

Weekly Media Updates (21-27 May, 2018)

Contents

Regions and Themes covered this Week

- **Africa**
- **Central Asia**
- **China**
- **Latin America and Caribbean**
- **North America**
- **Russia**
- **South Asia**
- **Indian Ocean**
- **West Asia**
- **Terrorism and Counter Terrorism**

Africa

- **Once Influential in Africa, Taiwan Loses All But One Ally¹**

Two days after breaking ties with Taiwan, Burkina Faso re-established diplomatic relations with China on Saturday, 26 May 2018, at a signing ceremony in Beijing. Burkina Faso's decision to sever relations with Taiwan has left the Asian island with diplomatic ties to only one African country, Swaziland. Lu Kang, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said, "We welcome Burkina Faso's return to the big family of China-Africa friendly cooperation on the basis of the one-China principle." Taiwan's Foreign Ministry called the decision a "sad situation" reflecting China's "desire to delete Taiwan from the global community."

- **Burundi backs new constitution extending presidential term limits²**

Voters in Burundi have backed constitutional amendments that could potentially allow President Pierre Nkurunziza to stay in office until 2034 as well as boost his powers. Pierre-Claver Ndayicariye, election commission chief, said 73 percent of voters had voted "Yes" in the referendum to change the constitution, including whether the current five-year-presidential terms will be increased to seven years. No change to the limit of two terms in office was proposed. Nineteen percent voted "No", with a turnout of 96 percent. More than five million people had registered to vote in the referendum on May 17, according to officials. The new document also scraps one of the country's two constitutionally enshrined vice presidents, and shifts a number of powers away from the government to the president. Before the vote, the opposition had decried it as an undemocratic foregone conclusion.

- **José Eduardo Dos Santos Quits Ruling MPLA Party This Year³**

The Angola's ruling MPLA party president, José Eduardo dos Santos, reaffirmed on Friday in Luanda that he is leaving his political life in 2018 of his own free will. The confirmation was communicated Friday, in Luanda, in the opening address of the second extraordinary session of the MPLA Central Committee, which took place on Friday.

In the session that aimed to approve the resolution on the holding of the sixth Extraordinary Congress of the MPLA, to be held in September, José Eduardo dos Santos said that the transition should be smooth and that the process should show the ruling party's political maturity, as a force with more than 60 years. During the speech, José Eduardo dos Santos, who did not run for the general elections last

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

² Aljazeera, 22 May 2018 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2018/05/burundi-backs-constitution-extending-presidential-term-limits-180521134736408.html>

³ Angola Press, 26 May 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201805260045.html>

August, recalled that the transition at the party level will culminate in the election of a new president as a result of his expressed desire to abandon political life in the year of 2018, despite his regular term expiring in 2021, under the MPLA statutes."I remember saying in broad outlines that everything that has a beginning has an end. Because that is the dialectic of life," he said during an improvised speech.

- **French, Rwandan Leaders Pledge Cooperation on African Security⁴**

President Paul Kagame and his French counterpart President Emmanuel Macron held bilateral talks in Paris, France on Wednesday, 23 May 2018, during which the two leaders discussed ties between the African Union and the European nation, among other subjects. French and Rwandan leaders vowed to work together on key African security issues as they sought to move forward after bitter differences over Rwanda's 1994 genocide. Standing alongside his Rwandan counterpart, Paul Kagame, French President Emmanuel Macron said the two leaders had agreed to work "pragmatically" on issues of mutual concern, especially on African hot spots like the Sahel, Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. Referring to years of tension over the Rwandan genocide, Macron said it was not a question of underestimating the past, but rather assuming it and trying to overcome it. He spoke at a joint news conference following talks between the two presidents, who also met with tech executives. The two leaders will attend a Paris tech forum Thursday that showcases African startups, among other talent.

- **WHO Says 9 African Nations Mobilise to Prevent Ebola⁵**

The World Health Organisation's regional director for Africa says the agency is accelerating efforts with nine countries neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo to try to prevent the spread of the current Ebola outbreak beyond its borders. Matshidiso Moeti says teams are being deployed to assess preparedness and "immediate next steps" include boosting capacity-building, training and resource mobilisation. The top two priority countries are Central African Republic and the Republic of Congo, near the epicenter of the outbreak. In the Republic of Congo, for example, WHO is working with government officials "to stop functioning" an active market on its side of the Congo River. Moeti told a World Health Assembly session on Wednesday the nine countries "have already initiated their readiness activities." The others are Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

- **Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention to Deploy Health Experts over Ebola in DRC⁶**

⁴ VOA, 24 May 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201805240389.html>

⁵ News24, 23 May 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/who-says-9-african-nations-mobilise-to-prevent-possible-ebola-spread-20180523>

⁶ New Vision, 14 May 2018, https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1478346/africa-centres-disease-control-prevention-deploy-health-experts-ebola-drc

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) is deploying 25 epidemiologists, laboratory experts, and anthropologists to support the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) efforts to control the recent Ebola virus outbreak in Mbandaka and Bikoro. Following the announcement on Tuesday May 8 on the Ebola outbreak by the Government of DRC, the Africa CDC deployed an assessment mission within 48 hours and activated its Emergency Operational Centre to link, scan and monitor the situation. The Africa CDC supports all African countries to improve surveillance, emergency response, and prevention of infectious diseases. This includes addressing outbreaks, man-made and natural disasters, and public health events of regional and international concern. It further seeks to build the capacity to reduce disease burden on the continent.

- **World is Looking Elsewhere in Africa as South Africa Economy Struggles⁷**

Within 12 years, South Africa and Nigeria will no longer be dominant on the continent. Euromonitor International said on Friday: "Africa's two largest economies, Nigeria and South Africa, account for nearly 50 per cent of the continent's GDP in 2017. However, by 2030 these two countries will represent just 37 per cent of Africa's total GDP, demonstrating the rising economic importance of Africa's emerging markets." Ethiopia and Rwanda are expected to be the two fastest growing economies in Africa by 2030, the report states. What's more, it says, Africa will show the highest growth in disposable income globally over the forecast period to 2030, at 9 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR). Euromonitor International's report, titled "Shifting Market Frontiers: Africa Rising", also identifies key trends.

- **South Africa's ANC to 'Test Constitution' on Land Expropriation⁸**

South Africa's ruling party aims to test clauses in the constitution to see if they allow for land to be expropriated without compensation to address racial disparities in ownership that persist more than two decades after apartheid's demise. Such a move could mean the African National Congress (ANC) will not need to stick to a policy pledge to change the constitution to allow for expropriation, which has unsettled investors concerned about the implications for broader property rights. The following explains some of the issues surrounding land rights. Following a land summit at the weekend, the ANC said it would test the argument that the existing constitution permits expropriation of land without compensation under certain circumstances. Some legal experts have argued that there is no need to amend the constitution, because Section 25 states that if land is taken from a property owner, "compensation ... must be just and equitable." The argument has been made that "just and equitable" could be zero - meaning no compensation - depending on the historical circumstances in which previous

⁷ Times Live, 15 May 2018, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/business/2018-05-25-world-is-looking-elsewhere-in-africa-as-sa-economy-struggles/>

⁸ Reuters, 22 May 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-safrica-land-explainer/south-africas-anc-to-test-constitution-on-land-expropriation-idUSKCN1IN1LP>

occupants or owners were deprived of or removed from the land. The ANC also said after the summit that if “current legal formulations” such as Section 25 impede or slow effective land redistribution, it will look at reviewing or changing the constitution.

- **Cabinet Apprised of MoU with Angola for Cooperation in Electronics, IT⁹**

Indian Union Cabinet was today informed about an agreement between India and Angola for promoting bilateral co-operation in electronics and information technology field. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) intends to promote closer ties in areas of e-Governance, human resource development for IT education, information security, electronics hardware manufacturing, IT embedded software industry and telemedicine, an official release said. "The Union Cabinet...has been apprised of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Angola for promoting bilateral cooperation in the field of electronics and Information Technology," it said. The IT Ministry -- mandated to promote international cooperation in the emerging and frontier areas of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) -- has inked pacts with various countries to promote close cooperation and exchange of information in this field, the release added.

- **Angolan Diplomats Sacked for Attending Jerusalem Embassy Opening¹⁰**

Angolan Foreign Minister Manuel Augusto dismissed two senior diplomats on Wednesday for their participation in the the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem, according to African Media. Jao Diogo Fortunato, a senior official at the Angolan Embassy in Tel Aviv, was fired from his job for "failing to comply with procedures and harming Angola's good reputation with countries that have enjoyed historically good relations." The Angolan state-run newspaper reported that Fortunato participated in the opening ceremony of the embassy in Jerusalem with the approval of the director for African, Middle East and Regional Organizations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that it was "contrary to the government's decision."

- **Rwanda, Angola Sign Airspace Agreement¹¹**

Rwanda and Angola on Wednesday signed an agreement granting their national airlines the fifth freedom right to fly at each other's airports without limitations. Angola's TAAG Airlines will be free to pick passengers from Rwanda to any destination while RwandAir can as well freely fly to Angola and pick passengers to any destination, Rwanda's state minister for transport Jean de Dieu Uwihanganye

⁹ Business Standard, 23 May 2018, http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/cabinet-apprised-of-mou-with-angola-for-cooperation-in-electronics-it-118052301298_1.html

¹⁰ The Jerusalem Post, 23 May 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/International/Angolan-diplomats-sacked-for-attending-Jerusalem-Embassy-opening-558132>

¹¹ Xinhua Net, 24 May 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/24/c_137201285.htm

said after signing the agreement. He projected that with the agreement, RwandAir could consider using the Angola route to fly to South American destinations and Portugal. The airspace agreement would boost relations between the two countries in various aspects, said Augusto da Silva Tomas, Angola's minister of transport.

- **Angola Seeks US\$15 Billion from China for Infrastructure**¹²

Angola plans to secure a loan worth more than US\$15.5 billion from China for infrastructure and building projects. The plan was revealed by the Angolan government in a memo sent to investors within the framework of a new bond issuance, reports the Ecofin Agency. Angolan authorities hope to secure around US\$2.5 billion from Exim bank China for infrastructure and energy projects. Of this, US\$690 million will be for the Corimba coast road, while US\$760.4 million will be for an electricity transmission system at Lauchimo dam. In addition, US\$1.1 billion will be pumped to build a naval academy in Kalunga. The country will also negotiate a loan of nearly US\$13 billion from the International and Commercial Bank of China, out of which US\$1.28 billion will be used to construct a new airport in Luanda and US\$11.7 billion as a credit line to fund various other projects across the country.

- **Switzerland Opens Criminal Probe Tied to Angola Fund**¹³

Swiss authorities have raided multiple sites as part of a money-laundering probe tied to Angola's sovereign wealth fund, the top prosecutor's office said on Tuesday. In an email to AFP, it said it "opened criminal proceedings in April 2018 in response to reports of money laundering... by persons unknown connected with alleged offences involving assets held by the National Bank of Angola (BNA) and the Fondo Soberano de Angola, the Angolan sovereign wealth fund." As part of the probe, Swiss authorities last Wednesday "conducted searches at several locations in Switzerland," it said, declining to provide further details. The operation came after the son of Angola's former president Jose Eduardo dos Santos was charged in his home country with siphoning off US\$1.5 billion (1.3 billion euros) when he ran the oil-rich country's sovereign wealth fund. Jose Filomeno dos Santos, nicknamed "Zenu," had been appointed by his father to head the US\$5-billion fund in 2013.

- **Mozambique Chases US\$18 Million to Build Polytechnic Institute**¹⁴

The Mozambican government, through its Ministry of Science, Technology and Vocational Technical Education (MCTESTP), is in talks with China to secure funding for the construction of the Gorongosa Polytechnic Institute, in the central province of Sofala, APA can report on Monday. It is a medium-level professional

¹² Global Construction Review, 21 May 2018,

<http://www.globalconstructionreview.com/news/angola-seeks-15bn-china-infrastructure/>

¹³ News24, 22 May 2018, <https://m.news24.com/Africa/News/switzerland-opens-criminal-probe-tied-to-angola-fund-20180522>

¹⁴ Journal du Cameroun, 21 May 2018,

<https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/mozambique-chases-18m-to-build-polytechnic-institute/>

technical education institution designed to accommodate 740 students and a boarding school with a capacity of 400 students to be installed in an area where 10 hectares are reserved for school infrastructure and 300 hectares for school and grazing cattle. A statement from MCTESTP to APA on Monday says, for this purpose, the Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education and Professional Technician Jorge Nhambiu received in Maputo a delegation of Chinese experts to design the IMP of Gorongosa, budgeted at about US\$18 million granted by Beijing.

- **Mumbai Businessman Missing in Mozambique¹⁵**

A Mumbai-based businessman has been missing in Mozambique ever since he went there three months back and efforts are underway to find his whereabouts, a senior police official said here today, amid reports that he may have been kidnapped. Pramod Goenka (52), who was visiting the African country for business, went missing hours after landing at the Maputo airport on February 19, the official said. His son Yash lodged a complaint with Juhu police here on February 21, saying his father was not traceable. Goenka was travelling to Maputo to meet a businessman named 'Kothari', the complaint said. Indian authorities are in touch with their Mozambique counterparts and the Indian High Commission there is also in touch with the local police, the official said.

- **Zimbabwe Applies to Rejoin Commonwealth¹⁶**

Zimbabwe has applied to rejoin the Commonwealth and has invited the bloc of former British colonies to send observers to its general elections set for this year. Robert Mugabe, who was pushed out of office last year, pulled Zimbabwe out of the organisation in 2003 after Harare's membership was suspended following disputed elections held the previous year. Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland said in a statement on Monday that President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who replaced Mugabe after a de facto army coup in November, made the application on May 15. "Zimbabwe's eventual return to the Commonwealth, following a successful membership application, would be a momentous occasion, given our shared rich history," Scotland said. Mnangagwa has vowed to hold fair and free elections, and has pledged to revive the moribund economy by repairing international ties and attracting foreign investment. Britain said last month that it would strongly support Zimbabwe returning to the Commonwealth.

- **Mugabe Misses Zimbabwean Parliamentary Hearing on US\$15 Billion Diamond Loss¹⁷**

¹⁵ Business Standard, 23 May 2018, http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/mumbai-businessman-missing-in-mozambique-118052301038_1.html

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, 22 May 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/zimbabwe-applies-rejoin-commonwealth-180522062016470.html>

¹⁷ CNBC, 24 May 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/24/zimbabwe-mugabe-misses-diamond-loss-parliament-hearing.html>

Former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe failed to attend a parliamentary hearing on Wednesday that is investigating his claim that US\$15 billion of the country's diamond wealth is missing. Temba Mliswa, the Zimbabwean lawmaker leading the inquiry, tweeted later on Wednesday that, "We've considered that 9 a.m. may be rather early for Mr. Mugabe to appear," adding that the investigatory body had written to the former leader asking him to appear on May 28 at 2 p.m. instead. Mugabe's appearance in front of lawmakers has been postponed multiple times, and would mark his first public appearance since losing power in a coup in November last year. His then-deputy Emmerson Mnangagwa has since become president of Zimbabwe. Mugabe, 94, is understood to be in frail health.

- **Tanzania Orders Multinational Mining Firms to Open Local Bank Accounts¹⁸**

Tanzania has directed multinational companies operating in the country's extractive sector to open local bank accounts so authorities can scrutinise their finances. The move is in line with new mining laws aimed at curbing illicit financial flows in the oil and gas subsectors. The companies are required to comply with the directive immediately in line with rules that came into effect in February this year. The government's decision will be seen as a bold move to stem the 'bleeding' that comes from loss of revenues from its lucrative mining sector to other jurisdictions. A Global Financial Integrity report in 2014 estimated that Tanzania lost US\$8.9 billion (about Sh899 billion) in four decades through illegal financial transfers abroad.

- **Madagascar Court Orders President to Form New Government¹⁹**

Madagascar's Constitutional Court has instructed President Hery Rajaonarimampianina to appoint a new prime minister within seven days and ruled that he can remain leader of the Indian Ocean island nation until 60 days before the next election. The new prime minister will oversee the government until the inauguration of a new president. The country is scheduled to hold presidential and parliamentary elections later this year. Last month, 53 lawmakers asked the court to remove Rajaonarimampianina for failing to abide with the constitution.

- **Madagascar Ruling Party Says 'Open To' Talks to End Crisis²⁰**

Madagascar's ruling party said on Saturday it was "open to" holding negotiations with the opposition, the day after a court ordered a coalition government to be formed to end the island's political crisis. The country has been rocked by violent protests against President Hery Rajaonarimampianina over electoral laws that the opposition says bar their candidates from participating in elections expected this

¹⁸ Business Daily, 24 May 2018, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/news/ea/tanzania/TZ-drive-against-illicit-cash-transfers/4003154-4577952-15nhlyy/index.html>

¹⁹ Bloomberg, 26 May 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-26/madagascar-s-top-court-orders-president-to-form-new-government>

²⁰ News24, 26 May 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/madagascar-ruling-party-says-open-to-talks-to-end-crisis-20180526>

year. "The High Constitutional Court calls us to enter negotiations, so we are open to negotiations," HVM party lawmaker Philibert Milavonjy Andriasy told a crowd of more than 2,000 supporters at a stadium in the capital Antananarivo.

- **Kenya: 'Handshake' at Risk as Raila, Ruto Clash²¹**

NASA leader Raila Odinga's allies have launched a scathing attack on Deputy President William Ruto, branding him Kenya's enemy number one in a vicious escalation of hostilities since the famous March 9 handshake. On Sunday, Ruto fired the first salvo, indirectly referring to Raila as a "loser" who is plotting a referendum to create top executive political positions for his selfish interests. Ruto was responding to Raila's statement during a public lecture in London that NASA had won the 2017 presidential election. But speaking at a funds drive at St Francis Cheptarit Catholic Church in Nandi county, Ruto said the problem with Kenya is not the law, but "ambitious politicians with dictatorial tendencies who participate in elections but cannot accept the results". Yesterday, Raila's lieutenants came out guns blazing. They claimed the DP's grudge-bearing and vindictive character, bad record in office and his tolerance of graft were the biggest impediments to his State House ambitions. Five opposition MPs — Gladys Wanga (Homa Bay MP), Antony Oluoch (Mathare), Godfrey Osotsi (ANC, nominated), Florence Mutua (Busia Woman Representative) and Zuleikha Hassan (Kwale Woman Representative) — accused the DP of holding the government and the country hostage.

- **Kenya Issues 60 Day Ultimatum to Expatriates: 'Get Valid Permits or Be Deported'²²**

Expatriates working in Kenya have been given 60 days to regularise their status with the authorities as the government intensifies a crackdown on illegal foreign workers in the country. The interior minister, Fred Matiang'i said the government is determined to weed out undocumented foreigners because they are a security threat and deny the government tax revenue in addition to cheating Kenyans of job opportunities. Those who fail to do so within this period will be jailed," said Matiang'i. The government says it has records of only 34,000 work permits yet there are more than 100,000 foreigners in the country. "We want, for the first time, to come up with clean, new and searchable effective digital registers of those who have work permits in the county," Matiang'i added. The department of immigration services which began the exercise on Monday will be issuing foreign workers with electronic work permits in a bid to improve efficiency and reduce paperwork.

²¹ The Star, 22 May 2018, https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2018/05/22/handshake-at-risk-as-raila-ruto-clash_c1761708

²² Africa News, 22 May 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/05/22/kenya-issues-60-day-ultimatum-to-expatriates-get-valid-permits-or-be-deported/>

- **South Sudan’s Opposition Groups Pull Out of Addis Ababa Peace Talks²³**

The opposition groups in South Sudan’s civil war have rejected a draft compromise agreement and pulled out of peace talks. Government and opposition groups were in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa to find a solution to the ongoing conflict. This week, in the first part of the talks mediated by the Anglican Archbishop of South Sudan, the sides reached agreement on a cessation of hostilities; but in the second part of the talks, led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), collapsed when parties rejected a compromise plan put forward by IGAD.

- **China Building Pier at Djibouti Base²⁴**

China has begun to rapidly construct a pier at its military base in Djibouti, confirming earlier reports that it would build a dock at the facility. Satellite imagery shows construction began sometime after 30 April and extended more than 330 m into the sea by 20 May. It is being constructed by trucks that are moving material from a quarry south of the base and unloading it into the sea at the end of the pier. “The Chinese navy needs a large-scale pier to offer logistical support for its flotillas conducting anti-piracy operations in Somali waters,” the South China Morning Post quoted an unidentified source as saying in September 2017.

Central Asia

- **Tajik Clerics Accuse Iran Trying to Destabilize Country**

In a statement on 23 May, the Council of Ulema of the Islamic Center of Tajikistan accused Iran of trying to ‘destroy peace in Tajikistan’.²⁵ The statement also says Iran has been involved in the destabilization of situation in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

In recent years, relationship between the two countries has not been smooth. Tajikistan has declared Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) a terrorist organization. Tajikistan did not like the invitation by Iran to the exiled IRPT leader Kabiri to attend an international Islamic conference in 2015.

²³ ACNS, 24 May 2018, <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/05/south-sudans-opposition-groups-pull-out-of-addis-ababa-peace-talks.aspx>

²⁴ Janes 360, 23 May 2018, <http://www.janes.com/article/80271/china-building-pier-at-djibouti-base>

²⁵ The Times of Central Asia, “Tajik Muslim scholars accuse Iran of attempts to destabilize Tajikistan,” 24 May 2018, <https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/19781-tajik-muslim-scholars-accuse-iran-of-attempts-to-destabilize-tajikistan>

In 2017, national TV of Tajikistan aired a documentary showing confessions of three Tajiks allegedly involved in the assassinations of Tajik politicians, saying that Tehran had provided funding and training for their terror actions.²⁶

In a meeting with clerics on May 15, Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon accused the leadership of the IRPT of adoption of Shi'a Islam and desire to 'thrust' it on Tajikistan.²⁷

- **SCO Legal Experts Discuss Extremism, Terrorism in Pakistan Meet**

Legal experts from Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (SCO-RATS) member countries and representatives met on 23-25 May in Islamabad, Pakistan, to discuss ways to increase cooperation to deal extremism and terrorism. They discussed different proposals for increasing counter-terror cooperation as well as the organization matters.²⁸

- **TAPI Close to Secure Finance for Pipeline**

Reuters report that Mr. Muhammetmyrat Amanov, chief executive of TAPI Pipeline company, has said that the company plans to secure finance for the construction of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline in the 'next three-four months'. The estimated cost of the pipeline is about US\$8 billion. He said the talks are underway with several export credit agencies, including SACE of Italy, Hermes of France and Greek export credit insurer ECIO.²⁹

China

- **China, Tanzania pledge to enhance military cooperation**

Chinese State Councillor and Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe met with the visiting Chief of Defence Forces of the Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF) General Venance Mabeyo in Beijing on May 23, 2018. Wei said that China will

²⁶ Ahmad Majidyar, "Tajikistan's top clerical body says Iran is fueling extremism in Central Asian country," 25 May 2018, <http://www.mei.edu/content/io/tajikistans-top-clerical-body-says-iran-fueling-extremism-central-asian-country>

²⁷ The Times of Central Asia, "Tajik Muslim scholars accuse Iran of attempts to destabilize Tajikistan," 24 May 2018, <https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/19781-tajik-muslim-scholars-accuse-iran-of-attempts-to-destabilize-tajikistan>

²⁸ The Times of India, "SCO legal experts meet in Pakistan to discuss extremism, terrorism," 25 May 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/sco-legal-experts-meet-in-pakistan-to-discuss-extremism-terrorism/articleshow/64321659.cms>

²⁹ Reporting by Marat Gurt Writing by Olzhas Auyezov; Editing by Susan Fenton, "Turkmenistan says close to securing TAPI pipeline financing," 24 May 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/turkmenistan-pipeline-loans/turkmenistan-says-close-to-securing-tapi-pipeline-financing-idUSL5N1SU6FS>

promote the building of a community of shared future for mankind and construction of the Belt and Road Initiative. Wei also expressed China's willingness to make joint efforts with Tanzania to further develop the pragmatic cooperation between the two militaries. Mabeyo thanked China for long-term support and assistance to Tanzania and its military. He also expressed willingness to actively participate in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative and work together with China for enhancing the bilateral relations including military cooperation.³⁰

- **Chinese FM criticizes disinvitation from U.S. military drill**

On May 23, 2018, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi condemned the US for excluding China from the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) multinational naval exercises to be held in June this year. China called the decision "imprudent and unconstructive." The development was preceded by the landing of China's H-6K bomber on the Woody Island in the Paracel Islands. The US invited China to participate in the naval exercises in 2014 and 2016 during the Obama Administration.³¹

- **China, Germany seek stronger cooperation as Merkel visits**

China and Germany agreed in Beijing on May 24, 2018, to step up win-win cooperation in emerging industries during German Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit to China. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed giving full play to the role of bilateral institutional dialogues in various areas, make good arrangement for the new round of inter-governmental consultation and enhance exchanges in such areas as finance, trade, investment and security. In addition to fair and open environment for Chinese investment in Germany, Li called for stronger cooperation in digitisation and innovation, artificial intelligence, new energy vehicle, vehicle networking and autopilot.³²

- **South Sudan welcomes China's peace mediator role: ambassador**

On May 27, 2018, speaking to Xinhua in Addis Ababa, South Sudan Ambassador to Ethiopia and the African Union (AU) James Morgan welcomed China's role as a mediator in peace talks to end the civil war. China has sent several groups of peacekeeping troops and police to South Sudan under the UN mandate. The Chinese peacekeepers have been engaged in protecting refugee camps, repairing infrastructures and facilitating local peace initiatives.³³

³⁰ "China, Tanzania pledge to enhance military cooperation", *China Military Online*, May 24, 2018, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-05/24/content_8041205.htm, Accessed on May 28, 2018.

³¹ "Chinese FM criticizes disinvitation from U.S. military drill", *The People's Daily*, May 24, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0524/c90000-9463712.html>, Accessed on May 28, 2018.

³² "China, Germany seek stronger cooperation as Merkel visits", *The China Daily*, May 25, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201805/25/WS5b075faba31001b82571c350.html>, Accessed on May 28, 2018.

³³ "South Sudan welcomes China's peace mediator role: ambassador", May 28, 2018, <http://www.focac.org/eng/zxxx/t1562942.htm>, Accessed on May 28, 2018.

European Union

- **Polish Defence Minister Advocates for More Efficient NATO Command**

In his address to the four-day Spring Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Błaszczak said that more efficient command structures within NATO are key for boosting the its capacity for deterrence and defence. He hoped that Brussels NATO summit would contribute to greater deterrence and defence capabilities. He argued that NATO needs “more combat forces with a higher degree of readiness, which should be closely affiliated to commands.”³⁴

- **France to Host Libya Summit**

Reportedly, France is to host a U.N.-sponsored conference on Libya. The objectives of the conference will be elections in the country and commitments to a joint political roadmap. President Macron hosted a meeting of the rival leaders in July 2017.³⁵

- **French President Macron’s Visit to Russia**

French President paid a two-day official visit to Russia on 24-25 May 2018. He attended the St Petersburg International Economic Forum as a guest of honour. President Putin and President Macron discussed issues of global and regional importance such as Iran nuclear deal, Syria and Ukraine, and the bilateral relations between the two countries.³⁶ President Macron said, “We are countries that have a special status of a United Nations Security Council permanent member, we also have deep historical ties, as well as ties in the international policy area.” He added, “I believe that we can find solutions and work together on all the issues, be it Ukraine, the Middle East, Iran or Syria.”³⁷

- **Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte’s Visit to India**

The Prime Minister of The Netherlands, Mark Rutte paid a two-day official visit to India on 24-25 May 2018. Prime Minister Rutte and Prime Modi discussed on a

³⁴ More efficient NATO command needed: Polish defence minister, Radio Poland, May 27, 2018, <http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/365457,More-efficient-NATO-command-needed-defence-minister>

³⁵ France’s Macron to host Libya summit pushing for elections, The Washington Post By Associated Press

May 27, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/frances-macron-to-host-libya-summit-pushing-for-elections/2018/05/27/b18603c4-61dc-11e8-81ca-bb14593acaa6_story.html?utm_term=.6e27c7a561b6

³⁶ The Kremlin, Joint news conference with President of France Emmanuel Macron, May 24, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57545>

³⁷ Putin, Macron hold 'open and useful' talks in St. Petersburg, TASS, May 25, 2018, <http://tass.com/politics/1006242>

wide variety of regional and international issues. They agreed to enhance bilateral relations between India and the Netherlands. India and the Netherlands discussed to enhance cooperation in areas of agriculture, water, digital technologies, etc.³⁸ They announced MoUs/Agreements and Initiatives across multiple sectors such as government to government, knowledge institutions, water, agrifood and horticulture, hi-tech/IT/space, life sciences & health, smart cities, business and sustainability.³⁹

- **EU pessimistic on permanent US trade exemption**

The EU's trade commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom on Tuesday (22 May) sounded pessimistic about whether the EU's offer to avoid a trade war with the US would be successful. Speaking after briefing EU economy and trade ministers in a closed meeting on the latest developments, she told reporters the bloc's offers are probably not enough for the Washington administration that pursues an "America first" policy to avoid new tariffs on steel and aluminium by 1 June. US president Donald Trump has threatened new tariffs on EU steel and aluminium unless the EU accepts rebalancing its trade with the US. The EU has been exempted twice from the tariffs during the spring to allow for talks. The EU has said it is willing to discuss a limited trade deal with the US but only after it receives a permanent exemption from the tariffs, which it deems unlawful under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.⁴⁰

- **Finance ministers clear way for eurozone reform**

EU finance ministers cleared the way on Friday (25 May) for their leaders to move forward on the deepening of the eurozone. At a meeting in Brussels, and after late-night discussions to convince the most reluctant countries - like the Netherlands - they agreed on a package to reduce risks in the banking system. Under the new rules, which now need to be agreed with the European Parliament, eurozone banks will apply international standards on prudential requirements and a common EU process for recovery and resolution in case of crisis. The package of various technical measures is referred to as a risk-reduction plan - as opposed to risk-sharing, which is the part of a eurozone reform that would strengthen common instruments to help countries in case of crisis. The need, under pressure from countries led by Germany, to first increase the eurozone's risk-reduction capacities

³⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, India-Netherlands Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister of Netherlands to India, May 24, 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29917/IndiaNetherlands_Joint_Statement_during_visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_Netherlands_to_India_May_24_2018

³⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, List of MOUs / Agreements / Initiatives launched during the visit of the Prime Minister of Netherlands to India, May 24, 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29918/List_of_MOUs__Agreements__Initiatives_launched_during_the_visit_of_the_Prime_Minister_of_Netherlands_to_India

⁴⁰ EUobserver, 22 May 2018, <https://euobserver.com/economic/141877>

has been the main obstacle so far to reform plans, in particular those pushed by French president Emmanuel Macron.⁴¹

- **GDPR: EU's new data protection rules come into effect**

The European Union's new data protection laws came into effect on Friday (25 May), with Brussels saying the changes will protect consumers from being like "people naked in an aquarium". The EU's so-called General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been blamed for a flood of spam emails and messages in recent weeks as firms rush to request the explicit consent of users to contact them. Even though the rules were officially adopted two years ago, with a grace period until now to adapt to them, companies have been slow to act, resulting in a last-minute scramble this week. Brussels insists that the laws will become a global benchmark for the protection of people's online information, particularly in the wake of the Facebook data harvesting scandal. Companies can be fined up to €20 million (\$24 million) or 4% of annual global turnover for breaching the strict new data rules for the EU, a market of 500 million people.⁴²

Italy

- **New elections loom in Italy amid calls for Mattarella to be impeached**

A standoff over Italy's future in the eurozone has forced the resignation of the populist prime minister-in waiting, Giuseppe Conte, after the country's president refused to accept Conte's controversial choice for finance minister. Sergio Mattarella, the Italian president who was installed by a previous pro-EU government, refused to accept the nomination for finance minister of Paolo Savona, an 81-year-old former industry minister who has called Italy's entry into the euro a "historic mistake". "I have given up my mandate to form the government of change," Conte told reporters after leaving failed talks with Mattarella. Italy has been without a government since elections on 4 March ended in a hung parliament. The country is now expected to go to the polls again in the autumn. The leaders of MS5 and Lega, Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini, denounced the veto, decrying what they called meddling by Germany, ratings agencies and financial lobbies. Di Maio also called for Mattarella to be impeached.⁴³

⁴¹ EUobserver, 25 May 2018, <https://euobserver.com/economic/141907>

⁴² Euractiv, 25 May 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/data-protection/news/gdpr-eus-new-data-protection-rules-come-into-effect/>

⁴³ The Guardian, 27 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/27/italys-pm-designate-giuseppe-conte-fails-to-form-populist-government>

East Asia /South-East Asia

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines)

- **Philippines raises concern over Chinese bombers recent training exercise in the SCS**

After China's H-6K had landed and taken off from the islands and reefs in the South China Sea as part of training exercises, it drew angry reactions from opposition lawmakers in Manila. The United States also sent ships to the disputed areas. On May 21, the Department of Foreign Affairs in the Philippines stated that it was monitoring developments and would undertake "appropriate diplomatic action" to assert its claims in the South China Sea. The statement from the foreign ministry also reiterated the government's commitment to protect every single inch of Philippines territory and areas in which it has sovereign rights. However, the foreign ministry stopped short of condemning China's action, which Washington said could raise tensions and destabilise the region. President Duterte has said he would not risk a confrontation with China and has reiterated his openness to undertaking joint exploration and development in waters believed to be rich in oil and natural gas.⁴⁴ Mr Duterte has made it a cornerstone of his foreign policy to cultivate friendship with Beijing, but Philippine lawmakers have criticised him for not confronting China. Mr Harry Roque, a spokesman for President Rodrigo Duterte, told reporters on May 21, that the Philippines would raise "recent developments" in the South China Sea during bilateral talks with China in August.⁴⁵

- **PM Hun Sen, nominating military officials for the July National Assembly Elections**

The Prime Minister Hun Sen-led Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is planning to bring influential senior military officials into the Kingdom's legislature by nominating them as candidates for the July 29, National Assembly elections. Sok Eysan, CPP spokesperson, said the nominations of senior military officials and police officers have been made to best serve the country and people. This act undertaken by the CPP is seen by analyst as a scheme to expand the ruling party's power in the National Assembly. According to Political analyst Meas Nee, there are two reasons for this. First, it is part of the strategy to replace these elders or old-aged generals with those who might be sympathetic to Hun Manet [the eldest son of Hun Sen and lieutenant general in RCAF] in the army ranks. Second, to have

⁴⁴ "Philippines takes 'diplomatic action' after China lands bombers on South China Sea isles", *The Straits Times*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-takes-diplomatic-action-after-china-lands-bombers-on-schina-sea-isles>, accessed on May 21, 2018.

⁴⁵ "Manila voices concern over Chinese bombers on islands", *The Straits Times*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/manila-voices-concern-over-chinese-bombers-on-islands>, accessed on May 22, 2018.

more army generals in the parliament would expand the structure of militarism into the National Assembly and, in such a case; the army will have some power over parliamentarians. Mr Nee also points out that in recent years there has been an increase in the number of army generals holding positions as provincial.⁴⁶

- **Indonesian Foreign Minister at the UNSC emphasis the role of ASEAN in building peace in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific**

Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno L.P. Marsudi, in her statement at the UN Security Council Open Debate, which was themed "Upholding international law within the context of the maintenance of international peace and security", at United Nations Headquarters, New York, on May 17, emphasized the need for the UN Security Council to carry out its mandate in realizing international peace and security by being part of the solution and not part of the problem itself. The Foreign Minister also conveyed the importance of arrangement and architecture of the region as a building block for the achievement of global peace and stability. In this regard, she exemplified regional organisations such as ASEAN, which has had contributed a lot in creating ecosystems of peace and stability in Southeast Asia, by prioritizing peaceful settlement of disputes, the habit of dialogue, and win-win solutions. "ASEAN will continue to be at the forefront of realizing peace not only in Southeast Asia but also in the Indo-Pacific region," Retno said. In the meeting, the Foreign Minister also mentioned the incident of terrorist attacks in Surabaya. She stressed that Indonesia is not afraid of terrorism and will not make room for extremism and terrorism. She also invited all UN members to unite in developing a comprehensive global approach in combating terrorism and extremism.⁴⁷

- **Three Indian Naval Ships docks at Da Nang, Vietnam**

Three vessels from the Indian Navy arrived in the central Vietnamese city of Da Nang to commence their friendly visit from May 21 to 25. The three naval ships were led by Rear Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, flag officer commanding the Eastern Fleet. The fleet which docked at Tien sa Port on May 21, included frigate Sahyadri, fleet tanker Shakti, and anti-submarine stealth corvette Kamorta, along with 900 crew members. According to the Da Nang Department of Foreign Affairs, the visit is aimed at enhancing cooperation between the two countries' naval forces, thus contributing to the maintenance of security and stability in Southeast Asia and the world.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ben Sokhean, "Ruling CPP fields candidates from armed forces, police for elections", *The Phnom Penh Post*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/ruling-cpp-fields-candidates-armed-forces-police-elections>, accessed on May 22, 2018.

⁴⁷ "At the UNSC, Indonesia Affirms the Importance of International Law Enforcement to Maintain International Peace and Security", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/At-the-UNSC,-Indonesia-Affirms-the-Importance-of-International-Law-Enforcement-to-Maintain-International-Peace-and-Security.aspx>, accessed on may 22, 2018.

⁴⁸ Duy Khang, "Three Indian naval ships begin friendly visit to Da Nang", *Tuoi Tre News*, May 22, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180522/three-indian-naval-ships-begin-friendly-visit-to-da-nang/45715.html>, accessed on May 23, 2018.

- **Indonesia's Parliament passes a tougher anti-terrorism law which includes Military in counter terrorism operations**

Indonesia's Parliament on May 25th unanimously approved a tougher anti-terrorism law, after President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo threatened to impose the changes by special decree if Parliament didn't rapidly approve them. This was in the aftermath of the suicide bombings of May 13-14 in Indonesia's second-largest city, Surabaya, that were carried out by radicalised families, who involved their children, as young as seven, in the attacks. The new anti-terror law definition of terrorist acts and threats were expanded to include motives of ideology, politics and security disruption. Some lawmakers said that would prevent the law from being abused. Further, the new law would increase the detention periods as well as involve the military in counter-terrorism operations. Since Indonesia became a democracy in 1998, the role of the military, which enjoyed sweeping powers, was reduced to national defence. The new anti-terror law however increases the scope for the military to become involved in counter-terrorism operations. This according to some activist group is contentious because it backtracks on two decades of keeping soldiers out of areas under civilian authority. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee Muhammad Syafi'i reviewed the new law, and said inclusion of the military aimed to beef up police capabilities in cracking down on extremism and radical networks in Indonesia.⁴⁹

North America

- **Canada PM raps possible U.S. auto tariffs, says linked to NAFTA**

A move by the United States to explore tariffs on auto imports is based on flimsy logic and is part of the pressure from Washington to renegotiate the NAFTA trade pact, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said. In an interview with Reuters, Trudeau said that while U.S. President Donald Trump had raised the idea of punitive measures, there was no guarantee they will happen. Trudeau also predicted talk of tariffs would likely disappear if slow-moving negotiations to update the North American Free Trade Agreement - currently stuck on autos issues - are successful. The Trump administration said on Wednesday it had launched a national security investigation into car and truck imports that could lead to new tariffs similar to those imposed on imported steel and aluminum recently. Canada rejects any idea it could be a threat to the United States. Imposing tariffs could cause chaos for a Canadian auto industry that is heavily

⁴⁹"Indonesia passes new terror law after attacks using children", *Borneo Bulletin*, May 26, 2018, <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/indonesia-passes-new-terror-law-after-attacks-using-children/>, accessed on May 28, 2018.

integrated into the North American economy. Canada is home to major plants operated by General Motors, Ford, Fiat Chrysler, Honda and Toyota.⁵⁰

- **Two masked men sought in restaurant explosion; 15 victims out of hospital**

Fifteen people injured in an explosion inside an Indian restaurant in Mississauga, Ont. have been released from hospital as police continue to search for two masked men who fled the scene. Police have not made any arrests in connection with the blast at Bombay Bhel restaurant late on Thursday. Three people suffered critical injuries in the blast, and 12 others sustained smaller shrapnel injuries. Both the mayor of Mississauga and the city's chief of police say the investigation is in its infancy, and they have no reason to believe the attack was a hate crime or an act of terrorism.⁵¹

- **Canada Blocks Chinese Takeover on Security Concerns**

Canada has blocked a \$1 billion takeover of a construction company by a state-controlled Chinese company over national security concerns, a rare move by a government that until now has largely welcomed such deals despite growing skepticism over Chinese money elsewhere. The government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said late on Wednesday that it stopped the deal for the Aecon Group, a construction company that helped to build the landmark CN Tower in Toronto, following a review that began earlier this year. The deal became politically charged after members of Canada's opposition party raised concerns about Aecon's access to government contracts — particularly in the nuclear power industry — and the Chinese company's ties to the Chinese state. A spokeswoman for Aecon said the company was "aware of the government's decision and will be issuing a response in due course." Chinese companies are increasingly facing hurdles as they go overseas to spread their wealth and acquire technology. Governments from Germany to the United States and Canada are pushing back, often citing national security concerns.⁵²

The United States

- **U.S. team in North Korea for talks on summit, Trump says**

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday a U.S. team had arrived in North Korea to prepare for a proposed summit between him and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, which Trump pulled out of last week before reconsidering. Earlier, the U.S.

⁵⁰ Andrea Hopkins, David Ljunggren, "Canada PM raps possible U.S. auto tariffs, says linked to NAFTA," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-canada-politics-trudeau-exclusive/exclusive-canada-pm-raps-possible-us-auto-tariffs-says-linked-to-nafta-idUSKCN1IP2ZM>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁵¹ ---, "Two masked men sought in restaurant explosion; 15 victims out of hospital," <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/two-masked-men-sought-in-restaurant-explosion-15-victims-out-of-hospital-1.3944681>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁵² Alexandra Stevenson, "Canada Blocks Chinese Takeover on Security Concerns," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/23/business/canada-china-aecon-block.html>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

State Department said U.S. and North Korean officials had met at Panmunjom, a village in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that runs along the heavily armed border between North and South Korea. In addition to those talks, White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said a “pre-advance team” left for Singapore - where the summit has been expected to take place - on Sunday morning to work on logistics. Earlier, South Korean President Moon Jae-in said he and North Korea’s Kim had agreed during a surprise meeting on Saturday that the North Korea-U.S. summit must be held. The weekend talks were the latest twist in a week of diplomatic ups and downs over the prospects for an unprecedented U.S.-North Korea summit, and the strongest sign yet that the two Koreas’ leaders are trying to keep the meeting on track.⁵³

- **White House says Rosenstein agrees to Trump 'demand' DOJ investigate whether campaign 'infiltrated'**

President Donald Trump met Monday at the White House with Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and FBI Director Christopher Wray a day after he tweeted that he would “demand” the Justice Department investigate whether his 2016 presidential campaign was improperly “infiltrated or surveilled” for political purposes by an alleged FBI informant. White House press secretary Sarah Sanders issued a statement indicating that while Trump may not have gone as far as he could have – agreeing to fold his demand into an existing probe – Rosenstein and the others had acceded at least in part to Trump’s order, something some critics were calling inappropriate interference. It was noteworthy that while congressional leaders were going to be allowed to review the secret information, the White House was still not calling for the pertinent documents to be surrendered to Congress as some Republicans have demanded.⁵⁴

- **US House passes \$717 billion defence budget for fiscal 2019**

The US House of Representatives has passed a whopping USD 717 billion annual defence spending bill for the fiscal 2019, which among other things seeks to bolster defence ties with India and greater American commitment in the strategic Indo-Pacific region in view of the challenges being posed by China. The National Defence Authorisation Bill or NDAA-2019, was passed by the House of Representatives by 351-66 votes. It now needs to be passed by the Senate, before it can be sent to the White House for the President Donald Trump to sign it into law. “In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States faces a near-term, belligerent threat armed with nuclear weapons and also a longer-term strategic competitor,” said Congressman Mac Thornberry, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. “In fact, four of the five key security challenges – China, Russia, North

⁵³ Hyonhee Shin, Lesley Wroughton, “U.S. team in North Korea for talks on summit, Trump says,” <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-northkorea-missiles/u-s-officials-in-north-korea-to-prepare-for-u-s-summit-report-idUKKCN11R06X>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁵⁴ Jordyn Phelps, Jonathan Karl and Katherine Faulders, “White House says Rosenstein agrees to Trump 'demand' DOJ investigate whether campaign 'infiltrated',” <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-trump-orders-doj-campaign-infiltrated/story?id=55309163>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

Korea, and terrorism – reside in the PACOM area of responsibility. Critical to meeting all of the challenges in the region is our relationship with our allies and also with countries with whom we share interests,” he said. The USD 717 billion bill seeks renaming US Pacific Command as Indo-Pacific Command. It seeks a better defence relationship with India. The NDAA bolsters the Department of Defence’s efforts to plan for and provide the necessary forces, military infrastructure, logistics capabilities, and bilateral and multilateral training in the region through the Indo-Pacific Stability Initiative.⁵⁵

- **"India's Status As Major US Defence Partner" Affirmed At Argentina Meet**

India's Minister of State for External Affairs V.K. Singh and US Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan discussed the strategic partnership between the two countries at their meeting in Buenos Aires. State Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert said: "The two leaders affirmed the strong US-India strategic partnership and India's status as a major defence partner of the US." Meeting on the sidelines of the G20 ministerial meeting in the Argentine capital, they also discussed the agenda for the forthcoming 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, that will bring together India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary James Mattis, she said. The dialogue of the cabinet officials for foreign affairs and defence from both countries. was to have taken place in Washington last, but was postponed after President Donald Trump forced the resignation of Rex Tillerson as secretary of state in March. No new dates have been set for the meeting.⁵⁶

Mexico

- **Mexico’s young voters are shaping the presidential campaign**

Six years ago, a crowd of outraged Mexican students protested a campaign appearance by Enrique Peña Nieto at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. The movement failed to materialize as a coherent political alternative, and most of the members have embraced different paths: activism, organizing, journalism and independent political ventures. Nonetheless, something that was just developing then is now fully matured: a steadfast opposition against the PRI, the authoritarian party that uninterruptedly ruled the country for 71 years, from 1929 to 2000. According to analysis by Javier Márquez, one of the statisticians behind the Oraculus website, which aggregates 21 polls from 10 polling firms, a majority of young voters support the current leading candidate, Andrés Manuel

⁵⁵ PTI, “US House passes \$717 billion defence budget for fiscal 2019,” <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/us-house-passes-717-billion-defence-budget-for-fiscal-2019/1180888/>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁵⁶ NDTV, “"India's Status As Major US Defence Partner" Affirmed At Argentina Meet,” <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indias-status-as-major-us-defence-partner-affirmed-at-argentina-meet-1855533>, Accessed on 28 May 2018

López Obrador. However, it is among this base that the 39-year-old runner-up, Ricardo Anaya, finds a lot of support as well. López Obrador and Anaya stand on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum yet find in the young their most enthusiastic backers. Millennial voters show the lowest support for José Antonio Meade, the PRI's candidate. The narrative of this year's election in Mexico is, to a certain extent, not a class struggle but one between generations. The demographic clash is particularly relevant because the traditional differences between left and right are hazy and convoluted in Mexico.⁵⁷

- **Mexico minister: 40 percent chance of NAFTA deal before July election**

There is about a 40-percent chance of concluding the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) before Mexico's presidential election on July 1, Mexican Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo said. The United States, Mexico and Canada have been bogged down in trade negotiations for the past nine months, with progress held up by U.S. demands to impose tougher minimum content requirements for autos built in the region.⁵⁸

- **Mexican election casts shadow over oil contracts**

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a leftist nationalist who has threatened to overturn the reforms so that oil never "falls back into the hands of foreigners", cruising to victory at Mexico's July 1 presidential election. Ostensibly at risk if Mr López Obrador, or Amlo as he is known, wins, is the over \$4bn investment already made by oil majors such as BP, ExxonMobil and Total; the \$200bn of investment that could follow; and tens of billions of dollars worth of US-Mexican energy flows. Adding to investor uncertainty is the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and conflicting signals from Mr López Obrador's closest advisers. The multiple uncertainties have frayed the nerves of Mexican and US businesses, and worried the White House. So far, international oil companies are keeping calm, largely thanks to apparently water-tight contracts governed by Mexico's constitutionally-independent National Hydrocarbons Commission, or CNH.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Arturo Rocha, "Mexico's young voters are shaping the presidential campaign," https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/05/22/mexicos-young-voters-are-shaping-the-presidential-campaign/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9370b7c317f7, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁵⁸ Dave Graham, "Mexico minister: 40 percent chance of NAFTA deal before July election," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-nafta/mexico-minister-40-percent-chance-of-nafta-deal-before-july-election-idUSKCN1IQ1RQ>, Accessed on 28 May 2018

⁵⁹ John Paul Rathbone and Jude Webber, "Mexican election casts shadow over oil contracts," <https://www.ft.com/content/16aeb5aa-5ece-11e8-ad91-e01af256df68>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Argentina

- **How Mauricio Macri Ended Argentina's Currency Crisis**

Having endured his most difficult two weeks in office, President Mauricio Macri ended the week relieved after his economic team managed to take control of an ominous currency crisis that reminded many of the 2001-2 economic meltdown. It didn't come easy for the Cambiemos (Let's Change) coalition, with the Central Bank forced to put a big number of precious foreign reserves into play, while fractures emerged among government allies and general opinion polls showed continued dissatisfaction. The President did acknowledge that their economic targets were "too ambitious" and that coordination between his economic team and the Central Bank had been "clearly" problematic. "We are all working together know, we've improved," he added. The government's economic team clearly has the support of IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde who presented Argentina's request for an "exceptional access Stand-By Arrangement" to the Fund's board, noting, "this will be Argentina's economic programme, one that has the full ownership of President Macri and his government."⁶⁰

Brazil

- **Brazil cuts diesel prices as truckers' strike cripples nation**

Brazil's President Michel Temer late on Sunday announced measures to try to end a week-long truckers' strike that has paralysed Latin America's largest economy and threatened to undermine his government. The measures, which included a cut in the price of diesel, came as the economic cost of the strike mounted — petrol was unavailable across much of the country and poultry producers were forced to cull 64m birds for lack of chicken feed. The strike started a week ago and has gathered momentum after fuel costs in Brazil soared, hit by a perfect storm of rising international oil prices and a sharp depreciation in the real. In spite of calling in the army on Friday to guarantee deliveries for essential services, such as petrol for airports and security forces, Mr Temer has been unable to end the strike. On Sunday, strikers were showing little sign of giving in, challenging the president's authority.

The drivers, many of whom own their own vehicles, have organised themselves through WhatsApp groups and social media and are fiercely opposed to a

⁶⁰ Agustino Fontevecchia, "How Mauricio Macri Ended Argentina's Currency Crisis," <https://www.forbes.com/sites/afontevecchia/2018/05/25/how-mauricio-macri-ended-argentinas-currency-crisis/#43fd7f055daa>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

government they see as corrupt and rapacious. Many of them are calling for a military “intervention” or coup to take over the government.⁶¹

Colombia

- **Colombia’s 2nd election round between leftist and conservative**

Colombia’s left and right will compete for the presidency in June after hard-line conservative Ivan Duque and ex-guerrilla Gustavo Petro scooped most of the votes in the first round of elections. Another vote will take place on June 17 which could see the country’s already fragile peace deal with the FARC shaken. Leftist Petro is a fan of the agreement which saw the country’s biggest rebel group put down their weapons to form a political party. Protege of popular ex-president Alvaro Uribe, Duque, wants to amend the deal. The first round of presidential elections since the 2016 peace agreement saw over 19 million Colombians hit the ballot box – the highest turnout in 20 years. The decider on June 17 will determine who is to deal with a country which, despite improving its security in the past decade, has faced troubles with armed groups filling a vacuum left by the FARC, unprecedented cocaine production and corruption. Huge amounts of Venezuelan migrants flooding over the border to escape a worsening economic crisis and a struggling economy are also pressing problems for the next administration.⁶²

Jamaica

- **Jamaica to host CARICOM immigration meeting May 29-31**

Jamaica will host the CARICOM Joint Standing Committees of Chiefs of Immigration and Comptrollers of Customs (CICC) meeting from May 29 to 31, at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel, Kingston. The 19th staging of the CICC conference will bring regional border security officials together to review the immigration processes, determine the current status of regional security structures and assess the need for modification in view of new and emerging trends. The meeting will also address security challenges being faced by CARICOM member states that are contributing to the rising levels of criminal activities, such as the illegal drug trade,

⁶¹ Financial Times, “Brazil cuts diesel prices as truckers’ strike cripples nation,” <https://www.ft.com/content/3c732756-6222-11e8-a39d-4df188287fff>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁶² Mathew Di Salvo, “Colombia’s 2nd election round between leftist and conservative,” <https://colombiareports.com/colombias-2nd-election-round-between-leftist-and-conservative/>, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

trafficking in firearms, human trafficking and smuggling, gang warfare, the deportation of criminals, unemployment and corruption.⁶³

Russia

- **Russia and India**

Ahead of PM's "informal summit" with Russian President Putin, a key discussion between the countries seemed to be getting tougher. Over the weekend, Putin's special envoy Zamir Kabulov was quoted as saying that the West (read the US) should make a deal with the Taliban directly or continue with a "grinding and bloody war for years to come". Russia, particularly Kabulov, has opened visible channels of communication with the Taliban, ostensibly with the aim of checking the growth of Daesh in the troubled country, particularly to stop it from threatening Russia. Kabulov told Bloomberg that US' refusal to talk to the Taliban is "why we are at a dead-end". Kabulov was also quoted as saying, "We realise that Pakistan and Iran, not Russia or the US, are the two key players in the Afghan settlement," he said. "We are trying to develop a dialogue with Pakistan and jointly search for solutions."⁶⁴

- **Russia and St. Petersburg International Economic Forum**

During his welcome speech at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin on 25 May said that "Such a discussion, informal dialogue is especially important today, when the system of international political, economic and trade relations is undergoing a serious test of durability. Conditions for doing business, the share of investments, and everyday life are changing dynamically". He said that "Until recently the core of the world economy was based on two most important principles. Firstly, it was on the freedom of entrepreneurship, trade and investment - an integral part of the rules in international relations. Secondly, it was sustainability and predictability of these rules, secured by legal mechanism. However, today we are witnessing not just erosion, but the demolition of these grounds. This system is breaking down. Today's rule is to violate rules. One thing is clear: violations have become an official tool for many countries, and many countries are forced to take mirror measures and adapt themselves. Today, it is impossible to agree even on symbolic steps in the world economy. The era of global "free trade" is coming to an end. Today, it goes about a new version of protectionism. Protectionist measures and trade restrictions are taken under the guise of national security references. The

⁶³ ----, "Jamaica to host CARICOM immigration meeting May 29-31," http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/Jamaica_to_host_CARICOM_immigration_meeting_May_29-31, Accessed on 28 May 2018.

⁶⁴Indrani Bagchi, "Vladimir Putin's envoy pushes talks with Taliban", *Economic Times*, May 22, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/vladimir-putins-envoy-pushes-talks-with-taliban/articleshow/64267868.cms> Accessed on May 28, 2018.

twisted spiral of sanctions and restrictions continues spiralling further, affecting an increasing number of countries and companies, including those that were certain that the regime of trade restrictions will never affect them. Such a system of global mistrust may take the world market to a state of subsistence economy. Rules should be uniform and transparent and legitimate for all players of the world market. We do not need trade wars today, we need full-fledged trade peace." It is important to maintain respect for each other: Russia stands for freedom of trade and world integration, for free dialogue on the way to development.⁶⁵

- **Russia and International Politics**

President Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov in an interview said that the real international blockade of Russia is impossible, and "it has never existed." "The total international blockade of Russia has never existed, because the Russian Federation is a system-forming state in international relations," Peskov said. According to him, economic interests sooner or later begin to prevail over politics. Peskov stated that, despite the imposed sanctions, Russia continues to develop, and business people from the countries that advocate those sanctions are far from being delighted with such decisions, because they affect their interests. Foreign countries do want to cooperate with Russia, and this is evidenced by the fact that many foreign countries, including, for example, France, show interest in St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF).⁶⁶

- **Russia and UK**

The report titled "Moscow's gold: Russian corruption in the UK" drafted by the Committee on International Affairs of the House of Commons said that business conditions in the UK remain favourable for Russia, despite London's tough stance on Moscow. According to British MPs, President Putin and his allies continue hiding their corrupt revenues in London. Gazprom managed to place its bonds worth 750 million euros on the London Stock Exchange despite sanctions. Oleg Deripaska's En+ placed shares worth a billion pounds in November 2017. The operations were legal, but they were conducted with the help of loopholes in the legislation, the report said. According to the document, Russian "dirty money" would be invested in elite real estate in London, as well as luxury goods and shares. Transparency International said that there was 4.4 billion pounds of "dirty Russian money" invested in the British real estate market. London-based NGO Global Witness said that Russian citizens keep \$47 billion at British offshore banks.⁶⁷

⁶⁵“World Leaders Unite with Russia at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum”, *Pravda*, May 25, 2018. <http://www.pravdareport.com/russia/economics/25-05-2018/141008-spief-0/> Accessed on May 28, 2018.

⁶⁶“Putin’s Spokesman: Total Blockade of Russia Impossible”, *Pravda*, May 24, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/kremlin/24-05-2018/140997-russia_blockade-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on May 28, 2018.

⁶⁷“UK Cracks Down on ‘Dirty Russian Money’”, *Pravda*, May 21, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/world/europe/21-05-2018/140979-dirty_russian_money-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on May 28, 2018.

- **Russia and US**

President Putin's official spokesman Dmitry Peskov commented on remarks in the US media about failures in launching [nuclear-capable missiles in Russia](#). He advised journalists should give more trust to what President Putin says CNBC reported that according to US intelligence, the tests of a Russian nuclear-capable cruise missile failed during its test in late 2017 and in early 2018. US journalists assumed that all the launches ended with a failure. It was reported that the longest of those tests lasted for over two minutes, when a missile flew for over 35 kilometres before coming out of control.⁶⁸

On 21 May Russia notified the Council of the World Trade Organisation about its readiness to take equivalent measures against the US in response to the introduction of import duties on aluminium and steel. It goes about the imposition of tariffs on US goods worth \$538 million. Under WTO rules, the countries that introduce protective measures should agree on compensating their effect through trade compensations. As a rule, compensations can be made in the form of trade concessions or concessions on other groups of goods. Since the US has not conducted negotiations with Russia through the WTO, Moscow announces single-handed protective measures. Russia thus intends to initiate special protective measures and may increase duties on American goods by \$537.6 million. This is the amount that the US will gain from duties on Russian steel and aluminium. All exports of Russian goods made of steel and aluminium in the US are estimated at \$3.158 billion. US' introduction of 25 percent tariffs on steel imports and 10 percent duties on aluminium imports will cut Russian exports by \$537.6 million.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has urged the Congress to provide the necessary waiver so that its sanctions on Russia under CAATSA do not impact countries for which it is not intended for.⁷⁰

- **SCO and Judiciary System**

A three-member Supreme Court judges' delegation led by Justice Arjan Kumar Sikri on 25 May exchanged views with their counterparts in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) here to deepen judicial cooperation on a host of issues including counter terrorism and drug trafficking. The judges exchanged views on ways to further deepen judicial cooperation among the SCO member states especially in the fields of digitisation of judicial activities, establishment of 'smart courts', assistance in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking, money

⁶⁸“Kremlin on Failed Nuclear Tests: ‘Listen to President Putin and Believe him’”, *Pravda*, May 21, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/kremlin/22-05-2018/140983-nuclear_missile_test-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on May 28, 2018.

⁶⁹“Russia Threatens to Raise Tariffs on US Goods worth \$538 million”, *Pravda*, May 22, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/economics/22-05-2018/140986-usa_steel_aluminium-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on May 28, 2018.

⁷⁰“Mike Pompeo pushes for CAATSA waiver so that countries like India aren't affected”, *Economic Times*, May 25, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/mike-pompeo-pushes-for-caatsa-waiver-so-that-countries-like-india-arent-affected/articleshow/64317426.cms> Accessed on May 28, 2018.

laundering as well as sharing of experience in jurisprudence on elimination of illegally obtained evidences in criminal proceedings.⁷¹

- **Russia and MH17 Air Crash**

On 24 May, the Netherlands and Australia issued an official statement, in which they accused Russia of involvement in the crash of the Malaysian Boeing over the Donbass in July 2014. The two countries informed Russia about their position. The international Joint Investigating Team (JIT) announced the findings of the investigation, according to which the [Buk missile system, from which the aircraft was allegedly shot down](#), belonged to the 53rd air defence brigade of the Russian Armed Forces based in Kursk. According to JIT, the Buk system arrived in Ukraine from Russia, and experts studied the route that the SAM had traveled from Russia to the Donbass.⁷²

- **Russia and NATO**

On May 22, US Air Force drones conducted reconnaissance operations off the coast of the Crimea and the Krasnodar Territory. The US Navy P-8A Poseidon anti-submarine aircraft conducted another operation near Sevastopol and the southern coast of the Crimea. Another US drone made a reconnaissance flight along the line of demarcation in the Donbass, and also explored the border between the Kharkov region and Russia. Experts note that the main purpose of the flights of US Navy aircraft over the Black Sea near the coast of the peninsula is to study the present-day military infrastructure of the Crimea. One Russian military expert commented that it would only be a matter of paperwork for Russia to shoot down the curious aircraft only if they violated Russia's airspace.⁷³

- **Russia and Iran**

President Putin's official spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that it was important to see how Tehran was going to assess the 12 requirements for the nuclear deal, which the US proposed. The Kremlin spokesman added that Moscow, Tehran and European countries reaffirmed their commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding the nuclear deal with Iran.⁷⁴

⁷¹"Supreme Court judges hold talks with SCO counterparts in China to deepen judicial cooperation", *Economic Times*, May 25, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/supreme-court-judges-hold-talks-with-sco-counterparts-in-china-to-deepen-judicial-cooperation/articleshow/64321635.cms> Accessed on May 28, 2018.

⁷²"The Netherlands and Australia Officially Accuse Russia of Downing MH17 over Donbass", *Pravda*, May 25, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/hotspots/disasters/25-05-2018/141003-donbass-air-crash-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on May 28, 2018.

⁷³"Russian Air Defences Ready to Shoot Down NATO drone and reconnaissance aircraft over Crimea", *Pravda*, May 23, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/politics/23-05-2018/140991-reconnaissance-crimea-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on May 28, 2018.

⁷⁴"Iran's Next Moves on Nuclear Deal Much More Important—Kremlin", *Pravda*, May 22, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/world/asia/22-05-2018/140989-iran-nuclear-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on May 28, 2018.

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Poppy Cultivation Up By 11 Percent**

On 21 May 2018, the Ministry of Narcotics issued a statement that cultivation of poppy crops had increased by 11 percent in the year 2017, a growing concern for Afghanistan. Jawed Ahmad Qayeem, deputy minister of counter narcotics held that growing production of opium and its smuggling had been the feature of insurgents' especially drug smugglers, mafia groups, Taliban and other the terrorist faction's activities.⁷⁵

- **Iran Supporting Taliban: Pompeo**

Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, speaking at the Heritage Foundation, raised concerns over Iran's assistance to the Taliban in the form of weapons and economic funding to continue war in Afghanistan. Mike Pompeo said, "Iran must end support for the Taliban and other terrorists in Afghanistan and the region, and cease harboring senior al-Qaeda leaders" and warned that US would take necessary steps to reduce Iran's influence over West Asia, alleging that the country had continued its nuclear activities, ballistic missile programs along with support to regional proxies, disturbing the security balance in the region.⁷⁶

- **Turkey-Afghanistan Air Trade Corridor Opens**

On 22 May 2018, in order to boost bilateral trade, Turkey and Afghanistan opened an air corridor at the Hamid Karzai international airport in the presence of high ranking political leaders of both Afghanistan and Turkey. Humayoon Rasaw, Minister of Industry and Commerce of Afghanistan said that this air corridor would provide leverage to Turkish businessmen, increasing trade volume between both countries.⁷⁷

- **Terrorists May Move from Afghanistan to Central Asia: Russia**

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on 22 May 2018 had discussions with Uzbek counterpart Abdusalom Azizov on the issue of rising terrorist threats in the region. Stressing on the need to build a military cooperation between both nations, Russian defense minister said that on account of unstable situation in Afghanistan,

⁷⁵ "Poppy Cultivation Up By 11 Percent," *Tolo News*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/poppy-cultivation-11-percent>, accessed on May 22, 2018.

⁷⁶ "Iran Supporting Taliban in Form of Weapons, Funding: Pompeo," *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 23, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20992, accessed on May 23, 2018.

⁷⁷ "Turkey-Afghanistan Air Trade Corridor Opens," *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 23, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20996, accessed on May 23, 2018.

terrorist groups of the country might shift their base to central Asia in particular Uzbekistan, adding that “We cannot say that the situation in Afghanistan is getting safer and more stable as groups leaving Syria are particularly moving to Afghanistan. That said, it is highly important to train the military that would be able to protect the state in case the need arises.”⁷⁸

- **Most US Efforts to Rebuild Afghanistan Failed: SIGAR**

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) on 24 May 2018 stated that reconstruction of Afghanistan by the US government remained unsuccessful. John Sopko, head of SIGAR stated, “[Our] overall assessment is that despite some heroic efforts to stabilize insecure and contested areas in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2017, the program mostly failed”.⁷⁹

Bangladesh

- **Drug dealers in parliament itself**

Jatiya Party chairman Muhammad Ershad on Wednesday (May 23) condemned the killing of people in the name of gunfights in the anti-drug drive of law enforcement. “We don’t know the identities of those who are being killed in the name of drive against drug dealers. Key drug dealers are in parliament itself. Execute them through necessary legal process,” he said.⁸⁰

- **FM questions Amnesty's intention**

Bangladesh has ruled out any negative impact over the ongoing Rohingya repatriation talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar due to Amnesty International’s (AI’s) new report saying people these days do not believe their stuff. “I don’t think the ongoing discussion (over Rohingya repatriation) will be affected. It (AI’s claim) is nothing logical. Nobody believes it,” foreign minister AH Mahmood Ali said on Wednesday (May 23). He questioned why the Amnesty International came up with the report so late and said they might have some intention behind it.⁸¹

⁷⁸ “Terrorists May Move from Afghanistan to Central Asia: Russia,” *Tolo News*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/%E2%80%98terrorists%E2%80%99-may-move-afghanistan-central-asia-russia>, accessed on May 23, 2018.

⁷⁹ “Most US Efforts to Rebuild Afghanistan Failed: SIGAR,” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 26, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=21016, accessed on May 26, 2018.

⁸⁰ “Drug dealers in parliament itself,” *Prothom Alo*, May 24, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/176164/Drug-dealers-in-parliament-itself>, accessed on May 24, 2018.

⁸¹ “FM questions Amnesty's intention,” *Prothom Alo*, May 24, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/176187/FM-questions-Amnesty-International's-intention>, accessed on May 24, 2018.

- **Silence on Teesta**

On Friday (May 25), two prime ministers and a chief minister shared the stage for four hours at Shantiniketan, the institution set up by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. But in the end, silence spoke the loudest. None of them mentioned Teesta, the issue that remains unresolved for decades. Sheikh Hasina did not mention Teesta. It was a master class on how to send out a message without saying a word. Teesta, unspoken, message sent. Bangladesh wants more water from the north Bengal river, and Mamata Banerjee is unwilling to give. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been unsuccessful on meeting a promise to Bangladesh after he became PM. PM Modi also did not touch on the Teesta and Rohingya issues.⁸²

- **EC fulfilling government wishes**

The election commission is, for all practical purposes, fulfilling the wishes of the government now run by Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the more the national election is nearing the more that is becoming apparent. Election experts said various steps in recent times have called the credibility of this constitutionally independent body into question. Following the demand of the ruling party, the election commission amended the rules of electoral code of conduct for city corporation elections allowing the members of parliament to participate in poll campaigns.⁸³

- **AL, BNP in verbal spats over polls**

The Awami League (AL) and the BNP have become involved in a verbal tug-of-war centering the next general election, which is likely to be held by the end of this year. The BNP demands a national consensus for resolving the current political crisis before the next parliamentary polls. But the AL denies the existence of any such crisis and claims that the election would be held in due time in keeping with the constitutional guidelines.⁸⁴

Pakistan

- **Pakistan and US diplomatic row**

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has informed the Congress that American officials are treated badly in Pakistan, adding that Washington released “far fewer funds” to Pakistan in 2018 and may give even less next year. Congressman Brad

⁸² “Silence on Teesta,” *The Daily Star*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/silence-teesta-1582186>, accessed on May 27, 2018.

⁸³ “EC fulfilling government wishes,” *Prothom Alo*, May 27, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/176376/EC-fulfilling-government-wishes>, accessed on May 27, 2018.

⁸⁴ “AL, BNP in verbal spats over polls,” *The Independent*, May 28, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/151724>, accessed on May 28, 2018.

Sherman, a California Democrat, brought Pakistan into the debate in the Congress which was discussing Iran and North Korea. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, a California Republican, later noted that the Trump administration's budget request for the next year had no increase for Pakistan.⁸⁵ It may be noted here that Pakistan's ambassador-designate to the US Ali Jahangir Siddiqui arrived in Washington on May 28 and will take charge of his new assignment on May 29, two days before the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government completes its term.⁸⁶

- **The Mumbai Attack Case**

The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) here on May 23rd asked the federal government to take a final decision about bringing 27 Indian citizens to the witness box in the Mumbai attacks case by June 27. ATC judge Shahrukh Arjumand issued the order during proceedings of the Mumbai attacks case. On May 16 the court had issued notices to the interior and foreign affairs secretaries and sought their response on bringing the 27 Indians to Pakistan for recording of their testimony against Pakistani suspects in the case.⁸⁷

Indian Ocean Region

- **Japan to boost port investments in Indian Ocean region**

The Japanese government is planning to develop ports in three Indian Ocean nations- Myanmar Sri Lanka and Bangladesh- by offering yen loans.⁸⁸ The project, part of Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, is intended to secure the sea lanes connecting Asia and Africa via the Middle East.⁸⁹ Dawei in southeast Myanmar, Trincomalee in northern Sri Lanka, and Matarbari in southeast Bangladesh are three sites that are under consideration for port development by Japanese government.⁹⁰ According to a media report, "Japan, Myanmar and Thailand will jointly construct a new port in Dawei. It is expected

⁸⁵ Anwar Iqbal, "US envoys treated badly in Pakistan, Pompeo tells Congress", *Dawn*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1409846> as accessed on May 28, 2018

⁸⁶ Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan's new US envoy to take charge two days before govt term ends", *Dawn*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410208> as accessed on May 28, 2018

⁸⁷ "Last Pakistani prosecution witness testifies in Mumbai case", *Dawn*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1409610> as accessed on May 28, 2018

⁸⁸ Japan to offer aid for Indian Ocean ports, 28 May 2018, <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0004465715> (Accessed on 28 May 2018)

⁸⁹ Japan to boost port investments in Indian Ocean region, <http://www.seatrade-maritime.com/news/asia/japan-to-boost-port-investments-in-indian-ocean-region.html> (Accessed on 29 May 2018)

⁹⁰ Japan to offer aid for Indian Ocean ports, 28 May 2018, <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0004465715> (Accessed on 28 May 2018)

that the cost will be anywhere from several tens of billions of yen to around ¥200 billion. Japan, Sri Lanka and India will expand an existing small-scale port in Trincomalee into a trade port at which large ships can call. The cost of this project is expected to be between ¥10 billion and ¥13 billion. In Matarbari, a new port will be constructed at a cost of several tens of billions of yen."⁹¹

- **India Pakistan to hold Maritime Security Talks**

India and Pakistan are planned to hold bilateral maritime dialogue on 28th May 2018 in New Delhi. Rear Admiral Zaka-ur-Rehman, the Director-General (DG) of Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA), during his two day visit to India is expected to hold a series talks with his Indian counterpart Rajendra Singh, DG of Indian Coast Guards (ICG).⁹² Last such maritime dialogue between the two countries was organised in 2016 in New Delhi.⁹³ As per memorandum of understanding signed between the two countries in 2005, both countries will have to hold the maritime security talks at the highest level every year.⁹⁴

- **Maldives a challenge for India: Indian Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba**

Maldives is a challenge for India at the moment as present Maldivian government is more inclined towards China, Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba said during an event at the Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, on 23rd May, 2018⁹⁵. "Maldives is a challenge at the moment. The present government in Maldives is more inclined towards China. The constitution has been tweaked and some islands have been given to the Chinese for development. There is no news at the moment of any listening post in the Maldives. There is some development that is going on. We will have to wait and watch,"⁹⁶ he said in response to a question asked after his speech.⁹⁷ He added that Indian navy has commenced patrolling of Maldives EEZ and India would continue to work with Maldivian government.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² India resuming maritime security talks with Pak, <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/india-resuming-maritime-security-talks-pak> (Accessed on May 28, 2018)

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Maldives a "challenge" for India, it's more inclined towards China: Indian Navy chief, 23 MAY 2018, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/maldives-more-inclined-towards-china-says-navy-chief-sunil-lanba/1178858/> (Accessed on May 28, 2018)

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

West Asia

Iraq and GCC

- **Iraq carries out more air strikes against Daesh in Syria**⁹⁹

Iraq announced Friday it had carried out air strikes against Daesh in Syria, the third cross border aerial operation inside a month in its war-torn neighbour. “Iraqi F-16 planes carried out (Thursday) morning raids against the headquarters of Daesh terrorist gang leaders and an explosives depot occupied by terrorists in Syria’s Hajin region,” a statement by Iraq’s operations command said.

Several strikes have been carried out by Iraq or the international coalition since Thursday against the centre of Hajin, the last major area held by Daesh in Syria, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor. Hajin is in Deir Al Zor province in eastern Syria, about 50 kilometres from Iraq’s border.

- **Iraqi Supreme Court rejects appeal to cancel election results**

Iraq’s Federal Supreme Court on Sunday rejected a request to cancel the country’s parliamentary election results over allegations of voter rigging and fraud. Complaints of irregularities in the balloting were raised by several political parties suggesting that hackers may have manipulated the results after electronic voting systems were used for the first time. “The Iraqi supreme federal court met and discussed the complaints presented and have decided not to proceed any further,” the spokesman of the court, Eyas al-Samok said. Instead Mr al-Samok said that the issue must be raised to the Independent High Electoral Commission “which is responsible for accepting complaints and objections to alleged violations during the election period.”

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi ordered the creation of a high powered commission to investigate the claims. An official statement said an emergency cabinet meeting, held late on Thursday and chaired by Mr Al Abadi, named the country’s anti-graft chief as the commission’s leader.

- **Qatar bans imports from four Arab neighbours**¹⁰⁰

Qatar has banned products imported from the four Arab neighbours -- Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt -- that a year ago imposed a trade and traffic embargo on the gas rich state. A government statement on Saturday said the ban was “to protect the safety of the consumers in the state of Qatar and to combat improper trafficking of goods.” Qatar’s imports plummeted by 40 per cent in the first weeks of the boycott and placed pressure on the long-haul airline Qatar Airways, which had extensive operations in the four states. While imports from the quartet have fallen

⁹⁹ <https://gulfnews.com/news/mena/iraq/iraq-carries-out-more-air-strikes-against-daesh-in-syria-1.2226758>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.ft.com/content/160a343a-61bc-11e8-a39d-4df188287fff>

dramatically, the government had to date turned a blind eye to goods arriving from the four nations that imposed the embargo via third states. The hardening of Qatar's position reflects the widening chasm across the Gulf, dividing US allies as Washington seeks to build a stronger regional alliance against Iran and Islamist extremism. Qatar is the headquarters of the US military's regional operations. The quartet has rebuffed recent US attempts to defuse tensions and bring its feuding Gulf allies around the negotiating table.

- **First UAE relief plane loaded with 40 tonnes of humanitarian and food aid arrives in Socotra¹⁰¹**

The first UAE relief plane carrying 40 tonnes of humanitarian and food aid arrived on Saturday in Socotra, Yemen. The assistance is provided by the Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation, KF, to the population of the island that was struck by Cyclone Mekunu, turning it into a disaster area. A KF official source noted, "The assistance is a continuation of the aid, under the instructions of President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan to help the Yemeni people, based on the feelings of brotherhood and the desire of His Highness to alleviate the daily suffering, in light of the dire circumstances of the population through the provision of basic commodities and foodstuff, especially during the holy month of Ramadan."

- **Cyclone Mekunu: 3 Indians among 11 killed in Southern Oman, Yemeni Island of Socotra¹⁰²**

Three Indians were among 11 people killed by Cyclone Mekunu that has battered southern Oman and the Yemeni island of Socotra, authorities and reports have said. Cyclone Mekunu hit Oman's Dhofar and Al-Wusta provinces on Friday after intensifying from a category one to a category two cyclone, with winds of up to 170 kilometres per hour after it made landfall on Socotra on Thursday.

"Indian Embassy Team in Salalah has confirmed that as per Royal Oman Police, mortal remains of one (Shamsher Ali) of two missing Indian have been found and the search for the other (Madhu) is underway. There is no report of casualty amongst other expatriates," the Indian Embassy in Muscat tweeted. According to *AFP*, Socotra's governor Ramzy Mahrous said today that the death toll on the island remained seven -- five Yemenis and two Indian sailors. A further eight Indian sailors remain missing.

¹⁰¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/first-uae-relief-plane-loaded-40-tonnes-humanitarian-and-food-aid-arrives-socotra>

¹⁰² <https://www.firstpost.com/india/cyclone-mekunu-3-indians-among-11-killed-in-southern-oman-yemeni-island-of-socotra-4484697.html>

Turkey

- **OIC members should consider call to boycott Israel, Erdoğan says**

President Erdoğan called on the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to consider advisory decision, made by the 57-member Muslim body to take economic and political measures against Israel. He also said they should deliberate on countries that follow the U.S.' decision to relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.¹⁰³

- **Turkey aims to be among high-income countries, says Erdogan**

Vowing to turn the country into a high-income nation, Turkey's president on Thursday released the election manifesto of the governing Justice and Development (AK) Party for the June 24 elections. ¹⁰⁴President Recep Tayyip Erdogan unveiled the election manifesto, titled "Strong Parliament, Strong Government, Strong Turkey," at the Ankara Arena in the capital.

- **Turkey condemns Greece for granting asylum to putschist**

Turkey's Foreign Ministry on Thursday condemned a decision by the top court in Greece granting asylum to ex-Turkish soldier Suleyman Ozkaynakci, who Ankara accuses of involvement in the 2016 coup bid. The Greek Council of State, the highest administrative court in the country, "in defiance of the rules of international law, granted asylum to putschist Suleyman Ozkaynakci," said the ministry in a statement.¹⁰⁵

- **Erdoğan: Turkey's domestically-produced cars to be ready for sale by 2021**

Erdoğan said that the prototype of Turkey's first indigenous automobile would be ready next year and sales would begin in three years. "The prototype of our domestically-produced vehicle will be ready next year, and mass production will commence in 2021," he said. Turkey launched a joint venture to produce its first domestically-produced car in November last year. Five local firms - Anadolu

¹⁰³“**OIC members should consider call to boycott Israel, Erdoğan says**”, 21 May 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2018/05/22/oic-members-should-consider-call-to-boycott-israel-erdogan-says>

¹⁰⁴ “**Turkey aims to be among high-income countries, says Erdogan**”, 25 May 2018, <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/turkey-aims-to-be-among-high-income-countries-says-erdogan-17717>

¹⁰⁵ “**Turkey condemns Greece for granting asylum to putschist**”, 25 May 2018. <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/turkey-condemns-greece-for-granting-asylum-to-putschist-17719>

Group, BMC, Kiraca Holding, Turkcell, and Zorlu Holding - will jointly manufacture Turkey's first car.¹⁰⁶

- **Turkish president slams opposition's election promises**

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday sought support in the June 24 early elections in order to execute Turkey's long-term plans. Speaking at his ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party's rally in southern Isparta province, Erdogan said the upcoming elections are "the most important elections" in the country's history. "We will either take our 16-year achievements much higher [levels] or allow the 'demolition alliance' [the opposition] to spoil all these," he said. For the first time in Turkish political history, political parties will go to election after forming alliances.¹⁰⁷

Saudi Arabia

- **Crown Prince Meets Presidents of Philips, Mitsubishi and BlackRock Companies**

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Deputy Premier, Minister of Defense, President of the Council of Economic Affairs and Development and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), has met separately here on the sidelines of the Future Investment Initiative with Chief Executive Officer of Philips Company Frans van Houten, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of Board of Directors of Mitsubishi Company Nobuyuki Hirano and Chairman of Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer of BlackRock Company Larry Fink. During the meetings, they reviewed investment opportunities in the Kingdom in line with its vision 2030 and coordinating areas of the future partnership available in the Kingdom.¹⁰⁸

- **GCC, global parliamentary groups warn Iran of consequences**

A number of parliamentarians from different countries including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have warned Iran of grave consequences if it continues to indulge in proxy wars with neighboring Arab countries that threaten the peace

¹⁰⁶ "Erdogan: Turkey's domestically-produced cars to be ready for sale by 2021", 26 May 2018.

<https://www.yenisafak.com/en/news/erdogan-russia-to-decrease-price-of-natural-gas-sold-to-turkey-3412305>

¹⁰⁷ "Turkish president slams opposition's election promises", 27 May 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-president-slams-opposition-s-election-promises/1158214>

¹⁰⁸ "Crown Prince Meets Presidents of Philips, Mitsubishi and BlackRock Companies". 25 May 2018. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1680881>

and stability in the Middle East. “Maintaining security and stability in the region is the first priority of the Gulf states,” said GCC Secretary-General Abdullateef Al-Zayani.¹⁰⁹

- **Saudi Arabia shutting out German businesses - report**

Saudi Arabia has ordered a freeze on government contracts being awarded to German companies, according to a new report from Der Spiegel magazine.

According to the popular weekly magazine, the freeze, which is based on Saudi sources, comes after six months of increasingly strained diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Germany which began after the kingdom calls its ambassador in Berlin home for consultations over comments made by then-Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel about Saudi Arabia’s role in Lebanon.¹¹⁰

- **King receives dean of diplomatic corps and heads of diplomatic groups**

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman received at Al-Salam Palace in Jeddah on Sunday the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Djibouti to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Dya-Eddin Said Bamakhrama and heads of the diplomatic groups accredited to the Kingdom including Eritrean Ambassador and Head of African Group Mohammed Omar Mahmoud, Omani Ambassador and Head of Arab Group Ahmed Bin Hilal Al-Busaidy, Argentinian Ambassador and Head of South American Group Jaime Sergio Cerda, Austrian Ambassador and Head of European Group Gregor Kossler, Singaporean Ambassador and Head of Asian Group Lawrence Anderson, Australian Ambassador and Head of Oceania Group Ralph King, and Canadian Ambassador and Head of North American Group Dennis Horak. The King also received Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr. Abdullatif Al-Zayani.¹¹¹

- **Madawi al-Rasheed: Saudi Arabia Arrests protracts the kingdom’s ‘Game of Thrones’**

Saudi writer Madawi al-Rasheed said that three recent waves of arrests reflect the paranoia of the new Saudi leadership, and suggested that that it appeared incapable of discriminating between friend and foe. The author added in an article published on the British *Middle East Eye* website: “These arrest campaigns can be

¹⁰⁹ “GCC, global parliamentary groups warn Iran of consequences”, 28 May 2018. <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1310691/saudi-arabia>

¹¹⁰ “Saudi Arabia shutting out German businesses - report”, 27 May 2018. <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/397400-saudi-arabia-shutting-out-german-businesses-report>

¹¹¹ “King receives dean of diplomatic corps and heads of diplomatic groups”, 28 May 2018 <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/535705/SAUDI-ARABIA/King-receives-dean-of-diplomatic-corps-and-heads-of-diplomatic-groups>

considered as a sign of the leadership's sense of insecurity, repressive tactics, or a popular mobilization strategy to ensure agreement on his policies and leadership, considering his legitimacy as the heir to the throne."¹¹²

Saudi Arabia

- **Nepal ready to send 100,000 House workers to Saudi Arabia**

Ananda Srarma, Nepal's Deputy Head of the Diplomatic Mission at the Embassy of Nepal, Riyadh, informed that they are considering the Saud proposal of sending 100,000 Nepalese in household sector.¹¹³ He informed that currently sending of maid to foreign countries, including Saudi Arabia, is on hold. This is because of safety and security as well as payment issue. The Nepal government is revising agreements with all the countries which host the Nepali maids and house workers. The prime emphasis of all the agreements is on safety, security and payment.

With regard to Saudi Arabia, he informed that the Nepali government is having positive view but it will only send once a new agreement is signed between the two countries. In the new agreement, Mr. Sharma hinted that the provision of better security and safety and payment are revised. He said that minimum payment to the house worker would not be less than 1500 Saudi riyal. Mr. Sharma said this during his meeting with Saudi Minister of Labour and Social Development (MLSD), Dr. Ali Al-Ghafis.

- **Saudi Arabia deports 100 Pakistanis**

Sources informed that Saudi Arabia has deported 100 Pakistanis who were overstaying in the Kingdom.¹¹⁴ These Pakistanis were arrested by the Saudi police and were sent to jail. After completing their punishment, they were deported by private airline to Pakistan. These deported Pakistanis informed the news reporters that thousands of Pakistanis are languishing in the jail and requested the Pakistani government to make arrangement for their release. It is noted that Pakistanis are deported on daily basis. In the last four months Saudi Arabia deported approximately 39,000 Pakistanis. They are deported mostly on the charge of violation work and residence rules.¹¹⁵

In addition, Saudi Arabia is also deporting people of other countries who are living illegally in the Kingdom. Last week, Saudi Arabia reportedly announced to deport

¹¹²“ **Madawi al-Rasheed: Saudi Arabia Arrests protracts the kingdom's 'Game of Thrones'**”, 28 May 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180528-madawi-al-rasheed-saudi-arabia-arrests-protracts-the-kingdoms-game-of-thrones/>

¹¹³ <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/535644/SAUDI-ARABIA/Nepal-ready-to-send-100000-house-workers-to-Saudi-Arabia>

¹¹⁴ <https://nation.com.pk/26-May-2018/saudi-arabia-deports-100-pakistanis>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1313308>

thousands of Somali people, who were living illegally in the Kingdom. They usually come through Yemen by crossing the Southern border of the Kingdom and travel to UAE as well.

Saudi Arabia has deported thousands of workers since the new economic reform programme has been introduced in the Kingdom. The introduction of expatriate fees has also forced the immigrants to send their families back to home as cost of living in Saudi Arabia has significantly grown. Accounts show that on an average around 1,500 people are leaving the Kingdom every day.¹¹⁶ In the last 18 months, around 811,000 expatriates have left on final exit visa from Saudi Arabia. However, the Indian embassy in Saudi Arabia informed that this is not affecting the Indian workers. Rather, their number has around 200,000 increased in the last two year.¹¹⁷ The impact of expatriates' leaving the Kingdom is visible on the falling house rent, which declined to 30 per cent during the last one years.

Israel

- **Continuing Violence at the Borders**

It has been reported that Palestinians in the Gaza Strip will try to breach Israel's blockade by boat this week in a fresh challenge to Israeli forces following weeks of deadly protests and clashes. Boats off the strip are generally limited to six nautical miles offshore, and the Israeli navy regularly fires warning shots at Palestinians who breach it.¹¹⁸ Israel's Defence Ministry said on May 27 that work had started on a maritime wall that would block infiltration by seaborne Palestinian fighters from north Gaza. It was reported that Israeli tank shelling killed three members of the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip on May 27. It was reported that militant group Islamic Jihad had placed a bomb next to the border fence which was detonated by IDF.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile 86 people injured on May 25th and were treated for tear gas inhalation while some sustained gunshot wounds.¹²⁰ Israel has also accused that a group of suspects crossed into Israeli border and set a military post on fire. In retaliation Israeli military fired several missiles at a Hamas position, including the Gaza port in Southern Gaza strip on May 22.¹²¹ It was

¹¹⁶ <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/532546/SAUDI-ARABIA/1500-expats-leaving-Saudi-Arabia-on-a-daily-basis>

¹¹⁷ <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-s-expat-family-fee-not-impacting-families-indian-embassy-679111.html>

¹¹⁸ "Gazans plan to try to breach Israeli sea blockade", *The Daily Star*, May 27, 2018,

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2018/May-27/450936-gazans-plan-to-try-to-breach-israeli-sea-blockade.ashx> as accessed on May 28, 2018

¹¹⁹ Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Israeli army kills three Gaza militants after foiling border bombing", *Reuters*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-violence/israeli-army-kills-three-militants-in-gaza-border-shelling-medics-idUSKCN1IS06K> as accessed on May 29, 2018

¹²⁰ "Gaza officials: 86 hurt by Israeli fire in border protest", *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/world/article/Gaza-officials-86-hurt-by-Israeli-fire-in-border-12944051.php> as accessed on May 29, 2018

¹²¹ "Israel shells Hamas post in Gaza", *ANI*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/israel-shells-hamas-post-in-gaza201805231133150001/> as accessed on May 29, 2018

reported that over two dozen mortar shells struck southern Israel early May 29th morning amid heightened tensions along the Gaza border.¹²²

- **Israel on Iran**

Israel's National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat left for US on May 28th for talks with his counterpart in Washington, John Bolton, set to cover policy towards Iran following US President Donald Trump's announcement that he would pull out of the 2015 nuclear deal. The discussions will specifically focus on renewing a far-reaching joint memorandum of understanding between Israel and the US providing for full cooperation to deal with Iran's nuclear drive, its missile programs and its other threatening activities.¹²³ It was also reported in Israeli media on May 28th that Israel and Russia have reached a secret agreement to distance Iranian forces from the border area in southern Syria. Under the apparent agreement coming together, Israel will accept the return of Syrian regime soldiers to the border on the Golan Heights, in exchange for Russia guaranteeing there are no Iranian or Hezbollah forces in the area.¹²⁴ Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be visiting Paris and Berlin next week, his office said on May 27th, with talks expected to focus on Iran. Netanyahu will fly to Germany on June 4 to meet with Chancellor Angela Merkel, before traveling later that day to France for talks with President Emmanuel Macron.¹²⁵

- **British Royal in forthcoming visit to Israel and Palestine**

Prince William will become the first member of the royal family to make an official visit to Israel and Palestine in June 24. He will be visiting Jordan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. His trip begins on June 24 in Amman, and includes stops in Tel Aviv and Ramallah before concluding in Jerusalem on June 28.¹²⁶

- **British Arms in Israel**

British defence contractors are selling record amounts of arms to Israel. Figures from the Campaign Against Arms Trade reveal that last year the UK issued £221m worth of arms licences to defence companies exporting to Israel. This made Israel

¹²² Judah Ari Gross, "Mortar shells strike southern Israel amid Gaza border tensions; no injuries", *The Times of Israel*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/sirens-blare-explosions-heard-in-southern-israel-amid-gaza-border-tensions/> as accessed on May 29, 2018

¹²³ "Israel's national security adviser on way to US to talk Iran policy with Bolton", *The Times of Israel*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-national-security-adviser-on-way-to-us-to-talk-iran-policy-with-bolton/> as accessed on May 29, 2018

¹²⁴ Alexander Fulbright, "Israel, Russia said to reach secret deal on pushing Iran away from Syria border", *The Times of Israel*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-russia-said-to-agree-on-pushing-iran-from-syria-border/> as accessed on May 29, 2018

¹²⁵ "Netanyahu heads to Berlin, Paris next week for talks expected to focus on Iran", *The Times of Israel*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-heads-to-berlin-paris-next-week-for-talks-expected-to-focus-on-iran/> as accessed on May 29, 2018

¹²⁶ "Prince William becomes first royal to make an official visit to Israel and Palestine", *Economic Times*, May 25, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/prince-william-becomes-first-royal-to-make-an-official-visit-to-israel-and-palestine/articleshow/64321506.cms> as accessed on May 29, 2018

the UK's eighth largest market for UK arms companies, a huge increase on the previous year's figure of £86m, itself a substantial rise on the £20m worth of arms licensed in 2015. In total, over the past five years, Israel has bought more than £350m worth of UK military hardware.¹²⁷

UN

- **India concerned over lack of political will for adequate funding for UN peacebuilding¹²⁸**

India has voiced concern over the lack of genuine political will in ensuring adequate funding for UN peacebuilding, saying funds available for such efforts are not even one per cent of the annual peacekeeping budget. India is the largest cumulative troop contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, having provided almost 200,000 troops in nearly 50 of the 71 peacekeeping missions mandated over the past six decades, including 13 of the current 16 missions. As on March 31 last year, the UN owed a total of USD 777 million to member states for peacekeeping operations. The UN had to pay a total of USD 55 million to India for its contribution to the world body's peacekeeping operations, the second highest outstanding payment to any member country.

Sandeep Kumar Bayyapu, First Secretary in India's Permanent Mission to the UN said yesterday "Building peace and prosperity for all remains a major objective for the international community." Despite the growing attention, the concept of peacebuilding that expanded the focus to post conflict situations and led to the establishment of UN's peacebuilding architecture around a decade ago continues to struggle due to lack of adequate funding that betrays a lack of genuine political will".

- **Unrealistic to expect UN peacekeepers to protect civilians in conflict situations¹²⁹**

India has said it is "unrealistic" to expect from UN peacekeepers protection of civilians in the absence of clear mandates, and suggested developing a "politically attuned" framework for the purpose. Speaking at a UN Security Council debate on 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts' on Tuesday, India's permanent representative to the UN, ambassador Syed Akbaruddin, said the Council's membership needs to frame mandates with clarity and specificity. He said that the

¹²⁷ Jamie Doward, "British arms exports to Israel reach record level", *The Guardian*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/27/british-arms-exports-israel-new-record> as accessed on May 29, 2018

¹²⁸ PTI, MAY 25, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-concerned-over-lack-of-political-will-for-adequate-funding-for-un-peacebuilding/printarticle/64318689.cms>

¹²⁹ TOI, 23 May 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/unrealistic-to-expect-un-peacekeepers-to-protect-civilians-in-conflict-situations-syed-akbaruddin/articleshow/64284151.cms>

expectations that the UN peacekeepers can effectively ensure protection of civilians in the absence of clear mandates are not realistic.

He, however, added that the growing instances of serious attacks on peacekeepers and the high level of casualties suffered by them in different missions point out to the difficulties of being able to implement so-called robust mandates in situations involving rival warring groups mixed with civilian populations."This also risks the credibility and the image of the United Nation's neutral presence in armed conflict situations," he added. He stressed that the responsibility of protecting the civilians lies, first of all, with the national governments and rued that "very little" was being done for bolstering it.

International Economic Issues

- **India initiates WTO dispute complaint against US steel, aluminium duties**

India has requested WTO dispute consultations with the United States (US) regarding US duties on certain imported steel and aluminium products. The request was circulated to WTO members on May 23, 2018. India claims the US duties of 25% and 10% on imports of steel and aluminium products respectively are inconsistent with provisions of the WTO's General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 and of the Agreement on Safeguards.¹³⁰

Trump imposed the tariffs in March, levying 25 percent on steel imports and 10 percent on aluminium, stating national security concerns and therefore outside the WTO's remit. India, China, Russia, Japan, Turkey and the European Union have all dismissed that claim, regarding the US tariffs as "safeguards" under the WTO rules, entitling them to a combined \$3.5 billion in annual compensation. Under WTO rules, the US has 60 days to settle the complaint, after which India could ask the WTO to set up an expert panel to adjudicate. However, uncertainty is hanging over the WTO's dispute settlement system because Trump is vetoing the appointment of new appeals judges. In its complaint, India listed a string of ways the US tariffs violated the WTO rules and unfairly damaged India's interests. It said they broke the WTO's safeguards agreement and the US was trying to use its tariffs to get other countries to agree to "voluntary export restraints". The US had also exceeded the maximum import tariff allowed by the WTO and the tariffs were not applied uniformly to steel and aluminum imports from all suppliers, breaking a core principle of the WTO rulebook.¹³¹

¹³⁰ WTO, "India initiates WTO dispute complaint against US steel, aluminium duties", https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news18_e/ds547rfc_23may18_e.htm (accessed on May 23, 2018)

¹³¹ Tom Miles, "India takes U.S. steel tariffs complaint to the WTO", Reuters, May 23, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-india/india-takes-u-s-steel-tariffs-complaint-to-the-wto-idUSKCN11O1WP> (accessed on May 23, 2018)

- **Key WTO member countries to meet in Paris next month: Suresh Prabhu**

Key World Trade Organisation (WTO) member countries, including India, will meet in Paris in June to deliberate upon issues like increasing protectionist measures by certain developed nations. This informal discussion will take place on sidelines of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) ministerial council meeting in Paris in June. The issue of appointment of appellate members in the WTO's dispute settlement body is also likely to come up at the meeting. Further delay in these appointments would create crisis in the functioning of the dispute settlement mechanism. This WTO meeting comes at a time when the world is facing trade war kind of situation following imposition of heavy duties on certain steel and aluminium products by the US. This move by the US evoked sharp reaction from both developed and developing countries of the Geneva-based organisation.¹³²

The ways to take forward unresolved issues flowing from the Buenos Aires Ministerial meeting in December 2017 — such as food security and permanent solution for treating procurement subsidies, curbing fisheries subsidies and treatment of new issues such as e-commerce and investments — are also likely to be taken up. New Delhi had hosted an informal meeting of select WTO members in March 2018, where members stressed on the need to operate within the ambit of the multilateral trade forum and dispute settlement mechanism. No concrete decision, however, was taken on how to move ahead with the multilateral negotiations.¹³³

- **NDB head favours BRICS free trade**

Speaking on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on May 25, 2018, New Development Bank (NDB) President K.V. Kamath welcomed the idea of creating a free trade area within the BRICS group of states. But at the same time he stressed that the inner-BRICS balance of trade must be made more even before a trade deal takes shape. “It is a good idea. We need to look at where the direction of trade today is flowing. If you look into inter-BRICS trade it will be mainly from China from other countries, with the balance strongly in favour of one country. We would need to decide how it will be balanced.”¹³⁴

¹³² “Key WTO member countries to meet in Paris next month: Suresh Prabhu,” *Economic Times*, May 25, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/key-wto-member-countries-to-meet-in-paris-next-month-suresh-prabhu/articleshow/64318407.cms> (accessed on May 25, 2018)

¹³³ Amiti Sen, “India to attend WTO members meet in Paris”, *Bussineline*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/india-to-attend-wto-members-meet-in-paris/article24007441.ece> (accessed on May 27, 2018)

¹³⁴ “NDB head favours BRICS free trade”, *Independent Online*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/international/ndb-head-favours-brics-free-trade-15155841> (accessed on May 28, 2018)