouta	Syrian government forces continued their offensive against Eastern Ghouta, a day after they cut off the rebel-held enclave’s largest town, pressing on with a 20-day assault that has left more than 1,000 civilians dead.		Syrian offensive continues

¹⁰⁹ Nehal Mostafa, Seven people killed, injured in bomb blast, armed attack in Baghdad, *Iraqi News*, March 11, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/seven-people-killed-injured-bomb-blast-armed-attack-baghdad/>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹¹⁰ Mohammed Ebraheem, Eight IS militants, including two senior leaders, apprehended in Mosul, *Iraqi News*, March 11, 2018, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹¹¹ Leith Aboufadel, Russian military demands Al-Rahman Legion group to cut ties with Nusra Front, *Al Masdar News*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/russian-military-demands-al-rahman-legion-group-to-cut-ties-with-nusra-front/>, accessed on March 12, 2018

			Government troops and allied militia launched their military campaign for Eastern Ghouta on February 18, 2018 and have since overrun more than half of the area. ¹¹²	
3	March 12	Ghouta	<p>Following the split of rebel-held areas across Damascus' East Ghouta region into two along the Masraba-Arbeen axis on March 11 afternoon, the Syrian Army is now making an all-out assault to force a third isolation of militant-controlled territory.</p> <p>The government onslaught is aimed at physically isolating the Islamist stronghold town from the nearby rebel-controlled city of Douma and thus impose a three-way split of the insurgent presence in East Ghouta.¹¹³</p>	Syrian army assault intensifies

International Economic Issues

- **Asia-Pacific nations sign sweeping trade deal without the US**

On March 8, 2018, eleven countries including Japan and Canada signed a landmark Asia-Pacific trade agreement without the United States (US) in what can be seen as a powerful signal against protectionism and trade wars.

The deal came as US President Donald Trump has announced to press ahead with a plan to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, a move that other nations and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said could start a global trade war. Chilean President Michelle Bachelet said, "Today, we can proudly conclude this process, sending a strong message to the international community that open

¹¹² Syria army cuts off main rebel town in Ghouta as death toll tops 1000, *news.com.au*, March 11, 2018, <http://www.news.com.au/world/middle-east/syria-army-cuts-off-main-rebel-town-in-ghouta-as-death-toll-tops-1000/news-story/d7a7a8742b5eeb2e2aa3666451959be5>, accessed on March 12, 2018

¹¹³ Andrew Illingworth, Syrian Army unleashes all-out assault to split militant-held East Ghouta into 3 pockets – Map update, *Al Masdar News*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-unleashes-all-out-assault-to-split-militant-held-east-ghouta-into-3-pockets-map-update/>, accessed on March 12, 2018

markets, economic integration and international cooperation are the best tools for creating economic opportunities and prosperity.” The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) will reduce tariffs in countries that together amount to more than 13 percent of the global economy - a total of \$10 trillion in gross domestic product. With the United States, it would have represented 40 percent. Even without the United States, the deal will span a market of nearly 500 million people, making it one of the globe's three largest trade agreements, according to Chilean and Canadian trade statistics. The final agreement, signed eliminates some requirements of the original TPP demanded by US negotiators. Those include rules ramping up intellectual property protection of pharmaceuticals, which governments and activists of other member nations worried would raise the costs of medicine. The agreement will become effective when at least six member nations have completed domestic procedures to ratify it, possibly before the end of the year.¹¹⁴

- **13th Meeting of NDB Board of Directors Held in Shanghai**

On March 2, 2018, the 13th meeting of the Board of Directors (BoD) of the New Development Bank was held in Shanghai. During the meeting, the BoD approved Pará Sustainable Municipalities Project and Maranhão Road Corridor – South-North Integration Project in Brazil with loans aggregating USD 121 mln subject to the completion of the domestic requirements in the Federative Republic of Brazil. The Board also considered a number of policy-related issues, including the approval of a Performance Management Policy and a Policy on Guarantees as well as revisions to policies pertaining to operations, treasury and administration. The Board was briefed on the project pipeline in the five member countries of the Bank, the budget utilization, audit matters, risk matters, human resource matters and other aspects pertaining to the ongoing work of the NDB.¹¹⁵

- **Donald Trump signs order for metals tariff plan, prompting fears of trade war**

On March 8, 2018, Donald Trump pushed forward with plans to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium imports, arguing the levies were necessary for national security and to stop the “assault on our country”. Flanked by steel and aluminium

¹¹⁴ Dave Sherwood and Felipe Iturrieta, “Asia-Pacific nations sign sweeping trade deal without U.S.”, *Reuters*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-tpp/asia-pacific-nations-sign-sweeping-trade-deal-without-u-s-idUSKCN1GK0JM> (accessed on March 9, 2018); “Asia-Pacific Nation sign sweeping trade deal”, *The Star tv.com*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.thestartv.com/v/asia-pacific-nations-sign-sweeping-trade-deal>, (accessed on March 9, 2018).

¹¹⁵ New Development Bank (NDB), “13th Meeting of NDB Board of Directors Held in Shanghai”, *Press Release*, March 5, 2018, https://www.ndb.int/press_release/13th-meeting-ndb-board-directors-held-shanghai/ (accessed on March 9, 2018)

workers and key staff, Trump said he had to act to stop the “decimation of entire communities” and insisted there would be a very fair process as the administration used the next 15 days to negotiate exemptions with allies. Canada and Mexico will be exempted. Trump’s plan is to impose a 25% tariff on imports of steel, and a 10% tariff on aluminium. The initial plan was for a global levy, although Trump made clear exceptions would be made and suggested that allies’ military spending might be taken into account. Trump campaigned on saving US steel and aluminium jobs, which have been lost to cheap foreign imports. But the tariffs threaten to undermine decades of detente in international trade and have split the Republican Party – no congressional members of his own party were present for the White House announcement. The announcement met with immediate opposition from senior Republicans, who see the move as a tax on US manufacturers and consumers. China and Europe have threatened retaliation if Trump goes ahead with his plan.¹¹⁶

- **India looking to approach WTO if US imposes ‘selective’ steel, aluminium tariffs**

On March 8, 2018, *BussinessLine* reported that India is largely unaffected by the increase in import tariffs on washing machines and solar panels brought about by the US but may raise a dispute at the World Trade Organisation if duties are raised selectively on steel and aluminium and it is among the targeted countries. A government official told *BussinessLine*, “If the US stretches a domestic law to restrict imports of steel and aluminium on the ground that it is impacting national security and apply it selectively on a handful of countries, we don’t think it will stand the scrutiny of the WTO.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Dominic Rushe, “Donald Trump signs order for metals tariff plan, prompting fears of trade war”, *The Guardian*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/08/donald-trump-metal-tariffs-trade-war> (accessed on March 9, 2018)

¹¹⁷ Amiti Sen , “India looking to approach WTO if US imposes ‘selective’ steel, aluminium tariffs”, *BussinessLine*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/policy/india-looking-to-approach-wto-if-us-imposes-selective-steel-aluminium-tariffs/article22983605.ece> (accessed on March 9, 2018)