

Weekly Media Updates **(16 – 22 April, 2018)**

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Africa

- **Somalia warns Dubai Ports World against violating its sovereignty¹**

Somalia's foreign minister Ahmed Isse Awad, said Dubai state-owned port operator DP World should reconsider its contract with the breakaway region of Somaliland and work with federal authorities so the East African country's sovereignty is not violated.

Awad said DP World's agreement to develop an economic zone and port in Somaliland's Berbera "bypassed the legitimate authority" of Somalia.

DP World, the world's fourth-largest port operator based in Dubai, said in 2016 it would invest more than \$400m to develop the Berbera port. The deal also included the government of Ethiopia, which took a 19 percent stake in the port. Abu Dhabi agreed in March to train security forces in Somaliland - a region in northern Somalia seeking secession from the rest of the country.

Mogadishu dismissed the agreement and called on the United Nations to take action. Somalia's ambassador to the UN, Abukar Osman, said the agreement between Somaliland and the UAE to establish the base in Berbera is a "clear violation of international law".

- **Chinese Company to Build U.S.\$7 Billion Tourism City²**

Chinese multinational group, Touchroad Holdings Group, is planning to develop a \$7 billion tourism city in Zimbabwe as investor interest in Zimbabwe by international tourism players from the Asian economic giant grows.

Zimbabwe Tourism Authority chief executive Dr Karikoga Kaseke said on Wednesday, 18 April 2018, that there had been massive interest from Chinese businesses in the local tourism sector and the Touchroad chairman was expected in the country to explore investment opportunities.

Dr Kaseke added that ZTA managed to secure agreements with some major Chinese tour operators to market the Zimbabwean tourism destination. He said the Chinese companies were not only interested in investing, but also pushing tourist movement towards Africa.

¹ Al Jazeera, 22 April 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/somalia-warns-dubai-ports-world-violating-sovereignty-180422065840609.html>

² The Herald, 20 April 2018, http://allafrica.com/stories/201804200474.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkgta

Touchroad is the first Chinese private enterprise to build a special economic zone in Africa -- the Touchroad Djibouti Special Economic Zone (TDSEZ). The zone is expected to be a fulcrum of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Africa.

The tourism city concept is already working in South Africa's Sun City, a place which currently houses many of the country's tourism activities

- **Nigeria Faces Tall Order to Become Hub of Seaports in Africa³**

Nigeria's mission to become the hub of port of destination in the Sub-Saharan Africa is currently under intense pressure as four other countries are vying for the same position in the continent. The countries are: Durban (South Africa), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) and Mombasa (Kenya), Tema (Ghana). They have highlighted serious investment on Greenfield ports and at advanced stage in the development of existing seaports.

Factors that determine who will eventually emerge the hub status was highlighted in a recent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) titled: 'Strengthening Africa's gateways to trade'. The report rated Nigeria behind four other countries, which appears to be growing faster in Africa.

The report picked only port of Durban as a hub at the moment, while Nigeria, Benin Republic and Ghana are in tight race to become hub in West Africa.

The Federal Government had declared its commitment to make Nigerian maritime a hub in the Sub Saharan Africa. But the PwC report showed that, "based on the degree of port centrality (shipping liner connectivity), the amount of trade passing through a port, and the size of the hinterland, Durban (South Africa), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) and Mombasa (Kenya) are most likely to ultimately emerge as the major hubs in Southern Africa, West Africa and East Africa, respectively

- **South Africa President Leaves Commonwealth Summit to Address Protests at Home⁴**

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa has cut short his visit to Britain by a day to return home to deal with protests in the country's North West province, his office said on Thursday. Protesters seeking jobs, better housing, roads and hospitals frequently clash with police in a country faced with weak economic growth and near-record unemployment – but these are the first big demonstrations since Ramaphosa took power in February. The unrest, dubbed “service delivery protests”, has mounted over the years. The latest protests erupted on Wednesday with residents demanding that the province's Premier Supra Mahumapelo, a member of Ramaphosa's ruling African

³ The Guardian, 18 April 2018,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201804180222.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkgta

⁴ Africa News, 20 April 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/04/20/south-africa-president-leaves-commonwealth-summit-to-address-protests-at-home/>

National Congress party, step down. Ramaphosa called for calm, ordered police to exercise maximum restraint and urged the aggrieved parties to express their grievances without resorting to violence. Botswana's government said on Thursday it had closed exit points to South Africa's North West province, where the two countries share a border. The troubled province lies 300 km (200 miles) west of South Africa's commercial hub Johannesburg.

- **Ramaphosa Touts 'New Dawn' in South Africa to Lure US\$100 Billion⁵**

President Cyril Ramaphosa brought his branding of a "new dawn" in South Africa to London as he promised to unveil incentives to attract US\$100 billion in investment. Ramaphosa, 65, has been working to convince investors that he's committed to reversing years of economic stagnation, policy uncertainty and looting of state funds since succeeding Jacob Zuma as president two months ago. So far he's fired some ministers and replaced the boards of several troubled state companies. Ramaphosa is seeking \$100 billion in new investment and this week named four "envoys," including former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel and ex-Standard Bank Group Ltd. Chief Executive Officer Jacko Maree, to travel the world seeking commitments. He said he's sticking to his target of 3 percent growth for this year, which is more than double the 1.4 percent forecast by the World Bank.

- **Angola Requests Non-Financial Assistance from IMF⁶**

Angola's finance ministry said it had requested non-financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund to help it implement economic reforms, as Africa's second-largest crude producer continues to suffer from a lower oil price. The agreement, known as a Policy Coordination Instrument, "will help to improve the external credibility of our country with positive impact on the ability to attract Foreign Direct Investment," the finance ministry said in a statement late on Tuesday. The ministry said it wanted help in implementing the Macroeconomic Stabilisation Plan, which is effectively the economic policy of the new Angolan government, but did not say what form this should take.

- **Angolan Activist to be Tried for Corruption Expose⁷**

Outspoken Angolan human rights activist and journalist Rafael Marques de Morais will be tried in camera for a story he wrote two years ago exposing alleged corruption. The charges relate to a story that Marques wrote in 2016 about a purchase of land by former attorney-general Joao Maria de Sousa. A court hearing on Monday was adjourned until 24 April after De Souza's lawyers argued that as a former attorney-general he has special privileges. "The court said the trial cannot be held in the court of law and must be held in the office of the attorney-general," Marques told AFP.

⁵ Bloomberg, 18 April 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-18/ramaphosa-says-land-redistribution-will-aid-south-africa-economy>

⁶ Reuters, 18 April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/angola-imf/angola-requests-non-financial-assistance-from-imf-idUSL8N1RV1T9>

⁷ eNCA, 17 April 2018, <https://www.enca.com/africa/angolan-activist-to-be-tried-for-corruption-expose>

Marques, who runs the news website Maka Angola, and Mariano Bras, another journalist who reproduced the article, face up to three years in jail. In 2015, he was convicted of defaming military generals in a book and was handed a six-month suspended prison sentence.

- **Angola Passes Law to Attract Foreign Investment⁸**

Angola on Thursday passed a law scrapping rules that previously forced foreign investors to partner with local firms, as President Joao Lourenco tries to revive the oil-dependant economy. Lourenco has vowed to pull in foreign investment after he succeeded Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who had ruled Angola for 38 years, in September. The new law ended a minimum investment level of US\$230 000, and the requirement that at least 35 per cent of the capital had to come from Angolan partners. "The law effectively eliminates the obligation on national citizens participating" in private investment, Finance Minister Pedro Luis da Fonseca told lawmakers. The law was passed unanimously by parliament with the backing of opposition parties.

- **Zambian Opposition Calls on SA to Tame 'Brutal Regime'⁹**

Zambia's opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema has accused President Edgar Lungu's government of political killings, rights abuses and rampant corruption, calling on South Africa to intervene to restore calm. Hichilema, who spent four months in jail last year on a treason charge, said in an interview that regional allies needed to apply pressure on Lungu or risk Zambia descending into the economic disarray seen in neighbouring Zimbabwe under former president Robert Mugabe. Zambia, Africa's second-largest copper producer, has been criticised by rights groups for an increase in political arrests under Lungu and concerns about corruption following reports of billions of dollars in undisclosed borrowing. Lungu denies there is a government corruption problem or that police are used to stifle dissent. Zambia is due to hold elections in 2021 but Hichilema said it was impossible to hold a free and fair vote in the current environment because Lungu controlled the electoral commission.

- **Botswana's New President Urges Congo's Kabila Not to Stand Again¹⁰**

Botswana's new leader has urged President Joseph Kabila not to stand for re-election in Congo's long delayed presidential poll, saying he had already been in power longer than expected. Botswana, one of Africa's most stable democracies, is so far the only country in Africa to have directly criticised Kabila. Earlier this year, the government issued a statement openly blaming the president for Democratic Republic of Congo's deteriorating humanitarian and security situation. Kabila's opponents suspect him of seeking a referendum to change Congo's constitution to enable him to run for more

⁸ News24, 19 April 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/angola-passes-law-to-attract-foreign-investment-20180419>

⁹ eNCA, 20 April 2018, <https://www.enca.com/africa/zambian-opposition-calls-on-sa-to-tame-brutal-regime>

¹⁰ Africa News, 20 April 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/04/21/botswana-s-new-president-urges-congo-s-kabila-not-to-stand-again/>

than two terms, as the leaders of neighboring Uganda, Rwanda and Congo Republic have.

- **Mozambique Police Deny Alleged Terrorist Infiltration¹¹**

The Mozambican police have categorically denied reports in a South African paper that terrorists from the self-styled “Islamic State”, or ISIS, have infiltrated northern Mozambique. The paper, the “Lowvelder”, published in Mbombela, capital of the eastern South African province of Mpumalanga, claimed that a group of 90 “well trained ISIS fighters” had infiltrated the north of the country in the previous month and had made their way to the port of Nacala. Citing unnamed “intelligence sources” the paper claimed the group had infiltrated from Zanzibar via mainland Tanzania. It suggested that “the jihadists may try to join forces with Renamo rebels in a united front against the Frelimo government”.

- **China, India Extend Grace Periods for Mozambique Debt Repayments¹²**

China and India extended the grace periods granted to Mozambique for repayment of more than US\$2.2 billion of debt, the southern African nation’s Finance Ministry said. The two countries agreed to the extensions in talks last year, Stelia Neta, deputy national director of the ministry, said in an emailed response to questions. In addition, China agreed to forgive US\$34 million of debt, she said. “The original amortization period of the capital was maintained,” as were interest rates of 1.75 per cent and 2 per cent on the Indian and Chinese debt respectively, Neta said. “The credit maturities of China and India range from 2028 to 2033,” she said. The announcement came amid government plans to restructure US\$2 billion of foreign loans after failing to meet its obligations on the debt since the start of 2017. The government has amassed US\$710 million of arrears on the debt, most of which it previously hid from the International Monetary Fund. The state won’t make payments for at least five more years, according to the Washington-based lender. Mozambique’s debt to China stood at US\$2.02 billion at the end of 2017, while it owes India US\$177.3 million, Neta said.

- **New Ruby Deposit Discovered in Mozambique¹³**

ASX-listed Mustang Resources has discovered a new ruby-bearing gravel deposit just 3.5 km from its processing plant at the Montepuez ruby project in Mozambique. The discovery was made during an extensive exploration and test pitting campaign undertaken at Montepuez during the March 2018 quarter, which resulted in the development of 196 test pits during the period. Preparations have now commenced to restart the exploration bulk sampling program at Montepuez as the rainy seasons

¹¹All Africa, 16 April 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201804170155.html>

¹² Bloomberg, 16 April 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-16/china-india-extend-grace-periods-for-mozambique-debt-repayments>

¹³ Mining Review Africa, 17 April 2018, <https://www.miningreview.com/mustang-resources-discovers-new-ruby-deposit-mozambique/>

ends, and the newly-identified Block D will form part of the upcoming bulk sampling program. "The discovery of the Block D ruby-bearing gravels and the success of our ongoing exploration activities continue to show the significant prospectivity of the ruby project," says Mustang Resources MD, Dr. Bernard Olivier. "When combined with the recent initial success of our newly-implemented sales and marketing strategy, we are confident that we can continue to steadily build value around this high-quality asset – which is strategically located in the heart of the Montepuez gem-field, currently the world's leading supply source of rubies."

- **India, Mauritius Conclude Second Round of Talks for FTA¹⁴**

India and Mauritius today concluded the second round of negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA), aimed at boosting bilateral trade and investments. The three-day talks for Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) started here on Tuesday, a government official said. During the deliberations, trade in goods, services besides economic cooperation were discussed. In an FTA, two trading partners cut or eliminate duties on majority of goods besides liberalising norms to promote services trade and boost investments. According to experts, India may not get huge benefit in goods sector as Mauritius is a small market, but services sectors such as IT and tourism hold huge potential to enhance economic ties. Island nation Mauritius is the top source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India. In 2016-17, India received US\$15.72 billion.

- **Clashes at Madagascar Opposition Protest Leave One Dead, Others Wounded¹⁵**

One person died and 17 others were injured Saturday in clashes between Madagascar's security forces and thousands of opposition activists protesting against new election laws ahead of a vote later this year in the restive island nation. Prime Minister Olivier Mahafaly Solonandrasana said in an address on state television that the country faced a "sad" day with the loss of a life during the demonstrations. "According to the official report, there is one death and 17 wounded," he said. The premier said an investigation had been launched "to shed light on the cause of this death". The opposition has accused the government of President Hery Rajaonarimampianina of wanting to muzzle it through new electoral laws in the run-up to presidential and legislative elections expected to be held in late November or December. The opposition claims that three new laws, adopted earlier this month, favour the ruling party and put in place obstacles to the disadvantage of opponents.

- **More Than 200 Child Soldiers Freed in South Sudan¹⁶**

¹⁴ The Economic Times, 19 April 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-mauritius-conclude-second-round-of-talks-for-fta/articleshow/63833046.cms>

¹⁵ Reuters, 22 April 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/2142774/clashes-madagascar-opposition-protest-leave-one-dead-others>

More than 200 child soldiers have been freed in South Sudan, according to UNICEF. One hundred and twelve boys and 95 girls, some as young as 14, were freed at a special 'laying down of arms ceremony' organized by UNICEF Tuesday in the town of Yambio, in the south west of the country. The UN agency said it hoped to release around 1,000 more child soldiers in coming months and has freed more than 500 child soldiers so far this year. Thousands of children have been forced to join the military and other armed groups in South Sudan since the oil-rich country became engulfed in civil war in 2013. Around 19,000 children are serving in the ranks of armed forces and groups in the country, according to figures released by the organization.

- **Sudan's President Sacks Foreign Minister, State News Agency Reports¹⁷**

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir has issued a presidential decree relieving Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour of his position, state news agency SUNA reported on Thursday. The news agency did not provide any further details or say who would be appointed in his place. Ghandour on Wednesday asked parliament to step in and help Sudanese diplomats, who had not been paid their salaries in seven months or given funds to rent Sudanese diplomatic mission headquarters abroad. The funds requested by the foreign ministry amount to less than US\$30 million, he said, the first public comment by a Sudanese government official on the central bank's inability to provide foreign currency to cover state affairs. Sudan has been largely cut off from international financing in the past decades by US sanctions, which were lifted in October.

- **South Sudan Says Military Chief has Died during Egypt Visit¹⁸**

South Sudan says its military chief has died during a visit to Egypt and after a "short illness." General James Ajongo had taken over the role a year ago after Paul Malong was fired and put under house arrest. The death comes ahead of a new round of peace talks expected in May as a regional bloc seeks an end to the country's five-year civil war. Conflict analysts say the death will put pressure on South Sudan President Salva Kiir to make critical decisions regarding his fragile ruling coalition. Alan Boswell, a South Sudan analyst for Small Arms Survey, says Kiir has pushed out former allies in recent months as he "concentrates power in fewer and fewer hands."

- **Ethiopia, Sudan Give No Reply to Egypt's Invitation for Dam Talks in Cairo: FM¹⁹**

Egypt got no reply from Ethiopia and Sudan to its invitation for further talks in Cairo over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) that is currently being built on

¹⁶ CNN, 18 April 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/18/africa/south-sudan-child-soldiers-freed/index.html>

¹⁷ Reuters, 20 April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-politics/sudans-president-sacks-foreign-minister-state-news-agency-reports-idUSKBN1HQ2XR>

¹⁸ News24, 20 April 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/south-sudan-says-military-chief-has-died-during-egypt-visit-20180420>

¹⁹ Xinhua Net, 19 April 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/19/c_137123355.htm

their shared Nile River, the Egyptian foreign minister said in an interview with a local TV channel on Thursday. Ethiopia and Sudan eye massive benefits from the GERD construction, while Egypt is concerned it might affect its 55.5-billion-cubic-meter annual share of the Nile River water. Earlier in April, a high-profile ministerial meeting of the three countries in Khartoum failed to reach an agreement over technical issues regarding the GERD, with Ethiopia and Sudan holding Egypt responsible for the failure of the talks. Egypt later rejected the blame and said it joined the talks with "a positive spirit and an earnest desire to reach an agreement," inviting Ethiopia and Sudan for further talks in Cairo. The nine-member tripartite talks in Khartoum comprised the ministers of foreign affairs, those of water resources and the heads of intelligence services of the three countries.

- **Rwanda Scoops Global Tourism Leadership Award at Key Summit²⁰**

Rwanda has been awarded the inaugural Global Tourism Leadership Award by the World Tours and Tourism Council (WTTC). Prime Minister Edouard Ngirente received the award Wednesday at the Global Tourism summit in Argentina's capital of Buenos Aires. The award is in recognition of the country's gains in the tourism sector, according to Clare Akamazi, the chief executive of Rwanda Development Board. Ngirente is leading a Rwandan delegation, that includes Akamanzi, to the summit. Last November, the World Travel Market also recognised President Paul Kagame for his efforts in promoting sustainable tourism and conservation.

- **Ethiopia Pips Ghana as Fastest-Growing Africa Economy at IMF²¹**

Ghana has lost its mantle as the African economy likely to grow the quickest this year to Ethiopia, which has held the position for most of the past decade, International Monetary Fund data showed. West Africa's second-biggest economy should expand 6.3 per cent this year, the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook released Tuesday. That's lower than the 8.9 per cent forecast in October, and is also less than the raised 7.4 per cent estimate for Ivory Coast and the prediction for Ethiopia, which was held at 8.5 per cent. Commodities including oil, gold and cocoa are the mainstay of Ghana's US\$43 billion economy, which surged 8.5 percent last year as the Sankofa crude field started up in May. Its growth booms and busts have been closely linked to oil since it became a producer in 2010. Ethiopia, whose gross domestic product is almost double Ghana's, has drawn investors including General Electric Co., Johannesburg-based Standard Bank Group and hundreds of Chinese companies.

- **Nigeria's Buhari Hints at US\$15 Billion Deal with Shell²²**

²⁰ The New Times, 19 April 2018, <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/rwanda-scoops-global-tourism-leadership-award-key-summit>

²¹ Bloomberg Quint, 18 April 2018, <https://www.bloombergquint.com/markets/2018/04/17/ethiopia-pips-ghana-as-africa-s-fastest-growing-economy-for-imf>

²² CNBC, 19 April 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/19/nigeria-president-buhari-hints-at-15-billion-shell-deal.html>

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari met with Shell on Wednesday as part of talks he said were to secure US\$15 billion of investment in his country. "I saw Shell Group, they came here, they saw me, they are preparing to invest US\$15 billion in Nigeria...so really, we are not doing too badly," Buhari said to applause at the Commonwealth Business Forum in London on Wednesday. He was speaking as part of a panel on the ease of doing business between Commonwealth countries. Shell confirmed to CNBC that the meeting had taken place, but did not comment on the size of the specific investment.

- **Nigerian Army Launches Operation to “Totally Destroy Boko Haram”²³**

The Nigerian Army has announced the launch of a new operation to totally destroy the terror group, Boko Haram. According to a statement by David Ahmadu, the Chief of Training and Operations, the new operation will last four months. “Operation LAST HOLD is expected to last for 4 months and it will entail deployment of 6 additional manoeuvre brigades and other critical assets in Borno State,” Mr. Ahmadu, a major general, said.

North Africa

- **Libya Pursuing Ways to Recover its Loan to Africa ²⁴**

The finance ministry of Libyan Presidency Council and the Libyan Foreign Bank (LFB) are pondering over various ways how Libya can recover faltering loans to African countries.

During a meeting between the Minister of Finance-designate of the Government of National Accord, Osama Hamad, and the LFB Director General in last week, both discussed and reviewed the financial and legal status of a number of loans granted by the Libyan state to a number of African states as reported by the Libya Herald. Both sides also discussed other legal, diplomatic and other means open to Libya to recover these amounts and how to protect its rights and interests were also discussed.

To pursue the matter, a decision was taken in the meeting to form joint Ministry of Finance-LFB committee. The committee was empowered to coordinate with other

²³ Premium Times, 20 April 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/265708-nigerian-army-launches-operation-to-totally-destroy-boko-haram.html>

²⁴ Business report , https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/international/libya-investigating-ways-to-recover-loans-to-africa-14472509?utm_source=Media+Review+for+April+17%2C+2018&utm_campaign=Media+Review+for+April+17%2C+2018&utm_medium=email

relevant state sectors to intensify efforts to encourage debtor African states to repay their outstanding Libyan loans. The committee is to report back within three weeks.

- **Draft Law Approved to Confiscate MBH Property in Egypt²⁵**

Two committees formed by parliament in Egypt has approved a government-drafted law with the aim of regulating the procedures for sequestering, managing, and disposing of the properties belonging to the members of banned Muslim Brotherhood. The draft law also includes all Islamist groups and movements that are found guilty of mounting terrorist attacks or being affiliated with the Brotherhood in any way.

The draft law was approved by both the Legislative and Constitutional Affairs Committee and the National Security and Defence Committee, and it is expected that parliament will approve it very soon in next plenary session. The 20-article draft states that an ad hoc committee will be formed with responsibility for managing the assets of the group and of all other groups and movements related with the mother organization and listed as terrorist entities. The sources informed that the assets include all kinds of property, in-kind possessions, bonds, national or foreign cash, and financial securities. The draft law states that all state institutions – including banks, whether public or private – will be obliged to cooperate with the ad hoc committee, giving all necessary assistance and implementing its resolutions.

It is worth mentioning here that Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood was designated a terrorist organization following a number of terrorist attacks targeting buildings belonging to security forces in Cairo and Nile-delta cities in December 2013. Many of the group's leading figures were arrested, while many of its assets were sequestered. The government also designated two movements – Hasm and Liwaa El-Thawra – as terrorist organizations led by Muslim Brotherhood figures. The two movements were listed as "terrorist" entities by the United Kingdom and the United States

Central Asia

- **New Government Formed in Kyrgyzstan**

The parliament of Kyrgyzstan (Jogorku Kenesh) has approved the composition the 30th government as Mr. Mukhammedkalyi Abylgaziev becoming the new Prime Minister. Previously, he was chief of staff in the office of President Sooronbai Jeenbekov.²⁶ Mr. Kubatbek Boronov has been appointed as the First Vice Prime Minister and Mr. Erlan Abdyl daev has been made the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

²⁵

²⁶ Reuters, "Kyrgyzstan's parliament names new prime minister," 20 April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-primeminister/kyrgyzstans-parliament-names-new-prime-minister-idUSKBN1HR1RT>

Earlier, Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov dismissed the cabinet of Prime Minister Sapar Isakov following the passage of no-confidence vote against his government. The opposition was not satisfied with the government's performance in the year 2017.²⁷ Among 120 legislators, more than 100 voted against the government. It is for the first time that the Kyrgyz parliament has expressed no confidence in the government since the country became independent in 1991.

China

- **EAM's visit to China**

External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj concluded her four day visit to China on 22 April 2018. Smt. Sushma Swaraj visited China not only participate in the SCO Foreign Ministers Meeting, but also to have a substantial bilateral interaction with State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi will visit China on 27 & 28 April for an informal Summit with President of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Xi Jinping in the city of Wuhan.

Smt. Sushma Swaraj noted: "My discussion with Foreign Minister Wang Yi today was to prepare for this Informal Summit between our leaders. It will be an important occasion for them to exchange views on bilateral and international matters from an over-arching and long-term perspective with the objective of enhancing mutual communication at the level of leaders".

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj called on Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing

- **5th India-China Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED)**

The 5th India-China Strategic Economic Dialogue between National Institution for Transforming of India (NITI) Aayog and National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China, was held in Beijing, China on April 14th, 2018. The Indian side was led by Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice- Chairman, NITI Aayog and the Chinese side was led by Mr. He Lifeng, Chairman of Development and Reform Commission of China. The Ambassador of India to China Mr. Gautam Bambawale was also present in the Dialogue.

Both sides reviewed the cooperation progress since the mechanism of SED initiated in the area of Resource Conservation and Environmental Protection and agreed to cooperate in the areas of waste to energy, waste water treatment, desalination,

²⁷ Kabar, "Kyrgyz president dismisses cabinet after no-confidence vote," 19 April 2018, <http://kabar.kg/eng/news/kyrgyz-president-dismisses-cabinet-after-no-confidence-vote/>

promoting reuse of tertiary treated water, water usage efficiency and related areas, and to further explore areas for collaboration in resource conservation sector.²⁸

- **China warns Australia over hostile sentiment**

If Australia considers exchanges between countries as interference, it should lock itself up in the dark room, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in response to Australia's anti-China allegations . People who have such a mindset need to reflect, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying told on 19 April. If there is no mutual trust, there's no room for cooperation. China hopes Australia takes practical action and corrects its prejudice against China, Hua said.²⁹

- **Wang Yi Holds Talks with Foreign Minister of Nepal**

On April 18, 2018, China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali of Nepal in Beijing. China's Foreign Ministry informed:

Wang Yi expressed that China and Nepal are good neighbors and good partners who treat each other equally and support each other. China congratulates Nepal on its smooth completion of political transformation and wishes Nepal to realize stable development at an early date....

Mr. Gyawali statedThe Nepalese side firmly adheres to the one-China policy, and thanks China for respecting Nepal's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity as well as helping Nepal's economic and social development. Nepal highly recognizes the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind proposed by President Xi Jinping and stands ready to actively participate in the "Belt and Road" construction, so as to push Nepal-China all-round cooperation to new and higher levels.³⁰

- **China inaugurates new state media group**

On 19 April China officially inaugurated the China Media Group as part of its wide-ranging institutional reshuffle. China Media Group is a new broadcasting platform made up of China Central Television, China National Radio and China Radio International. Huang Kunming, Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, attended the inauguration ceremony.

²⁸ <http://indianembassybeijing.in/economic-dia.php>

²⁹ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0420/c90000-9451678.html>

³⁰ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1552712.shtml

While addressing a symposium, Huang called for efforts to build the China Media Group into a new mainstream media that was strong in guiding and influencing the public. "The restructuring is significant in following the principle of the Party exercising leadership over media," Huang said.³¹

- **Xi calls for efforts to break new ground in national security**

On April 17, 2018, speaking at the first meeting of the 19th CPC Central Committee National Security Commission, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for efforts to fully implement a holistic approach to national security and break new ground in national security in the new era. Xi stressed efforts to strengthen the centralised, unified leadership of the Party over national security and provide a firm safety guarantee for realising the two centenary goals. Xi noted that the Commission has initially built up the framework, developed a theory, and improved the strategies of national security, and established mechanism for coordinating relevant work. Also, he called for concrete efforts to safeguard political security, establish sound national security systems and institutions, improve strategies and policies and enhance capacity-building.³²

- **Ambassador Qin Jian meets with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Somalia Mr. Awad**

On April 18, 2018, Chinese Ambassador to Somalia Qin Jian met with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Somalia Mr. Awad. Qin said that China will deepen its reform and opening up, promote global trade liberalisation and bring more opportunities to Somalia and other African countries. Awad noted that China has helped Africa build massive infrastructure projects and promoted economic and social development within the framework of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. He added that Somalia has an important strategic location, rich resources and a huge potential for development.³³

- **China offers Gambia 400 short term study packages**

On April 18, 2018, speaking at a press conference in Banjul, Gambia's information minister, Demba A. Jawo announced that China has offered 400 short term study packages to Gambia as part of bilateral education exchange. The Chinese government will provide training on information and communications for mainstream media and government officials and cyber security. In addition, the Chinese government has

³¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/19/c_137123154.htm

³² "Xi calls for efforts to break new ground in national security", *People's Daily*, April 18, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0418/c90000-9450634.html>, Accessed on April 22, 2018.

³³ Ambassador Qin Jian meets with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Somalia Mr. Awad, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1552646.shtml, Accessed on April 22, 2018.

provided 40 fully-funded scholarships to Gambia for human resources development in 2018.³⁴

- **Xi congratulates Miguel Diaz-Canel on election as Cuba's new president**

On April 19, 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated Miguel Diaz-Canel on his election as the new Cuban president. In the congratulatory message, Xi said that the two countries are good comrades, good friends and good partners that sincerely trust each other and share the same fate. He also expressed his willingness to work with Diaz-Canel to deepen and expand bilateral cooperation, and achieve new accomplishments in the new era. Again, in a separate message, Xi expressed his readiness to maintain close communications with the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba Raul Castro.³⁵

- **China, Britain agree to further promote golden era of bilateral ties**

On April 19, 2018, in a telephone conversation, Chinese President Xi Jinping and British Prime Minister Theresa May agreed to further promote their relationship to a more strategic, practical, globalised and inclusive level. Xi advocated strengthening communication and coordination on macro policy, maintaining high-level exchanges and institutional communication and promotion of practical cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. May appreciated Xi's pledges to further open up China's economy. The two leaders also exchanged views on the situation in Syria and global trade.³⁶

European Union

- **Andrea Nahles Was Elected New Leader of SPD**

Andrea Nahles was elected as the leader of Social Democratic Party (SPD) at a party congress held on 22 April 2018 in the city of Wiesbaden. She received around 66 percent of delegate votes against Simone Lange, the mayor of the northern town of Flensburg. She has become the first woman to lead German Social Democrats. It is expected that new leader would work to reform and enlarge the support base of the party. She told delegates, "You can reform a party while it's in the government - and I intend to prove it starting tomorrow." She added, "government need our support. There aren't two parties. We are one party." Vote share of party had been reduced in the federal election 2017. Subsequently, it refused to join the government. After

³⁴ "China offers Gambia 400 short term study packages", China Daily, April 19, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201804/19/WS5ad8075ca3105cdcf651942a.html>, Accessed on April 22, 2018.

³⁵ "Xi congratulates Miguel Diaz-Canel on election as Cuba's new president", *People's Daily*, April 20, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0420/c90000-9451615.html>, Accessed on April 22, 2018.

³⁶ "China, Britain agree to further promote golden era of bilateral ties", *People's Daily*, April 20, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0420/c90000-9451616.html>, Accessed on April 22, 2018.

breakdown of coalition talks of CDU with FDP and the Greens, the Social Democrats entered the negotiations and has now joined grand coalition.³⁷

- **French President Macron's Speech at European Parliament**

In his first speech at the European Parliament on 17 April 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron called for a “proper debate on convictions and proposals” and make ‘EU democracy come alive’. He also called for a debate on migration, euro zone regulation, banking reforms and ‘EU-wide sovereignty’. President Macron said, “Faced with authoritarianism, the answer is not democratic authoritarianism but the authority of democracy.” President Macron proposed establishing a European program to ‘directly financially support local communities that welcome and integrate refugees.’ He also proposed to create a new tax on the digital economy.³⁸

- **French President Macron's Visit to Germany**

French President Macron visited Berlin on 19 April 2018 for talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on European Union reforms. Chancellor Merkel said, “We need an open debate and at the end the ability to compromise.” President Macron said, “We live in a moment of European adventure that is truly unique. Also within our states there are serious doubts and strong nationalistic visions.”³⁹

European Union

- **Brexit: first talks on future UK relationship with EU begin⁴⁰**

Senior British and EU officials opened talks on the UK's future relationship with the European Union, marking a milestone in the Brexit process. More than a year after the government triggered article 50, British and EU negotiators met behind closed doors to discuss the UK's future trade ties. The talks were mostly limited to a formal presentation on the negotiating guidelines agreed by EU leaders in March and setting a schedule for future meetings. Four more rounds of negotiations have been pencilled in ahead of a crunch EU summit in June, when European leaders will next assess Brexit. Two rounds are planned for May and two in June, with the aim of working

³⁷ Jefferson Chase, New chairwoman Andrea Nahles seeks to unify Germany's SPD, DW, April 22, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/new-chairwoman-andrea-nahles-seeks-to-unify-germanys-spd/a-43487566>; Madeleine Schwartz, Andrea Nahles: German SPD's last hope, POLITICO, April 22, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/andrea-nahles-spd-germany-last-hope/>

³⁸ France's Emmanuel Macron calls for revival of EU democracy, DW, April 17, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/frances-emmanuel-macron-calls-for-revival-of-eu-democracy/a-43415579>; Macron calls for 'European sovereignty' to combat authoritarianism in speech at European Parliament, France24, April 17, 2018, <http://www.france24.com/en/20180417-live-france-macron-eu-reform-european-parliament-speech-brexit-strasbourg>

³⁹ Ben Knight, Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron present united front in Berlin, DW, April 19, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkel-and-emmanuel-macron-present-united-front-in-berlin/a-43450750>

⁴⁰The Guardian, 18 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/18/brexit-first-talks-on-uks-future-relationship-with-eu-begin>

through a long list of unresolved issues on the divorce, including Ireland and an outline text of the future relationship.

- **EU rejects Irish border proposals and says Brexit talks could still fail⁴¹**

The EU's chief negotiator has warned there is still a "risk of failure" in the Brexit negotiations as Brussels continues to reject Britain's proposals on avoiding a hard border in Ireland. Michel Barnier said on Friday that a quarter of the work needed to complete preparations for the UK to leave the EU next March remained to be done. Even if Britain and the EU were working towards a British exit from the EU taking place in March 2019, this may not happen if outstanding topics such as Ireland were unresolved, he said. The UK continues to insist the border issue cannot be resolved without knowing what the future trading relationship will be – and insists the real deadline is October, not June. However, Ireland's deputy prime minister, Simon Coveney, said "serious questions" would start to be asked about Britain's commitment to an open border in Ireland if there were no fresh ideas on the table by the June deadline.

France

- **Macron and Merkel pledge euro reform⁴²**

France and Germany have pledged to forge a joint position on euro reform by June, despite German reluctance on deeper monetary union. The French and German leaders made the pledge during French president Emmanuel Macron's visit to Berlin on Thursday (19 April). Macron had earlier embraced European Commission ideas on creating a joint deposit guarantee scheme, an EU bailout fund, and a eurozone budget and finance ministry. The reforms were meant to show that the EU can live without the UK and to prevent a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis, but Germany has proved reluctant to use its money to underwrite the proposals. Merkel said the euro "isn't yet crisis resistant" and that Germany wanted stricter regulation of eurozone banks, but she said the joint deposit guarantee scheme would have to wait until "the more distant future".

Germany

- **Merkel faces CDU revolt against Eurozone reforms⁴³**

The German Christian Democrats (CDU) are less enthusiastic about moving ahead with the political integration of the Eurozone than the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The CDU's deputy parliamentary leader, Katja Leikert, called for a parliamentary group meeting on Tuesday which, according to Reuters, seeks to limit

⁴¹ The Guardian, 20 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/20/eu-rejects-irish-border-proposals-and-says-brexit-talks-could-still-fail>

⁴² EUobserver, 20 April 2018 <https://euobserver.com/economic/141653>

⁴³ New Europe, 17 April 2018 <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/merkel-faces-cdu-revolt-eurozone-reforms/>

Angela Merkel's mandate for negotiation. The main concern was to ensure that EU member states retain sovereign liability and ensure there is not mutualisation of debt. "Financial aid will only be granted with strict conditions," the proposal for debate reads. Conservative lawmakers want to ensure that any financial aid to other eurozone members must be authorized by the Bundestag. Moreover, it warns against a bold initiative of the Franco-German axis that would undermine cohesion and "overstretch" the European Union.

- **Modi had a 'wonderful' meeting with German Chancellor Merkel⁴⁴**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he had a 'wonderful meeting' with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and discussed multiple aspects relating to bilateral cooperation as well as other global issues with her. Modi met Merkel during a brief stopover in Berlin after wrapping up his visit to the United Kingdom where he attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and held a series of bilateral meetings with world leaders. The two leaders discussed ways to further strengthen India-Germany cooperation, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said, adding that Modi's visit 'demonstrates India's mutual desire to strengthen the strategic partnership'. It was the first meeting between the two leaders since Merkel began her fourth term as German chancellor last month.

Sweden

- **New Swedish-Indian "innovative" partnership⁴⁵**

Sweden and India launched a partnership for environmental innovations, announces Stefan Löfven and his Indian colleague Narendra Modi, who is visiting Stockholm. The two Heads of Government also promise a deeper defense and security cooperation. "Sweden has many sustainable modern solutions to offer India," said Löfven, mentioning green technology, smart cities and innovations. Sweden now pushes SEK 50 million into such an "innovative partnership" in the area, said Löfven. Löfven also declared that the countries should work for a security agreement, with the exchange of secret information for defense purposes. Modi described in turn how Sweden can make the most of India's development" to the advantage of both. The Indian leader also said that he and Löfven discussed "renewable energy, local traffic and waste management", issues that concern "quality of life" in India, which are facing major environmental problems, not least the air in the country's giant cities.

UK

- **US and UK blame Russia for 'malicious' cyber-offensive⁴⁶**

⁴⁴ Rediff, 21 April 2018, <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/modi-holds-talks-with-german-chancellor-merkel/20180421.htm>

⁴⁵ Dagens Nyheter, 17 April 2018, <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/nytt-svensk-indiskt-innovativt-partnerskap/>

⁴⁶ The Guardian, 16 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/16/us-and-uk-blame-russia-for-malicious-cyber-offensive>

The cyberwar between the west and Russia has escalated after the UK and the US issued a joint alert accusing Moscow of mounting a “malicious” internet offensive that appeared to be aimed at espionage, stealing intellectual property and laying the foundation for an attack on infrastructure. Senior security officials in the US and UK held a rare joint conference call to directly blame the Kremlin for targeting government institutions, private sector organisations and infrastructure, and internet providers supporting these sectors. Previously the two nations have spoken only of attacks “originating from Russia”, with lines between Russian criminals and state activity being blurred, but they pinned blame on the Kremlin on this occasion. The US and UK said they had “high confidence” that the Kremlin was behind the attack.

- **Ireland warns of perils of failing to agree Brexit ‘backstop’ solution on border⁴⁷**

Ireland has warned there will be no Brexit withdrawal treaty and no transition agreement unless Britain comes up with acceptable wording as a “backstop” solution to the Irish border question in the event of no deal. The Irish foreign minister, Simon Coveney, told reporters in Luxembourg that difficulties would arise as early as June if the wording was not agreed. Asked whether the transition agreement would be at risk if there was no deal in place by June, he said: “It puts everything at risk. Michel Barnier [the EU chief negotiator] has been very clear there will be no withdrawal agreement if there is not a backstop relating to the Irish border consistent with paragraph 49 of the political agreement in December.

- **May defends British strikes in Syria against parliament critics⁴⁸**

British Prime Minister Theresa May, facing a rowdy session of parliament on Monday (16 April), defended her decision to join US-led missile strikes against Syria without first seeking parliament’s authorisation. May justified her action in bypassing a parliament vote on military action, saying she was driven by the need to decide quickly about joining the United States and France in Saturday’s strikes, made in retaliation for a suspected poison gas attack. Saying she had no doubt the “Syrian regime” was behind the 7 April gas attack which she called a “stain on humanity”, May told lawmakers she had acted in the national interest. She refused to be drawn on whether she would seek their approval for future action.

- **May woos Modi as UK pursues free-trade deal with India⁴⁹**

Britain and India have laid the ground for a possible post-Brexit bilateral free trade deal and signed off on a series of commercial agreements worth up to €1bn, according to Downing Street. British ministers say a free trade deal with India is a priority after

⁴⁷The Guardian, 16 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/16/ireland-warns-of-perils-of-failing-to-agree-brexit-backstop-solution-on-border>

⁴⁸Euractiv, 17 April 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/may-defends-british-strikes-in-syria-against-parliament-critics/>

⁴⁹The Guardian, 18 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/18/uk-and-india-sign-agreement-laying-ground-for-free-trade-deal-brexit>

Brexit, but the joint Indian-UK statement issued after the bilateral meeting acknowledges that the UK cannot sign any new deal until the Brexit transition period ends. The EU is also locked in talks with India over a free trade deal. After Brexit the UK will initially simply seek to replicate the EU-Indian free trade deal, but any bespoke agreement will be hard to negotiate since India will be looking for concessions on visa travel from India to the UK. The lengthy bilateral deal signed by the two countries covers cyberspace, technology sharing, solar energy, sustainable urban development, water management, animal husbandry, safe use of nuclear energy, artificial intelligence and big-data analytics.

- **Prince Charles to be next head of Commonwealth⁵⁰**

Commonwealth leaders have formally announced that Prince Charles will become the next head of the organisation after the Queen. Asked at the summit's closing press conference whether any leaders had expressed dissent, Theresa May insisted the decision had been unanimous. In the statement, issued at a press conference in Lancaster House, the leaders highlighted the Commonwealth's "unique perspective" and "consensus-based approach". They highlighted a series of joint challenges the countries had agreed to tackle together, including climate change - particularly with reference to "small island developing states"; chemical weapons; countering extremism and human trafficking.

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **North Korea announces freeze of nuclear and missile tests and shutdown of its nuclear test site**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un announced that Pyongyang decided to abandon its northern nuclear experiment site and to stop its nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests. Kim also announced that the socialist regime would now concentrate on improving the economy. The announcement was made during the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party on April 20, 2018.⁵¹

- **South, North Korea set up direct hotline between leaders**

⁵⁰The Guardian, 20 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/20/prince-charles-next-head-commonwealth-queen>

⁵¹"North Korea to close northern test site and halt missile tests", The JoongAng Daily, April 21, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3047251

On April 20, 2018, South Korea and North Korea set up a telephone line between their leaders, enabling direct dialogue between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, who are also set to meet in person next week.⁵²

- **Abe- Trump Summit**

On April 18-19, 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago retreat in Palm Beach, Florida. The Trump-Abe summit has played out amid growing tensions between the two countries over North Korea and trade. Japan has raised concerns that the U.S. might press Kim only on long-range missiles that could hit the mainland United States — and not on the short- and medium-range missiles that pose an immediate threat to Japan — as they discuss North Korea's nuclear weapons program. During the meeting President said he wants to see "free, fair and reciprocal trade" between the two countries. "We have a very big deficit, and we're going to weed that down and hopefully get a balance at some point in the not-too-distant future," he added. Abe said that he and Trump had had "very in-depth discussions" on both North Korea and economic issues and that "on those two points" they had "successfully forged a mutual understanding." Prime Minister Abe and President Trump confirmed that maximum pressure will continue against North Korea until it abandons its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in a verifiable and irreversible manner. Trump also agreed with Abe's request to bring up the issue of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea decades ago during his talks with Kim.⁵³

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Exiled Cambodia Opposition leader raises concern on the growing Cambodia-China Nexus**

Sam Rainsy, the exiled opposition leader of the Cambodian National Rescue Party has warned Cambodia's ever-closer relationship with China, weakening regional security and undermining the country's national sovereignty. Mr Rainsy has been in Jakarta to lobby the Indonesian government to speak out about Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen's violations of human rights and curtailing of democratic norms. The opposition leader is calling on the international community not to send their observers to the July 29 national elections, termed as an 'electoral sham'. He has called on PM Hun Sen to organise a real election which includes allowing the participation of the opposition parties. According to Rainsy, Cambodia's growing ties with China had jeopardised stability, democracy and the country's independence. Last month, China and Cambodia held a 17 day military exercises on Cambodian soil, with hundreds of soldiers and military hardware involved. At the same time, Cambodia has in the last year signed a series of development deals with China, resulting in the influx of

⁵² "South, North Korea set up direct hotline between leaders", The Yonhap News, April 20, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2018/04/20/0401000000AEN20180420006751315.html

⁵³ "Trump cites 'very big deficit' with Japan during Abe visit", The Asahi Shimbun, April 19, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201804190014.html

Chinese infrastructure cash and tourists. However, according to Mr Rainsy these developments with Beijing have also led to the deteriorating relationship with and investment from the West.⁵⁴

- **Philippines denounces the EU for interfering in its Internal Matters**

The European Parliament on April 19 adopted a resolution condemning Philippine authorities for trying to justify the murders of about 2,300 drug-related deaths that have occurred separately, at the hands of what police say are unknown assassins. The EU parliament and its members have criticised the Philippines' brutal "war on drugs" several times in the past and in the resolution adopted stated that falsified evidence of the murders had been provided by the authorities. European lawmakers also called on Manila to remove "human rights defenders" from its list of what it considers as terrorists, including Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the United Nations special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples. They also condemned "the intimidation and the abuse" of human rights defenders, activists and journalists, and said reintroducing the death penalty in the Philippines was against its international obligations. Philippines Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, while denouncing the EU for its resolution stated that, "the European Parliament has crossed a red line when it called for unwarranted actions against the Philippines". Mr Cayetano stated that "In case the members of the European Parliament are not aware of it, may we remind them that their recommended actions already constitute interference in the affairs of a sovereign state," He further stated that the European Parliament's resolution was based on "biased, incomplete and even wrong information and does not reflect the true situation on the ground".⁵⁵

- **PM Lee emphasises against rising trade protectionism at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting**

While speaking at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Chogm) on April 19, on free trade and threats to the global trading order, Singapore's PM Lee Hsien Loong, stated that while countries need to address their political and security concerns that come with the freeing up of investment flows, these should not become a disguised form of protectionism. He warned that restricting investments unduly will not only damage the multi-lateral system of trade and investments, it will also cause strategic and great power rivalry. According to PM Lee the spectre of a trade war is of grave concern to many Commonwealth countries, including Singapore that shares a common interest in upholding the multi-lateral trading system. He further states that such system sets uniform rules and balances the benefits and concerns of different countries, while unilateral trade restrictions that do not comply with World Trade

⁵⁴ James Massola, "Cambodia's Sam Rainsy warns against 'fake election', China ties", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/cambodia-s-sam-rainsy-warns-against-fake-election-china-ties-20180418-p4zabk.html>, accessed on April 19, 2018.

⁵⁵"Philippines decries European Parliament's 'interference'", *The Straits Times*, April 20, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-decries-european-parliaments-interference>, accessed on April 20, 2018.

Organisation (WTO) rules lead to tit-for-tat responses. PM Lee urged the leaders of the 52 other Commonwealth member nations to promote trade in the network even as he praised the talks being held at the meeting. The combined GDP, of the Commonwealth nations is estimated at US\$10.4 trillion in 2017. It is predicted to reach US\$13 trillion in 2020. PM Lee encouraged Commonwealth countries to continue maintaining liberal investment flows, even as they address national interests and security concerns.⁵⁶

Myanmar

- **Over 2000 Kachin villagers flee KIA-military battles**

More than 2000 local people have fled their homes amid fresh fighting between the Tatmadaw (military) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Hpakant and Tanai townships of Kachin State, according to a statement by Knut Ostby, the United Nations resident and humanitarian coordinator in Myanmar. The statement said the UN agency has been particularly alarmed by reports of civilian casualties and the plight of communities affected by fighting in the two townships, while other areas have been gravely affected as well. This includes possibly up to 2000 people who reportedly have been displaced from Awng Lawt, Sut Ring Yang and Sut Ra villages in Tanai⁵⁷.

- **Lack of knowledge about NVC card holding up repatriation: minister**

Refugees in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh want to return to Myanmar but cannot because they have not yet undergone the national verification process, according to Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Win Myat Aye. U Win Myat Aye, who led a delegation to Bangladesh to visit refugee camps last week and met with the district commissioner, said many of the refugees have not yet filled out forms with the personal details the government needs to verify their citizenship⁵⁸.

- **Family of whistle blowing Myanmar cop evicted after testimony**

The family of a Myanmar policeman who testified in court that two Reuters reporters had been set up was evicted from their police housing a day after his evidence, his wife said. Deputy police Major Moe Yan Naing, a prosecution witness, surprised the Yangon courtroom on Friday by describing how his colleagues were ordered by a senior officer to "get" reporter Wa Lone by handing him sensitive documents at a

⁵⁶“PM Lee Hsien Loong warns of political, security concerns becoming a disguised form of trade protectionism”, *The Straits Times*, April 20, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/pm-lee-hsien-loong-warns-of-political-security-concerns-becoming-a-disguised-form-of-trade>, accessed on April 20, 2018.

⁵⁷ Over 2000 Kachin villagers flee KIA-military battles, 23 April 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/over-2000-kachin-villagers-flee-kia-military-battles.html>

⁵⁸ Lack of knowledge about NVC card holding up repatriation: minister, 20 April 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/lack-knowledge-about-nvc-card-holding-repatriation-minister.html>

meeting. The 32-year-old Myanmar journalist and his colleague Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, have been detained since they were arrested in December and accused of possessing classified papers⁵⁹.

- **Government pardons nearly 8500 prisoners, including student activists' killer**

The Presidential Office announced on Tuesday that 8541 prisoners, including 51 foreigners, were released from prisons across the country. According to the AAPP (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners) only 36 of those freed were political prisoners. Only one female was among those released by decree of Myanmar President U Win Myint on Tuesday, to mark Myanmar New Year's Day. Most of the inmates released were those imprisoned under drug-related cases. They numbered over 6000⁶⁰.

- **Dozens of Rohingya come ashore in Indonesia**

About 80 Rohingya in a wooden boat arrived in Indonesia on 20th April, officials said, the latest batch of the vulnerable minority to come ashore in the world's biggest Muslim majority nation. The group landed in Aceh province on Sumatra island, just weeks after dozens of the persecuted Muslim minority from Myanmar came ashore in neighbouring Malaysia⁶¹.

- **UN Security Council to Make a Two-Day Visit to Myanmar**

A team of 15 permanent representatives from the 15 members of the United Nations Security Council will visit Myanmar for two days early next month after being invited to examine the situation in Rakhine State by the Myanmar government⁶².

North America

Canada

- **'Fear and division': Trudeau rips Conservatives in campaign-style speech to supporters**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took sharp aim at his chief electoral opponent today, casting Andrew Scheer as a divisive force in a campaign-style speech to fire up his

⁵⁹ Family of whistleblowing Myanmar cop evicted after testimony, 23 April 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/family-whistleblowing-myanmar-cop-evicted-after-testimony>

⁶⁰ Government pardons nearly 8500 prisoners, including student activists' killer, 19 April 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/government-pardons-nearly-8500-prisoners-including-student-activists-killer.html>

⁶¹ Dozens of Rohingya come ashore in Indonesia, 21 April 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/dozens-rohingya-come-ashore-indonesia>

⁶² UN Security Council to Make a Two-Day Visit to Myanmar, 23 April 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/un-security-council-make-two-day-visit-myanmar.html>

troops. Addressing about 3,000 delegates at the Liberal policy convention in Halifax, Trudeau seized on the Conservative leader's characterization as "Stephen Harper with a smile." Trudeau said Canadians rejected the politics of fear and division in 2015, opting instead for positive politics fuelled by ideas over demonizing opponents. He touted the Liberal record on everything from the economy, to gun control, to helping the Syrian refugee crisis. He thanked the more than two million Canadians who played a role in sponsoring refugees. Trudeau also invoked his popular past "sunny ways" motto in his speech. In a subsequent news conference, the prime minister was asked how that reconciles with his sharp words for Scheer.⁶³

- **MPs ask questions about Mali combat - senior Canadian officer says combat debate "nonsensical"**

MPs on the House of Commons defence committee raised those concerns Thursday and questioned generals about details of the Mali mission and whether Canadian military personnel would be safe. Conservative defence critic James Bezan wanted information about the risks and whether troops will have enough protection from insurgent attacks. Questions were also asked about whether insurgents had surface-to-air missiles that could be of a threat to RCAF helicopters. "Our guys could potentially be going into hot conflict," Bezan said at the committee. Another MP asked if Mali was a war zone. Lt. Gen. Stephen Bowes, who was appearing before the committee, answered that, "war zone is not a term. It's a complex conflict zone." Last month the Liberal government announced it would send two RCAF Chinook helicopters from the military base at Petawawa, Ont. as well as four armed Griffon helicopters to act as escorts for those larger aircraft. There will also be support personnel for the helicopters being sent to Mali, a country that since 2013 has been dealing with insurgents and armed Islamic extremists. One hundred and sixty-four military personnel from various nations have been killed during the mission. Bezan noted that the head of the United Nations mission to Mali has characterized the operation as "war."⁶⁴

The United States

- **CIA Director Pompeo met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over Easter weekend**

CIA Director Mike Pompeo made a top-secret visit to North Korea as an envoy for President Trump to meet with Kim Jong Un, and plans for a possible summit between the two leaders are underway, Trump confirmed. The extraordinary meeting between one of Trump's most trusted emissaries and the authoritarian head of a rogue state

⁶³ Kathleen Harris, "'Fear and division': Trudeau rips Conservatives in campaign-style speech to supporters," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-liberal-convention-2018-1.4630161>, Accessed 22 April 2018.

⁶⁴ David Pugliese, "MPs ask questions about Mali combat - senior Canadian officer says combat debate 'nonsensical'," <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/mps-ask-questions-about-mali-combat-senior-canadian-officer-says-combat-debate-nonsensical>, Accessed on 22 April 2018.

was part of an effort to lay the groundwork for direct talks between Trump and Kim about North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The clandestine mission came late last month, soon after Pompeo was nominated to be secretary of state. Speaking at his Mar-a-Lago resort, Trump appeared to allude to the extraordinary face-to-face meeting between Kim and Pompeo when he said the United States has had direct talks with North Korea "at very high levels." The president didn't elaborate at the time. Trump said that he would sit down with Kim probably in early June, if not sooner. Trump also said he has given his "blessing" to planned discussions between South Korea and North Korea about bringing a formal end to the Korean War, as fast-moving diplomatic developments surrounding nuclear-armed North Korea came into view.⁶⁵

- **Ongoing trade issues expose the limits of the Trump-Abe "bromance"**

Mr. Trump appeared to be successful in reassuring Abe that he would take Japan's concerns to heart during his upcoming meeting with North Korea's Kim Jong Un. But Wednesday brought public disagreements, as Mr. Trump spurned his guest's top economic and trade priorities. Principal among them: allowing Japan an exemption from new U.S. steel and aluminum tariffs and persuading Trump to re-join the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal. The session on trade and economic issues quickly turned tense and tough, according to two U.S. officials, as the leaders found themselves at an impasse on the tariffs. And Mr. Trump refused to budge on his opposition to the TPP, from which he withdrew the U.S. last year. The summit was hastily put together after Mr. Trump accepted Kim's invitation for a meeting in the next two months, and as the president prepared to implement the metals tariffs. On North Korea he declared "we've never been in a position like this" to address worldwide concerns over North Korea's nuclear weapons, but he may still pull the plug on the meeting between the long-time adversaries. "If I think that if it's a meeting that is not going to be fruitful we're not going to go. If the meeting when I'm there is not fruitful I will respectfully leave the meeting," Trump said, adding that a US-led "maximum pressure" campaign of tough economic sanctions on North Korea would continue. "Just because North Korea is responding to dialogue, there should be no reward. Maximum pressure should be maintained."⁶⁶

Mexico

- **'We are watching you': Political killings shake Mexico election**

⁶⁵ Shane Harris, Carol D. Leonnig, Greg Jaffe and David Nakamura, "CIA Director Pompeo met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over Easter weekend," https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/us-china-trade-dispute-looms-over-trump-summit-with-japans-abe/2018/04/17/2c94cb02-424f-11e8-bba2-0976a82b05a2_story.html?utm_term=.2a0e2356c8e1, Accessed on 22 April 2018.

⁶⁶AP, "Ongoing trade issues expose the limits of the Trump-Abe bromance", <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ongoing-trade-issues-expose-the-limits-of-the-trump-abe-bromance/> Accessed on 22 April 2018

An explosion of political assassinations in Mexico has cast a pall over nationwide elections slated for July 1, when voters will choose their next president and fill a slew of down-ballot posts. At least 82 candidates and office holders have been killed since the electoral season kicked off in September, making this the bloodiest presidential race in recent history, according to a tally by Etellekt, a security consultancy based in Mexico City, and Reuters research. The victims hail from a variety of political parties, large and small, and most were running for local offices far removed from the national spotlight. The vast majority were shot. Most cases remain unsolved, the killers' motives unclear. But security experts suspect drug gangs are driving much of the bloodshed. With a record of about 3,400 mostly local offices up for grabs in July, Mexico's warring cartels appear to be jostling for influence in city halls nationwide. Electoral authorities have warned that the bloodshed could affect voter turnout in some areas. The killing spree has stunned even veteran observers who see it as an assault on Mexico's democracy and the rule of law.⁶⁷

Latin America and the Caribbean

Brazil

- **Brazil top court ruling could free Lula, derail graft fight**

A decision looming before Brazil's Supreme Court could free imprisoned former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva within days and deal the harshest blow yet to the South American country's battle against corruption, prosecutors and judges say. Several justices on Brazil's top court have already made clear they want to overturn a landmark 2016 ruling that allowed defendants to be jailed if their graft convictions were upheld on a first appeal - the sole reason that Lula and several senior politicians and businessmen are currently behind bars. Critics say the decision denies defendants the constitutional right to exhaust the appeals process before being jailed and Supreme Court Justice Marco Aurelio Mello is expected to decide whether to bring before the full tribunal a motion against the ruling. But leaders of Brazil's groundbreaking anti-corruption drive, including the crusading Judge Sergio Moro who jailed Lula this month, told Reuters that overturning the decision would seriously damage the country's sweeping battle against graft. Reversing the ruling would mean not just freedom for Lula, who leads polls for October's presidential election, but also the release of many other leading politicians and businessmen serving time for corruption.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Reuters, "We are watching you': Political killings shake Mexico election," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-election-violence/we-are-watching-you-political-killings-shake-mexico-election-idUSKBN1HP0HV>, Accessed on 22 April 2018.

⁶⁸ Brad Brooks, "Brazil top court ruling could free Lula, derail graft fight," <https://in.reuters.com/article/brazil-politics-lula/brazil-top-court-ruling-could-free-lula-derail-graft-fight-idINKBN1HN1FX>, Accessed on 22 April 2018.

Cuba

- **Miguel Diaz-Canel: Cuba's post-Castro president**

Cuba has formally announced Miguel Diaz-Canel as the country's new president. The 57-year-old father of two was elected president of Cuba on April 19 after Raul Castro, who led the country for 10 years, stepped down. Political campaigning is outlawed in Cuba, so little is known about Diaz-Canel's plans to navigate the challenges facing the island nation, including its struggling economy. However, Diaz-Canel is expected to continue in the same vein as his predecessor, but would be "part of the process of change that has been happening in Cuba since 2011", former Cuban diplomat Carlos Alzugaray told Al Jazeera, adding that the change in power continues the "transition in progress to a new social-economic model".⁶⁹

Russia

- **Russia and India**

According to KPMG report India has been recording the highest growth rate amongst the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) economies. According to the report titled "India Soars Higher", in spite of some reformative steps that slowed the growth momentum in the first quarter of FY18, the economy is likely to grow at 7.4 per cent in 2018 -- higher than the advanced economies and the world -- which are at 2 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. The report highlighted that India's economic stability is further reinforced with its approximately \$420 billion (as on February 9, 2018) foreign exchange reserves which provides sufficient cover for almost 11 months of imports for India.⁷⁰

The Ukrainian and Russian military-industrial complexes are engaged in a fierce competition for India's arms market. India, which represents 12 percent of global arms purchases, is critical for both countries, and their rivalry will only intensify. For India, Ukraine is becoming a vital partner.⁷¹

- **Russia and Europe**

⁶⁹ Aljazeera, "Miguel Diaz-Canel: Cuba's post-Castro president," <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/miguel-diaz-canel-cuba-post-castro-president-180411171136657.html>, Accessed on 22 April 2018.

⁷⁰"India's growth rate highest among BRICS nations: Report", *Economic Times*, April 19, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/indias-growth-rate-highest-among-brics-nations-report/articleshow/63830341.cms> Accessed on April 23, 2018).

⁷¹Pavlo Barbul, "Ukraine, US are kicking Russia out of India's defense market" *Defence News*, April 19, 2018. <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2018/04/17/ukraine-us-are-kicking-russia-out-of-indias-defense-market/> Accessed on April 23, 2018.

Germany's Europe minister called on 16 April for a new policy of easing tensions with Russia, adding to a chorus of voices pressing Chancellor Angela Merkel to moderate her hardened stance towards the Kremlin. Europe Minister Michael Roth, a member of the Social Democrat party (SPD), said that while the European Union needed a united front on Russia, sanctions should aim to bring Moscow to the negotiating table.⁷²

- **Russia and US**

US President Donald Trump accused Russia and China on 16 April of devaluing their currencies while the United States raises interest rates, prompting China to accuse the United States of sending confusing messages.⁷³

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Quetta-Kandahar Railway Service under Consideration: Ahsan⁷⁴**

On 12 April 2018, Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms stated that Pakistan and Afghanistan have planned to start a railway service from Quetta to Kandahar with the cooperation from China. In an exclusive meeting with Geo News, the minister said, "A plan to start fast train with a speed from 250km to 350km from Peshawar to Karachi via Lahore is in the near future", with assistance from China Railway Construction Corporation. According to the minister, the speed of train would increase from existing 80km per hour to 160km per hour after the completion of the project, adding that it would connect Gwadar port with the railway network, commencing a direct train service from Quetta to Peshawar.

- **Georgian Peacekeepers Conduct Training in Afghanistan⁷⁵**

Recently, Georgian troops serving in the international peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan have conducted training of Afghan servicemen. Georgian soldiers of the 31st battalion of the III Infantry Brigade who look after outer and inner security of Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, the largest US military base in Afghanistan organised

⁷²Markus Wacket, Thomas Escritt, "Merkel's tougher Russia stance meets resistance in Germany", *Reuters*, April 16, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-russia/merkels-tougher-russia-stance-meets-resistance-in-germany-idUSKBN1HN1XU> Accessed on April 23, 2018.

⁷³"Trump says Russia, China playing 'currency devaluation game'", *Reuters*, April 16, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-currency/trump-says-russia-china-playing-currency-devaluation-game-idUSKBN1HN1PO> Accessed on April 23, 2018.

⁷⁴ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 15 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20688

⁷⁵ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 16 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20700

a coordinative-situational training under NATO peacekeeping Resolute Support Mission. Georgia, as the largest non-NATO contributor to mission Resolute Support Mission contributed 885 troops.

- **Iran Backs Restoration of Peace, Development in Afghanistan⁷⁶**

On 15 April 2018, Head of Iran's High Council of Human Rights Mohammad Javad Larijani met with Afghan delegation consisted of Civil Society, Human Rights and Women Rights of Parliament headed by Fawzia Koofi. Both sides stressed on the restoration of peace and development in Afghanistan, paving the way for the expansion of cooperation with neighbouring countries. Focussing on cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan for expansion of judiciary, international as well as human rights would improve the status of human rights and the amendment of existing rules and regulations.

- **UN Assures Full Support for Upcoming Elections⁷⁷**

On 17 April 2018, Tadamichi Yamamoto, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan assured that UN would provide full cooperation in holding free, fair and transparent elections at the launch of voters' registration process. Appreciating the efforts of UN envoy, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah said that commencement of registration process in line with new reforms has initiated government's commitment to a transparent election.

- **Japan Announces \$11.6m to Improve Kabul Road Access⁷⁸**

The Embassy of Japan on 18 April 2018 announced that the country would offer Afghanistan \$11.6 million to construct road projects in line with Kabul City Master Plan. Japan would assist construction of Maslakh Road, the Abdul Haq Roundabout along with new Makroyan Bridge aiming to improve quality of lives of 4.5 million beneficiaries residing in the rural and urban areas of Kabul. Since 2008, Japan has been actively working with Kabul Municipality and improved around 70 km of main and community roads in Kabul City. All these projects would facilitate smooth traffic between the southwest and east of Kabul and would boost economic activities from the city center to Jalalabad Road and linking southwest Kabul with east. Japanese assistance to Afghanistan which is around \$6.6 billion have spent in nation building efforts of Afghanistan in the field of security, infrastructure, agriculture, rural development, human capacity development, education, health, culture and humanitarian assistance.

- **Growing Insecurity Hampers Voter Registration in Ghazni⁷⁹**

⁷⁶ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 17 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20712

⁷⁷ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 18 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20722

⁷⁸ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 19 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20735

Amidst of increasing violence in Ghazni province, there was a protest by provincial council members and residents of southern Ghazni province on the issue of security. They held that if the security situation of the province would not improve, the residents would be debarred from the forthcoming parliamentary and district council elections. People blamed lack of coordination among provincial officials for lukewarm voter's registration campaign in the province and appealed to the government to take necessary measures ensuring safety. However, Arifullah Noori, the spokesman of the governor mentioned that the overall situation has improved although there is rise of terrorist attacks in Ghazni City.

- **Results of Pakistan PM's Kabul Visit "Not Clear So Far"**⁸⁰

On 19 April 2018, the office of Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah held that there was no visible sign of progress in relation between Pakistan and Afghanistan after the visit of Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. Mujib Rahman Rahimi, spokesman of Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said, "Afghanistan shared its views and discussed a range of issues in Pakistan prime minister's visit to Kabul. But so far we have not witnessed any big and new progress in the policies (of Pakistan) and relations between the two countries". There emerged a general perception among Afghans that Pakistan was not in favour of a peaceful Afghanistan. Meanwhile, it was also reported that Pakistan did not respond clearly on attending a meeting of religious scholars from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia of the High Peace Council. The High Peace Council's deputy Chief Mohammad Haidari stated, "Afghanistan and Indonesia are completely ready to hold this meeting soon. Indonesia will host the meeting, but Pakistan so far has not responded to us clearly. Pakistan has said that it will announce its stance in the coming week".

Bangladesh

- **EC snubs BNP over army deployment, EVM use**

The Election Commission ruled out BNP's demand for deployment of army and avoiding electronic voting machines (EVMs) in Gazipur and Khulna city corporation elections scheduled to be held on May 15. The commission has no plan to deploy army and if the party has any specific objection about EVMs, it is welcomed to see those, said EC acting secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 21 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20744

⁸⁰ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 21 April 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20747

⁸¹ "EC snubs BNP over army deployment, EVM use," *The Daily Star*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/ec-snubs-bnp-over-army-deployment-evm-use-1564009>, accessed on April 20, 2018.

- **Wilmar-Adani to invest \$350m in Mirsarai economic zone**

Singapore-based Wilmar and India's Adani Group plan to invest \$350 million in Bangladesh to establish an industrial park in the Mirsarai economic zone under a joint venture that will produce agro-based foods and allied products. Pua Seck Guan, chief operating officer of Wilmar International, a leading agribusiness group in Asia, sought a 50-acre land at Mirsarai in Chittagong so as to make the investment during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Singapore in March this year.⁸²

- **Sheikh Hasina, Modi hold bilateral talks on sidelines of CHOGM**

Sheikh Hasina held talks with Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on various issues of bilateral interest on Thursday (April 19), on the sidelines of the multilateral Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London. "Neighbourhood first! Connecting with a neighbour and a close friend, PM Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina had a productive exchange of views on various issues of bilateral interest on the sidelines of CHOGM 2018," India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.⁸³

- **Give befitting reply to BNP-Jamaat's propaganda: PM**

Sheikh Hasina on Sunday (April 22) urged the leaders of All European Awami League to give a befitting reply to BNP-Jamaat's propaganda abroad against Bangladesh and the government. Hasina said BNP and Jamaat have huge money earned through corruption and they are carrying out a negative publicity against the government by capitalising their illegal money. The Prime Minister directed the leaders of Awami League to maintain unity and gave necessary directives on further strengthening the organisation.⁸⁴

- **Fakhrul: Khaleda jailed to take political revenge**

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has said that the party Chairperson Khaleda Zia was sent behind bars as political revenge. He made the statement while addressing a procession in front of Hossain Market in Badda Sunday afternoon (April 21). Fakhrul said: "BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has been jailed as an

⁸²Jagaran Chakma, "Wilmar-Adani to invest \$350m in Mirsarai economic zone, *The Daily Star*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/wilmar-adani-invest-350m-mirsarai-economic-zone-1564480>, accessed on April 20, 2018.

⁸³Aditi Khanna, "Sheikh Hasina, Modi hold bilateral talks on sidelines of CHOGM," *Dhaka Tribune*, April 20, 2018, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2018/04/20/sheikh-hasina-modi-hold-bilateral-talks-sidelines-chogm/>, accessed on April 20, 2018.

⁸⁴"Give befitting reply to BNP-Jamaat's propaganda: PM," *The Independent*, April 22, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/146868>, accessed on April 22, 2018.

act of political revenge. She is severely ill. She has not been given proper medical treatment.”⁸⁵

नेपाल

- **दहाल और प्रधानमंत्री ओली की बैठक हुई:**

एमाले के अध्यक्ष और प्रधानमंत्री के पी शर्मा ओली तथा माओवादी केंद्र के मुखिया पुष्पकमल दहाल ने प्रधानमंत्री आवास बालूवाटर में एक दूसरे के साथ बैठक की. दोनों दलों के अध्यक्षों ने दोनों दलों के औपचारिक एवं आधिकारिक विलय पर बातचीत से पहले सारे असुलझो मुद्दों को निपटाने की बात कही.⁸⁶

- **नेपाल और चीन के मध्य रेल संपर्क पर वार्ता:**

नेपाल के विदेश मंत्री प्रदीप ग्यावली छः दिवसीय चीन की यात्रा पर हैं जहाँ विभिन्न द्विपक्षीय मुद्दों पर बातचीत हुई. इसके तहत नेपाल और चीन के मध्य करंग से काठमांडू, काठमांडू से पोखरा और लुम्बिनी तक रेल लाइन के संभावित अध्ययन और डीपीआर पर चर्चा हुई.⁸⁷

- **नेपाल चीन के पिछले समझौते लागू होंगे:**

चीन की यात्रा से लौटने पर विदेश मंत्री ग्यावली ने पत्रकारों को त्रिभुवन हवाईअड्डे पर संबोधित किया. उन्होंने कहा कि दोनों देश इस बात पर राजी हुए हैं कि प्रधानमंत्री ओली और प्रचंड के पिछले कार्यकाल के दौरा हुए समझौतों को भी लागू किया जायेगा. उन्होंने आगे कहा कि दोनों देश सीमा पार कनेक्टिविटी जैसे रेल मार्ग, सडक मार्ग, विमानपत्तन, सुचना और संपर्क आदि पर एक जैसे दृष्टिकोण साझा करते हैं.⁸⁸

- **भारत-पाकिस्तान मित्रता के लिए प्रधानमन्त्री ओली करेंगे पहल:**

⁸⁵ “Fakhrul: Khaleda jailed to take political revenge,” *Dhaka Tribune*, April 22, 2018, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2018/04/22/fakhrul-khaleda-jailed-take-political-revenge/>, accessed on April 22, 2018.

⁸⁶ “Unsettled issues to be taken to party unification committee”, *The Rising Nepal*, 17 April 2018, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2018-04-17/ec2b62389c84804ee674a045b29e7ccd.jpg>

⁸⁷ “Nepal, China discuss DPR for cross-border railway”, *The Rising Nepal*, 19 April 2018, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2018-04-19/42f5b8ea2523924ec72052fa2955f10a.jpg>

⁸⁸ “Nepal, China agree to implement past deals”, *The Rising Nepal*, 22 April 2018, <http://therisingnepal.org.np/epaper/showimage?img=uploads/epaper/2018-04-22/d88ecb3fe9e589f65fb00b678746d828.jpg>

प्रधानमन्त्री केपीशर्मा ओली ने कहा है कि भारत-पाकिस्तान संबंध में व्याप्त असह्यदारी हटाकर दक्षिण एशियाली सहयोग संगठन क (सार्क)ो सुचारु करने की पहल हो रहा है. उन्होंने यह भी कहा है कि इसके लिए उन्होंने भारतीय प्रधानमन्त्री नरेन्द्र मोदी और पाकिस्तानी प्रधानमन्त्री साहिद खकान अब्बासी के साथ बातचीत भी की है. रविवार को काठमांडू में 'रिजनल कन्फेरेन्स अफ सार्क इफेक्विभनेस' नामक पुस्तक लोकार्पण करते हुए प्रधानमन्त्री ओली ने यह दावा किया है.⁸⁹

Sri Lanka

- **Malicious Media Discrediting Government, President Tells Sri Lankans In London**

President Maithripala Sirisena lamented that the 'forward march of the motherland' is being stymied by certain people's efforts to suppress truth and inflate untruths. Addressing a gathering of expatriate Sri Lankans living in London, President Sirisena requested them to understand the true situation and support efforts to put the country back on track, according to a media release of the President's Media Unit⁹⁰.

- **Will boycott SLFP May Day Rally if changes not made-Ministers who left Govt. warn**

The SLFP MPs who left the government warned that they would boycott the May Day Rally organised by the party unless the party replaced several office bearers holding key positions. They said they would organise a separate May Day Rally if these changes do not take place.⁹¹

- **House prorogued fearing impeachment motion by UNP: SLPP**

President Maithripala Sirisena prorogued Parliament because he feared an impeachment motion to be brought against him by the United National Party (UNP) backbenchers, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) said. MP Prasanna Ranatunga told a news conference that the UNP backbenchers were planning to submit a impeachment motion against the President. "They are reaching out to other political parties seeking help in this regard. UNP backbenchers approached JO as well.

⁸⁹ "भारत-पाकिस्तान मित्रता के लिए प्रधानमन्त्री ओली करेंगे पहल", हिमालिनी, 22 अप्रैल 2018, <http://www.himalini.com/>

⁹⁰ Malicious Media Discrediting Government, President Tells Sri Lankans In London, 18 April 2018, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/malicious-media-discrediting-government-president-tells-sri-lankans-in-london/>

⁹¹ Will boycott SLFP May Day Rally if changes not made-Ministers who left Govt. Warn, 23 April 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Will-boycott-SLFP-May-Day-Rally-if-changes-not-made-Ministers-who-left-Govt-warn-148947.html>

We informed them that if they brought the motion in a proper manner, we May make a decision after submitting a proposal to our leadership committee,” he said⁹².

- **Red notice against Mahendran**

A red notice was issued against former Central Bank Governor Arjuna Mahandran by the Interpol, Police Spokesman SP Ruwan Gunasekara told Daily Mirror a short while ago. He said the notice was issued in connection with the CID investigation into Central Bank bond scam. Mr. Mahendran was directed by Court to report to the CID by February 15 to record statements in connection with the magisterial inquiry into the bond auction held on February 27, 2015 however he had failed obey the Court's directive⁹³.

- **‘Go back Maithri,’ LTTE protesters demand in London**

A group of LTTE supporters staged a protest outside the Commonwealth Summit premises in London today against President Maithripala Sirisena. Carrying placards and LTTE flags, the protesters demanded President Sirisena to go back to Sri Lanka. Some of the slogans read, “Go back Maithri!” and “We don’t want a Constitution, final solution is Tamil Eelam,”. The protest was held near the Buckingham Palace⁹⁴.

- **US report notes limited progress, rights abuses in Sri Lanka**

The annual US human rights report noted that the Sri Lankan Government has made limited progress toward establishing additional transitional justice mechanisms. The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017 made public by Acting US Secretary of State John J. Sullivan, noted that there were some reports that the Government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings⁹⁵.

Maldives

- **Maldives failed to address issue of electoral reforms: EU**

The political and institutional environment in the Maldives has not been conducive to the adaptation of meaningful and concerted electoral reforms, the Electoral Follow-up Mission (EFM) by the European Union (EU) has stated. In the report released on 19th April, the EU EFM noted that neither the government, nor the parliament, nor the

⁹² House prorogued fearing impeachment motion by UNP: SLPP, 20 April 2018,

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/House-prorogued-fearing-impeachment-motion-by-UNP-SLPP-148882.html>

⁹³ Red notice against Mahendran, 20 April 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Red-notice-against-Mahendran-148871.html>

⁹⁴ Go back Maithri,’ LTTE protesters demand in London, 19 April 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/-Go-back-Maithri-LTTE-protesters-demand-in-London-148823.html>

⁹⁵ US report notes limited progress, rights abuses in Sri Lanka, 21 April 2018,.

<http://colombogazette.com/2018/04/21/us-report-notes-limited-progress-rights-abuses-in-sri-lanka/>

opposition had sought to address the issue of electoral reforms and highlighted how it has not been a priority on the domestic political agenda.

In 2014, the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) had found “grave deficiencies” in the right to vote, stand for election and the protection of the secrecy of the vote. Campaign finances regulations and monitoring, vote buying, and a lack of legal certainty were noted among the main issues in the Maldives’ electoral process. As such, it made 22 recommendations to improve the electoral process in line with the country’s international obligations and commitments, most notably to the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). However, the EU follow-up report revealed that the Maldives had implemented only one recommendation, related to the promotion of gender equality, out of the 22, and that four were partially implemented⁹⁶.

- **Human rights in Maldives imperilled by ‘deterioration of democracy’**

A reversal of democratic gains, restriction of rights and impunity for abuses by the security forces are the chief human rights concerns identified by the US State Department’s 2017 report on the Maldives. “The most significant human rights issues included the deterioration of democratic governance, as the executive branch increased its interference in legislative and judicial affairs; a politicized and inefficient judiciary; and political prisoners,” reads the report released last week⁹⁷.

- **Maldives govt rejects UN Rights Committee decision, insists Nasheed’s rights not violated**

The Maldives’ government has rejected United Nations Human Rights Committee’s decision made in favour of former President Mohamed Nasheed, and “wholeheartedly refutes that any of these rights have been violated”, in his case. Reuters revealed that the United Nations committee had firmly advocated the former president’s right to stand for office, including in a presidential election later this year. Maldives government responded affirming that “it is for the Supreme Court to decide on the eligibility of Nasheed for the presidential election, and not for the Human Rights Committee.”⁹⁸

- **Former President Nasheed must be able to contest in elections : UN Human Rights Committee**

United Nation’s Human Rights Committee have stated that the Maldives must revoke former President Nasheed’s conviction and allow him to contest in the presidential election that will take place later this year. The committee published their report on

⁹⁶ Maldives failed to address issue of electoral reforms: EU, 21 April 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/maldives-failed-to-address-issue-of-electoral-reforms-eu/>

⁹⁷ Human rights in Maldives imperilled by ‘deterioration of democracy’, 22 April 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/human-rights-in-maldives-imperilled-by-deterioration-of-democracy-137644>

⁹⁸ Maldives govt rejects UN Rights Committee decision, insists Nasheed’s rights not violated, 16th April 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/maldives-govt-rejects-un-rights-committee-decision-insists-nasheeds-rights-not-violated/>

Nasheed's case saying that they find that Nasheed's conviction on terrorism charges was based on vague laws and that it violated his right to a fair trial. Committee member Sara Cleveland stated that political rights can be suspended or restricted only in exceptional circumstances and only under certain conditions⁹⁹.

West Asia

Iraq and GCC

- **Iraqi war planes strike ISIS positions in Syria¹⁰⁰**

Iraqi Air Force conducted airstrikes against ISIS in Syrian territory on Thursday with the coordination of the Syrian government in Damascus. "Based on the orders from Abadi, commander in chief, our air forces by using F-16 war planes bombarded ISIS terrorists' positions in Syria on border with Iraq on Thursday," the Iraqi Air Force tweeted.

There have been pockets of ISIS resistance in western parts of Iraq's Anbar province that borders Deir ez-Zor governorate in Syria. Control of the strategic Middle Euphrates River Valley on both sides would strengthen border defenses against the insurgent group.

Previously on February, 27, Abadi had ordered strikes against ISIS in Syria.

- **US aid for Peshmerga encourages rebellion: Iraqi MP¹⁰¹**

Firdaws al-Awadi, an Iraqi lawmaker with State of the Law coalition criticised the agreement KRG and Washington over financial assistance to Peshmerga, with out involving the government in Baghdad.

The US is assisting the Peshmerga with \$365 million in 2018. The Peshmerga ministry said on Saturday that an instalment was received and will be used to pay salaries this week. "Delivering financial aid for the Peshmerga from a bank account in the US shows disrespect to the sovereignty of Iraq and is an encouragement for the Peshmerga to rebel against the Iraqi government," said Firdaws al-Awadi,

"The US is trying to build an armed force as strong as that of Iraq or even stronger in order to use it to confront the crises that might arise in the future. I think the US doesn't want good for Iraq and is to this day trying to divide the country. This financial aid is just one of the plans to divide the country," Awadi alleged.

⁹⁹ Former President Nasheed must be able to contest in elections : UN Human Rights Committee, 16 April 2018, <http://miadhu.mv/article/en/10298>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/19042018>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/220420183>

Nouri al Maliki, the former prime minister who heads the pro-Iran State of the Law coalition is very critical of the KRG-Washington alliance had advocated that Barzani's intention to establish a Great Kurdistan state including Kirkuk, must be stopped by "force if needed."

- **Qatari Forces participate in Gulf Shield drill in Saudi Arabia¹⁰²**

The Qatari Armed Forces have participated in "Joint Gulf Shield 1" Drill in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar News Agency said.

The military drill was conducted in the town of Ras Al Khair, north of Jubail city in the eastern region of the kingdom, from March 21 to April 16, QNA quoted the defence ministry as saying. A number of officers from the Qatari Armed Forces, led by Brigadier General Khamis Mohamed Deblan, participated in the exercise, along with land, sea and air forces from 25 other countries.

Led by Saudi Arabia, the exercise aimed to showcase the participating countries' capabilities of planning and executing military actions and operating modern weapon systems.

The participation of Qatar, which has been under blockaded by Saudi led terror quartet since June last year, signals signs of compromise between feuding gulf neighbours.

- **Iraq restarts war reparations to Kuwait¹⁰³**

Iraq resumed paying Kuwait compensation on Friday for the destruction of Kuwaiti oilfields and facilities during the 1990-91 Gulf War, the United Nations said in Geneva in a prepared statement. The payment had been suspended since Oct 2014 because of security and budgetary problems the Iraqi government in its fight against Islamic State.

"The United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC) today made available \$90 million to the Government of the State of Kuwait," the UN said. "With today's payment, the Commission has paid out \$47.9 billion, leaving approximately \$4.5 billion remaining to be paid to the only outstanding claim." The sum owed, as well as the \$90 million payment, goes towards an overall claim of \$14.7 billion in damages by the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, the largest approved by the Geneva-based commission, set up by the UN Security Council in 1991.

- **Bahrain's FM calls for prosecution of Qatari al-Jazeera TV Channel**

¹⁰² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/qatari-forces-participate-gulf-shield-drill-saudi-arabia-180419053305193.html>

¹⁰³ <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/iraq-resumes-payments-to-kuwait/>

Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, has called for the prosecution of Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV channel for "spreading lies and rumours that cause confusion in our countries".

The remarks came in response to TV channel's coverage of incident when gunfire broke out after a 'toy drone' was detected in Al-Kuzhama neighbourhood, near royal palace in Riyadh.

Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, tweeted: "Demand Number 14: Putting the despicable Al Jazeera on trial for spreading lies and rumours to cause confusion in our countries." The minister was referring to the 13 demands issued by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt to Qatar after they severed their diplomatic, trade and travel relations with it on June 5.

- **IMF staff concludes 2018 Article IV visit to Oman¹⁰⁴**

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team led by Stéphane Roudet visited Muscat April 3-16 to hold the 2018 Article IV consultation discussions with Oman. "The government's diversification efforts and the planned completion of major infrastructure projects are expected to gradually raise non-hydrocarbon growth to about 4 percent over the medium term," said Stéphane Roudet, at the conclusion of the visit.

"The government is undertaking further reforms to raise non-hydrocarbon revenue, such as introducing value-added and excise taxes, and intends to continue with spending restraint. This would bring the deficit to below 4 percent of GDP in the next two years," Roudet added.

Given that Oman, like its Gulf neighbours is heavily dependent on hydro-carbon sector - dominated by state-owned companies - for its revenue, the lender also said that Oman's government needed to ease regulations and encourage private sector growth.

¹⁰⁴ <http://oilreviewmiddleeast.com/industry/imf-highlights-oman-s-non-hydrocarbon-growth>

Terrorism Counter-Terrorism

Pakistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 15	Balochistan	At least two members of the Christian community were killed and five others injured in a firing incident near a church in Essa Nagri area of provincial capital Quetta. ¹	2	5
2	April 18	Balochistan	A shopkeeper belonging to the Hazara community was killed in a targeted sectarian attack. Quetta Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Abdur Razzaq Cheema said that the shopkeeper was from the Hazara community and that it appeared to have been a targeted killing. It was the fourth attack in recent months targeting Hazaras. No outfit claimed responsibility for the attacks. ²	1	0
3	April 21	Balochistan	Security Forces (SF) killed five militants in an operation conducted in Bambore area of Dera Bugti district. In addition, 10 militants were arrested and a huge cache of arms and ammunition, including anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank mines and other weapons was recovered. ³	5	--
4	April 22	Balochistan	Two Hazara men, identified as identified as Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Zaman, were killed and third man was injured in a targeted attack in Western Bypass area of provincial capital Quetta. ⁴	2	1
5	April 22	FATA	One soldier, identified as Muhammad Hanif, was killed and three others were injured in	1	3

			a roadside bomb blast near Miranshah town in North Waziristan Agency. The military convoy was on its way to Miranshah from the Datakhel area when an Improvised Explosive Device exploded. ⁵		
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Afghanistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 8	Kabul	<p>Latest statistics released by the Ministry of Education shows that over 1,000 schools, out of 17,500, are closed for various reasons, including that of insecurity. Most of the schools, the Ministry said, are located in insecure provinces like Kunduz, Helmand and Kandahar.</p> <p>An official from Ghor said 130 schools are operational in areas under Taliban influence. The official said these are operational on condition the teachers' salaries are paid through school finance officers instead of being paid into a teacher's bank account.⁶</p>	1,000 schools closed across country	
2	April 21	10 provinces	At least 21 Taliban militants, including a local 'commander', were killed and 17 others were wounded during operations conducted by Afghan National Security Forces' (ANSF) operations in Nangarhar, Kapisa, Khost, Logar, Paktia, Uruzgan, Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh and Helmand provinces.	21	17

			The MoD said that the commander, Mullah Jalal, was killed in Faryab province. ⁷		
3	April 22	Badghis	At least nine soldiers were killed in Qala-e-Naw district after Taliban attacked a check post. In a separate incident, seven Policemen were killed in Taliban attack on a Police check post in Qads district. ⁸	16	NS
4	April 22	Kabul	At least 57 people were killed and 119 others were injured in a suicide attack at a voter registration centre in Dashte Barchi area of Kabul. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. ⁹	57	119

Iraq

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 19	Kirkuk	Three IS militants were killed in armed confrontations with the Federal Police and al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces/PMF) security troops in al-Khadra village in al-Zab town, southwest of Kirkuk. ¹⁰	3	0
2	April 20	Mosul	At least 18 IS militants were killed as Iraqi troops repulsed an attack by the militant group on the Iraqi-Syrian borders, near Rabei'a town, northwest of Mosul. ¹¹	18	0
3	April 20	Diyala	One Iraqi soldier was killed and three others were injured in a bomb blast in Diyala. According to an official source, "An Islamic State haven was destroyed by the US-led Coalition jets near Muqdadiya region, northeast of Diyala," adding, that an army troops then advanced to check the haven, where a bomb,	1	3

			planted near the haven, exploded as the troops advanced. ¹²		
4	April 22	Baghdad	<p>The pro-government paramilitary troops have said Iraqi SFs would depend on air force rather than group troops in operations to chase IS militants in Syria.</p> <p>Ali al-Husseini, the spokesperson of the northern axis of PMF, said that the troops “have all the factors for victory against IS inside and outside Iraq. They are ready to enter Syria and fight the militants there.”¹³</p>	Iraqi troops to depend on air force to follow ISIS in Syai	

Syria

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 23	Golan Heights	An Israeli missile strike targeted a position of the Syrian Army in al-Kom town near the Golan Heights as the government forces crackdown on <i>jihadi</i> groups in the area. According to a military source, the strike hit an artillery position in the bordering town but no casualties reported. ¹⁴	Israeli missile target Syrian army	
2	April 23	Damascus	<p>The last batch of militants left their former bastion in East Qalamoun region to Syria’s north under an evacuation deal with the Syrian government.</p> <p>A convoy of 35 buses carrying up to 1,078 of rebel fighters and their families headed to the northern city of Jarabulus after concluding</p>	Militants move north after evacuation deal with Government	

			an agreement with the Syrian government. Militants who chose to stay will have their status legally settled and given full pardon in order to join the Syrian Army ranks. ¹⁵	
3	April 23	Aleppo	Jabhat Tahrir Souriya launched an attack in the western countryside of Aleppo targeting Hay'at Tahrir al Sham's positions in several areas. The Jabhat forces managed to capture several towns from Al-Sham, which included Balnta, al Habateh, al Sadiyah and Jama'at al Sadiyah. ¹⁶	Jabhat attacks Tahrir al Sham
4	April 23	Syria	Iraq is planning to carry out new air raids inside the Syrian territories to eliminate IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. According to Member of Parliament Abdel Aziz Hassan, "Islamic State chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is expected to be at one of IS sites inside Syria," adding that the Iraqi government will seek Syria's approval first before launching the raid. ¹⁷	Iraq plans raid in Syria to target IS chief Baghdadi

International Economic Issues

- **Trump appears to rule out rejoining the TPP: 'I don't like the deal'**

After recently indicating he could consider rejoining the massive Pacific trade pact on April 12, 2018, President Donald Trump on April 17, 2018, said he now does not think the Trans-Pacific Partnership is good for the world's largest economy. Following bilateral meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Trump-owned Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida on April 17, the US leader took to Twitter to criticise the current TPP agreement, saying it had "too many contingencies and no way to get out." He also expressed a preference for bilateral trade deals, calling them more "profitable."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Nyska Chandran, "Trump appears to rule out rejoining the TPP: 'I don't like the deal'", *CNBC News*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/18/president-donald-trump-says-he-doesnt-like-tpp-deal-for-us.html> (accessed on April 23, 2018)

- **EU and Mexico reach new agreement on trade**

On April 21, 2018, the European Union (EU) and Mexico reached a new agreement on trade, part of a broader, modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement. Practically all trade in goods between the EU and Mexico will now be duty-free, including in the agricultural sector. The main elements of the agreement

- 1) **Agricultural exports** from the EU are set to benefit the most, such as poultry, cheese, chocolate, pasta, and pork.
- 2) The agreement includes a comprehensive **trade and sustainable development** chapter, which sets the highest standards of labour, safety, environmental and consumer protection;
- 3) The agreement also includes an explicit reference to the **precautionary principle** that, already enshrined in the EU treaties, allows the EU to keep products out of its market as long as there is no scientific certainty that they are safe.
- 4) It will also be the very first EU trade agreement to include provisions to **fight corruption**.
- 5) The agreement provides companies mutual access to government contracts in both the EU and Mexico **public procurement markets**, placing them on equal footing.
- 6) Provides for a high level of protection of **intellectual property rights**.
- 7) The new agreement opens up **trade in services**, such as financial services, transport, e-commerce, and telecommunications. The agreement will also help develop a favourable environment for a knowledge-based economy, with a new chapter on digital trade.
- 8) On **investment protection**, the agreement improves investment conditions and includes the EU's new Investment Court System, ensuring transparency and the right of governments to regulate in the public interest, and will also ensure that Mexico and the EU work towards the setting up of a Multilateral Investment Court.¹⁰⁶

- **Canada, Mexico hail NAFTA progress in D.C.**

Canada and Mexico on April 20, 2018 said good progress had been made in talks with the United States to modernise the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and that ministers would meet again on April 24 as they push to wrap up a deal. Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland and Mexican Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo struck a positive note after a second day of meetings with US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to revamp the 24-year-old accord, which underpins some \$1.2 trillion in annual trilateral trade. The three ministers are pressing

¹⁰⁶ European Commission, "EU and Mexico reach new agreement on trade", Press Release, April 21, 2019, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-782_en.htm (accessed on April 23, 2018)

for a quick deal to avoid clashing with a July 1 presidential election in Mexico, which would mean overcoming major differences on several US demands.¹⁰⁷

- **RCEP talks: Members to meet in Singapore by month-end for next round**

Chief negotiators of India, China and 14 other countries will meet from April 28 to May 8, 2018, in Singapore for the 22nd round of discussions on the proposed mega free trade deal, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The issues which would figure in deliberations include finalising the number of goods on which duties would be significantly reduced or eliminated and matters pertaining to the services sector. Recognising that substantial progress has been made in the previous rounds, China said that it will work with other parties to reach a modern, comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement at the earliest. China's Ministry of Commerce spokesperson, Goa Feng, said on April 19, 2018, "Related parties are showing an active attitude in pushing the RCEP, and the pace of negotiations is speeding up".¹⁰⁸

¹ Syed Ali Shah, At least 2 dead, 5 injured in attack on Christian community near church in Quetta, *Dawn*, April 15, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1401797/at-least-2-dead-5-injured-in-attack-on-christian-community-near-church-in-quetta>, accessed on April 23, 2018

² Hazara shopkeeper gunned down in Quetta, *Dawn*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1402346/hazara-shopkeeper-gunned-down-in-quetta>, accessed on April 23, 2018

³ Syed Ali Shah, 5 suspected militants killed, 10 arrested in Dera Bugti operation, *Dawn*, April 21, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1403002/5-suspected-militants-killed-10-arrested-in-dera-bugti-operation>, accessed on April 23, 2018

⁴ Syed Ali Shah, 2 Hazara men gunned down in 'targeted attack' in Quetta: police, *Dawn*, April 22, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1403198/2-hazara-men-gunned-down-in-targeted-attack-in-quetta-police>, accessed on April 23, 2018

⁵ Pazir Gul, Soldier killed in Miramshah IED blast, *Dawn*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1403294/soldier-killed-in-miramshah-ied-blast>, accessed on April 23, 2018

⁶ Over 1,000 Schools Remain Closed Countrywide, *Tolo News*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/over-1000-schools-remain-shut-countrywide>, accessed on April 23, 2018

¹⁰⁷ Jason Lange, "Canada, Mexico laud NAFTA progress, ministers to reconvene Tuesday", *Reuters*, April 21, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-trade-nafta/canada-mexico-laud-nafta-progress-ministers-to-reconvene-tuesday-idUKKBN1HR33S> (accessed on April 23, 2018)

¹⁰⁸ "RCEP talks: Members to meet in Singapore by month-end for next round", *The Indian Express*, April 15, 2018, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2018/apr/15/rcep-talks-members-to-meet-in-singapore-by-month-end-for-next-round-1801895.html> (accessed on April 23, 2018); "Substantial progress made in RCEP negotiations: China", *Business Standard*, April, 2018, http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/substantial-progress-made-in-rcep-negotiations-china-118041900745_1.html (accessed on April 23, 2018)

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- ⁷ 21 Armed Taliban Killed In ANSF Operations, *Tolo News*, April 21, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/21-armed-taliban-killed-ansf-operations>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ⁸ 16 Security Force Members Killed in Attacks in Badghis, *Tolo News*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/16-security-force%2%A0members%2%A0killed-attacks-badghis>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ⁹ Afghanistan: Kabul voter centre suicide attack kills 57, *BBC*, April 22, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43855884>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹⁰ Three Islamic State members killed in confrontations against troops, southwest of Kirkuk, *Iraqi News*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/three-islamic-state-members-killed-in-confrontations-against-troops-southwest-of-kirkuk/>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹¹ Nehal Mostafa, 18 Islamic State members killed as Iraqi troops thwart attack on borders with Syria, *Iraqi News*, April 20, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/18-islamic-state-members-killed-as-iraqi-troops-thwart-attack-on-borders-with-syria/>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹² Nehal Mostafa, Four Iraqi soldiers were killed, injured in bomb blast, northeast of Diyala, *Iraqi News*, April 20, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/four-iraqi-soldiers-were-killed-injured-in-bomb-blast-northeast-of-diyala/>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹³ Nehal Mostafa, Iraqi troops likely to depend on air force to follow Islamic State in Syria: Official, *Iraqi News*, April 22, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/iraqi-troops-likely-to-depend-on-air-force-rather-than-ground-forces-in-syria-official/>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹⁴ Zen Adra, BREAKING: Israeli strikes hit Syrian Army near Occupied Golan Heights, *Al Masdar News*, April 23, 2018, , accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹⁵ Zen Adra, Last convoy of militants leaves East Qalamoun, *Al Masdar News*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/last-convoy-of-militants-leaves-east-qalamoun/>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹⁶ Leith Aboufadel, Jihadist civil war turns into bloodbath in northern Syria after JTS launches big attack, *Al Masdar News*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/jihadist-civil-war-turns-into-bloodbath-in-northern-syria-after-jts-launches-big-attack/>, accessed on April 23, 2018
- ¹⁷ Mohammed Ebraheem, Iraq to strike Syrian sites in search of IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi — MP, *Iraqi News*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraq-to-strike-syrian-sites-in-search-of-is-chief-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-mp/>, accessed on April 23, 2018