

Weekly Media Updates **(28 May - 3 June, 2018)**

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Africa

- **The EU's GDPR and Some African Data Protection Laws Differ Significantly'**

Africa has 17 countries in which data protection legislation has been adopted. In addition, the African Union (AU) has adopted the AU Convention on Cyber-security and Personal Data Protection, which is pending ratification by 15 of the 54 AU members. The data protection legislation adopted by countries in Africa share many principles with the EU's new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), but there are some key areas in which they differ. While some jurisdictions require organisations to register with a data protection authority, others may not. Some countries are very prescriptive on cross-border data transfers, while others either have little to no requirements. In SA, a key distinction between the GDPR and the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) is the definition of a person and, by extension, what constitutes personal information. POPIA includes juristic persons, such as companies, in its definition of "personal". The disparities in data protection legislation in Africa already prove challenging to multinational organisations with an African presence, and when you add on the requirements of GDPR, these challenges can seem quite overwhelming.

- **External Actors Urged to Stop Meddling in Somalia's Affairs¹**

The chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, has expressed concern over "increasing instances" of interference by "non-African actors" in Somalia's internal affairs. During a meeting at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa on Sunday with Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire, Faki said such actions threaten peace-building efforts in Somalia, according to a statement from the AU. Without referring to specific countries, Faki urged all "concerned external actors" to "refrain from any actions that might undermine Somalia's progress", saying such action "risks reversing the hard-won gains so far made in the country thanks to the sacrifices of African Union Mission in Somalia [AMISOM] forces and the Somali security forces".

- **African Union, IEA to Provide Clean Energy²**

The International Energy Agency and the African Union have agreed to have a strategic partnership towards a more secure, sustainable and clean energy future for countries across the African continent. The joint commitment was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed last Friday in Paris by Dr Fatih Birol, the IEA's Executive Director, and H.E. Dr Amani Abou-Zeid, the African Union Commissioner for Infrastructure, Energy, ICT and Tourism. The MoU provides a general framework for cooperation on activities and projects that

¹ Al Jazeera, 30 May 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/external-actors-urged-stop-meddling-somalia-affairs-180529180345722.html>

² ESI Africa, 28 May 2018, <https://www.esi-africa.com/african-union-and-ia-to-provide-clean-energy/>

advance shared interests in areas of energy security, energy statistics, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainable economic development.

- **DRC Swipes at Macron After Talks with African Union Leader³**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) reacted angrily on Monday after French President Emmanuel Macron met the head of the African Union, apparently suspecting closed-door dealings on the crisis-riddled country's future. Government spokesperson Lambert Mende blasted Macron for "dog-whistle remarks" that he made last Wednesday in Paris after meeting with Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who is also the AU's current chair. The comments caused "discomfort, not to say anger" in Kinshasa, Mende told a press conference. Macron had said, "France supports the initiative taken by the president of the African Union, in strict concertation with the president of Angola," but did not elaborate. Angola President Joao Lourenco was visiting Paris on Monday. Mende said, "We do not accuse the French president of anything. The question is about knowing what may have been said between him -because he spoke about it - and the president of Rwanda concerning the DRC without us knowing about." "No-one has the right to envisage solutions to our problems without us," he said, condemning "people who are nostalgic for the colonial order" and "closed-door meetings and open plotting against our country's sovereignty." The representatives of France, Rwanda and Angola were called to the foreign ministry in Kinshasa on Saturday after Macron's remarks.

- **South Africa Needs Extraordinary Measures to Boost Growth⁴**

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the country needs to take extraordinary measures to boost growth following years of stagnation in Africa's most industrialized economy, and that his administration is taking immediate action to stamp out graft at state companies. Ramaphosa won control of the ruling African National Congress in December and was named president in February after the ANC forced Jacob Zuma to resign from the post. He's been spearheading a drive to attract US\$100 billion in new investment over the next five years and rebuild public confidence in state institutions, which was badly damaged during Zuma's scandal-tainted nine-year tenure. The president said his administration will push ahead with plans to expropriate land without compensation, and ensure that this will promote economic empowerment. Lawmakers are currently evaluating whether a constitutional change is needed to allow for land seizures.

³ News24, 24 May 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/drc-swipes-at-macron-after-talks-with-african-union-leader-20180528>

⁴ Bloomberg, 31 May 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-31/s-africa-need-extraordinary-measures-to-boost-growth-ramaphosa>

- **Total Takes FID on US\$1.2 Billion Angola Deep Offshore Development⁵**

Total SA revealed on Monday that it, along with its partners, has taken the final investment decision (FID) to launch the Zinia 2 deep offshore development in Block 17, 93 miles offshore Angola. The US\$1.2 billion Zinia 2 project, which will have a production capacity of 40,000 barrels per day, comprises nine wells in water depths ranging from 1,968 feet to 3,937 feet. Total operates Block 17 with a 40 per cent interest, alongside Equinor (23.33 per cent), ExxonMobil (20 per cent), and BP (16.67 per cent). Sonangol is the concessionaire. In addition to announcing the Zinia 2 FID on Monday, Total revealed that during an official visit to France by João Lourenço, the president of the Republic of Angola, Patrick Pouyanné, chairman and CEO of Total, and Carlos Saturnino, chairman of the board of directors of Sonangol, signed several agreements covering upstream and downstream activities in Angola. These comprised: a risk service agreement for the deepwater Block 48 exploration license, which Total will operate; framework agreement for the future joint venture between Total and Sonangol to jointly develop a network of service stations in Angola, including petroleum product logistics and supply; and a memorandum of understanding to fund 50 new scholarships for young Angolans to study at French universities by end-2019.

- **Angola Destroys Thousands Landmines of War⁶**

Angola has destroyed more than 14 000 landmines planted in the country during its 27-year civil war. The mines are a deadly remnant of the civil war, one of the longest in Africa, which ended in 2002. The National Demining Institute (INAD) has presided over the destruction of the landmines in the northern Bengo Province as part of an ongoing demining process in Southern Africa's largest country by area. "This is part of the ongoing demining process in the country," Paulo Canganjo, INAD head of operations in Bengo, said.

- **Suspected Islamists Decapitate 10 in Mozambique - Sources⁷**

Ten people including children were beheaded in a village in northern Mozambique in a weekend attack blamed on suspected Islamists, local sources said on Tuesday. The attack occurred in Monjane, a village not far from Palma, a small town gearing up to be the country's new natural gas hub in the northern Cabo Delgado province. Since October, Cabo Delgado has seen a number of attacks by suspected radical Islamists. One of the victims of the weekend attack was the leader of Monjane village, a local resident said, without giving his name for fear of reprisals. In October 2017, two officers died and 14 attackers were killed in what was believed to be the first jihadist attack on the country. In the following weeks, at least 300 Muslims were arrested and several mosques forced to close.

⁵ Rigzone, 29 May 2018,

<https://www.rigzone.com/news/total-takes-fid-on-12b-angola-deep-offshore-development-29-may-2018-155744-article/>

⁶ All Africa, 28 May 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201805280501.html>

⁷ Independent Online, 29 May 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/suspected-islamists-decapitate-10-in-mozambique-sources-15213171>

- **Malawi, Mozambique Boundary Reaffirmation**⁸

Malawi Government has appealed for a peaceful boundary re-affirmation exercise between Malawi and Mozambique, saying despite the imaginary borderline that separates the two countries, Malawians and Mozambicans remain one. Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, Anna Kachikho, made the appeal on Thursday at Nkopola Holiday Resort in Mangochi when she opened a three-day meeting by senior government officials from the two countries aimed at reviewing the boundary re-demarcation exercise and setting terms of reference for the same. The meeting is a follow-up of the one held by the two countries' Foreign Affairs ministers in Maputo, Mozambique on April 2, this year (2018) where it was recommended that officials from the two sides meet for the review and terms of reference for the re-demarcation exercise. The re-affirmation exercise, which started in 2008, left seven Malawian villages under four Group Village Headmen in Makanjira on the Mozambican side, a development that has, over the years, seen growing conflicts between the local people on both sides of the border. The situation worsened in December 2017 when Mozambican Police shot dead a Malawian man and injured another at Mkwapiti Village allegedly for trespassing, a development that left Malawians along the border to live in fear

- **Mozambique to Suspend Haiyu Mining Operations**⁹

Responding to the Mozambican government's decision to suspend the mining operations of Chinese mining company Haiyu after Amnesty International exposed the human cost of the company's irresponsible practices, Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International's Regional Director for Southern Africa, said that "Haiyu's irresponsible practices have devastated lives in the coastal village of Nagonha, likely contributing to flash floods that put more than one thousand people at serious risk of being washed into the Indian Ocean and left hundreds of people homeless." The report, *Our lives mean nothing: the human cost of Chinese mining in Nagonha, Mozambique*, exposes how the operations of mining company, Haiyu, likely contributed significantly to a flash flood in 2015 in the village of Nagonha, which destroyed 48 homes and left 290 people homeless.

- **Opposition Jittery as Zimbabwe Poll Date is Set**¹⁰

Zimbabwe's main opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has criticised the provisional voters' roll even as President Emmerson Mnangagwa declared July 30 as the General Election date. MDC said it had uncovered serious anomalies in the registers that were bound to undermine the credibility of the General Election. "The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) denied us the

⁸ The Maravi Post, 02 June 2018, <http://www.maravipost.com/malawi-mozambique-boundary-reaffirmation/>

⁹ Steel Guru, 01 June 2018, <https://steelguru.com/mining/mozambique-to-suspend-haiyu-mining-operations/510924>

¹⁰ The Zimbabwe Mail, 30 May 2018, <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com/zimbabwe/opposition-jittery-as-zimbabwe-poll-date-is-set/>

voters' roll, insisting that people should do individual inspection, after we noticed some anomalies," MDC acting chairperson Morgan Komichi told journalists.

- **Zimbabwe Parliament Warns Mugabe: Turn Up for Hearing or Face Jail Time¹¹**

Zimbabwe's parliament has threatened to charge the country's former president Robert Mugabe with contempt if he does not appear at a hearing probing US\$15 billion in lost diamond revenue. Mugabe, 94, failed to show up at a hearing Monday before the Zimbabwe's Mines and Energy Parliament Portfolios Committee to clarify claims he made in 2016 that the country had lost US\$15 billion through diamond leakages. It was the second time Mugabe did not turn up to face the lawmakers and he drew the anger of the committee officials who have ordered him to turn up on June 11 or face contempt charges and possible jail time.

- **Zambia Grants Temporal Residency Permits to Over 1,400 Former Rwandan Refugees¹²**

Today, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has granted Temporal Residence permits to 1,468 former Rwandan refugees at Meheba Refugee Settlement, marking the beginning of a process that will lead to local integration of some 4,000 Rwandan former refugees in Zambia. The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR is welcoming this progressive development as a landmark in providing sustainable solutions for former Rwandan refugees who have opted to remain in Zambia after the end of the voluntary repatriation in 2016. Zambia currently hosts over 74,000 refugees and other persons of concern mainly in Meheba Settlement, in North-Western Province, Mayukwayukwa in Western Province and Mantapala, in Luapula Province, as well as in transit centres in Makeni (Lusaka) and Kenani in Nchelenge. Many more are also self-settled across the country.

- **New Rule Compels WhatsApp Admins in Zambia to Register Groups or be Arrested¹³**

All WhatsApp group administrators in Zambia will now be required to register the groups and set up codes of ethics or risk being arrested if there is a breach. The new rule was announced by Zambia Information and Communications Technology (ZICTA) boss Mofyta Chisala on Thursday, in a move widely perceived by many as efforts by the Zambian government to control free speech. Opposition leader Mike Mulongoti however described the development as a 'waste of time' and signs that the government is 'desperate'. This move comes a day after the Ugandan Parliament passed a law that will see Ugandans charged UGX200 on a daily basis for the use of WhatsApp.

¹¹ CNN, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/29/africa/mugabe-zimbabwe-parliament-questions-intl/index.html>

¹² Relief Web, 31 May 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/zambia/zambia-grants-temporal-residency-permits-over-1400-former-rwandan-refugees>

¹³ Nairobi News, 02 June 2018, <https://nairobi.news.nation.co.ke/news/whatsapp-admins-zambia-register-groups/>

- **Tanzania Government Wins Court Case to Impose Online Regulations¹⁴**

Tanzania's government won a court case on Tuesday against bloggers and activists who sought to block the enforcement of tough, new online content regulations that require them to be registered and declare their financial backers. Earlier this month, six human rights watchdogs, media organisations and bloggers successfully applied for a temporary court injunction against the rules. But the government overturned that injunction at an appeal hearing on Tuesday in a case that activists have condemned as an attack on free speech. "Following this ruling ... owners of social media platforms that are used to disseminate news such as blogs, online TV and radio are required to continue with the registration process and observe ethics outlined in the relevant regulations," government spokesman Hassan Abbasi said in a statement. The new rules require bloggers to pay a registration and licence fee of up to US\$900 and disclose details of shareholders, share capital, citizenship of owners, staff qualification and training programmes, as well as a tax clearance certificate to obtain an operating licence from the regulator. Bloggers convicted of defying the new rules could be fined at least 5 million Tanzania shillings (US\$2,200) or face imprisonment for a minimum 12 months, or both. Several Tanzanian bloggers have already begun shutting down their websites to avoid punitive action under the new regulations.

- **Indian Navy Completes Refit of 32-year-old Mauritius Coast Guard Ship¹⁵**

The Indian Navy has completed "service life extension refit" of a 32-year-old ship of the Mauritius Coast Guard. The six-month-long overhaul of the Mauritius Coast Guard Ship (MCGS) Guardian here was undertaken in furtherance of the Indian Navy's diplomatic outreach, the Western Naval Command (WNC) said in an official statement today. The 'service life extension refit' of the 32-year-old ship started on December 1, 2017 at Naval Dockyard and ensured timely completion of its hull, engineering, electrical and weapon work package, it said. MCGS Guardian, after successfully completing all the mandated trials, is set to return to Mauritius "as good as new", the statement said.

- **France Looking to Renew Military Cooperation With Seychelles to Protect Region¹⁶**

France and Seychelles are seeking to redevelop and renew military cooperation, the French commander of the armed forces of the South Indian Ocean Zone (FAZSOI) said Tuesday after meeting with President Danny Faure at State House. Eric Vidaud, who is on a four-day visit in the 115-island archipelago, said that discussions included the social ills affecting the Indian Ocean region and how

¹⁴ Africa News, 30 May 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/05/30/tanzania-government-wins-court-case-to-impose-online-regulations/>

¹⁵ Financial Express, 03 June 2018, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/indian-navy-completes-refit-of-32-year-old-mauritius-coast-guard-ship/1191897/>

¹⁶ Seychelles News Agency, 29 May 2018, <http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/9213/France+looking+to+renew+military+cooperation+with+Seychelles+to+protect+region>

France can offer its expertise. “I am thinking of drug trafficking and illegal fishing that is common for all islands in the region. We are working with the authorities to develop mutual training to protect the borders from these activities,” said Vidaud. The commander said that the region is more efficient when all countries work together. The discussion also touched on establishing a centre for coordination and surveillance of marine activities. “We want the centre to become operational as soon as possible. The centre will be able to designate a vessel in a shorter limit of time to counter any illegal activities in the Indian Ocean,” said Vidaud.

- **Kenya’s Odinga Meets South Sudan’s Kiir Over Civil War¹⁷**

Raila Odinga, the Kenyan opposition leader who now serves as his country’s special envoy to South Sudan on Thursday held a seven-hour meeting with President Salva Kiir. Odinga was accompanied to the South Sudan capital, Juba by his lawyer Paul Mwangi and the Suna East legislator, Junet Mohamed. The two leaders reportedly discussed ways of resolving the civil war that has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions. The Kenyan opposition leader is also scheduled to travel to South Africa to meet the exiled former South Sudanese first vice-president Riek Machar. Meanwhile, the Machar-led rebels welcomed Kenya’s move to involve Odinga in the negotiations for peace in the war-hit nation. The group, however, insists that Machar, who is in South Africa, be released and allowed to sit in the talks. They have said that this would reduce the time needed to bring calm to South Sudan.

- **Ethiopia, South Sudan Leaders Agree on Viability of IGAD Led Peace Deal¹⁸**

The leaders of Ethiopia and South Sudan have agreed that the peace process mediated by regional body, Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), offers a viable chance to end conflict in Africa’s youngest nation. During a meeting held in Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa, Abiy Ahmed and president Salva Kiir discussed regional peace and stability. Ethiopia’s prime minister is the chair of the regional body which is pursuing an agreement between South Sudan’s government and rebel groups. Last week, the second phase of the High Level Revitalisation Forum, a stage of the peace process, ended without an agreement in Addis Ababa. In a statement IGAD said the talks ended after “several attempts to narrow the gaps between the positions of the parties” proved fruitless. Calls for IGAD to hold saboteurs of the peace process accountable have intensified, following repeated failure to agree during peacetalks in addition to violations of ceasefires by both sides of the conflict.

¹⁷ Sudan Tribune, 28 May 2018, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article65507>

¹⁸ Africa News, 31 May 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/05/31/ethiopia-south-sudan-leaders-agree-on-viability-of-igad-led-peace-deal/>

- **China Scales Back Investment in Ethiopia¹⁹**

China is scaling back investment in Ethiopia in the face of rising foreign exchange shortages and government debt, highlighting the fragility of the African nation's economy as the new prime minister prioritises political reform to quell three years of deadly social unrest. For much of the last decade Ethiopia has been a leading investment destination in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly for China. But Beijing's waning enthusiasm for the region's fastest-growing economy reflects the challenges facing Abiy Ahmed, the prime minister, as he juggles demands from a public hungry for both democracy and development and myriad vested interests. Business people, diplomats and bankers said Chinese entities, which have loaned more than US\$13 billion between 2006 and 2015 for everything from roads and railways to industrial parks, were now taking a "more cautious approach" to Ethiopia.

- **Ethiopia Cabinet Drafts Early End to State of Emergency²⁰**

Ethiopia's cabinet has approved a draft law that would bring an early end to the six-month state of emergency imposed in February. The government said law and order had been restored in the country. The three years of deadly protests by the country's two largest ethnic groups - the Oromo and the Amhara - appear to have come to an end. Thousands of political prisoners have been released and other reforms promised. The draft will be sent to parliament which is expected to endorse it as all MPs are from the governing party. The move to lift the state of emergency two months early shows how far Ethiopia has come since the new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, came to power, says BBC World Service Africa Editor, Mary Harper.

- **Djibouti Economic Growth Unsustainable, Says Report²¹**

A new country report by a business risk intelligence firm, EXX Africa, which released a country report on Djibouti says the economic growth of the country is over stated and unsustainable. "The high profile cancellation of a port terminal concession earlier this year has raised questions over Djibouti's attitude to foreign investment. On the one hand, the government is becoming increasingly nationalist and seems to be promoting statist interventions in the economy," the report stated. "Meanwhile, Djibouti is favoring preferred development partners, arguably in violation of existing contractual arrangements. Such interventions are likely to deter further foreign investment in the services sector, while Djibouti's natural resources are negligible. Moreover, while the incumbent president secured a fourth term in office on a landslide electoral victory only two years ago, a reinvigorated opposition is now boycotting local elections and vocally insisting on

¹⁹ Financial Times, 03 June 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/06b69c2e-63e9-11e8-90c2-9563a0613e56>

²⁰ BBC News, 02 June 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44344025>

²¹ New Business Ethiopia, 29 May 2018, <https://newbusinessethiopia.com/djibouti-economic-growth-unsustainable-says-report/>

political reform.” Security forces have taken a heavy-handed approach to crack down on opposition supporters and rights activists, according to the report.

North Africa

- **17 Killed in Libya Fresh Fighting**²²

According to the UN, at least 17 civilians have been killed in the town of Derna in Libya in an offensive by military strongman Khalifa Haftar’s forces to take the last city in eastern Libya under his control. The UN Support Mission in Libya said that the escalation of fighting in the town of Derna has reached unprecedented levels during the past week, with fighting further reaching to densely populated areas. In the ongoing fighting, 30 others suffered severe injuries. The Mission on its part called on all sides to exercise maximum restraint after seven civilians were killed and seven others were wounded by an explosion on May 30 as they were attempting to leave the city. It is worth mentioning here that Haftar’s self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA) launched an offensive on May 7 to “liberate” the eastern coastal city, home to about 150,000 people. The city of Derna for a long time is controlled by a ragtag coalition of Islamist and jihadist militias, including groups close to Al-Qaeda, hostile to both Haftar and ISIS.

Haftar’s forces entered the city’s suburbs last week and tightened the noose on their opponents with the help of air strikes and heavy artillery. LNA forces have besieged Derna for nearly two years, making it difficult for residents to access humanitarian aid. The UN Mission meanwhile warned that severe food and medicine shortages continue to worsen and said that electricity and water are intermittently cut off.

- **Egypt May Suffer Wheat Shortage**²³

Egypt, one of the world’s biggest wheat importers, may have to face wheat shortage in near future because it had returned the huge quantity of wheat from Russia as it was found to be fungus-tainted. The senior officials in Egypt Agricultural Ministry said it rejected a Russian cargo of wheat due to higher-than-allowed levels of the common ergot fungus, which is harmful in large amounts. Further two more shipments of Russian grain were held back amid payment disputes, while another won’t be shipped due to a missed delivery time. Mr. Ismail Gaber, head of the

²² Al-Arabia English: https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2018/05/31/UN-reports-unprecedented-fighting-in-Libyan-city-of-Derna.html?utm_source=Media+Review+for+June+1%2C+2018&utm_campaign=Media+Review+for+June+1%2C+2018&utm_medium=email

²³ Bloomberg https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-31/egypt-is-playing-with-fire-as-wheat-cargo-disputes-risk-supply?utm_source=Media+Review+for+June+1%2C+2018&utm_campaign=Media+Review+for+June+1%2C+2018&utm_medium=email

General Organization for Export and Import Controls, which oversees grain inspections, said that the cargo's fate is still unclear as Egyptian inspectors will take a second sample and conduct further tests before making a final decision, said Ismail Gaber. Delivery disruptions could leave Egypt's state-run buyer in a difficult position and might force them to buy at much higher prices than previous years.

Central Asia

- **SCO Group on Afghan Meet in Beijing**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Contact Group on Afghanistan held a meeting in Beijing on May 28, 2018. It was the second meeting of the Contact Group after India becoming the full member of the SCO in 2017. Additional Secretary (Multilateral Diplomacy), Shri Gitesh Sarma led the Indian delegation.

Three main issues discussed: current situation of Afghanistan and neighbouring regions, the reconciliation process, and SCO cooperation in Afghanistan. India expressed its perspectives on the security situation in Afghanistan, including security challenges posed by terrorism and extremism imposed from beyond its borders, extended support to the talk offer made by the Afghan President in February 2018, need for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled national peace and reconciliation in an environment free of terror and violence. India also assured continued assistance for socio-economic development as per the priorities of the Afghan people and greater connectivity and regional integration for Afghanistan. India reiterated its support to the membership of Afghanistan in the SCO.²⁴

India reiterated its support to the full membership of Afghanistan in the SCO. India also expressed its readiness to work closely with the SCO members in efforts to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

China

- **India – China Agree to Commence Negotiations on a Social Security Agreement**

India and China have agreed to start formal negotiations on a bilateral Social Security Agreement. Over two days of discussions held in Beijing on 28-29 May 2018, the Indian delegation led by Shri Vinod K. Jacob, JS (ED & States), Ministry of

²⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Second SCO- Afghanistan Contact Group Meeting, Beijing (May 28, 2018)," 28 May 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29926/Second_SCO_Afghanistan_Contact_Group_Meeting_Beijing_May_28_2018

External Affairs, and a Chinese delegation led by Mr Ma Hezu, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, exchanged views on the social security systems in India and China and their experiences with finalizing and signing bilateral Social Security Agreements with other countries. The two sides carried out detailed and extensive discussions on the next steps which would make up the formal negotiation phase on the Social Security Agreement that is expected to begin in 2019.

Till date, India has signed Social Security Agreements with 18 countries from different parts of the world and is currently engaged in discussions with a number of other countries including Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Mexico, Peru and Thailand.²⁵

- **China cuts solar subsidies to curb industry overheating**

China's new rules for investment and subsidies for photovoltaic (PV) installations will curb overheating in the sector, experts said Sunday, after three government agencies issued a new policy on 1 June. The National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance and the National Energy Administration of China announced a cut in the national feed-in-tariff by 0.05 yuan (\$0.008) per kilowatt-hour and a reduction of the same amount in subsidies for power generated by distributed PV projects.²⁶

- **Parties' leaders gather in birthplace of China's rural reform**

Leaders of 65 political parties from 44 countries and regions gathered in Xiaogang village, Anhui province, for a forum on 3 June to exchange their opinions on reform, development and the modernization of state governance.

The Wanshou Forum, which has been held 18 times prior to the latest event, was initiated by the International Department of the Central Committee, Communist Party of China, in 2016 as a platform for international exchange and dialogue to promote mutual understanding.

Officials from the department said they choose Xiaogang for the event because the village is the site of a milestone in China's reform and opening-up.²⁷

- **China signs more trade deals with Belt and Road countries**

China and countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative inked trade deals worth 389.1 billion U.S. dollars in the first four months, China's Ministry of

²⁵ <http://indianembassybeijing.in/social-security-agreement.php>

²⁶ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0604/c90000-9467075.html>

²⁷ <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201806/02/WS5b128c6fa31001b82571dd4d.html>

Commerce said on 30 May. It represented a growth of 19.2 percent year on year, Gao Feng, spokesperson for the Ministry, told a press briefing.

China's non-financial investment in those countries increased 17.3 percent from the same period a year ago to 4.67 billion US dollars. Business volume of outbound contract projects came in at 24.2 billion US dollars, up 27.7 percent year on year.

Economic integration of China and the Belt and Road countries gained steam. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) reached between China and Georgia has become effective. China held the first round of FTA negotiations with Mauritius and the second round of FTA talks with Pakistan. It also signed an economic and trade cooperation pact with the Eurasian Economic Union.

“Construction of major projects have progressed well with a range of railways and infrastructures going smoothly,” Gao said. By the end of April, China had built 75 economic and trade cooperation zones along the Belt and Road countries with accumulated investment of 25.5 billion US dollars.

More than 3,800 companies have joined the cooperation zones, paying nearly 1.7 billion U.S. dollars in tax revenue and generating nearly 220,000 jobs.²⁸

- **Xi calls for developing China into world science and technology leader**

Addressing the opening of the 19th Meeting of the Academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the 14th Meeting of the Academicians of the Chinese Academy of Engineering in Beijing on May 28, 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for efforts to develop China into a world leader in science and technology. He said the circumstances, challenges and missions are pressing and called on China's science and technology personnel to aim for the frontiers of science and technology, lead the direction of its development, shoulder the heavy responsibilities bestowed by history and be vanguard in innovation in the new era. He said China's strength in this field is undergoing a transition from quantity accumulation to quality leap and from breakthroughs in certain fields to improvement of systematic capabilities. According to him, China's prime resources should be focused and strategic planning made to deal with “key areas and stranglehold problems” for breakthroughs at the earliest possible date in these fields.²⁹

- **China, Austria eye in-depth military cooperation**

On May 30, 2018, Chinese State Councillor and Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe met with General Othmar Commenda, chief of the General Staff of the

²⁸ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/56683.htm>

²⁹ “Xi calls for developing China into world science and technology leader”, The People's Daily, May 29, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0529/c90000-9464968.html>, Accessed on June 4, 2018.

Austrian Armed Forces in Beijing. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen agreed to establish the China-Austria strategic partnership of friendship in April 2018. Wei said that Austria is an important cooperative partner of China in Europe and expressed China's willingness to extend cooperation with the Austrian military to implement the important consensus reached by the heads of state of the two countries to promote the construction of a community of shared future for mankind and the Belt and Road Initiative. Commenda said Austrian military is willing to work with Chinese military to deepen cooperation, expand exchanges and promote the sound development of friendly relations between the two militaries.³⁰

- **China, Laos to advance building community of shared future**

On May 30, 2018, China and Laos agreed to advance the building of a community of shared future during the talks between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Laotian President Bounnhang Vorachit in Beijing. Xi said the two sides have reached important consensus on building a community of shared future with strategic importance and urged both sides to promote its transformation from concept to action, from vision to reality. Xi also called on both sides to carry out comprehensive, multi-level and institutional dialogues and exchanges and raise the level of mutual trust.

Xi added the two sides should make efforts to promote cooperation in major projects under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, improve people's to form a new pattern of cooperation. He suggested that the two countries strengthen security cooperation to ensure safety of China-Laos community of shared future. Bounnhang vowed to enhance pragmatic cooperation in all areas, speed up cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and strengthen coordination in international and regional affairs.³¹

- **China to host first China-Africa defence forum**

On May 31, 2018, spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defence of China said that China will host the first-ever China-Africa forum on defence and security from June 26 to July 10, 2018. According to the statement, the forum aims to deepen the China-Africa comprehensive strategic partnership, promote building a shared future for China and Africa, and meet the needs of Africa's new security situations and China-Africa defence cooperation.³²

³⁰ "China, Austria eye in-depth military cooperation", *China Military Online*, May 30, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-05/30/content_8046045.htm, Accessed on June 4, 2018.

³¹ "China, Laos to advance building community of shared future", May 31, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-05/31/content_8046051.htm, Accessed on June 4, 2018.

³² "China to host first China-Africa defence forum", June 01, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-06/01/content_8047589.htm, Accessed on June 04, 2018.

- **China participates in West Africa ‘Eku Kugbe’ naval exercise for the first time**

China sent its guided-missile frigate Yancheng to Nigeria for a multinational naval exercise in the Gulf of Guinea. It is the first time China has participated in the exercise. Six foreign warships and 12 Nigerian Navy combat vessels conducted an international maritime policing in a joint multinational navies manoeuvre code named Exercise Eku Kugbe. The six foreign ships include one each from Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, France, Portugal and China. The multinational maritime exercise started in 2016 to deal with piracy and regional threats to shipping in the Gulf of Guinea. China has invested in Nigeria’s energy resources importing nearly \$1.5 billion worth of oil and gas annually. The naval exercise was sponsored by the Economic Community of Central African States and the Economic Community of West African States.³³

European Union

- **French National Front has Renamed itself as ‘National Rally’**

French National Front has renamed itself as ‘National Rally’. Members of the party have voted to change the name. The move is considered to be an attempt to ‘shed a brand associated by many voters with racism and anti-Semitism and facilitate alliances with other parties.’ Marine Le Pen has also sought to reassert her authority after her defeat in the Presidential elections held in 2017. She said the decision would give the party new momentum. She also talked about a coalition with allies to come into power.³⁴

- **EU Lodges Case against US’ Steel and Aluminium Tariffs**

The EU has opened a case at the World Trade Organisation after the US imposed a 25 per cent duty on European steel and a 10 percent duty on European aluminium. Cecilia Malmström, the EU trade commissioner, said, “We are not in a trade war, but we are in a very difficult situation caused by the United States.” She added, “I would not use the term ‘trade war’ because it has a psychological effect.” She also said, “The US is playing a dangerous game here.” The US claim that the tariffs were

³³ Drake Long, “China participates in West Africa ‘Eku Kugbe’ naval exercise for the first time”, *The Defense Post*, May 31, 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/05/31/china-eku-kugbe-exercise-west-africa/>, Accessed on June 4, 2018.

³⁴ France's National Front renamed 'National Rally', France 24, June 1, 2018, <http://www.france24.com/en/20180601-france-national-front-renamed-national-rally-le-pen-marine>

needed for national security, she argued that it was unjustified and no more than “pure protectionism”.³⁵

- **Stop Criticizing Trump Administration, Hungarian Foreign Minister Said**

Hungarian Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Peter Szijjarto said, “I always urge our friends in the European Union not to play this new sport art which is created which is called bashing (the) United States, you know, because the more our European friends bash the U.S., the more negative impact they will cause with that.” He opposed the EU’s vocal criticism of Trump administration. However, he accepted that “all restrictive measures that constrain international trade are detrimental for Hungary.”³⁶

- **More Czech Troops in Afghanistan and Iraq**

The Czech Parliament has approved to increase the number of troops deployed in Afghanistan and other countries. The Czech Republic plans to deploy 390 soldiers in Afghanistan through 2020 under the NATO-led Resolute Support mission. 110 Czech troops will serve in Iraq up from 49 at present and around 120 soldiers will be sent to Africa’s Sahel region.³⁷

- **The Saber Strike Exercise**

Non-NATO member Israel is participating in Saber Strike for the first time. 18,000 soldiers from 19 primarily NATO countries are participating in the military exercise in Poland and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.³⁸

- **EU braces for retaliation as US tariffs come into effect**

The European Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmstrom, vowed to open a World Trade Organization (WTO) case against Washington on Thursday; but, Europe all eyes are now on the immediate tariffs Brussels will introduce. Brussels is said to be targeting Harley Davidson, bourbon, peanut butter, denim jeans and a number of products that are not only “iconic” but will hurt prominent Republicans in their constituencies. Although retaliation will be iconic and politically targeted, it will also be proportionate. According to Bloomberg, the EU is planning tariffs to

³⁵ Jennifer Rankin, EU opens WTO case against Trump's steel and aluminium tariffs, The Guardian, June 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jun/01/eu-starts-retaliation-against-donald-trumps-steel-and-aluminium-tariffs>

³⁶ Natasha Turak, Stop bashing Trump, Hungary's foreign minister tells Europe, CNBC, June 1, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/01/stop-bashing-trump-hungarys-foreign-minister-tells-europe.html>

³⁷ Czech parliament approves more troops in Afghanistan, Iraq, The Seattle Times, June 1, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/czech-parliament-approves-more-troops-in-afghanistan-iraq/>

³⁸ Yaniv Kubovich, In First, Israel Participates in Major NATO Exercise Near Russia, Haaretz, June 4, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/russia-nato-israel-in-major-nato-exercise-1.6140090>

the tune of €2.8 billion on American by June 20. US tariffs on European steel and aluminium come into force on 1 June, 2018, aligning the status of Europe with that of Mexico, China, Canada, South Korea, Japan and China. The 25% tariff on steel and 10% on aluminium are meant to shield the US economy from a glut in production, which is mostly attributed to China.³⁹

- **Secretary General Welcomes President of Colombia to NATO**

Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia to NATO for talks on Thursday (31 May 2018), marking the first-ever visit by a Colombian head of state to the Alliance. Colombia is NATO's newest partner, and its first in Latin America. Looking to future cooperation, President Santos and Secretary General Stoltenberg agreed that NATO and Colombia should work together in areas of mutual interest, including cyber defence, demining, and promoting the role of women in peace and security. NATO's cooperation with Colombia has been developing steadily since 2013, and Colombia officially became a partner country in May 2017. NATO works with more than 40 partner countries around the world to promote international peace and security.⁴⁰

- **Assessing the impact of artificial intelligence on security**

NATO has to take the necessary steps to protect the alliance from external cyber threats from other countries but also weaknesses within NATO, General John Allen told a closed on the record briefing at the GLOBSEC Forum in Bratislava. Asked by New Europe if NATO is identifying specific countries as potential threats for cyber security, Allen said, "Sure. At the intel level, absolutely. And, frankly, you have countries that are coming at you. And you have other countries that are weaknesses within NATO because they're not taking the kind of steps necessary to protect their networks. You have vulnerabilities of your own and you have to work with certain countries to ensure that if they're not properly protected, your network is protected from them so it's a very interesting moment actually."⁴¹

- **Italy: populist government sworn in as political deadlock ends**

Italy's new populist government has been sworn in to power after the president, Sergio Mattarella, agreed to a revised slate of ministers – just days after a bitter row over the incoming leaders' stance on the euro ended their initial bid to assume power. Giuseppe Conte was sworn in as prime minister on Friday after a last-ditch coalition deal ended months of political deadlock and narrowly avoided snap elections in the eurozone's third largest economy. Conte, an academic and political novice, will head a government of ministers from the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and the far-right League party. The first populist coalition in a

³⁹ New Europe, 1 June 2018, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/eu-braces-retaliation-us-tariffs-come-effect/>

⁴⁰ NATO Newsroom, 31 May 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_155030.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁴¹ New Europe, 1 June 2018, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/nato-eu-tackle-cyber-threats/>

founding EU member has raised concerns in some European quarters. The 53-year-old was sworn in alongside his cabinet, which will see the M5S leader, Luigi Di Maio, and League chief, Matteo Salvini, in key ministerial posts. The deal will bring at least temporary calm to a political crisis that has embroiled Italy for weeks. The tumult raised questions – in Brussels and among investors around the world – about whether the rise in Italian populism and the collapse of traditional parties posed [a fundamental threat to the country's future in the eurozone](#). The formation of the new government will at least temporarily allay those concerns, because it will remove for now the threat that snap elections will be called later this summer, a prospect that worried investors because it could have bolstered support for anti-EU parties.⁴²

- **Mariano Rajoy Ousted in Spanish No-Confidence Vote**

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy of Spain lost a no-confidence vote on Friday, ousting one of Europe's longest-serving leaders from office over a major corruption scandal within his conservative party. Pedro Sánchez, the leader of the main opposition Socialist Party, is set to replace Mr. Rajoy as prime minister as soon as this weekend. But with Mr. Sánchez's party holding just 84 of the 350 seats in Parliament, his mandate could be short-lived, paving the way for another general election. The abrupt leadership switch in Spain amplifies the political uncertainty in southern Europe, coming on the heels of the recent power struggle in Italy. The developments in Italy have rattled financial markets and resulted in a new government in which two parties with a history

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Trump puts Singapore meet back on after meeting North Korean official**

On June 1, 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump said that his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is back on for June 12 in Singapore. The announcement came after Trump's meeting with Kim Yong-chol, vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea for South Korean affairs and head of the United Front Work Department. Kim is the highest-ranking official from Pyongyang to visit Washington in 18 years. "We'll be meeting on June 12 in Singapore," Trump told reporters at the White House. Trump also said that Kim

⁴² The Guardian, 1 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/31/italys-populist-leaders-strike-deal-resurrect-coalition>

delivered a personal letter from Kim Jong-un. Kim previously had talks with Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of States.⁴³

- **Russian foreign minister Lavrov meets Kim Jong-un**

On May 31, 2018, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov met North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang. During the meeting Kim reaffirmed his commitment to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and expressed hope for a phased process in resolving the issue. Kim during the meeting said, “the DPRK’s will for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula still remains unchanged and consistent and fixed”. The KCNA quoted Kim that “he hoped that the DPRK-U.S. relations and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula will be solved on a stage-by-stage basis.” Lavrov praised Kim for having contact with South Korea and the United States, saying that the situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula has entered a “phase of stability.” He expressed full support for the North’s commitment to denuclearization. According to KCNA, Lavrov said that “Russia fully supports the DPRK’s determination and stand on the DPRK-U.S. summit high on the agenda and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and wishes for their good successes.”⁴⁴

- **North Korea and South Korea high-level meeting held**

On June 1, 2018, a high-level meeting between North Korea and South Korea was held at the border village of Panmunjom. The meeting was led by South Korea's Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon and Ri Son Gwon, chairman of the North's committee for the peaceful reunification of the country. Both sides discussed ways to follow up on the agreement reached during the first summit between Kim and Moon in April that included working-level military, sports and forest cooperation. North Korea had called off a planned meeting with the South last month in protest against U.S.-South Korean air combat drills before South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong -un revived it during a surprise second summit on May 26.⁴⁵

- **Japanese Prime Minister Abe to meet President Trump before the Singapore Summit**

On May 30, 2018, Japan announced that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will meet U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington on June 7 ahead of an expected summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore on June 12. Japanese Prime Minister Abe, one of the most vociferous supporters of Trump’s “maximum pressure” campaign against the nuclear-armed North, has been concerned that the U.S. president’s decision to meet Kim might result in him

⁴³ "Trump meets with North Korean official, says June 12 Singapore summit is back on", The Korea JoongAng Daily, June 2, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3048863

⁴⁴ "Kim talks denuclearization pledge with Lavrov", The Korea JoongAng Daily, June 2, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3048839

⁴⁵ "North Korea suggests joint celebration of first inter-Korean summit in the South", The Korea Times, June 1, 2018, www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/06/103_249961.html

making a deal with Pyongyang that leaves out shorter- and medium-range missiles that could strike Japan. He has also sought to resolve the issue of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s, making it a priority of his administration, and has repeatedly asked Trump to broach the issue with Pyongyang.⁴⁶

- **Japan, Vietnam agree on maritime safety cooperation**

On May 30, 2018, Japan and Vietnam agreed to bolster cooperation in maritime safety and defense, and expressed shared concerns over China's growing activity in the South China Sea. The agreement was made during a meeting between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang in Tokyo. President Quang was in Japan on a state visit marking the 45th anniversary of the countries' diplomatic ties. In a statement after their talks, they called for a non-militarization of the South China Sea and warned against any unilateral actions changing the status quo. "Diplomatic efforts will lead to non-militarization," Abe said. "We shared an understanding that it is important to fully comply with international law and contribute to achieving a peaceful and stable South China Sea."⁴⁷

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Malaysia cancels High-Speed Rail project with Singapore**

Malaysia's Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad on May 28 after the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia supreme council meeting confirmed that the High-Speed Rail (HSR) project with Singapore will be scrapped. The HSR is a 350-km railway scheme linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore and is expected to start operations from 2026. The Prime Minister said that the Government had to talk to Singapore about it and the compensation that needed to be paid which comes to around RM 500 million. According to the PM, "It's not beneficial, it's going to cost us a huge sum of money. We will make no money at all from the operation. It is just a short track". Earlier, while speaking to the told the Financial Times the PM talked on the need to do away with some of the unnecessary projects in which he cited the example of the high-speed rail.⁴⁸

- **Philippines Foreign Secretary states all action being undertaken against China's action in the SCS**

⁴⁶ "Abe to meet Trump at White House on June 7 ahead of possible U.S.-North Korea summit", The Japan Times, May 30, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/05/30/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-meet-trump-white-house-june-7-ahead-possible-u-s-north-korea-summit/#.WxTM2EiFOM8>

⁴⁷ "Japan, Vietnam agree on maritime safety cooperation", The Asahi Shimbun, May 30, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201806010016.html

⁴⁸ Rashninjeet S. Bedi and Hemanantnani Sivanabdam, "Dr M confirms high-speed rail project with Singapore to be scrapped", *The Star Online*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/05/28/dr-m-confirms-scrapping-of-high-speed-rail-project-with-singapore/>, accessed on May 29, 2018.

Amid calls to file a diplomatic protest against China's landing of an H-6K bomber on Woody Island in the Paracel chain in the South China Sea, the Philippine government justified its position not to engage in "megaphone or microphone" diplomacy. The Philippine government did not directly call out China for its recent actions in the disputed South China Sea unlike Vietnam which asked Beijing to withdraw military equipment from the South China Sea. Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano during a flag-raising ceremony at the Department of Foreign Affairs on May 28 stated that "for those who keep saying, 'File a protest, file protest,' what do they think we meant when we said, 'We are taking all diplomatic actions'? At the right time, we will prove you wrong because nothing is secret forever'. Mr Cayetano stressed that President Rodrigo Duterte himself had asserted the country's claim over the West Philippine Sea before Chinese President Xi Jinping. The Foreign Secretary further added that all actions taken to address China's aggression will be revealed in the future.⁴⁹

- **India to establish medical college and hospital in Cambodia**

Indian Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu at a press conference after returning from the fifth edition of the India-Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) Business Conclave in Phnom Penh, stated that as part of a move to strengthen ties with ASEAN, India will establish a medical college and hospital in Cambodia. The minister however did not give details as to who might invest in the Cambodian project and did not offer a timeline. Mr Prabhu said a detailed report of the project is being finalised. The state-owned Export-Import Bank of India has already prioritised funding for Indian healthcare operators and investors in the education sector to expand into Cambodia, noting that the demand for specialised medical services in the Kingdom was on the rise.⁵⁰

- **India-Indonesia Relations elevated to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**

During the first official visit of the Prime Minister of India to the Republic of Indonesia on 29-30 May 2018, it was announced that the bilateral relationship between the two countries have been elevated to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This will allow the creation of new mechanisms like bilateral security dialogue, trilateral dialogue, signing of an enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement and Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the Exploration and Uses of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes. The elevation of the partnership would also allow for enhanced trade and investment cooperation, sustainable development of marine resources with emphasis on the development of the Blue Economy, help develop maritime infrastructure and promote maritime industries especially in fisheries and ship-building, enhance information sharing related to

⁴⁹ Patricia Lourdes Viraj, "Philippines to disclose diplomatic actions 'at the right time'", *Phil Star Global*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/05/28/1819453/philippines-disclose-diplomatic-actions-at-right-time>, accessed on May 29, 2018.

⁵⁰ Hor Kimsay, "India to build medical college and hospital in the Kingdom", *The Phnom Penh Post*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/india-build-medical-college-and-hospital-kingdom>, accessed on May 29, 2018.

maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region and also help strengthen marine safety and security in the Indo-Pacific through the ASEAN-led mechanism. Both parties reaffirmed their support to the Technical Meetings for expeditious negotiations for a mutually acceptable solution on the delimitation of maritime boundaries between the two countries based on the principles of international law, including UNCLOS. The President of Indonesia, Mr. Joko Widodo, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed on a shared vision and principles for the Indo-Pacific region. Both leaders shared their desire towards strengthening their maritime cooperation for promotion of peace, stability and bringing in robust economic growth and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific region, where sovereignty and territorial integrity, international law, in particular UNCLOS, freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development and where an open, free, fair and mutually beneficial trade and investment system are respected.⁵¹

- **PM Modi meets new Malaysian PM**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 31 met his newly-elected Malaysian counterpart Dr Mahathir Mohammad. According to MEA Spokesperson Raveesh Kumar, the two leaders had a productive exchange of views on strengthening bilateral strategic partnership, which also includes boosting economic and cultural relationship. PM Modi also met with Deputy Prime Minister Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and her husband Anwar Ibrahim. In the meeting good discussion took place in order to take India-Malaysia relationship to newer heights.⁵²

- **India-Singapore committed to expanding the scope of their strategic and economic partnership**

In a press statement by the Indian Prime Minister after his meeting with Singapore's PM on June 1, PM Modi emphasized the importance of defence and security in the bilateral strategic partnership. While congratulating the navies of India and Singapore on the 25th anniversary of SIMBEX, the PM also stated on the initiation of a tripartite naval exercises very soon.

Combating cyber security, extremism and terrorism according to PM Modi will be an important area of bilateral cooperation in the coming days. On the economic relationship front the PM expressed his happiness on the completion of the second review of the India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. Both Prime Ministers also expressed their satisfaction on the start of their digital partnership; defined as an area of natural partnership with unlimited possibilities, while both emphasising on the need to maintain an open, stable and fair international trade regime. PM Modi also emphasised the importance of ASEAN

⁵¹“Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”, *Prime Minister India*, May 30, 2018, http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/shared-vision-of-india-indonesia-maritime-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific/?comment=disable, accessed on May 31, 2018.

⁵²“PM Modi meets Malaysian counterpart Mahathir Mohammad”, *Business Line*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/pm-modi-meets-malaysian-counterpart-mahathir-mohammad/article24043714.ece>, accessed on June 1, 2018.

unity, its centrality and regional sustainability, through the institutions led by ASEAN. He also conveyed India's firm commitment to an early conclusion of the RCEP Agreement and hoped for a fair, balanced and comprehensive agreement.⁵³

Myanmar

- **Government rejects US report on Myanmar religious freedom**

The government said the US report on religious freedom in Myanmar ignores reality in the country where most people of different ethnic races and beliefs are living together peacefully. U Aung San Win, spokesperson from the Ministry of Religion Affairs and Culture, rejected the allegations in the report, which cited widespread “abuses and discrimination against religious minorities by government and societal actors” in the country. “We reject the report,” he said. “We are always explaining the condition of the state. It’s politically targeting Myanmar.”⁵⁴

- **Government launches investigation of ARSA massacre in Rakhine**

The government has formed a three-member independent investigation commission that will include “one international personality” to look into human rights violations, the President’s Office announced. The commission will investigate “the violation of human rights and related issues following the terrorist attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army”, the statement said. “National and international legal and technical experts” will assist the team, it said. The statement however did not say who would be involved in the commission. It also did not describe if the team would be allowed to probe allegations directed against Tatmadaw personnel.⁵⁵

- **Government issues amnesty to 62 Muslim returnees**

Over 60 Muslims refugees who voluntarily returned to northern Rakhine State were given amnesty by the government so their identities can be verified under the agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh, the State Counsellor’s Office said in a statement. It said the Muslims, who fled to Bangladesh last year to escape the

⁵³“English Translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister during visit to Singapore”, *Ministry of External Affairs*, June 1, 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29941/English_Translation_of_Press_Statement_by_Prime_Minister_during_visit_to_Singapore, accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁵⁴ Government rejects US report on Myanmar religious freedom, 1 st June 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/government-rejects-us-report-myanmar-religious-freedom.html>

⁵⁵ Government launches investigation of ARSA massacre in Rakhine, 1 June 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/government-launches-investigation-arsa-massacre-rakhine.html>

violence in northern Rakhine, returned under their own arrangements, unaware of the agreement signed between the two countries in November⁵⁶.

- **US Secretary of Defence discusses on Rakhine affairs at ASEAN meeting**

Union Minister and National Security Adviser Thaung Tun said that US Secretary of Defence James Norman Mattis discussed Rakhine State affairs at a meeting with ASEAN ministers on Indo-Pacific strategy. Union Minister and National Security Adviser Thaung Tun said that he told the US Secretary of Defence and ASEAN ministers at the meeting, his government welcomed the refugees who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh and the government was doing work for receiving repatriated refugees as quickly as possible as the pre-monsoon season would arrive soon⁵⁷.

- **Rakhine Govt Undecided on How to Use Farmland Abandoned by Rohingya Refugees**

The Rakhine State government has not yet made a decision regarding some 70,000 acres of abandoned farmland in Maungdaw Township left behind by Rohingya Muslims who fled to Bangladesh last year. “We’re still waiting for the policy of the Union government. We’ll do as it says. We don’t have enough workers for 70,000 acres of farmland,” the Rakhine State minister for agriculture, livestock, forestry and mining U Kyaw Lwin told The Irrawaddy⁵⁸.

- **Rohingya Insurgents Reject Amnesty Report on Hindu Villagers Killed in Myanmar**

In its report, published last week, Amnesty documented in detail atrocities it said had been committed by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) near a remote village in Rakhine State. The report, citing witnesses, including Hindu women who said they were abducted by ARSA insurgents, said fighters from the group killed as many as 99 Hindus near Kha Maung Seik after launching the raids on security posts on August 25. “We categorically deny all of these unjustifiable and careless serious criminal accusations mentioned in the said report,” ARSA said in a statement signed by its leader, Ata Ullah, and posted on social media network Twitter.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Government issues amnesty to 62 Muslim returnees, 28 May 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/government-issues-amnesty-62-muslim-returnees.html>

⁵⁷ US Secretary of Defence discusses on Rakhine affairs at ASEAN meeting, 2 June 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/us-secretary-defence-discusses-rakhine-affairs-asean-meeting>

⁵⁸ Rakhine Govt Undecided on How to Use Farmland Abandoned by Rohingya Refugees, 31st May 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/rakhine-govt-undecided-use-farmland-abandoned-rohingya-refugees.html>

⁵⁹ Rohingya Insurgents Reject Amnesty Report on Hindu Villagers Killed in Myanmar, 28th May 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/rohingya-insurgents-reject-amnesty-report-hindu-villagers-killed-myanmar.html>

North America

- **Canada Retaliates With Tariffs on \$12.8 Billion of U.S. Goods**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau retaliated swiftly against President Donald Trump's metals tariffs by imposing his own levies on as much as C\$16.6 billion (\$12.8 billion) of U.S. imports in what Canada calls its strongest trade action since the Second World War. Trudeau invoked decades of battles fought alongside the U.S. and defending North American airspace as proof the U.S. tariffs based on a national security investigation are "unacceptable" and "punitive." The Canadian tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum will aim to match U.S. penalties on a dollar-for-dollar basis, based on export values, according to Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland. The tariffs take effect on July 1 -- Canada Day -- and will last until the U.S. ends its trade action. They will also cover a range of imports such as yogurt, pizza, whiskeys and tablecloths, in addition to aluminum and steel products. Canada will challenge the U.S. tariffs at the World Trade Organization and through a Nafta panel.⁶⁰

- **Trudeau given classified national security report on India trip**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is reviewing a highly classified report on his ill-fated trip to India from the newly-created national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians. The committee says the document includes 18 findings and six recommendations based on its review of allegations of foreign interference in Canadians' political affairs, risks to the prime minister's security and inappropriate use of intelligence. Trudeau will now determine how much can be divulged publicly without damaging national security, international relations or solicitor-client information, although an unclassified version will eventually be tabled in the House of Commons and the Senate. The investigation was prompted by the controversy that engulfed Trudeau's trip to India in February after it was revealed that a convicted attempted murderer had been invited to two events with the prime minister.⁶¹

- **Canada invites a dozen extra nations to G7 Summit**

Canada will invite the leaders of a dozen additional countries to the Group of Seven summit in Charlevoix, Que., this month, as well as four international organizations. Canada holds the G7 presidency for 2018 and will host the summit in Charlevoix June 8-9. This year the outreach nations, which are chosen exclusively by the host country, come from every inhabited continent but Australasia. The invitees are: Argentina, Bangladesh, Haiti, Jamaica, Kenya, Marshall Islands, Norway, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa and Vietnam.

⁶⁰ Greg Quinn and Josh Wingrove, "Canada Retaliates With Tariffs on \$12.8 Billion of U.S. Goods," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-31/canada-retaliates-with-tariffs-on-12-8-billion-of-u-s-goods>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

⁶¹ The Canadian Press, "Trudeau given classified national security report on India trip", <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-trudeau-given-classified-national-security-report-on-india-trip/>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

The heads of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the World Bank are also on the guest list. One nation that comes as no surprise is Argentina, which this year holds the presidency of the G20. All of the members of the G7 are also in the G20. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited Argentina in 2016 for talks with the country's President Mauricio Macri. The two men had already established a rapport. Rwanda is the only landlocked country on a list that includes several island nations. Protection of the oceans and preservation of fisheries is a signature theme this year. Some of the countries on the list (such as Argentina) have struggled to control illegal, unregulated fishing off their coasts by foreign vessels. That topic will be discussed in Quebec. The Marshall Islands, Seychelles, and Bangladesh are all nations considered especially vulnerable to climate change and rising oceans. Norway is also a maritime nation that has been able to combine a strong offshore oil industry with a healthy fishery, which may help explain its presence on the list. Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and has suffered major environmental degradation.⁶²

The United States

- **Trade Tensions Intensify With Trump and Allies Set For Showdown**

President Donald Trump is headed for a showdown with America's allies at a Group of Seven summit this week in Quebec, with the European Union and Canada threatening retaliatory measures unless he reverses course on new steel and aluminum levies. China, meanwhile, is warning it will withdraw commitments it made on trade if the president carries out a separate threat to impose tariffs on the Asian country. While China doesn't want an escalation in trade tensions, it has the confidence, competence and experience to defend its core interests, according to a commentary published by state-run Economic Daily. The White House appeared unfazed by threats from allies. Top economic adviser Larry Kudlow said Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was "overreacting" in response to the tariffs, and said the blame for any escalation lies with the U.S.'s trading partners. He said Trump is simply responding to decades of trade abuse.⁶³

- **US-North Korea: Trump says summit with Kim is back on**

Donald Trump's summit with Kim Jong-un in Singapore on 12 June is back on, the US president says, a week after it was scrapped. Mr Trump made the announcement after talks with a senior North Korean envoy at the White House. The envoy, General Kim Yong-chol, hand-delivered a letter from the North Korean leader to President Trump. Mr Trump at first said the letter was "very interesting"

⁶² Evan Dyer, "Canada invites a dozen extra nations to G7 Summit," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/g-7-countries-invited-1.4686890>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

⁶³ Andrew Mayeda, Yuko Takeo, and Justin Sink, "Trade Tensions Intensify With Trump and Allies Set For Showdown," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-03/u-s-allies-push-trump-for-change-of-heart-as-trade-war-looms>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

but later said he had not yet opened it. He also said the issue of formally ending the Korean War would be on the table in Singapore. The 1950-53 conflict only ended with a truce, not a final peace treaty. Mr Trump cautioned that the summit might not achieve a final deal on the North's controversial nuclear programme. President Trump has offered to help rebuild the North's economy if it scraps its nuclear weapons. Kim Jong-un says he is committed to "denuclearisation" in some form but his precise demands are unclear.⁶⁴

- **Modi, Mattis pledge to continue strong U.S.-India strategic partnership**

India and the United States have pledged to continue their strong bilateral strategic partnership, the Pentagon said after a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis. Mr. Mattis met the prime minister on the sidelines of the International Institute for Strategic Studies' 17th Asia Security Summit -- also known as the Shangri-La Dialogue -- in Singapore. "The two discussed the importance of the U.S.-India relationship, and the role of both nations in cooperating to uphold international laws and principles, and to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific," defence spokesperson Captain Jeff Davis said. The two leaders "pledged to continue the strong US-India strategic partnership and affirmed their commitment to maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in the region," Davis said in a readout of the meeting.⁶⁵

- **Mattis: US will compete vigorously with China if it must**

The United States is prepared to support China's choices if the East Asian giant promotes long-term peace and prosperity for all in the region, but it will "compete vigorously" with China if it must, said US Defence Secretary James Mattis. "There will be consequences to China ignoring the international community," said Mr Mattis, referring to China's militarisation in the disputed South China Sea and its competing claims with Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei over the islands there. One of those consequences was the disinvitation by the US to China recently for the US-hosted biennial naval drill, the Rim of the Pacific exercise. But he also added that the US will continue to pursue a "constructive, results-oriented relationship" with China and "compete vigorously if we must". But Mr Mattis also struck a positive note in mending ties. He will travel to Beijing soon for talks, he said. He also devoted a significant portion of his speech to assuring the largely regional audience of the US' commitment to their part of the world, and what he calls a "free and open Indo-Pacific". The US, he says, "seeks to help build an Indo-Pacific where sovereignty and territorial integrity are safeguarded, the promise of freedom fulfilled and prosperity prevails for all". It is also strengthening its partnership with India, as it values the role India can play in regional and global security, with Mr Mattis touting it as a "natural partnership" between the world's

⁶⁴ BBC, "US-North Korea: Trump says summit with Kim is back on," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44339003>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

⁶⁵ PTI, "Modi, Mattis pledge to continue strong U.S.-India strategic partnership," <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/modi-mattis-pledge-to-continue-strong-us-india-strategic-partnership/article24076453.ece>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

two largest democracies. "Make no mistake, America is in the Indo-Pacific to stay."⁶⁶

Mexico

- **Why Is Trump 'Not Important' in Mexico Election? All Candidates Are Against Him**

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a former mayor of Mexico City, railed against corruption and what he called "the mafia of power." He vowed to combat violence and impunity. He decried inequality and promised wage increases for the working class. He pledged to increase investment in social services for the young and the old. But there was one issue notably absent from his populist oratory: international relations, specifically those with the neighbor to the north. As the July 1 election nears, the relationship between the United States and Mexico has been only a minor theme, and often mostly absent. Amid the profound problems facing Mexico, matters of international relations can seem abstract and remote to many voters, and Mr. Trump's periodic attacks can feel irrelevant. The issues that seem to be animating the electorate are immediate problems that directly affect Mexicans' quality of life, including historically high rates of violence; poverty and inequality; and intractable corruption and impunity. While the presidential candidates have sought to differentiate themselves on key domestic issues, they have largely echoed each other in their positions on Mexico's relationship with the United States. In the May 20 debate, they sought to show they would be able to stand up to Mr. Trump's bullying, defend Mexico's sovereignty and honor, and support both Mexican immigrants in the United States and those returning to Mexico.⁶⁷

- **Mexico aims tariffs at Trump country, sees NAFTA complications**

Mexico hit back fast on U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum, targeting products from congressional districts that President Donald Trump's Republican party is fighting to retain in November elections. Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo said the tit-for-tat measures would complicate talks between the United States, Canada and Mexico to revamp the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that underpins trade between the neighbours. The spat meant it would be "very difficult" to reach a deal to revamp NAFTA before Mexico's July 1 presidential election, though he underlined the continent had not entered a trade war. Mexico's retaliatory tariffs target pork legs, apples, grapes and cheeses as well as steel – products from U.S. heartland states that supported Trump in the 2016

⁶⁶ Tan Dawn Wei, "Mattis: US will compete vigorously with China if it must," <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mattis-us-will-compete-vigorously-with-china-if-it-must>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

⁶⁷ Kirk Semple, "Why Is Trump 'Not Important' in Mexico Election? All Candidates Are Against Him," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/03/world/americas/mexico-election-trump.html> Accessed on 04 June 2018.

election. The measures will be in place until the U.S. government drops its tariffs, Mexico's government said. Trump's Republicans are fighting to retain control of Congress in mid-term elections. Their majority in the House of Representatives is seen as vulnerable.⁶⁸

Latin America and the Caribbean

Argentina

- **President Macri, Congress Clash Over Energy Rates**

Argentina's senators are in a special session debating whether to freeze public service rates or even push back prices to last year's levels. The bill, which was already passed by the lower house on May 9, was proposed by the opposition bloc, Argentina Federal, and would roll back water, electricity and gas tariffs to November 2017 levels. The measures, as it stands, would also only allow rate increases on these items based on users' salaries or pensions. Senator Jose Mayans said rates must be halted because since November 2017 the value of the peso has plummeted. Meanwhile, the national inflation rate, which had hovered around 23 percent for the past year, rose to 25 percent this month. Opposition Senator Miguel Pichetto told reporters: "This is a political message from Congress to the government that there is little social tolerance regarding the energy-heavy increases, not just for energy, but in groceries, transportation." Interior Minister Rogelio Frigerio said the government "will not hesitate a moment to do what it has to do." The only thing that remains unclear is when the president will veto: immediately after the law is approved by the Senate, or after the June 8 organized march on Congress.⁶⁹

Brazil

- **Fed Up With Corruption, Fresh Faces Take On Brazil's Political Old Guard**

Political novices — activists, economists, entrepreneurs, business executives and lawyers — have been jolted into action by an enormous bribery and corruption scandal that has engulfed all the country's mainstream parties and taken down powerful politicians. President Michel Temer, Brazil's conservative leader, has been charged in the yearslong corruption investigation known as Lava Jato, or Carwash, centered on money laundering at the state-controlled oil company, Petrobras. The former left-wing President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva began serving a

⁶⁸ Michael O'boyle And Frank Jack Daniel, "Mexico aims tariffs at Trump country, sees NAFTA complications," <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-mexico-hits-back-at-us-steel-aluminum-tariffs-with-equivalent/>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

⁶⁹----, "Argentina: President Macri, Congress Clash Over Energy Rates," <https://www.telesur.tv/english/news/Argentina-President-Macri-Congress-Clash-Over-Energy-Taxes-20180530-0036.html>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

12-year prison sentence related to the case in April. More than half the country's senators and one-third of the lawmakers in the lower House are being investigated for crimes. But the vast majority intend to run for re-election in October, when Brazil is also choosing its next president. According to polls, corruption is the top concern for voters ahead of the election, while confidence in traditional political parties is at an all-time low. Outsiders are hoping to seize on the discontented national mood to break into a political establishment that has long been closed to disruptive, new voices. Experts say it is unlikely there will be a big shift in the political landscape in October, but the new candidates could lay the groundwork for greater success in future elections.⁷⁰

- **Brazil's Trucker Strike Defies Solution Amid Political Clash**

Brazil's government declared the end of a devastating truckers' strike on several occasions over the past week. Yet much of Latin America's largest economy remains strangled as protests continue for a ninth day. The explanation for the prolonged chaos includes a weak and unpopular government in an election year. What started as a genuine movement by workers accustomed to spending many days away from home was eventually hijacked by political forces on the left and the right. The strike continues because of the interest of "people who want to overthrow the government," said Jose da Fonseca Lopes, head of the largest truckers' union. In a bid to restore order, the government started arresting people who were blocking roads, Institutional Security Minister Sergio Etchegoyen, a retired general, told reporters on Tuesday. Yet a military intervention isn't a solution, he added.⁷¹

Colombia

- **Right-wing Duque leads Petro in Colombia election: poll**

Colombian right-wing presidential candidate Ivan Duque is holding onto his long-time lead over leftist Gustavo Petro, ahead of the country's run-off election on June 17, an opinion poll published showed. Duque, who has promised to overhaul the 2016 peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and cut taxes, won the most votes in the first round election on May 27, with 39 percent. Ahead of the run-off, Duque has 55 percent support, Centro Nacional de Consultoria poll said. Petro, a former member of the M-19 rebel group and ex-mayor of Bogota, has 35 percent support, according to the survey. Petro, who has promised to fight inequality, safeguard the FARC peace deal, ban open-pit mining and shift state-run oil company Ecopetrol to focus on renewable energy, won 25

⁷⁰ Shasta Darlington, "Fed Up With Corruption, Fresh Faces Take On Brazil's Political Old Guard," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/02/world/americas/brazil-election.html>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

⁷¹ Mario Sergio Lima and Simone Preissler Iglesias, "Brazil's Trucker Strike Defies Solution Amid Political Clash," <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-29/why-the-trucker-strike-strangling-brazil-doesn-t-want-to-end>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

percent in the May vote. The run-off will pit the two top finishers from the May election and means Duque and Petro are now seeking support from backers of candidates no longer in the race.⁷²

Russia

- **Russia, India and Defence Equipments**

According to a report in Economic Times on 29 May, the US has expressed concerns over the purchase of S-400 air defence system from Russia. Citing Mac Thornberry, chairman of US House Armed Services Committee, the report said that purchasing the Russian system would make it difficult for the US to share sensitive technology with India. The US officials have reportedly asked India to "reconsider" its decision to acquire S-400. It may be noted that India has concluded the Rs 40,000 crore deal with Russia to procure S-400 air defence system.⁷³

India has expanded its search for hightech assault rifles, carbines and small arms for its frontline soldiers, but has excluded its traditional ally, Russia, from the list of five countries that the Army-led procurement team plans to visit mid-June. The team is set to visit gun manufacturers in the US, Israel and South Korea, and even countries from where India has never bought military equipment.⁷⁴

- **Russia and US**

On a question on what would Russia like to see in US foreign policies, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on 30 May said that it would be nice if the US were more predictable in its actions. However, he said that reality is different. He said that Russia must conduct a dialogue both with Washington and Trump in particular even though US' actions are unpredictable and zigzag in nature.⁷⁵

- **Russia, Israel and NATO**

⁷² Reuters, "Right-wing Duque leads Petro in Colombia election: poll," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-election-polls/right-wing-duque-leading-petro-in-colombia-election-poll-idUSKCN1IX4LZ>, Accessed on 04 June 2018.

⁷³"India's S-400 air defence system purchase from Russia a matter of concern: US", *Times Now*, May 29, 2018. <http://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/indias-s-400-air-defence-system-purchase-from-russia-could-affect-ties-with-us/233328> Accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁷⁴Shaurya Karanbir Gurung, "Search for rifles: Russia not in list of 5 selected nations", *Economic Times*, May 31, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/search-for-rifles-russia-not-in-list-of-5-selected-nations/articleshow/64406348.cms> Accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁷⁵"Russian FM says what kind of politics Moscow would like to see from Washington", *Pravda*, May 30, 2018. http://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/politics/30-05-2018/141027-russia-usa-0/?utm_referrer=last_news_list Accessed on June 4, 2018.

18,000 soldiers from 19 countries are participating in Saber Strike 18 drill in NATO's eastern flank involving Poland and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania from 3 June. The drill will be till 15 June. It stressed, however, that Saber Strike "is not a provocation of Russia." In this exercise, Israel will also be part of the drill exercises. The other armed forces participating in the exercise are from United States, Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Macedonia, Poland, Spain, Romania, Norway, the Czech Republic, Romania and NATO.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, on 31 May, the NATO-Russia Council met at Ambassadorial level in Brussels. They had an open exchange on several topics, including the situation in and around Ukraine, issues related to military activities, transparency and risk reduction, as well as asymmetric techniques as aspects of doctrine and strategy. NATO and Russia both briefed on major upcoming exercises.⁷⁷

- **Russia, China and North Korea**

On 1 June, China complimented Russia for playing a “positive role” in the North Korean denuclearization process. China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying on 1 June said that “China welcomes the development of bilateral ties and the enhancement of high-level exchanges on the part of the DPRK and Russia. We believe that this is conducive to promoting the political settlement process of Korean Peninsula issue and upholding the peace and stability of the Peninsula and the Northeast Asia.”⁷⁸

On 29 May, Director of the Asian Strategy Center at the Institute of Economics within the Russian Academy of Sciences Georgy Toloraya said that an agreement between South Korea, the US and North Korea on settling the situation on the Korean Peninsula won’t have legal value, if the interests of Russia and China are ignored.⁷⁹

- **Russia and Syria**

On 29 May, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that only Syrian forces should be present in areas alongside the country's border with Israel and Jordan, as rebels in southern Syria prepare for a possible offensive by government troops. In recent days, Syrian government aircraft have dropped leaflets on rebel-held areas

⁷⁶Yaniv Kubovich, “In First, Israel Participates in Major NATO Exercise Near Russia”, *Haaretz*, June 3, 2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/in-first-israel-participates-in-major-nato-exercise-near-russia-1.6140090> Accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁷⁷“NATO-Russia Council meets in Brussels”, *NATO*, May 31, 2018. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_155036.htm Accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁷⁸Joel Gehrke, “China elevates Russia in North Korean talks”, *Washington Examiner*, June 1, 2018. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/china-compliments-russia-north-korean-denuclearization-talks> Accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁷⁹“Expert warns peace agreement can’t be reached on Korean Peninsula without Russia and China”, *TASS*, May 29, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1007076> Accessed on June 4, 2018.

in Deraa, warning of an imminent push and urging the fighters to lay down their arms. The southern province has emerged as a flashpoint in a wider standoff between Israel and Iran. Mr. Lavrov said the withdrawal of non-Syrian forces from the "de-escalation area" should be done on a "mutual basis" as part of a "two-way street". "The result of the ongoing work should be a situation in which troops of the Syrian armed forces will be stationed alongside the Syrian border with Israel," he said, without specifying which countries back these rebel groups.⁸⁰

- **Russia and UAE**

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed of the United Arab Emirates signed a declaration on a strategic partnership on 1 June which included an agreement to continue cooperation in the oil and gas sphere. This cooperation is aimed at providing balance and stability on the global oil market, the declaration said.⁸¹

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Pakistan, Afghanistan Renew Resolve to Jointly Fight Terrorism**

Afghanistan's national security advisor along with high ranking security officials consisted of country's interior minister and the intelligence agency chief visited Pakistan on 27 May 2018. The Afghan delegation not only met Pakistan's Pakistani National Security Adviser Nasser Janjua but also held crucial talks with military chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Both countries discussed Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Stability, recently concluded during Pakistan's Prime Minister Abbasi's visit to Kabul in April 2018. General Bajwa asked Afghan delegation to have mutual trust for each other in reducing violence initiated by terrorists in the region.⁸² The trip was to improve strained relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, increasing joint efforts to bring enduring peace and stability. Over the years, there were allegations that Pakistan continued to be the safe heaven for Taliban leaders in operating against Afghanistan and launching

⁸⁰"Russia: Only Syrian forces should be stationed on Israel border", *Aljazeera*, May 29, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2018/05/russia-syrian-forces-stationed-border-israel-180528145855321.html> Accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁸¹"Russia, UAE sign partnership deal, aim for stability in oil markets", *Reuters*, June 1, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-uae-sign-partnership-deal-aim-for-stability-in-oil-markets-idUSKCN1IX54G> Accessed on June 4, 2018.

⁸² Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 29 May 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=21037.

deliberate missile attacks on Afghanistan's eastern regions, resulting in killing of innocent Afghan nationals.⁸³

- **Saudi Arabia to Host Islamic Conference on Afghan Peace**

On 29 May 2018, Sayed Ehsan Tahiri, spokesman of High Peace Council (HPC) said that Saudi Arabia would organise a conference of religious scholars with regard to bringing peace in Afghanistan. Recalling Saudi Arabia's influence over Pakistan and Taliban, Tahiri mentioned, "When the war in Afghanistan is declared as a prohibited act in the view of religion, then the Taliban must show acceptance to the proposed peace package". It was expected that the two day conference in Saudi cities of Jeddah and Mecca, Islamic scholars around the world would discuss measures to bring Taliban to peace negotiating table with the support of Pakistan, US, Russia and NATO allies.⁸⁴

- **Atmar Meets India's Deputy NSA in Kabul**

Indian Deputy National Security Advisor Rajinder Khanna to Kabul visited Afghanistan on 30 May 2018. He was welcomed by Haneef Atmar, National Security Advisor of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. The visit came against the backdrop of the visit of high level Afghan delegation to Pakistan on 27 May that discussed joint efforts for peace negotiations and implementation of Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Stability improving bilateral relation and security situation of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistani government released an official statement adding "Pakistan and Afghanistan have expressed the resolve to work together to strengthen bilateral relations and improve the security situation in the region. This understanding was reached during a meeting between a high-level Afghan delegation and National Security Advisor Nasser Khan Janjua"⁸⁵.

- **Afghan, Pakistani & Chinese Diplomats Hold Strategic Talks**

A Trilateral strategic dialogue occurred amongst China, Afghanistan and Pakistan on 28 May 2018. In the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Karzai from Afghanistan, Vice-Foreign Minister Kong Xuan You from China and Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua from Pakistan highlighted steps Pakistan taken to boost bilateral trade, transit, people-to-people exchanges as well as deepening connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan. During the meeting, the leaders reassessed arrangements for the second trilateral meeting of foreign ministers to be held in Kabul 2018. The first FM-level meeting was held in Beijing in December in 2017 that focussed on three key areas namely strategic and security issues, counter-terrorism and

⁸³ Tolo News, 28 May 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/high-level-delegation-meets-pakistan%E2%80%99s-bajwa>

⁸⁴ Tolo News, 29 May 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/saudi-arabia-host-islamic-conference-afghan-peace>

⁸⁵ Tolo news, 30 May 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/atmar-meets-indias-deputy-national-security-advisor-kabul>

security and economic development and connectivity. Emphasizing Pakistani initiatives to engage Afghanistan in areas of peace and stability and economic cooperation, Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua from Pakistan highlighted the measures taken by Pakistan to enhance bilateral trade, transit, people-to-people exchanges and to deepen connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁸⁶

- **183 Civilians Killed, Hundreds Injured in May**

Civilian Protection Advocacy Group (CPAG) on 2 June 2018 reported that nearly 500 civilians were killed and injured in the month of May, 2018 in 23 provinces of Afghanistan. Afghan civilians had been constantly attacked through suicide attacks, roadside blasts, targeted attacks, mortar shells, night raids by security forces and constant violent activities by the Taliban. CPAG reported that 60 incidents of violence took place killing 183 people, including women and children and injuring nearly 337 others. Most of the recorded casualties happened in Nangarhar province with high number of casualties in Kandahar and Khost provinces.⁸⁷

- **Afghanistan Launches First-Ever Anti Human Trafficking Network**

On 30 May 2018, Chief Executive (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah launched Afghanistan Network for Combating Trafficking in Persons (ANCTIP). It was the first national referral network of NGOs and media to combat human trafficking as a part of a multi-year United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded program, implemented by the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM). According to Abdullah Abdullah, “The establishment of the anti-trafficking network is a fundamental need. Unfortunately, groups of smugglers in Afghanistan have gained ground because of various problems the country faces such as security threats. The Afghan government is committed to counter human trafficking; there is still much to be done. It is crucial now more than ever to cooperate, coordinate, and share responsibility in the fight against human trafficking.” US ambassador John Bass viewed that human smuggling in Afghanistan is the result of expansion of threats, violence and instability. Laurence Hart, IOM Afghanistan Chief of Mission said, “Trafficking in persons is a serious concern in Afghanistan. Strengthening the capacity of national NGOs to help the Afghan government in effective implementation of the new law to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants is the key purpose of this network,”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 29 May 2018, <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/node/515587>.

⁸⁷ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 3 June 2018,

http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=21073

⁸⁸ Tolo News, 30 May 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-launches-first-ever-anti-human-trafficking-network>

Bangladesh

- **India gives nod to 14 projects**

India has approved 14 of the 16 projects forwarded by Bangladesh for implementation under the second line of credit worth \$2 billion. The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council has approved the detailed plans of all 14 projects. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, high commissioner of India in Dhaka, met Mashiur Rahman, the prime minister's economic affairs adviser, on Wednesday (May 30) and discussed the swift implementation of the projects.⁸⁹

- **Hasina's India visit very successful: Envoy**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to West Bengal last week has been very successful in further strengthening the historical, cultural and people-to-people relations between Bangladesh and India, says the Bangladesh high commissioner to India. Syed Muazzem Ali's remarks came during an interaction with members of Indian Women's Press Corps at its office in New Delhi on Thursday (May 31), said a press release from the high commission.⁹⁰

- **SC extends stay order on Khaleda's bail**

The Supreme Court yesterday (May 31) extended its chamber judge's order that stayed the bail granted by the High Court to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in two criminal cases filed in Comilla. The SC asked government to file two separate leave to appeal petitions with it by June 24 against the HC bail orders in the cases filed in Comilla. The apex court fixed June 24 for holding hearing on the leave to appeal petitions.⁹¹

- **Moudud finds PM's India remark insulting**

Senior BNP leader Moudud Ahmed on Friday (June 1) criticized Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's remark that India would ever remember Bangladesh for what it gave to the neighbouring country and termed it insulting for the nation. "The prime minister has said India will remember forever for what she has so far given. Nothing can be more offensive and shameful remarks for the nation than this. We

⁸⁹ Jagran Chakma, "India gives nod to 14 projects," *Daily Star*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/india-gives-nod-14-projects-1584625>, accessed on June 2, 2018.

⁹⁰ "Envoy: PM Hasina's India visit very successful in boosting ties," *Dhaka Tribune*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2018/06/01/envoy-pm-hasina-s-india-visit-very-successful-in-boosting-ties>, accessed on June 2, 2018.

⁹¹ "Comilla Cases: SC extends stay order on Khaleda's bail," *Daily Star*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/comilla-cases-sc-extends-stay-order-khaledas-bail-1584502>, accessed on June 2, 2018.

strongly condemn it," he said while speaking at a discussion at the National Press Club.⁹²

- **Softer programmes won't ensure Khaleda's release: Moudud**

The BNP's senior leader Moudud Ahmed on Saturday (June 2) advocated harsher programmes to ensure release of party chairperson Khaleda Zia. Such programmes, he said, will also force the Awami League government to hold the next polls under a non-party government, reports UNB. "It's not possible to have Khaleda Zia freed from jail with soft and peaceful programmes. So, we must gradually take harsher programmes," he told an iftar-cum-discussion programme.⁹³

नेपाल

- प्रधानमंत्री ओली ने संसद को संबोधित किया:

प्रधानमंत्री के पी शर्मा ओली ने अपने कार्यकाल के १०० दिन पूरे होने पर संसद को संबोधित किया. उन्होंने कहा कि सरकार की नीतियाँ और कार्यक्रम जनता की इच्छाओं और विकास को पूरा कर रही है. प्रतिनिधि सभा के समक्ष बोलते हुए ओली ने कहा कि उनके कार्यक्रम एवं नीतियाँ 'समृद्ध नेपाल, प्रसन्न नेपाल' के सिद्धांत का समावेश करते हैं.⁹⁴

- समाजवादी फोरम सरकार में शामिल:

संघीय समाजवादी फोरम नेपाल ओली सरकार में शामिल हो गयी है. गौरतलब है कि मधेश की यह पार्टी जिसके अध्यक्ष उपेन्द्र यादव हैं, दो सूत्री समझौते के बाद सरकार में मिलने को राजी हो गयी. समझौते के अनुसार, फोरम द्वारा आन्दोलन के दौरान उठाये गये मुद्दे और संविधान संशोधन से संबंधित मुद्दे आपसी समझ से सुलझाये जायेंगे.⁹⁵

⁹² "Moudud finds PM's India remark insulting," *Dhaka Tribune*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2018/06/01/moudud-finds-pm-s-india-remark-insulting>, accessed on June 2, 2018.

⁹³ "Softer programmes won't ensure Khaleda release, admits Moudud," *Prothom Alo*, June 3, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/176887/Softer-programmes-won't-ensure-Khaleda-release>, accessed on June 3, 2018.

⁹⁴ "House endorses govt's policy and programme", *The Rising Nepal*, 28 May 2018, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2018-05-28/7e7c344b6a64dbb8f61eec544051164e.jpg>

⁹⁵ "FSFN to join govt", *The Rising Nepal*, 29 May 2018, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2018-05-29/a182be1873086e8d2f89cca11f77f9ec.jpg>

- सितम्बर में बिम्स्टेक की बैठक:

सितम्बर माह में बिम्स्टेक की बैठक की मेजबानी इस बार नेपाल कर रहा है और इसकी बैठक काठमांडू में होगी. नेपाल वर्तमान में बिम्स्टेक की अध्यक्षता कर रहा है. ३ जून को हुई इसकी परिषद की बैठक में यह निर्णय लिया गया. ६ या ७ सितम्बर को बिम्स्टेक की बैठक काठमांडू में हो सकती है.⁹⁶

- नेपाल के बजट पर चर्चा हुई:

प्रतिनिधि सभा में नेपाल के वर्ष २०१८-१९ के बजट पर व्यापक बहस हुई. सांसद मिनेंद्र रिजाल ने इस बजट की आलोचना की और कहा कि यह बजट केवल सरकार के कैडर के लिए ही है. उन्होंने कहा कि यह बजट निवेश के माहौल को कम करता है और अंतर्राष्ट्रीय निवेशको को आने में अडचने पैदा करता है. सांसद मान बहादुर विश्वकर्मा ने कहा कि यह बजट बहुत महत्वकांक्षी है जिसे लागू करना कठिन कार्य है. गौरतलब है कि यह बजट २९ मई को वित्त मंत्री डॉ युवा राज कठियावादा ने संघीय संसद के समक्ष प्रस्तुत किया था.⁹⁷

Pakistan

- **Caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan**

Former chief justice Nasirul Mulk was named as the caretaker prime minister on May 28th, which was announced by Leader of the Opposition Khursheed Shah.⁹⁸ He was sworn in on Friday as seventh caretaker prime minister of Pakistan. After assuming the charge, the first order that PM Mulk issued was to remove senior bureaucrat Fawad Hasan Fawad from the post of the 'secretary to PM' and to appoint the Cabinet Division secretary Mirza Suhail Aamir in his place. Nasirul Mulk will stay in the office for two months and quit the charge as soon as an elected PM is sworn into the office after the general election scheduled for July 25.⁹⁹

- **India and Pakistan**

⁹⁶ "Nepal proposes hosting 14th BIMSTEC Summit by Sept", The Rising Nepal, 4 June 2018, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2018-06-04/d8bceb9e7431c201483877557244ee.jpg>

⁹⁷ "Budget discussion continues in House", The Rising Nepal, 30 May 2018, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2018-06-01/64f7817ab10f37a275e60651f88f9863.jpg>

⁹⁸ "Former CJP Nasirul Mulk named as caretaker PM", *Dawn*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410523/former-cjp-nasirul-mulk-named-as-caretaker-pm> as accessed on June 4, 2018

⁹⁹ Sardar Sikander, "In the saddle, Mulk reshuffles top bureaucracy", *The Express Tribune*, June 01, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1724763/1-justice-mulk-takes-oath-caretaker-pm/> as accessed on June 4, 2018

In a rare positive development, Pakistan and India agreed on May 26th to restore ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) and Working Boundary (WB). The agreement was reached during a hotline conversation between the Directors General of Military Operations of Pakistani and Indian armies.¹⁰⁰ It can be noted here that the Pakistan Army on May 28th set up a 'court of inquiry' to investigate former director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) retired Lt Gen Asad Durrani's collaboration with A.S. Dulat, former chief of RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), in what is being seen as a lightning-rod book project that has stirred heated controversy, and asked the government to impose travel ban on him (Gen Durrani).¹⁰¹

- **Pakistan Navy and China**

The Pakistan Navy announced on June 1st that it was purchasing two multirole Type 054A frigates from China for bolstering its war-fighting capability. The contract for the acquisition of two warships from China Shipbuilding Trading Company Ltd (CSTC) was signed at the Ministry of Defence Production, Islamabad. Type-054A is equipped with latest weapons, including long range missiles and hi-tech sensors, capable to undertake operations in all domains of naval warfare. The ship has a stealthy design and is primarily designed for air defence. The frigates are also equipped to conduct anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions. Type 054A frigates also have a helipad and a hangar and can accommodate a helicopter or unmanned aerial vehicles. Pakistan Navy already have two Type 054A frigates. The two new frigates will be delivered by 2021.¹⁰²

Sri Lanka

- **SL joins world's largest maritime exercise for the first time**

Twenty-six nations including Sri Lanka, will participate at the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), the world's largest international maritime exercise, scheduled between June 27 to Aug. 2, in and around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California. This is the first time Sri Lanka is participating in RIMPAC. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command reported that 47 surface ships, five submarines, 18 national land forces, and more than 200 aircraft and 25,000 personnel will participate in the exercise. As the world's largest international maritime exercise, RIMPAC provides a unique training opportunity designed to foster and sustain cooperative relationships that are critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the

¹⁰⁰ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan, India agree to restore LoC ceasefire", *Dawn*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410857> as accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁰¹ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Army to investigate former ISI chief over claims in book", *Dawn*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410634> as accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁰² "PN signs accord with China for two frigates", *Dawn*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1411489> as accessed on June 4, 2018

world's interconnected oceans. RIMPAC 2018 is the 26th exercise in the series that began in 1971¹⁰³.

- **FLOOD VICTIMS AT 200 CENTRES RETURN HOME**

Water levels in all major rivers had decreased and flood victims in over 200 welfare centres had returned to their homes, as of Friday, June 1. The pre-monsoon conditions affected Sri Lanka with a deluge of rain last week, resulting in floods in 23 out of the 25 districts. People residing on the banks and surrounding areas of major rivers including Kelani, Kalu, Gin, Nilwala, Maha Oya and Attanagalu Oya were issued flood warnings while sluice gates were opened in reservoirs including Kukule Ganga, Deduru Oya and Rajangana tank. The flood affected 174,310 persons from 45,680 families. Twenty six persons were reported dead due to drowning, lightening and falling of trees. Over 70,000 people, infants and elderly alike were housed in 265 temporary shelters managed by the National Disaster Management Center (DMC) in 12 affected districts¹⁰⁴.

- **OMP says cannot give assurances of quick fixes**

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) says it cannot give assurances of quick fixes or false promises and assurances. Chairman of the Office on Missing Persons Saliya Pieris said that he told families of the disappeared in Mulaithivu that the issue of surendees disappearing is high on the OMP list of priorities. ¹⁰⁵

- **Abolish PTA without compromising national security: HRCSL**

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) should be abolished in order to prevent violations of citizen's human rights without posing any threat to national security, Chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) Dr. Deepika Udugama said. She said that it was the Commission's preliminary recommendation to the government to abolish the PTA Act, since it was observed that the human rights were heavily violated via the Act throughout the past decades¹⁰⁶.

- **US says attacks on religious minorities continue in SL**

The US Government said attacks on religious minorities in Sri Lanka continued unabated from the previous year. In its International Religious Freedom Report for 2017, the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour said the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) documented 97 incidents of

¹⁰³ SL joins world's largest maritime exercise for the first time, 3rd June 2018,

<https://news.lk/news/world/item/20823-sl-joins-world-s-largest-maritime-exercise-for-the-first-time>

¹⁰⁴ FLOOD VICTIMS AT 200 CENTRES RETURN HOME, 3rd June 2018, <https://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/20818-flood-victims-at-200-centres-return-home>

¹⁰⁵ OMP says cannot give assurances of quick fixes, 3 June 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/06/03/omp-says-cannot-give-assurances-of-quick-fixes/>

¹⁰⁶ Abolish PTA without compromising national security: HRCSL, 1 June 2018,

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Abolish-PTA-without-compromising-national-security-HRCSL-150682.html>

attacks on churches, intimidation and violence against pastors and their congregations, and obstruction of worship services¹⁰⁷.

Maldives

- **MDP awards presidential candidacy to Nasheed**

Main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has awarded the party's ticket for the upcoming presidential election to self-exiled former President Mohamed Nasheed. The party's ticket was officially awarded by MDP's chairperson Hassan Latheef to Nasheed's campaign manager and North-Hithadhoo constituency MP Mohamed Aslam, during an MDP rally. Nasheed had also spoken to members of MDP via Skype during the rally¹⁰⁸.

- **We do not accept the primary elections of MDP : EC**

Elections Commission have stated that they do not accept the primary elections of MDP and that they will take action against the party. Member of EC, Ahmed Akram said that what MDP did yesterday was against the law and hence they will take action against the party. He said that they will decide what action they will take during the next meeting of EC. The only person who contested in the primary election was former President Nasheed and the EC ordered not to include him in the primary because he has been jailed for 13 years¹⁰⁹.

- **Government of Maldives is committed to hold free, fair and credible elections**

In a statement the Government of the Maldives said that it takes note of the statement issued by the Ambassador of the European Union (EU) together with Ambassadors of France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and the United States of America (US), on 31 May 2018. The Government of the Maldives fully concurs that a legitimate and genuine opposition is a vital part of any healthy democracy. Attempts to undermine the Constitution and the laws of the land and to hoodwink the people and hype pre-election political rhetoric cannot be considered as responsible political activities and thus will not have any place in the current political landscape of the country¹¹⁰.

- **February 1 ruling: "an unforgivable act", Prez Yameen claims**

¹⁰⁷ US says attacks on religious minorities continue in SL, 31st May 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/US-says-attacks-on-religious-minorities-continue-in-SL-150655.html>

¹⁰⁸ MDP awards presidential candidacy to Nasheed, 3 June 2018, <https://edition.mv/news/6103>

¹⁰⁹ We do not accept the primary elections of MDP : EC, 31st May 2018, <http://miadhu.mv/article/en/10450>

¹¹⁰ Government of Maldives is committed to hold free, fair and credible elections, 1 June 2018, <http://www.foreign.gov.mv/index.php/en/mediacentre/statements/4478-government-of-maldives-is-committed-to-hold-free,-fair-and-credible-elections>

The Supreme Court's landmark ruling on February 1 ordering the release nine political detainees was an unforgivable act of defiance, President Abdulla Yameen claimed. Speaking at a meeting held at ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM)'s main hub in capital Male to welcome new members to the party, the president said that the actions of former Police Commissioner and some top judges on February 1 were fundamentally deplorable¹¹¹.

West Asia

Iraq and GCC

- **Sadr wins Iraqi Parliamentary Elections with 54 Seats¹¹²**

The Independent High Electoral Commission released the final results for national assembly elections in the country. The Sayirun or Marching towards Reforms alliance of Muqtada al-Sadr and Communist Party has won the most seats - 54 of the parliament's total 329. The Fatih or Conquest alliance with ties to Iranian-backed militias came second with 47 seats, pushing the Victory (Nasr) alliance of incumbent Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi into third place with 42 seats.

Among the Kurdish parties, the KDP won the most seats with 25, putting it fifth overall in the country, one seat behind Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law coalition. The PUK won 18 seats.

- **Six Kurdish parties consider withdrawing from Iraqi political process¹¹³**

After receiving no response to their calls for a manual recount or a full do-over of the election in the Kurdistan Region and the disputed territories because of reports of fraud, six Kurdish parties are contemplating pulling out of the political process. Gorran, the Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CDJ), the Kurdistan Islamic League (Komal), the Kurdistan Communist Party, the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), and the Kurdistan Islamic Movement (IMK) have formed a united front as they protest "systematic and pre-planned fraud" in last Saturday's parliamentary elections. These smaller and new Kurdish parties had hoped to challenge the political dominance of traditional Kurdish parties of KDP and PUK after botched Kurdish referendum and loss of disputed oil-rich city of Kirkuk to Baghdad.

¹¹¹ February 1 ruling: "an unforgivable act", Prez Yameen claims, 29 May 2018, <https://edition.mv/news/6067>

¹¹² <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/180520182>

¹¹³ <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/180520181>

- **Bahrain revokes citizenship of 115 people in mass trial¹¹⁴**

Bahrain court today revoked the citizenship of 115 people at a mass terrorism trial, sentencing dozens to prison amid a years-long crackdown on all dissent in the island kingdom. Bahrain's Public Prosecution said the case involved a little-known militant group it identified as the "Zulfiqar Brigades," whose mass arrests authorities previously announced in 2016. Prosecutors said those accused built and detonated bombs, received weapons training and plotted to kill police officers in Bahrain, an island off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf. A statement from prosecutors said 53 defendants received life sentences, while dozens of others faced prison time. It said 23 defendants were acquitted.

- **Qatar Pledges to Continue Support for Stability and Sovereignty of Somalia¹¹⁵**

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who held talks Monday with visiting Somali President Mohammad Abdullahi, said the relationship between Doha and Mogadishu were based on "brotherhood and mutual respect." "Qatar will continue to support the unity, stability, sovereignty and well-being of the people of Somalia," Sheikh Tamim said in a tweet following the meeting.

Earlier this month, a Qatari official told Reuters that Doha had provided \$385 million in infrastructure, education and humanitarian aid to the Somali government. The Monday meeting, which is the third in less than a year, comes at a particularly sensitive time when Mogadishu abandoned a military deal with Abu Dhabi and seized millions of dollars from an Emirati plane.

Turkey

- **Turkey Slams Macron Over Erdogan Magazine Cover Support**

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has slammed French President Emmanuel Macron over his support for a French magazine's cover calling President Recep Tayyip Erdogan a "dictator". The Weekly French Magazine Le Point splashed a photo of the Turkish President on the cover of its May 24 edition with words that read: "The dictator. How far will Erdogan go?"¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/bahrain-revokes-citizenship-of-115-people-in-mass-trial-118051501110_1.html

¹¹⁵ <https://www.albawaba.com/news/qatar-pledges-continue-support-stability-and-sovereignty-somalia-1132016>

¹¹⁶ "Turkey slams Macron over Erdogan magazine cover support", <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/turkey-slams-macron-erdogan-magazine-cover-support-180529120258692.html>, 29 May 2018.

- Turkey Turning to Russia for Su-57 Jets, Nightmare for NATO - Analysis

After U.S. Senate passed a defence spending bill last month, seeking to prevent Turkey from getting 100 fighter jets F-35 it had ordered, Turkey could turn to Russia's Su-57 "stealth" jet in what would be a nightmare scenario for NATO, says Alex Lockie in article he penned for Business Insider.¹¹⁷

- **Turkey Stresses Impact of Syria Crisis on Labour Market**

Labour and Social Security Minister Julide Sariroglu highlighted the increase in women, youths and people with disabilities in working life in Turkey and the impact of the Syria crisis on the labour market. "In Turkey, we developed a multifaceted policy that both protects and prioritizes women, youth and people with disabilities in working life," Sariroglu said at the annual conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva.¹¹⁸

- **Turkey Sets up Firm for 'indigenous car'**

The joint venture to produce Turkey's first domestically-manufactured car established a company and hired Mehmet Gürcan Karakaş, a former manager at Bosch, as its chief executive, semi-official Anadolu Agency reported on June 2. According to the report, five local firms — Anadolu Group, BMC, Kıraca Holding, Turkcell, and Zorlu Holding — launched the firm that they named as the "Joint Venture for Turkey's Car Industry and Commerce Co." (Türkiye'nin Otomobili Girişim Grubu Sanayi ve Ticaret AŞ).¹¹⁹

- **Turkey, Italian-French Consortium Advance Talks on air Defence Systems**

Cooperation between European manufacturer of anti-air missiles Eurosam and Turkish defence organizations will provide technology transfer to Turkey and bring the opportunity of export to third party markets, Ambassador of Italy to Ankara Luigi Mattiolo told Hürriyet Daily News, as the two sides advance talks on the Turkish procurement of the SAMP-T missile system.¹²⁰

- **Turkey's Steel wars Heat Up**

US President Donald Trump shows no intention of stepping back from his steep steel tariffs; on the contrary, he is forging ahead to expand them. Turkey, which was hit by Trump's tariff blow in March, has geared up to respond in kind,

¹¹⁷ "Turkey turning to Russia for Su-57 jets a nightmare for NATO – analysis", <https://ahvalnews.com/f-35/turkey-turning-russia-su-57-jets-nightmare-nato-analysis>, 03 June 2018

¹¹⁸ "Turkey stresses impact of Syria crisis on labor market", <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/news/turkey-stresses-impact-of-syria-crisis-on-labor-market-3413139>, 05 June 2018

¹¹⁹ Turkey sets up firm for 'indigenous car', <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-sets-up-firm-for-indigenous-car-132729>, 02 June 2018

¹²⁰ "Turkey, Italian-French consortium advance talks on air defense systems", <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-italian-french-consortium-advance-talks-on-air-defense-systems-132740>, 04 June 2018

contemplating levies on various US products. Yet a fresh challenge has emerged under its nose as regional steel producers are targeting Turkey's own market.¹²¹

Saudi Arabia

- **Saudi Arabia Threatens Military Action Against Qatar**

France's Le Monde newspaper reported that Saudi King Muhammad Bin Salman Ibn Saud has threatened Qatar if it deploys Russian air defence system, S-400. Le Monde reported that Saudi king wrote to the French Prime Minister, "The kingdom would be ready to take all necessary measures to eliminate this defence system, including military action".¹²² King Salman asked Macron for his assistance to prevent the sale of the missiles and preserve peace in the region, Le Monde said.

Last year, Qatar and Russia have signed military and technical cooperation and Qatar's ambassador to Russia has reportedly been in talk with Moscow of purchasing the S-400 missile defence systems. Last year, both countries have signed military and technical cooperation agreement also.

However, there is no response to this news from both Saudi and French offices.

The relations between Qatar and four Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain, known as Anti-Terrorist Quartet (ATQ) are not good. The ATQ has cut off its diplomatic relations with Doha, charging it of supporting the terrorist forces, which are working against the safety and security of these countries. They accused Qatar of terror financing, giving shelter to the ousted people from these countries and financially supporting the people who are living in other countries and are working against the ATQ. They also accused of misusing its airpower, *al jazeera* by providing platform to the people who are involved in fanning the spirit of violence in the region. Qatar has vehemently denied all these charges and is accusing the ATQ of subjugating its sovereignty and trying to control its foreign policy independence.¹²³

- **Saudi Arabia Passes Sexual Harassment Law**

The Saudi Council of Ministers approves sexual harassment law. This is the first law of its kind in the Kingdom. The law will 'criminalize sexual harassment, which is defined as words or actions that hint at sexuality, coming from one person to another that harms the body, honor or modesty of a person in any way, including through the use of modern technology'. The most severe cases will face a prison

¹²¹ "Turkey's steel wars heat up", <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/06/turkey-faces-two-front-battle-in-steel-wars.html>, 01 June 2018.

¹²² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-qatar-france/saudi-threatens-military-action-if-qatar-deploys-anti-aircraft-missiles-report-idUSKCN1IY0IW>

¹²³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/saudi-threatens-military-action-qatar-400-report-180601165304449.html>

term of five years and /or a maximum penalty of SAR 300,000 (US\$ 80,000).¹²⁴ Less severe cases would face a prison term of two year and/ or a maximum penalty of SAR 100,000. The law is designed to protect the people of both genders, including minors and people of special needs. The case can reported by calling a hotline through an app KULUMA Amn or by calling in police stations.

- **We Did Not Detain Hariri, Saudi Arabia Refutes French President’s Claim**

Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Ministry denied French President Emmanuel Macron’s claim that the Kingdom held Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri captive last November, Saudi Press Agency reported. “What French President said in an interview with channel BFM TV that the Kingdom has detained Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri is incorrect,” an official source at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.¹²⁵

- **Saudi Arabia Establishes Royal Commission for Mecca City, Holy Sites**

Saudi Arabia’s King Salman bin bin Abdulaziz Al Saud issued a royal order establishing a Royal Commission for Mecca City and Holy Sites, where the Commission shall have a board of directors under the chairmanship of the Vice President of the Council of Ministers and the Commission's members shall be appointed by an order issued by the President of the Council of Ministers.¹²⁶

- **Saudi Arabia in Talks With SDF to Form New Force in Northern Syria**

Weeks after President Trump suggested that the US forces should pull out of Syria and be replaced with an Arab army, Saudi Arabian military officials met with an Arab faction of the YPG-dominated SDF for talks regarding a new force. Saudi military consultants met with the SDF at the US base in Harab Isk in the northern Syrian town of Kobani for coalition talks with the group, weeks after Washington said it was seeking to replace US troops in Syria with an Arab force.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1314546/saudi-arabia>

¹²⁵ “We did not detain Hariri, Saudi Arabia refutes French president’s claim”, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/535882/SAUDI-ARABIA/We-did-not-detain-Hariri-Saudi-Arabia-refutes-French-presidents-claim>. 30 May 2018

¹²⁶ “Saudi Arabia establishes Royal Commission for Mecca City and Holy Sites”, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/06/02/Saudi-Arabia-establishes-Royal-Commission-for-Mecca-City-and-Holy-Sites.html>, 02 June 2018

¹²⁷ “Saudi Arabia in talks with SDF to form new force in northern Syria”, <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/saudi-arabia-in-talks-with-sdf-to-form-new-force-in-northern-syria-17900> 02 June 2018.

Israel

- **Violence in Gaza Strip**

On May 30th, around 40 rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israel from the Palestinian side. Most of them were intercepted by the Iron Dome, some fell on open grounds and one house was directly hit by them. One injury was reported in the shelling.¹²⁸ In retaliation to the mortar attacks, Israel fired at 65 sites in the Gaza strip. The locations that were targeted included a Hamas attack tunnel, two Hamas drone facilities, one for storing drones outfitted with explosives and another a test site; a cache of shoulder-fired SA-7 missiles; a rocket manufacturing plant; a Palestinian Islamic Jihad depot for storing locally produced rockets; and the Hamas naval armory containing advanced, unmanned submarine vessels, capable of maritime infiltration and carrying out maritime terror attacks.¹²⁹

On the ongoing violence, Kuwait on behalf of Arab countries placed a UN draft resolution calling for protective measures for the Palestinians that won backing from 10 countries at the Security Council, including China, France and Russia. However, US vetoed the resolution.¹³⁰

It can be noted here that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on May 3rd ordered Israel to withhold funds from the Palestinian Authority, in order to compensate farmers living on the Gaza border who have had their crops destroyed by massive fires sparked by flaming kites sent from the Palestinian enclave.¹³¹

The Israeli navy stopped and seized control of a boat carrying 17 demonstrators as it tried to leave the Gaza fishing zone on May 29th in defiance of Israel's blockade of the coastal enclave.¹³²

- **Czech Republic and Israel**

The Czech Republic on May 29 reopened its honorary consulate in Jerusalem, after President Milos Zeman voiced his wish to move the Czech embassy to the city

¹²⁸Judah Ari Gross, "Dozens of rockets and shells fired into Israel overnight, house hit", *The Times of Israel*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/dozens-of-rockets-and-mortars-fired-into-israel-overnight-several-intercepted/> as accessed on May 30, 2018; Judah Ari Gross, "28 mortar shells strike southern Israel in largest barrage since 2014; 1 injured", *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 30, 2018

¹²⁹Judah Ari Gross, "IDF says it targeted unmanned Hamas submarines in Gaza airstrikes", *The Times of Israel*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-it-targeted-hamas-submarine-drones-in-gaza-airstrikes/> as accessed on May 31, 2018

¹³⁰"US vetoes Arab-backed resolution on Gaza at UN Security Council", *The Times of Israel*, June 01, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-set-to-veto-as-proposal-on-palestinians-heads-to-un-security-council/> as accessed on June 2, 2018

¹³¹"Netanyahu orders funds withheld from PA to compensate victims of kite attacks", *The Times of Israel*, June 03, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-orders-funds-withheld-from-pa-to-compensate-victims-of-kite-terror/> as accessed on June 04, 2018

¹³²"Israel intercepts protest boat trying to break Gaza blockade", *The Times of Israel*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-seizes-protest-boat-trying-to-break-gaza-blockade/> as accessed on May 30, 2018

from Tel Aviv. Dan Propper, a 78-year-old Israeli businessman of Czech origin, will be the new honorary consul. Opened in the early 1990s, the Czech honorary consulate in Jerusalem was closed in 2016 due to the death of the honorary consul. The Czech Foreign Ministry vowed in April that the decision to reopen the honorary consulate had “no influence on the final agreement on Jerusalem,” adding that Prague “fully respects the common position of the European Union that considers Jerusalem as the future capital of both states, that is to say, the State of Israel and the future state of Palestine.”¹³³

- **Syria, Israel and Iran**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on May 30 said foreign militias should leave southwestern Syria as soon as possible. Lavrov echoed comments he made earlier in the week when he said that only Syrian troops should be stationed in rebel-held Daraa province, a region adjacent to the Israeli border that has emerged as a flashpoint in a wider standoff between the Jewish state and Iran.¹³⁴ Russia’s Ambassador to the UN Vasily Nebenzya said on June 01 that he believed Israel and his country had reached an agreement on the withdrawal of Iranian forces from the Syrian-Israeli border.¹³⁵ As reported in the Arabic-language daily Asharq al-Awsat, Israel and Russia have reached an agreement green-lighting Israeli strikes on Iranian targets in Syria, as well as the withdrawal of Tehran-backed troops from Syria’s border with Israel.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visiting Europe on June 4, to meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Theresa May, to discuss ways to block Iran’s nuclear aspirations and Iran’s expansion in the Middle East.¹³⁷ Netanyahu said on May 3rd that Israel’s archenemy Iran would top his agenda and voiced optimism for a successful visit.¹³⁸ However, on June 1st, European Union and China said they will do their utmost to keep afloat an international agreement to stop Iran developing nuclear weapons despite the US abandoning the pact.¹³⁹

¹³³“Czech Republic reopens honorary consulate in Jerusalem”, *The Times of Israel*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/czech-republic-reopens-honorary-consulate-in-jerusalem/> as accessed on May 30, 2018

¹³⁴ “Russia tells Iran to immediately remove militias from Syrian-Israel border”, *The Times of Israel*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-tells-iran-to-immediately-remove-militias-from-syrian-israel-border/> as accessed on May 31, 2018

¹³⁵“Russia’s UN envoy ‘believes’ deal reached with Israel on Iranian border pullout”, *The Times of Israel*, June 02, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/russias-un-envoy-believes-deal-reached-with-israel-on-iranian-border-pullout/> as accessed on June 2, 2018

¹³⁶ “Russian-Israeli Agreement to Keep Iran Away from Syria’s South”, *Asharq al-Awsat*, June 01, 2018, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1286681/russian-israeli-agreement-keep-iran-away-syrias-south> as accessed on June 2, 2018

¹³⁷ “Netanyahu to push hard line on Iran during Europe trip”, *The Times of Israel*, June 02, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-to-push-hard-line-on-iran-during-europe-trip/> as accessed on June 2, 2018

¹³⁸ “Netanyahu heads to Europe, with Iran on his mind”, *The Times of Israel*, June 04, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-heads-to-europe-with-iran-on-his-mind/> as accessed on June 04, 2018

¹³⁹ “EU, China vow to uphold Iran nuclear deal”, *The Times of Israel*, June 02, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-china-vow-to-uphold-iran-nuclear-deal/> as accessed on June 04, 2018

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	May 28	Balochistan	At least 14 persons, including three policemen, were injured in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast targeting a police vehicle in Dera Murad Jamali area of Naseerabad district. ¹⁴⁰	0	14
2	May 29	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	A prominent member of the Sikh community, identified as Charanjeet Singh, was killed in a targeted attack in Scheme Chowk area of provincial capital in Peshawar. ¹⁴¹ Following the killing, the Capital City Police Officer Qazi Jameel on May 30 constituted an investigation committee, headed by Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Investigation Nisar Khan, to probe the matter. ¹⁴²	1	0
3	June 3	FATA / Balochistan	Security Forces (SFs) repulsed terrorist attacks from across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, killing a total of six terrorists in two separate areas of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Balochistan. The attacks targeted border posts and border fencing parties in Bajaur area of FATA and the	6	0

¹⁴⁰ 14 injured in blast targeting police vehicle, *The Nation*, May 29, 2018, https://nation.com.pk/29-May-2018/14-injured-in-blast-targeting-police-vehicle?show=previewutm_medium=PoliticsNewz, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁴¹ Ali Akbar, Sikh social activist shot dead in Peshawar, *Dawn*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410753>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁴² Hassan Farhan, Committee formed to probe murder of prominent Sikh leader in Peshawar, *Dawn*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410953/committee-formed-to-probe-murder-of-prominent-sikh-leader-in-peshawar>, accessed on June 4, 2018

			Qamar Din Qarez area of Balochistan. ¹⁴³		
4	June 3	FATA	<p>At least three supporters of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) were killed and 20 others were injured when armed assailants of self-identified <i>aman</i> (peace) committee attacked a gathering in Wana area of South Waziristan Agency. These people were attacked for their association with PTM.</p> <p>Initial reports suggest that the attack was carried out by militants belonging to Mullah Nazir faction of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), who disguised themselves as peace committee members.¹⁴⁴</p>	3	20

Afghanistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	May 28-29	Takhar	<p>At least 17 security check posts fell to the Taliban in Khwaja Ghar district following the siege of 10 villages in the same district.¹⁴⁵</p> <p>Following the incident, the Ministry of Defense said that the Afghan National Army (ANA) was planning to launch targeted operation in the district.</p>	17 check-posts fall to Taliban	
2	May 30	Kabul	One policeman was killed and four others were injured in a vehicle borne suicide attack on the Ministry of Interior in Kabul. All the 10	1	4

¹⁴³ Security forces kill 6 'terrorists', repulse multiple attacks from across Afghan border, *Dawn*, June 3, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1411773/security-forces-kill-6-terrorists-repulse-multiple-attacks-from-across-afghan-border>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁴⁴ Rehmat Mehsud & Abdullah Malik, At least 3 PTM supporters dead, 20 injured in 'Taliban' attack, *Daily Times*, June 4, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/248702/at-least-3-ptm-supporters-dead-20-injured-in-taliban-attack/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁴⁵ 17 Security Check Posts Fall To Taliban in Takhar, *Tolo News*, May 29., 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/17-security-check-posts-fall-taliban-takhar>, accessed on June 4, 2018

			militants involved in the attack were killed by SFs after a nearly two-hour assault. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack on its media wing, Amaq Agency. ¹⁴⁶		
3	June 2	Nangarhar	At least 17 ISIS militants and one civilian were killed while four other civilians were injured during military operations in Loi Payin, Camp Payin and Gorgori areas. According to the provincial government, the operations are still being conducted against the terror group in various parts of Haska Mina district. ¹⁴⁷	18	4
4	June 3	Kabul	<p>The security institutions confirmed that fatalities among the Afghan SFs have significantly increased during the current fighting season compared to previous years - as the Taliban expand their military offensives on multiple fronts across the country.</p> <p>The Ministry of Interior (MoI) said that currently security forces are tackling insurgents as part of their preplanned operations in at least 14 provinces and that additional police and commando forces have been deployed to the frontline in order to curb the increase in fatalities.¹⁴⁸</p>	ANSF fatalities on rise	
5	June 3	Kabul	The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in its report, titled, <i>Out of School Children: Afghanistan Country Study</i> , revealed that an estimated 3.7 million children – including 60 percent girls– are out of school in Afghanistan, due to ongoing conflict, poverty and discrimination, making an estimated	3.7 million children out of school	

¹⁴⁶ Spencer Feingold, ISIS claims attack on Afghan Interior Ministry, *CNN*, May 30, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/30/asia/afghan-interior-ministry-attack-isis/index.html>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁴⁷ Civilians and ISIS-K militants suffer casualties in Nangarhar operation, *Khaama Press*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.khaama.com/civilians-and-isis-k-militants-suffer-casualties-in-nangarhar-operation-05300/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁴⁸ Sayed Sharif Amiri, ANSF Fatalities on the Rise as Taliban Intensify Attacks, *Tolo News*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/ansf-fatalities-rise-taliban-intensify-attacks>, accessed on June 4, 2018

			half of children - aged between 7 and 17 years old -deprived of education. ¹⁴⁹	
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Iraq

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	June 2	Nineveh	Iraqi SFs unearthed seven secret tunnels that were used by IS militants in different parts of the province. "The tunnels were located in Zummar and Qarah Tabbah districts in Nineveh with one of them containing Afghan uniforms and a grenade," according to spokesman for the Iraqi Security Media Council Brigadier General Yehia Rasool ¹⁵⁰ .	Seven secret tunnels of ISIS unearthed	
2	June 3	Salahuddin	A family, composed of 12 members, was killed by an ISIS militant after he infiltrated their house in al-Farhatiya village. A report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) said that 94 Iraqis were killed, while 163 others were wounded due to violence and armed conflicts during the month of May. ¹⁵¹	12	0
3	June 3	Iraqi-Syrian border	The month of May saw an increase in military operations of the international anti-ISIS coalition and partner forces to eliminate the last remaining pockets of ISIS fighters in Syria's Euphrates River valley along the Iraqi-Syrian border in addition to strikes against militant remnants in Iraq. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with support from the US-backed	Increase in military operations	

¹⁴⁹ 3.7 million children deprived of school, *Afghanistan Times*, June 3, 2018, <http://afghanistantimes.af/3-7-million-children-deprived-school/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁵⁰ Mohammed Ebraheem, Seven secret tunnels for Islamic State unearthed in Iraq, *Iraqi News*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/seven-secret-tunnels-for-islamic-state-unearthed-in-iraq/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁵¹ Nehal Mostafa, Islamic State kills family composed of 12 members in Salahuddin, *Iraqi News*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/islamic-state-kills-family-composed-of-12-members-in-salahuddin/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

			coalition, upped military operations on May 1 with the launch of Operation Roundup, continuing to gain ground against ISIS targets, the US Department of Defense said in a report. The coalition reported a 304 percent increase in strikes during the month of May with 225 airstrikes and 280 engagements. ¹⁵²	
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Syria

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	May 31	Al Desheisha	<p>The pro-government Iraqi paramilitary troops announced shelling, through its artillery, Islamic State militants inside Syria.</p> <p>A statement by the media service of al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces) said that troops “shelled Islamic State members gathering at the Syrian al-Desheisha village.” The targeted militants, according to the statement, “were trying to reach to the troops deployed along the borders, taking advantage of the bad weather conditions.”¹⁵³</p>	Iraqi troops target ISIS in Syria	
2	May 31	Damascus	<p>The Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has expressed readiness for negotiations with the SDFs, or else he would use force against them to get out of the regions they control. Assad said that western forces, with US on top of them, backs ‘terrorist groups’ in the region.</p> <p>In response to a question about time for</p>	Assad expresses readiness for negotiations	

¹⁵² Coalition, SDF operations against ISIS surged in May, *Rudaw*, June 3, 2018, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/02062018>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁵³ Nehal Mostafa, Iraqi paramilitary troops target Islamic State members inside Syria, *Iraqi News*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraqi-paramilitary-troops-target-islamic-state-members-inside-syria/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

			ending the war, Assad said it's hard to set time for that, however, he said it's about to end. "The only problem remaining in Syria now is the Syrian Democratic Forces. We will deal with them through two options. First is that we opened door for negotiations. If this does not happen, we will have to liberate those regions forcibly," he said. ¹⁵⁴	
3	June 2	Rif Dimashq	The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) recently uncovered a child training center that was used by ISIS in Hajar Al-Aswad. According to a military report, the child terrorist school was used to teach young children between the ages of 8 to 15 about the IS's radical teachings. The report added that approximately 250 children were trained inside of this institution before it was fully seized by the Syrian Army recently. ¹⁵⁵	SAA uncovered ISIS child training centre
4	June 3	Aleppo	The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) unleashed a powerful assault against the Turkish-backed rebels in west Aleppo on the night of June 3. According to the military source, the Syrian Army began the assault by launching a large number of artillery shells and missiles on the Islamist-held town of Al-Mansourah and Al-Rashiddeen District. ¹⁵⁶	SAA attack Turkish-backed rebels

¹⁵⁴ Nehal Mostafa, Syria's Assad says ready for talks with U.S.-backed militias, SDF challenges, *Iraqi News*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/syrias-assad-says-ready-for-talks-with-u-s-backed-militias-sdf-challenges/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁵⁵ Leith Aboufadel, ISIL's child terror center uncovered by Syrian Army in southern Damascus, *Al Masdar News*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/isils-child-terror-center-uncovered-by-syrian-army-in-southern-damascus-video/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

¹⁵⁶ Leith Aboufadel, Syrian Army launches big assault on jihadist forces in west Aleppo despite large Turkish military presence, *Al Masdar News*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-launches-big-assault-on-jihadist-forces-in-west-aleppo-despite-large-turkish-military-presence/>, accessed on June 4, 2018

International Economic Issues

- **NDB Board of Governors and Board Of Directors Meetings Held in Shanghai, China**

The New Development Bank (NDB) held its Third Annual Meeting and 14th Board of Directors (BoD) Meeting in Shanghai on May 28-29, 2018. Taking note of the progress, the BoD approved six projects from all five member countries of the NDB with loans aggregating USD 1.6 billion. It was highlighted that in 2018 the Bank has significantly strengthened its project portfolio, and the total amount of approvals in 2018 has reached USD 1.7 billion. With the six projects approved, the total amount of the Bank's portfolio has reached over USD 5.1 billion. The meeting also addressed the ongoing technological advances, reflecting on how multilateral development institutions could adapt to the emerging economic realities including technological advances such as artificial intelligence and block chain and also the operating environment for development institutions; the role of development institutions in supporting innovation and sustainable infrastructure development during the fourth industrial revolution; and the special attention and support of multilateral development institutions to avoid being left behind in a fast-changing global economic landscape.¹⁵⁷

- **Trump imposes new tariffs on Canada, Mexico and EU**

On May 31, 2018, US President Donald Trump imposes steel and aluminum tariffs on the EU, Canada and Mexico. The tariffs — 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum — took effect from midnight of May 31, marking a major escalation of the trade war between the United States and its top trading partners. In response to announcement, the EU said it will impose duties “on a number of imports from the United States,” referring to a 10-page list of targets for retaliation it published in March, which included bourbon and Harley-Davidson motorcycles. European leaders also vowed to proceed with a complaint to the World Trade Organization. The Mexican government said it would levy import taxes on US exports of pork bellies, apples, cranberries, grapes, certain cheeses and various types of steel, while Canada slapped surtax on \$12.8 billion of American steel, aluminum, coffee, candy, pizza and quiche.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ NDB, “NDB Board of Governors and Board of Directors Meetings Held in Shanghai, China”, *Press Release*, May 28, 2018, https://www.ndb.int/press_release/ndb-third-annual-meeting-unveils-key-updates-technology-backed-development/ (accessed on May 20, 2018); NDB, “NDB Third Annual Meeting Unveils Key Updates On Technology-Backed Development”, *Press Release*, May 30, 2018, https://www.ndb.int/press_release/ndb-third-annual-meeting-unveils-key-updates-technology-backed-development/ (accessed on May 20, 2018)

¹⁵⁸ David J. Lynch, Josh Dawsey and Damian Paletta, “Trump imposes new tariffs on Canada, Mexico and EU”, *Washington Post*, May 31, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/trump-imposes-steel-and-aluminum-tariffs-on-the-european-union-canada-and-mexico/2018/05/31/891bb452-64d3-11e8-a69c-b944de66d9e7_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d4b8d887cbef (accessed on June 1, 2018)

- **India signs Loan Agreement with the World Bank for USD 21.7 Million**

India signs Loan Agreement with the World Bank for USD 21.7 Million for Strengthening the Public Financial Management in Rajasthan Project. The Project size is approximately USD 31 million, of which USD 21.7 million will be financed by the World Bank, and the remaining amount will be funded-out of the State Budget. The Project duration is 5 years. The Project objective is to contribute to improved Budget execution, enhanced accountability and greater efficiency in Revenue Administration in Rajasthan. The Project involves Strengthening of the Public Financial Management Framework; Strengthening of Expenditure and Revenue Systems; and Project Management and Capacity Building among others.¹⁵⁹

- **China warns US against imposing tariffs**

On June 3, 2018, China said that President Donald Trump's plan to impose tariffs on \$50 billion of Chinese exports threatens to wipe out progress made in trade talks between Beijing and Washington. According to a Chinese government statement carried by the official news agency, Xinhua, a US delegation led by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross held talks with Chinese negotiators in Beijing on June 2-3, 2018, that produced “positive and concrete” developments. The statement gave few details on the talks, but it made clear that China would not deliver on commitments to buy more American goods if its exports are sanctioned. The statement also said that “agreements between China and the United States should be based on the premise of both sides moving in the same direction and not waging a trade war” and “if the US launches trade sanction measures, including the imposition of tariffs, then all the economic and trade benefits negotiated by both sides are not going to take effect.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ PIB, “India signs Loan Agreement with the World Bank for USD 21.7 Million for Strengthening the Public Financial Management in Rajasthan Project”, *Press Release*, May 29, 2018, <http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1533726> (accessed on May 30, 2018)

¹⁶⁰ Jethro Mullen, “China warns US against imposing tariffs”, *CNN Money*, June 3, 2018, <http://money.cnn.com/2018/06/03/news/economy/china-us-trade-talks/index.html> (accessed on June 4, 2018)