

Weekly Media Updates **(23 – 29 April, 2018)**

Contents

Regions and Themes covered this Week

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

Africa

- **Uganda Loses EA Fish Market to China¹**

Uganda has over the years slowly lost its regional fish market to Chinese exports, according to data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. Apart from Uganda, Chinese fish exports continue to flood the region with the biggest export being tilapia. According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the country spent \$22m (Shs81b) on fish imports in 2017. This was a growth from \$10m in 2016. Kenya requires one million tonnes of fish annually but only produces 200,000 tonnes domestically, which leaves a deficit of 800,000 tonnes. Much of the deficit was imported from Uganda, Tanzania and India but China has since taken over. China exported more than 357,000 tonnes of tilapia worth \$11m (Shs40b) into Kenya. According to Philip Borel, the Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association vice chairperson, cheap tilapia from China continues to be a problem to the region and has unfairly heightened competition in one of Uganda's traditional markets such as Rwanda and DR Congo. According to data from the Central Bank, Uganda's formal fish exports were valued at \$131m (Shs480b) while informal exports stood at \$36.9m (Shs135b) in 2017. Reports indicate that Tanzania, which controls more than half of Lake Victoria, also imported more fish from China growing by about 23 per cent to \$8m (Shs29b). This is more than double the \$3.6m (Shs13bn) fish the country imported in 2014. Tanzania imported frozen pacific mackerel, Indian mackerel, chub, frozen sardine and tilapia.

- **SADC Summit Focuses on Bringing Stability to Lesotho, DRC and Madagascar²**

The Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) held on 24 April 2018, in Luanda, aimed to analyse the political situation in the DR Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar and consolidate aspects relating to the southern Africa region, among other issues. The consensus emerged was that despite some security challenges the region remains stable. Progress in Lesotho in terms of constitutional and security sector reforms were reviewed, with President Cyril Ramaphosa, chairperson of SADC stating in his opening remarks: "We urge the government, opposition parties and people of the Kingdom to start the reform process in earnest...constitutional reforms remain a cornerstone towards political stability that will constitute the edifice of all other sectoral reforms including security." On the DRC, Ramaphosa said: "We note the progress made in the implementation of the December 2016 Political Agreement as demonstrated by the National Independent Electoral Commission publicising the electoral calendar, voter registration and the general preparations for the December elections."

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

² 25, April 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/sadc-summit-focuses-on-bringing-stability-to-lesotho-drc-and-madagascar-14637285>

The elections in the DRC have been scheduled for December 23, and it is expected that the UN, SADC and AU will send election observer missions. SADC has decided to appoint former Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba as the Special Envoy to the DRC ahead of the elections.

SADC expressed grave concern with the unfolding situation in Madagascar, where mass demonstrations against the government have taken place in recent days. Madagascar's President has said that the current unrest is intended to divide the country, while the opposition claims that new electoral laws are designed to prevent former President Marc Ravalomanana from running for power. SADC agreed on the urgent deployment of Special Envoy to Madagascar to facilitate a national dialogue to de-escalate political tensions. Former President of Mozambique Joaquim Chissano has undertaken the responsibility.

- **Hajj 2018 - Saudi Arabia Moves to Stop Nigerian Pilgrims³**

Saudi Arabian authorities are threatening to block Nigerian pilgrims from attending this year's Hajj exercise. Nigeria has one of the largest contingents in the annual religious exercise with about 95,000 pilgrims. The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) on Monday said Saudi Arabia is taking the decision because of reports of Lassa fever outbreak in Nigeria. Outbreak of Lassa fever has been reported in a number of states. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 1081 suspected cases and 90 deaths have been reported from 18 states between January 1 through February 25 this year. During the period, 317 cases have been classified as confirmed and eight as probable, including 72 deaths.

WHO however, said in a report Sunday that there is a steady decline in Lassa fever cases and deaths from 70 by February 18 to five by April 15th. One of the spokespersons of NAHCON, Mousa Ubandawaki, who confirmed the moves by Saudi Arabia, informed that Nigerian authorities are not taking the threat lightly.

However in the meeting held at the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), in response to fears raised by Saudi Arabian authorities on the outbreak of the disease, Nigeria's Minister of Health, Isaac Adewole, said that the country is on the verge of tackling the Lassa fever outbreak.

- **Parliament Ratifies AfCFTA Protocol⁴**

A month after 44 African states signed the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, members of the Lower House have given the green light to the deal that is aimed at making Africa the largest trade bloc in the world.

³ Premium Times, 23 April 2018, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201804240014.html>

⁴ The New Times, 24 April 2018,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201804250031.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabmrjk

The MPs also passed the protocol on trade in services, free movement of persons, protocol on trade in goods, and the protocol on dispute settlement mechanism. Rwanda becomes the first country to ratify all the instruments.

The AfCFTA protocol, signed in Kigali by 44 of the 54 African Union member states, paves the way for an expanded market and economic growth and development across the continent.

Presenting the concept paper on the agreements on Tuesday, the State Minister for Constitutional and Legal Affairs, Evode Uwizeyimana, said that as a country that hosted the AU Summit that endorsed the deals and was fully involved in the historical signing just a month ago, it was imperative that Rwanda ratifies the agreements and set precedence for the rest of Africa. AfCFTA will open doors to more business and investment opportunities," he said.

- **Rival Groups from Somalia's Army Fight at Former UAE Training Facility⁵**

Rival forces from Somalia's army shot at each other in the capital Mogadishu on Monday, with one group trying to storm a training centre the United Arab Emirates left behind after it ended a training programme there, soldiers and residents said. The clash was an indication of the difficulty in rebuilding unified security forces for a state where centralised authority collapsed in 1991 and an internationally backed government, elected last year, faces huge challenges. It was also another sign of the fallout from a crisis in the Gulf region that has spilled into the volatile Horn of Africa. The UAE has trained hundreds of troops since 2014 as part of an effort boosted by an African Union military mission to defeat an Islamist insurgency and secure the country for the government backed by Western countries, Turkey and the United Nations. The Gulf nation ended its programme in Somalia this month in response after Somali security forces seized millions of dollars and temporarily held a UAE plane. "Some Somali military forces attacked us at the base, they wanted to loot it but we repulsed them," Ahmed Nur a soldier who was trained under the discontinued programme, told Reuters. After 90 minutes of sporadic gunfire, the training facility was secured by presidential palace guards, a Reuters journalist at the scene said.

- **Protests grip South Africa as Introduction of Minimum Income Dubbed 'Poverty Wage' is Delayed⁶**

Disagreement over a proposed minimum wage in South Africa has led to mass protests and reassurances from the presidency this week. President Cyril Ramaphosa met with officials from the labor ministry on Thursday, following protests the previous day that mobilized workers across the country including in the cities of Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. Ramaphosa has been pushing a minimum wage of R20 (US\$1.62) per hour, a policy that was scheduled to be implemented on May 1 though

⁵ Africa News, 24 April 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/04/24/rival-groups-from-somalia-s-army-fight-at-former-uae-training-facility/>

⁶ CNBC, 27 April 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/27/south-africa-workers-protest-minimum-wage-ramaphosa-reassures.html>

the draft legislation was since delayed in parliament. The initiative dates back to Ramaphosa's days as deputy president under former South African leader Jacob Zuma. The minimum wage is intended to alleviate inequality and stabilize labor. But, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU), the group behind the strike, described it as a "poverty wage on which no-one should be expected to live" in a press release Sunday. The minimum wage "legitimizes the unequal apartheid wage structure," it added.

- **Nigerian Roasted As Police Watch In South Africa⁷**

A Nigerian has been burnt to death in South Africa in a what appears to be the continuation of xenophobia attacks by citizens of the former apartheid enclave on foreigners. Confirming the attack, Mr. Habib Miller, the publicity Secretary of the Nigeria Union in South Africa who spoke with NAN in a telephone interview, said the victim, a native of Njikoka in Anambra State, was mobbed and killed in Rustenburg, North West Province. According to the publicity Secretary, the Anambra indigene lost his life because the mobsters felt offended by the way he spoke and custom.

- **Anti-Gov't Protests in Tanzania Flop, Magufuli Elevates New Capital Dodoma to City Status⁸**

Tanzania's police has effectively thwarted planned anti-government protests that had been scheduled for Thursday, to coincide with Union Day celebrations, the anniversary of the union between mainland Tanzania and the Indian Ocean archipelago of Zanzibar. Local media reported that most businesses didn't open in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and other major towns, as police patrolled the streets to deal with any courageous demonstrators. Nine demonstrators, who marched in Dar Es Salaam, were quickly arrested. The president, who presided over the Union celebrations in Dodoma, used the occasion to call for peace. The leader of the main opposition party's Women's Wing, Elizabeth Mambosho, was detained for inciting demonstrations on social media. The US based organiser of the protests, online activist Mange Kimambi posted images and videos of Tanzanians marching in Germany. She added that the solidarity marches in the diaspora were to inspire courage in the Tanzanians at home to demonstrate against President John Magufuli's regime. Meanwhile, president Magufuli used the Union Day celebrations to elevate the capital designate, Dodoma to city status, from municipality status.

- **Tanzania Asks AfDB to Finance Hydropower Project in Heritage Site⁹**

Tanzania has approached the African Development Bank (AfDB) to finance a 2,100-megawatt (MW) hydroelectric plant in a World Heritage site renowned for its animal population, despite concerns from conservationists. The East African nation considers

⁷ Sahara Reporters, 23 April 2018, <http://saharareporters.com/2018/04/23/nigerian-roasted-police-watch-south-africa>

⁸ Africa News, 26 April 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/04/26/anti-gov-t-protests-in-tanzania-flop-magufuli-elevates-new-capital-dodoma-to/>

⁹ Reuters, 28 April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tanzania-electricity/tanzania-asks-bank-to-finance-hydropower-project-in-heritage-site-idUSKBN1HZ0QC>

the project at Stiegler's Gorge in the UNESCO-designated Selous Game Reserve to be vital in its bid to diversify its energy mix and end chronic electricity shortages. The project would more than double the country's power generation capacity. But critics say securing financing for it could prove difficult because construction of a dam on a major river that runs through the Selous Game Reserve could affect wildlife and their habitats downstream. The AfDB confirmed that it was reviewing Magufuli's request but did not say how much the project would cost.

- **New 'Islamist' Attacks in Northern Mozambique¹⁰**

Three new attacks, allegedly by radicalised Muslim youth in northern Mozambique, have left one dead and three injured in recent days, sources told AFP Wednesday. A spate of violence has erupted in the region since October when an apparent jihadist assault targeted a police station and military post, leaving two officers and 14 attackers dead. In that attack, dozens of armed men, known locally as "al-Shabaab" - Arabic for "youth" though with no confirmed link to the Somali jihadist group of the same name - were involved. The latest assaults, on Saturday and Sunday, targeted two villages near the towns of Mocimboa da Praia and Palma, not far from the border with Tanzania, said sources on condition of anonymity. Police are not allowed to speak to the press, but the attacks and toll were confirmed by local residents who said small farms were targeted.

- **'Cashew into Cash' is Mozambique's New Mantra to Boost the Economy¹¹**

Mozambique is going nuts about cashews, and they're boosting the economy's health. The country's cashew nut industry, one of the world's biggest, was dealt a body blow first by the 1977-1992 civil war and then by a controversial World Bank assistance package. Now, the government is looking to help the curved, nutrient-packed nut to recover its past glory. Cashew nuts are now one of the crops fuelling growth in the agricultural sector. Almost half of the raw products are now processed locally. While competition is fierce with India and Vietnam, Mozambique is holding its own and attracting international investors.

- **Madagascar Protesters Seek President's Resignation¹²**

Hundreds of opposition activists in Madagascar on Tuesday called for the president to step down on a fourth straight day of anti-government protests in which at least two people have died. Seven months ahead of presidential and legislative elections, the opposition accuses the regime of trying to elbow them out of the race through new electoral laws they claim benefit the incumbent. They allege that the new laws could bar some candidates from standing in the presidential election. Crowds gathered at a square in front of the capital Antananarivo's town hall asking President Hery

¹⁰ eNCA, 25 April 2018, <https://www.enca.com/africa/new-islamist-attacks-in-north-mozambique>

¹¹ The Hindu, 29 April 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/mozambique-cracks-open-its-cashews-to-boost-the-economy/article23717186.ece>

¹² News24, 24 April 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/madagascar-protesters-seek-presidents-resignation-20180424>

Rajaonarimampianina to quit. Two people were killed and at least 16 people wounded on the first day of the protests on Saturday, which the president denounced as an attempted coup.

- **Swaziland is Now the Kingdom of eSwatini¹³**

King Mswati III of Swaziland announced at the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Swazi independence that the country will be known as the Kingdom of eSwatini. Africa's last absolute monarch who was also celebrating his 50th birthday said the country was regaining the original name it had before being colonized by the British adding that whenever he goes abroad, people refer to Swaziland as Switzerland and therefore he wants to clear that confusion. Even before making this announcement, the king has been recently referring to the nation as 'kingdom of eSwatini' during international conferences like the UN General Assembly last year. Swaziland gained independence from Britain in 1968 and is a member of the Commonwealth.

- **Angola's Wealth Fund to Sack Asset Manager, President Consolidates Power¹⁴**

The most powerful body in Angola's ruling MPLA party said on Friday it had approved the candidacy of state president Joao Lourenco to become head of the party, replacing his predecessor as head of state Jose Eduardo dos Santos. The move coincided with an announcement by Angola's US\$5 billion sovereign wealth fund that it was sacking Swiss-based Quantum Global as its asset manager because it was concerned about the way its capital was being invested. Both developments will further cement the political grip of Lourenco, who has taken action against dos Santos' allies and removed family members from key positions while pledging to root out endemic corruption and clean up public finances in Africa's No. 2 crude producer. Dos Santos' son Jose was formerly head of the fund but has since been removed by Lourenço, who has also overseen the sacking of his daughter Isabel as head of state oil company Sonangol. The next MPLA president will be formally appointed at a party congress in September.

- **Angola's dos Santos to Quit as Ruling MPLA Leader in September 2018¹⁵**

Angola's ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) will have a new leader by September this year as immediate past president Jose Eduardo dos Santos stands down from a position he has held for close to four decades. The Portuguese news agency, Lusa, cited an MPLA statement as stating that President Joao Lourenco will be taking over from dos Santos as party leader later this year. The move effectively means that dos Santos has given up his last political post after he retired from the presidency to allow Lourenco contest on MPLA ticket in the August 2017

¹³ The Independent, 28 April 2018, <https://www.independent.co.ug/this-week-swaziland-is-now-kingdom-of-eswatini/>

¹⁴ Reuters, 28 April 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-angola-politics/angolas-wealth-fund-to-sack-asset-manager-president-consolidates-power-idUSKBN1HY2Q3>

¹⁵ Africa News, 27 April 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/04/27/angola-s-dos-santos-to-quit-as-ruling-mpla-leader-in-sept-2018/>

polls. Dos Santos had in March 2018 asked that the MPLA picks a new leader to replace him. Despite resigning as president, he held on to the influential party leader position. At the time, he said the party should wait until December or April next year before choosing a new leader to replace him. It effectively means that he will leave “active political life” this year. MPLA has governed Angola continuously since independence from Portugal in 1975.

- **Angola's First Satellite Defunct Four Months After Launch**¹⁶

Angola's first satellite has been officially declared defunct by Russia, which had partially funded the West African nation's space project. The AngoSat-1, a communications satellite built for almost US\$300m, was launched late December from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Shortly after launch, communication with the device was lost. Despite restoring contact several days later, the project had several technical issues in the following months, eventually leading to the announcement of its official loss on Monday. Russia, who built the AngoSat-1 on behalf of Angola, said it would start building a more powerful follow-up satellite at no cost, as per AngoSat-1's insurance policy. The new satellite will take about 18 months to build and will launch in 2020, Russia's space agency said.

- **Mauritius Bank SBM to Put US\$60 Million of Extra Capital into Kenya's Chase**¹⁷

Mauritius' banking group SBM Holdings said on Tuesday it aimed to inject an additional US\$60 million of capital into Kenya's Chase Bank in a month's time. The Central Bank of Kenya has been seeking a strategic investor for Chase, which has been in receivership since April 2016 after failing to meet its financial obligations. Chase was the third medium-to-small sized bank to be closed in Kenya over a period of nine months, rattling investors in the country, where the level of gross non-performing loans reported by banks rose sharply in 2015. The central bank said last week that it and state-run Kenya Deposit Insurance Corporation had signed a deal with SBM Bank Kenya Limited for SBM to take 75 per cent of certain assets and deposits of Chase Bank, as first agreed in January.

- **Raila Proposes Creation of Three-tier State**¹⁸

Former Prime Minister Raila Odinga wants the country to adopt a three-tier government that will see the formation of 14 regional blocs. On Wednesday Raila told delegates at the fifth devolution conference in Kakamega it was time the country revisited the structure of governance to address the issue of economic viability of counties. This is the latest proposal by the Opposition leader to change the

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, 28 April 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/angola-satellite-defunct-months-launch-180424072213475.html>

¹⁷ Reuters, 24 April 2018, <https://af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFKBN1HV1DO-OZABS>

¹⁸ Standard Digital, 26 April 2018, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001278227/raila-proposes-creation-of-three-tier-state>

Constitution and bring back issues left out from an earlier draft constitution (Bomas), which divided Kenya into 14 regions, each made up of several districts. “It is time to recover this original spirit. My proposal is that we adopt a three-tier system that retains the current counties, create regional or provincial governments, and retain the national government with a very clear formula for revenue sharing,” Raila said in his keynote address at the conference. He said as currently constituted, counties are not attractive to investors due to their sizes and this has put their long-term viability to question.

- **Ethiopian Businesses Disappointed by New PM's Economic Stance¹⁹**

Local business leaders at a banquet in Ethiopia’s capital last week were hoping the new prime minister Abiy Ahmed would tell them he planned to loosen the state’s grip on the economy. He took power on April 2 promising a “new political beginning”. But four people who heard his dinner speech said he signalled he would stick with policies to keep the government’s hand in sectors such as infrastructure, banking and telecoms. Ethiopia has let foreign companies such as fashion chain H&M set up factories in a decade-long push to change the economic focus from agriculture exports, such as coffee, to manufacturing. Other sectors are also open to investors. Analysts say the government must free up the economy further to sustain annual growth rates it estimates averaged nearly 10 per cent in the past decade and to create jobs. But those at the speech said Abiy did not outline plans to open up new sectors, a move which could also ease a shortage of foreign exchange. He said state spending on infrastructure, which has crowded out local companies, would continue. Abiy named 10 new ministers to his cabinet on Thursday to clear a path for political reform. But he retained the rest of Hailemariam’s 34-strong cabinet, including the finance minister. That is consistent with remaining a “developmental state”, the term the four businessmen said Abiy used at the banquet. His office did not respond to requests from Reuters for comment on his policies. Economists describe a “developmental state” as one where the government is deeply involved in the economy.

- **Ethiopia-Israel Strengthen Agricultural Cooperation²⁰**

Israel is working with Ethiopia and other East African countries to improve agriculture by developing new technologies such technologies include but not limited to Computer drip irrigation. Computer drip irrigation; early warning systems; and thermal imaging; are some of the projects underway. Farming accounts for half of GDP and 83.9 percent of total employment in Ethiopia so improving productivity is a priority. Horticulture was the main point of discussion at a recent conference. Israel is an example to the world in optimising the use of water. The country has high level technologies and their involvement will benefit both small and large scale farmers.

¹⁹ Reuters, 23 April 2018, <https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN1HU1N6-OZATP>

²⁰ East African Business Week, 23 April 2018, <http://www.busiweek.com/index1.php?Ctp=2&pi=6671&pLv=3&srI=84&spI=463&cl=25>

- **Rwanda's Paul Kagame Accuses ICC of Bias Against Africa**²¹

Rwandan President Paul Kagame has repeated his harsh criticism of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for what he calls open bias against Africa, saying it has failed to mete out justice in any other part of the world. "The ICC was supposed to address the whole world, but it ended up covering only Africa," Kagame said on Saturday at a meeting with British-Sudanese telecoms tycoon and philanthropist Mo Ibrahim in Rwanda's capital, Kigali. "From the time of its inception, I said there was a fraud basis on which it was set up and how it was going to be used. I told people that this would be a court to try Africans, not people from across the world."

- **Ten South Sudan Aid Workers Are Abducted, UN Says**²²

Ten relief workers traveling in South Sudan have been abducted by an armed group, the United Nations said on Thursday. The kidnapping underscores the risks to humanitarian aid providers in the war-afflicted African country. A statement from the United Nations said the aid workers, all from South Sudan, disappeared on Wednesday during a trip through the southern part of the country. The statement gave no details on the armed group that seized them or its demands.

- **Top US Official's Visit to Eritrea Indicates Renewed Relations, Assisting Sanctions' Lifting, Investment, and Ethiopian Peace Talks**²³

US Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto visited Eritrea on 22–24 April, the first visit by a top US official in years. No details have been made public, other than Yamamoto was due to meet Eritrean officials, foreign diplomats, and US embassy staff in Asmara, before moving on to Djibouti and Ethiopia. In November 2017, Yamamoto, a former US envoy to all three countries, announced that the United States was ready to facilitate peace talks between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Ethiopia's new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has said that he is ready for dialogue. However, Eritrea insists on Ethiopia's withdrawal from occupied territory, particularly the town of Badme, awarded to Eritrea by international arbitration following the two countries' 1998–2000 border war, but never vacated by Ethiopia.

- **Nigeria Tops Remittances to Sub-Saharan Africa with US\$22 billion**²⁴

The World Bank, yesterday, said that Nigerians living abroad (Diaspora) sent home US\$22 billion in 2017, the highest in the Sub-Saharan region, and the fifth highest in

²¹ Al Jazeera, 29 April 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/rwanda-kagame-accuses-icc-bias-africa-180429050656022.html>

²² New York Times, 26 April 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/world/africa/south-sudan-aid-workers-abduction.html>

²³ Jane's 360, 24 April 2018, <http://www.janes.com/article/79538/top-us-official-s-visit-to-eritrea-indicates-renewed-relations-assisting-sanctions-lifting-investment-and-ethiopian-peace-talks>

²⁴ Vanguard, 24 April 2018, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/04/nigeria-tops-remittances-sub-saharan-africa-22bn-world-bank/>

the world. This represents 10 per cent increase when compared to the US\$19.64 billion sent home in 2016. The amount sent home by Nigerians in Diaspora represents the highest in the Sub-Saharan Africa region followed by Senegal and Ghana with US\$2.2 billion each for the year. The World Bank disclosed this in a report titled, Migration and Development Brief.

North Africa

- **EU and Egypt to Sign New Agreement on Energy Cooperation²⁵**

The European Union and Egypt are set to sign a strategic partnership agreement on energy as per a press release of the European Commission. European Climate and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete said in a statement that Egypt is becoming an upcoming important gas and electricity hub that can provide energy security for the EU and for the entire region. On behalf of the Commission, Mr. Cañete is expected to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Egyptian government that will last from 2018 to 2022. The memorandum highlights six priorities in the context of the EU-Egypt partnership. These priorities include a further assistance to the development of the oil and gas sector, continued support to electricity sector reforms and development of the energy hub.

The statement also referred to further assistance with joint measures and projects in the field of renewable energy, additional support on energy efficiency strategies, policies and measures, across various sectors, and cooperation in technological, scientific and industrial areas across the energy field. During the visit, Mr. Cañete is also expected to meet with European energy companies and launch the EU-Egypt Sustainable Energy Business Forum & Exhibition. The two-day trip will include a site visit to Egypt's Zohr gas field, discovered in 2015, which is estimated to contain 30 trillion cubic feet of gas. The gas field is located near Egypt's Suez Canal City of Port Said.

Mr. Cañete said that there is much to gain, in terms of access to new sources of energy and market opportunities, for European and Egyptian citizens and businesses alike. The EU stands ready to support Egypt in its energy market reforms and to boost sustainable energy investment. The last agreement signed between Egypt and the EU was in Brussels in 2008 to enhance EU-Egypt energy cooperation.

- **Many Christian Houses set on Fire on Issue of Disputed Church in Egypt²⁶**

²⁵ Ahram online , An Egyptian English Daily <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/298075/Egypt/Politics-/EgyptEU-to-sign-new-energy-partnership--.aspx>

The houses of many Coptic Christians in the Beni Suef village of Beni Menin town (Egypt) were set on fire by Muslim villagers in a latest incident of sectarian violence over the status of disputed church. Around twenty persons have been taken into custody and the investigation is has been initiated to go deep into the matter and to take actions against the culprit. The reports mentioned that many children and women from the Coptic community have fled their villages and taken shelter in the neighboring village to rescue their lives after the incident. Another report also mentioned that some Coptic Christians were arrested when they were trying to burn their own houses to put the blame on the Muslim of the villages. The village has seen many conflicts in the past over the legal status of a church in the village which both side claim that it belong to their ancestral property.

- **Wang Yi Meets with Former President U Thein Sein of Myanmar**

On April 22, 2018, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with former President of Myanmar Thein Sein in Beijing. Wang said that China is willing to cooperate with Myanmar in the construction of China-Myanmar Economic corridor, implement the major projects and inject fresh vitality into Myanmar's economic development. He expressed China's gladness to see the progress made in Myanmar's peace and reconciliation process and reiterated China's position to play a constructive role. He also expressed China's support to Myanmar and Bangladesh in seeking proper settlement of the displaced people in Rakhine State through friendly negotiations and hoped that repatriation of the refugees is implemented at an early date.²⁷

- **Chinese, Russian FMs hold talks on ties**

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Beijing on April 23, 2018. Wang called on both the countries to enhance coordination to maintain their interests and to safeguard world peace and stability. Lavrov said that it has always been Russia's priority to develop the comprehensive partnership of strategic coordination with China. On the Korean Peninsula issue, Wang stressed the need to enhance coordination and communication under the new circumstances in order to make their contribution to the political settlement.²⁸

- **China, India reach broad consensus in informal summit**

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached broad consensus on the overarching, long-term and strategic issues of global and bilateral importance after an informal summit in Wuhan from April 27 to 28, 2018. According to a press release issued on April 28, the two leaders had in-depth discussions in a

²⁶ Mada Misr, An Egyptian Daily <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2018/04/18/feature/politics/disputed-status-of-beni-suef-church-sparks-sectarian-violence/>

²⁷ "Wang Yi Meets with Former President U Thein Sein of Myanmar", *MOFA, PRC*, April 22, 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1553687.shtml, Accessed on May 1, 2018.

²⁸ "Chinese, Russian FMs hold talks on ties", *The Global Times*, April 24, 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1099363.shtml>, Accessed on May 1, 2018.

friendly atmosphere and underscored the strategic autonomy of the two biggest developing countries as an important factor for stability. The two countries agreed to enhance stable and balanced development of major-country relations, advance stability, development and prosperity of Asia in the 21st century, promote the rejuvenation of the oriental civilisation and make a positive contribution to global peace and development.

Both sides agreed to use the Special Representatives' Meeting on the Boundary Question to seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement and uphold border peace and tranquillity through communication and cooperation between the two militaries. Moreover, they agreed to work for democratisation of the international relations, increase the representation and say of developing countries and emerging markets, support the multilateral trading regime, oppose protectionism and work for economic globalisation.²⁹

- **China and Azerbaijan eye further military cooperation**

Chinese State Councillor and Defence Minister Wei Fenghe held talks with Defence Minister of Azerbaijan Zakir Hasanov on April 27, 2018 in Beijing. Wei said that military cooperation in the areas of high-level contacts and personnel training have developed steadily. He expressed China's willingness to make joint efforts to deepen the pragmatic cooperation in defence and security areas to provide a secured environment for the construction of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and safeguard international and regional peace and stability. Hasanov also expressed willingness to work with China to enhance cooperation in various fields and the two militaries to make new progress.³⁰

European Union

- **Britain, France and Germany Support Iran Nuclear Deal**

Britain, France and Germany support Iran nuclear deal. They maintain that the deal remains "the best way of neutralizing the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran." In telephonic calls with French President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Prime Minister Theresa May discussed Iran nuclear deal. Press release issued by Prime Minister May office states, "They agreed that there were important elements that the deal does not cover, but which we need to address - including

²⁹ "China, India reach broad consensus in informal summit", *MOFA, PRC*, April 30, 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1555656.shtml, Accessed on May 1, 2018.

³⁰ "China and Azerbaijan eye further military cooperation", April 28, 2018, *MOD, PRC*, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-04/28/content_4812039.htm, Accessed on May 1, 2018.

ballistic missiles, what happens when the deal expires, and Iran's destabilizing regional activity.”³¹

- **Eurozone Reform Plan by June 2018**

Reportedly, Finance Ministers of Germany and France announced that a eurozone reform plan would be delivered by June 2018. German finance minister, Olaf Scholz, said, “We are optimistic that we will be successful.” He added, “It is absolutely important that France and Germany agree on questions.” French finance Minister, Bruno Le Maire said, “We strongly believe that we should be able to find a compromise between France and Germany for the next council of June.” European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis said, “We need to move beyond established positions now and find compromises.”³²

- **President Macron's State visit to the US**

French President Emmanuel Macron paid a three-day state visit to the US from April 23 to 25, 2018. It was the first state visit by a foreign leader under the Trump administration. US-French relations, trade and economic relations and the security partnership between the two countries and other regional and global issues were discussed.³³ In his address to a joint session of Congress, the French President urged US to engage more with the world. He said, “This requires - more than ever - the United States' involvement as your role was decisive for creating and guarding today's free world. The United States is the one who invented this multilateralism. You are the one now who has to help preserve and reinvent it.”³⁴

European Union

- **Artificial intelligence: Commission outlines a European approach to boost investment and set ethical guidelines**³⁵

The European Commission presented a series of measures to put artificial intelligence (AI) at the service of Europeans and boost Europe's competitiveness in this field. The Commission is proposing a three-pronged approach to increase public and private

³¹ PM calls with President Macron and Chancellor Merkel: 29 April 2018, Prime Minister Theresa May spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel about the Iran nuclear deal, Press release, 29 April 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-calls-with-president-macron-and-chancellor-merkel-29-april-2018>

³² Germany and France to deliver eurozone reform plan by June, DW, April 28, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/germany-and-france-to-deliver-eurozone-reform-plan-by-june/a-43578631>

³³ Macron, Trump announce 'common objective' on Iran and Syria, France24, April 25, 2018, <http://www.france24.com/en/20180424-macron-trump-resolve-differences-iran-syria-nuclear-deal-troops>

³⁴ France's Macron urges US to engage world, reject nationalism, France 24, April 26, 2018, <http://www.france24.com/en/20180425-french-president-macron-urges-us-help-reinvent-multilateralism>

³⁵ European Commission Press Release, 25 April 2018, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3362_en.htm

investment in AI, prepare for socio-economic changes, and ensure an appropriate ethical and legal framework. This follows European leaders' call for a European approach on AI. Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus Ansip said: "Just as the steam engine and electricity did in the past, AI is transforming our world. It presents new challenges that Europe should meet together in order for AI to succeed and work for everyone. We need to invest at least €20 billion by the end of 2020. The Commission is playing its part: today, we are giving a boost to researchers so that they can develop the next generation of AI technologies and applications, and to companies, so that they can embrace and incorporate them."

- **Commission wants bigger post-Brexit budget³⁶**

A week before the much-anticipated moment when it will present its ideas for the EU's post-2020 budget, the European Commission is now fine-tuning its proposals. But the main message is not going to change: the EU executive will urge member states to endorse a message of strength and unity by investing more in Europe after the UK has left the club. Commissioner Guenther Oettinger will roll out a framework and headline numbers for the next seven-year budget on Wednesday 2 May. The commission plans to put forward a budget that is larger than the previous one, and is expected to propose that budget for the period of 2021 to 2027 should be between 1.13 and 1.18 percent of the EU's gross national income (GNI), compared to the 1.0 percent now. Consequently the commission will put out specific legislative proposals on specific areas - such as agriculture, cohesion and research - by mid-June. The final decision on the budget will be taken by national governments, that are being asked by the commission to foot the bill for at least half the gap left by the UK's departure, and new challenges, such as migration, terrorism or border security, which need extra funding. Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden are sceptical about a larger EU budget, even though the largest net payer, Germany, has pledged to chip in with more.

- **Tusk gives Western Balkans countries hopes of EU membership³⁷**

European Council President Donald Tusk, who is on a tour of the Western Balkans countries, said Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania, FYROM and Montenegro are all candidates to join the EU, even as the region remains badly scarred by the ethnic wars of the 1990s and struggles to overcome a reputation for lawlessness. Tusk's visit is part of a weeklong tour of Western Balkans ahead of the May 17 summit of EU and regional leaders in Sofia, Bulgaria, which Tusk said would "reconfirm our readiness to continue the work on a European perspective for the region." Serbia and Montenegro are the frontrunners for EU membership and the EU's executive Commission has set a tentative target accession date of 2025. Serbia is seeking to join the EU but at the same time attempting to preserve its traditional strong ties with Russia, which shares its

³⁶ EUobserver, 26 April 2018, <https://euobserver.com/political/141698>

³⁷New Europe, 26 April 2018, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/tusk-gives-western-balkans-countries-hopes-of-eu-membership/>

Orthodox Christian heritage and has supported Belgrade in numerous disputes with the West. EU officials have urged Serbia, which is one of six Western Balkan countries that remain outside the bloc, to normalize ties with Kosovo in order to be able to join by 2025.

- **Empire strikes back: EU to combat eastern strongmen with funding threat³⁸**

The European Union will deploy a new financial weapon next week to try to rein in what Brussels sees as illiberal nationalism rising in the east of the bloc and threatening its democratic foundations. A big electoral triumph on 8 April for Victor Orbán, the Hungarian leader EU chiefs call “The Viktor”, and a battle to save the independence of courts in Poland have sounded alarm bells about the Union’s future when Britain leaves next year. President Jean-Claude Juncker’s European Commission, backed by Germany, France and the EU’s other wealthy paymasters, will unveil proposals on Wednesday as part of the 2021-2027 budget that will tie funding, on which poorer eastern countries rely, to respect for the rule of law, EU officials told Reuters. Under the proposals, funds could be withheld from countries which fail to abide by treaty obligations to respect the rule of law, such as by having independent courts.

Germany

- **Three against Trump³⁹**

The leaders of Germany, France and Britain have agreed in telephone calls on Saturday and Sunday, to fight together, the American president should Donald Trump , the European Union (EU) on Tuesday to no longer of American punitive tariffs on imports of steel and Take out the aluminum. A statement from the federal government on Sunday stated that Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Theresa May had been some that the United States should not take any trade measures against the EU, "and the European Union should otherwise be ready to Determined to defend their interests within the framework of the multilateral trade order ". In doing so, they responded that neither Merkel nor Macron on their visit to Washington had managed to persuade Trump to extend the exemptions last week.

NATO

- **New US secretary of state Pompeo discusses Russia strategy with NATO⁴⁰**

³⁸Euractive, 27 April 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/empire-strikes-back-eu-to-combat-eastern-strongmen-with-funding-threat/>

³⁹ Frankfurter Allgemeine, 29 April 2018, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/merkel-may-und-macron-planen-vorgehen-gegen-strafzoelle-15566337.html>

⁴⁰ New Europe, 27 April 2018, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/new-us-secretary-of-state-pompeo-discusses-russia-strategy-with-nato/>

New US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has landed in Brussels for talks with NATO allies on Russian “aggression” in Europe, a day after being sworn into military pact forged a consensus on the need for a response to “Russian aggression”. Earlier Pompeo was quick to praise NATO as “invaluable” just minutes after getting off his plane, in his first meeting of the day, with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, a sharp contrast to Trump’s earlier rebuke of the alliance. Even before his confirmation on April 26, the former CIA director was already involved in U.S. diplomacy, although it will be his first meeting as the top U.S. diplomat with his counterparts in Europe. Stoltenberg said Pompeo’s visit to Brussels was “a great expression of the importance of the alliance.”

France

- **Macron stuns US Congress with strong rebuke of Trumpism⁴¹**

French President Emmanuel Macron urged the United States to embrace multilateralism and warned of the perils of trade war and “extreme nationalism” in an address to Congress on Wednesday (25 April), pushing back against Donald Trump’s “America First” agenda. The French leader’s feisty speech to lawmakers was a dramatic twist near the end of a three-day visit that had showcased his warm personal relationship with Trump, despite the gulf between their visions of world affairs. The two presidents had literally embraced each other, repeatedly talking up their much-vaunted friendship during the trip, but in his speech to Congress Macron rigorously pushed back against Trump’s trade, climate and non-proliferation policies.

Albania

- **We are aware of ‘Europeisation fatigue’, warns Albanian minister⁴²**

Albanian foreign minister Ditmir Bushati briefed a small group of Brussels journalists about his country’s EU ambitions, following the Commission’s proposal to start accession negotiations with Tirana and a visit of Prime Minister Edi Rama to Berlin. The European Commission proposed on 17 April to open EU membership talks with Albania and Macedonia, in line with its new focus on the integration of the Western Balkans. The renewed interest in the region, which has made some progress in the past year in resolving disputes with neighbours and embraced a more reform-friendly agenda, coincides with concerns about the growing interest of non-EU countries to gain a foothold there, most notably Russia and China. In the meantime, French President Emmanuel Macron told the European Parliament that he did not want further EU enlargement before the bloc makes reforms allowing it to function more successfully. Asked by EURACTIV if Albania was disturbed by Macron’s remarks,

⁴¹Euractive, 26 April 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/macron-stuns-us-congress-with-strong-rebuke-of-trumpism/>

⁴²Euractive, 27 April 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/albanian-minister-we-are-aware-of-the-europeisation-fatigue/>

Bushati made it clear that his country understood the bloc's problems, but wanted to start the accession negotiations to better anchor itself with the EU.

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **3rd Inter-Korean Summit held in Panmunjom**

On April 27, 2018, a Summit between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was held at the Panmunjom village at the inter-Korea Demilitarised Zone. The meeting between the two Korean leaders was the 3rd Summit and the first time in the last eleven years. For the first time the North Korean leader set foot on South Korean soil. At the Summit two leaders signed a joint statement, called the Panmunjom Declaration. In the joint statement Seoul and Pyongyang declared their commitment to the "complete denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula. Moon and Kim agreed to try to officially end the 1950-53 Korean War by signing a peace treaty by the end of this year in three or four-way talks involving the two Koreas, the United States and possibly China. The two also declared there would be "no war on the Korean Peninsula," affirming their commitment to establishing a permanent peace between the two Koreas.⁴³

- **North Korea vows to dismantle nuke test sites in May, allow US inspection**

South Korea's Presidential Office on April 29, 2018, said that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un promised to close down the country's main nuclear test site at Punggye-ri in May before the eyes of security experts and journalists from South Korea and the United States. During his summit with President Moon Jae-in, Kim even disclosed that two of the four underground tunnels at the test site were still "usable" but that they would be sealed off as well. Kim abruptly made the offer and President Moon accepted it, Moon's top press secretary Yoon Young-chan said. "The two leaders reached an agreement after Mr. Kim made the proposal during the summit," Yoon said during a follow-up briefing.⁴⁴

- **Kim Jong-un ready to talk with Abe at 'any time': Seoul**

On April 29, 2018, South Korean Presidential office announced that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is willing to hold talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Kim told South Korean President Moon Jae-in during their Summit on April 27, that he is ready

⁴³ "Panmunjom Declaration signed", The JoongAng Daily, April 27, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3047508

⁴⁴ "Kim Jong-un vows to dismantle nuke test sites in May, allow US inspection", The Korea Times, April 29, 2018, www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/05/731_248150.html

to hold a dialogue with Japan at “any time.” It also added that Moon had conveyed Kim’s remark to Abe in a telephone call.⁴⁵

- **Prime Minister Abe visits UAE**

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe arrived in the United Arab Emirates on April 29, 2018 at the start of a trip across the Mideast, meeting first with a crucial oil supplier for his energy-hungry nation. About a quarter of all oil imports for Japan come from the UAE. A third comes from Saudi Arabia, while a fifth of all its natural gas imports come from Qatar and the UAE, making peace across the Gulf Arab nations crucial to Japanese energy supplies. Abe made previous visits to the UAE in 2007 and in 2013. After Abu Dhabi, Abe will travel onto Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories. Before leaving Japan, Abe told journalists Middle East peace was a priority on his trip.⁴⁶

- **Abe, Trump agree Korean summit positive for denuclearization**

According to the office of Japanese Prime Minister, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and U.S. President Donald Trump welcomed the inter-Korean summit as a positive move for denuclearization and a “historical step” towards peace and stability in northeast Asia. However, Trump said he would maintain pressure on Pyongyang through sanctions ahead of his own unprecedented meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Abe and Trump spoke on a 30-minute phone call on April 28, 2018 and also agreed on the importance of concrete steps towards denuclearization by Pyongyang, the Japanese prime minister's office said in a statement. Abe said that, “the important thing is whether North Korea will take specific actions in the future.”⁴⁷

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Vietnam Rejects China’s temporary ban on Fishing in the Gulf of Tonkin**

Mr Vu Van Tam, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, has declared null and void China’s temporary ban on fishing in part of the East Vietnam Sea, including the Gulf of Tonkin and Vietnam’s waters effective from May 1 to August 8. According to a document sent to the local administrations in Vietnam’s coastal provinces and cities on April 23, Mr Tam suggested that the authorities should encourage fishermen to continue catching fish in Vietnam’s waters and organize their boats in groups to enable mutual help in case of problems. The Common Fishery Zone, where both Vietnamese and Chinese fishing boats can travel, is a body of water

⁴⁵ "Kim Jong Un ready to talk with Abe at ‘any time,’ Blue House reveals after North-South summit", The Japan Times, April 29, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/04/29/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-trump-agree-concrete-north-korea-action-toward-denuclearization-key/#.WuhEAcIFOM8>

⁴⁶ "Prime Minister Abe arrives in UAE on Middle East trip", Asahi Shimbun, April 30, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201804300018.html

⁴⁷ "Abe, Trump agree Korean summit positive for denuclearization", The Asahi Shimbun, April 29, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201804290027.html

in the Gulf of Tonkin – which is off the coast of northern Vietnam and southern China. Vietnamese fishing vessels licensed to work in the Common Fishery Zone between Vietnam and China must not cross the border running through this area to reach the eastern part nearer to China. The state-founded Vietnam Fisheries Society while rejecting the ban as ‘valueless’, stated that the introduction militates against Vietnamese fishers’ livelihood, violates Vietnam’s sovereignty and legal rights, infringes international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and runs counter to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in East Vietnam Sea, of which both countries are signatories.⁴⁸

- **Singapore’s Stealth Frigate docks at Da Nang, Vietnam**

A Singaporean warship docked at Tien Sa Port in Da Nang on April 26 on a four-day visit to Vietnam. The RSS Intrepid stealth frigate carrying a crew of 150 officers and sailors led by Captain Joseph Neo, Commanding Officer at the Singapore Naval Academy. Crews from both countries are expected to participate in search and rescue drills and train in utilizing international flags, blinking lights and radio signalling.⁴⁹ Both nations are celebrating 45 years of diplomatic relations and five years of strategic relations. Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc had talks with his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong on April 25, as part of his official visit to Singapore from April 25 to 27. The two premiers noted that cooperation between both countries has developed stably in all aspects. Singapore is one of the top ten trade partners and the third-biggest investor of Vietnam with 2,000 projects that are worth US\$43 billion. In order to enhance the existing ties, the leaders agreed to maintain political trust through all-level delegation exchanges, and step up affiliation in national defence and security, with attention paid to collaboration between naval forces, search and rescue units, and in defence technology. They also agreed to coordinate with each other in settling common security challenges such as piracy and terrorism, ensuring maritime security and safety, and cyber security. PM Lee pledged that Singapore will boost its investment in Vietnam in such areas as clean energy, waste treatment, water resource management, and the building of high-tech parks and smart cities.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Thai Xuan, “China’s ban on fishing in Vietnam’s waters is void: official”, *Tuoi Tre News*, April 24, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180424/chinas-ban-on-fishing-in-vietnams-waters-is-void-official/45248.html>, accessed on April 25, 2018.

⁴⁹ Thai Xuan, “Singaporean stealth frigate visits Da Nang”, *Tuoi Tre News*, April 26, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180426/singaporean-stealth-frigate-visits-da-nang/45310.html>, accessed on April 27, 2018

⁵⁰ Duy Khang, “Singapore pledges to boost investment into Vietnam”, *Tuoi Tre News*, April 26, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180426/singapore-pledges-to-boost-investment-into-vietnam/45291.html>, accessed on April 27, 2018.

- **32nd ASEAN Summit April 28, 2018, Singapore⁵¹**
 - The Heads of States/Government of ASEAN Member States gathered in Singapore for the 32nd ASEAN Summit on April 28, 2018. The ASEAN Leaders' Vision for a Resilient and Innovative ASEAN was adopted as it has the potential in contributing to a stronger ASEAN Economic Community.
 - The leaders emphasised on the importance of maintaining ASEAN centrality and unity while welcoming initiatives through the various ASEAN led mechanisms that reinforced this status quo. The statement of the Chairman also put into record, further discussion to be made on recent initiatives, including the Indo-pacific concept.
 - The leaders adopted the Statement on Cyber security Cooperation in recognition of the growing urgency and sophistication of transboundary cyber threats. The Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers on Countering Terrorism in ASEAN released on February 2018 was welcomed by leaders. They also discussed the need to enhance regional cooperation in countering terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism.
 - The leaders expressed their continued support for Myanmar's humanitarian relief programme in Rakhine State and urged Myanmar to continue in implementing the recommendations provided by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.
 - The importance of enhancing ASEAN Connectivity based on sustainable infrastructures was noted towards building a more competitive, inclusive, resilient, and integrated ASEAN Community.
 - The leaders welcomed the successful convening of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit held in New Delhi on January 25, 2018.
 - The ASEAN leaders expressed their deep concern over the rising tide of protectionism and anti-globalisation sentiments. While reiterating ASEAN's continued support for multilateral trading system the leaders stated their commitment towards improving ASEAN+1 FTAs, while also urging on the swift conclusion of the RECEP.
 - Given the improving ASEAN-China cooperation and the official commencement of the substantive negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective Code of Conduct in the SCS on a mutually-agreed timeline.
 - The leaders welcomed the Inter-Korean Summit held on April 27, 2018, while reiterating their support to bring about the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner and expressed hope for a peaceful and amicable resolution to the issue.

⁵¹ "Chairman's Statement of the 32nd ASEAN Summit Singapore, 28 April 2018", ASEAN, April 28, 2018, <http://asean.org/storage/2018/04/Chairmans-Statement-of-the-32nd-ASEAN-Summit.pdf>, accessed on May 1, 2018.

Myanmar

- **UN Security Council meet Myanmar's Suu Kyi over Rohingya**

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi received a UN Security Council delegation in the highest-level diplomatic visit since the start of the Rohingya crisis, which will include a brief tour of violence-hit Rakhine state. Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of mainly Buddhist Myanmar, has been pilloried overseas for her failure to speak up for the Muslim Rohingya or publicly condemn the army for driving them out of the country. She chaired a meeting of 15 UN delegates on May 1st, according to a Ministry of Information photograph, as the UN tries to put more pressure on Myanmar to allow refugees to return safely⁵².

- **Tatmadaw sanctions 47 officers for recruiting child soldiers**

Forty-Seven Tatmadaw (military) officers who recruited children to become soldiers have been sanctioned by the military, the Ministry of Defence announced in the government media. The statement, published in state-owned newspapers said the violations were committed by the Tatmadaw in the first year of the second term of the current government. A total of 47 military officers have faced action, said Lt Gen Sein Win without giving details of the sanctions meted out against the officers.⁵³

- **Chinese FM discusses economic partnership with Myanmar**

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with former Myanmar President U Thein Sein to discuss a strategic economic partnership and assistance for resettlement in Rakhine. During the meeting in Beijing, both leaders reaffirmed the good cooperation between the two neighboring nations and discussed further partnership. Wang Yi and U Thein Sein talked about developing the China-Myanmar economic corridor to benefit both nations and “inject fresh vitality” into Myanmar’s economy, according to a press release of China’s Foreign Ministry⁵⁴.

- **UN Secretary General announces special envoy for Myanmar**

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on 28th April 2018, announced the appointment of Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener of Switzerland as his new Special Envoy on Myanmar. According to a press release, Ms. Burgener brings over 25 years of

⁵² UN Security Council meet Myanmar's Suu Kyi over Rohingya, 1 May 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/un-security-council-meet-myanmar%E2%80%99s-suu-kyi-over-rohingya>

⁵³ Tatmadaw sanctions 47 officers for recruiting child soldiers, 27 April 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-sanctions-47-officers-recruiting-child-soldiers.html>

⁵⁴ Chinese FM discusses economic partnership with Myanmar, 25 April 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/chinese-fm-discusses-economic-partnership-myanmar.html>

experience in diplomacy having served in various high-level government positions in the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs⁵⁵.

- **EU extends arms embargo on Myanmar**

The European Union has extended its arms embargo against Myanmar, following human rights violations in the country, and was preparing sanctions against individual army officials, Reuters reported. The embargo includes arms, other equipment that could be used for repression, the provision of military training and products used to monitor communications, the Council of the European Union said. The Council added it had agreed on a framework for personal sanctions against officials of the Myanmar Armed Forces and the border guard police, should human rights violations in the country continue, the report said⁵⁶.

North America

Canada

- **Leaders extend support but Canada PM Justin Trudeau skips Khalsa Parade**

Justin Trudeau skipped the annual Khalsa Day Parade in Toronto, a year after he riled the Indian government by becoming the first Canadian Prime Minister in a decade to appear at the event, which is marked by a profusion of Khalistan flags and separatist banners and posters featuring those like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. However, even if Trudeau stayed away, the focus that emerged from his troubled visit to India in February, on how Canada is serving as a base for revival of the Khalistan movement, did not prevent a galaxy of the country's leading politicians from appearing at the nagar kirtan, just as they had done in the Surrey Vaisakhi celebration in British Columbia. Among them was New Democratic Party (NDP) national leader Jagmeet Singh, who was present at both events. Ontario's premier Kathleen Wynne also addressed the gathering. Trudeau's government was also well represented in the Khalsa Day Parade, with cabinet minister Navdeep Bains speaking from the stage.⁵⁷

- **Trudeau government proposes major changes to elections law**

The Trudeau government is proposing to limit the length of federal election campaigns, restrict the amount of spending allowed in the period immediately before a campaign and introduce new rules to regulate third-party political activity — all part

⁵⁵ UN Secretary General announces special envoy for Myanmar, 28 April 2018,

<http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/un-secretary-general-announces-special-envoy-myanmar>

⁵⁶ EU extends arms embargo on Myanmar, 27 April 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-international/eu-extends-arms-embargo-myanmar>

⁵⁷ Anirudh Bhattacharyya, "Leaders extend support but Canada PM Justin Trudeau skips Khalsa Parade," <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/leaders-extend-support-but-canada-pm-justin-trudeau-skips-khalsa-parade/story-FjFBNp6wdDuDfUBDB9EwHJ.html> Accessed on 01 May 2018.

of a new set of reforms to Canada's elections laws. Political parties also would be required to disclose how and what information they collect from voters. In broad strokes, Bill C-76 touches on a series of concerns that have been raised about Canada's electoral and political systems, including changes made by the previous Conservative government, the activity of third-party organizations and the collection of data by political parties. Whether the bills responds sufficiently or appropriately to those concerns will be debated over the days ahead, but the government is also facing a constrained timeline to pass the bill in time for next year's federal election.⁵⁸

- **Canada making 'great' progress on Trump's NAFTA 'sweet spot': Ambrose**

Canada has made a "great deal of progress" on reworking trade criteria on the automotive industry in NAFTA, and it could be crucial to the fate of the talks, says Rona Ambrose, a member of Canada's NAFTA Advisory Council. She said that rules of origins for the automotive sector has been an important but challenging part of the ongoing renegotiation, and said it could be the key to assuring U.S. President Donald Trump walks away happy. Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland was in Washington, D.C., throughout the week to continue high-level talks, and elected to skip an important meeting with NATO allies in Brussels, leading some to wonder if a deal may be imminent. Freeland has previously said that auto rules would be central to a successful deal. Officials are set to continue working on the deal throughout this coming week, with Freeland and her fellow high-level officials reconvening days later to consider the state of the deal.⁵⁹

The United States

- **Trump postpones decision on imposing steel and aluminum tariffs on Canada to June 1**

With just hours remaining before Canada's exemption from new U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum was set to expire, the United States postponed its decision on whether to impose the tariffs until June 1. U.S. President Donald Trump ordered sweeping tariffs in March of 25 per cent on steel imports and 10 per cent on aluminum, but granted temporary exemptions to certain countries. In the case of Canada and Mexico, Trump's administration tied both countries' tariff exemptions to the successful renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Canada's exemption period was officially set to end at midnight April 30. But late Monday, Trump decided to give Canada, Mexico and the European Union another month to work out a deal with the Americans. Canada has used the past few weeks of uncertainty to bring in new measures to crack down on companies that try to ship cheap foreign steel and

⁵⁸ Aaron Wherry, "Trudeau government proposes major changes to elections law," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-elections-scott-brison-legislation-1.4641525>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

⁵⁹ Rachel Aiello, "Canada making 'great' progress on Trump's NAFTA 'sweet spot': Ambrose," <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/canada-making-great-progress-on-trump-s-nafta-sweet-spot-ambrose-1.3905809>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

aluminum through the Canadian market — points Trudeau emphasized in a recent phone conversation with Trump.⁶⁰

- **Trump considering DMZ and Singapore for summit with North Korea**

President Donald Trump said that he's considering the Peace House near the Korean Demilitarized Zone, or the DMZ, for a meeting with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. Trump -- aware of the optics of his potentially historic meeting with Kim -- teased his preference for Peace House, a modern looking 3-story building built to host talks between North and South Korea, in a tweet. The White House is still finalizing plans for Trump's summit in the coming weeks with North Korea. Trump expressed optimism about his summit with Kim happening, but added, "we'll see." "If it's not a success, I will respectfully leave," Trump said. Trump has not announced his final decision about whether he will withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal by the quickly-approaching May 12 deadline but balked when asked if pulling out of the deal would send the wrong message to North Korea.⁶¹

- **Trump and Macron spoke about Syria, Iran: White House**

U.S. President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron spoke about Syria and Iran, the White House said, as the leaders wrestle with the future of a 2015 international agreement on limiting Iran's nuclear capabilities. The two leaders spoke on the same day as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressed to jettison the Iran deal, while Trump told a press conference he would decide on or before May 12 on whether to withdraw from the accord.⁶²

- **Mattis Says US Troops Will Remain in Syria, Afghanistan for Long Haul**

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Monday that U.S. troops are in Syria and Afghanistan for the long haul to leverage a diplomatic solution to the ongoing conflicts in both countries. Mattis did not minimize the difficulties of negotiating peace among numerous warring factions in Syria. The SecDef said the U.S. has a similar commitment to Afghanistan, where twin suicide bombings Monday killed at least 25, including nine journalists who rushed to the scene after the first bomb went off. The attack in Kabul was the latest in a wave of bombings across Afghanistan by the Taliban and an offshoot of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria that has triggered protests against the shaky central government of President Ashraf Ghani. However, Mattis said the bombings were signs of desperation by the militants and insisted that the new strategy approved by Trump last August of increased airpower and intensified

⁶⁰ Catharine Tunney, "Trump postpones decision on imposing steel and aluminum tariffs on Canada to June 1," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/steel-tariffs-deadline-1.4641458> Accessed on 01 May 2018.

⁶¹ MERIDITH MCGRAW, "Trump considering DMZ and Singapore for summit with North Korea," <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-dmz-singapore-summit-north-korea/story?id=54827584>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

⁶² Reuters Staff, "Trump and Macron spoke about Syria, Iran on Monday: White House," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nuclear-iran-trump-macron/trump-and-macron-spoke-about-syria-iran-on-monday-white-house-idUSKBN1I125B> Accessed on 01 May 2018.

training for local forces is having success. He said the new U.S. strategy, combined with the resilience of the Afghan national security forces, has put the Taliban "on their back foot."⁶³

Mexico

- **Mexico's Pro Business Candidate Tells Citigroup He Can Defeat Leftist Frontrunner**

Citibanamex, Citigroup Inc's Mexican unit, celebrated its annual Plenary Session in Mexico City with closed-door presentations by Mexico's leading presidential candidates. Ricardo Anaya, the pro business candidate backed by a left-right coalition of parties, who has been running second in the polls, told the 800 bankers and representatives of top international investment houses that he is open to collaborating with the ruling PRI party to defeat frontrunner Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the leftist candidate who holds a double-digit lead in almost all recent polls. José Antonio Meade, the PRI presidential candidate who has failed to connect with voters and is running a distant third, has repeatedly rejected the idea of withdrawing in favor of Anaya. López Obrador claims that even by combining Anaya's and Meade's votes "they will not be able to reach me." As the crucial election draws closer, investors will be attentive to who Mexico's business elite backs.⁶⁴

- **Mexico's Economy Picked Up Pace in First Quarter**

Mexican economic activity accelerated in the first quarter, growing at its fastest rate in six quarters as industrial production recovered and services picked up pace. Gross domestic product, a measure of output in goods and services, expanded 1.1% seasonally adjusted from the fourth quarter of 2017, the National Statistics Institute said. The increase, which translates into an annualized rate of 4.6%, was the highest since the third quarter of 2016, and above the 0.8% expansion in the previous quarter. Industrial output was up 0.7%, services grew 1.2%, and agricultural production increased 0.8%. Strength in manufacturing backed by export demand, and a pickup in construction in an election year, has contributed to the improved industrial performance. Industrial production contracted 0.6% in 2017, when the overall economy grew 2%.⁶⁵

⁶³ Military.com, "Mattis Says US Troops Will Remain in Syria, Afghanistan for Long Haul," <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/04/30/mattis-says-us-troops-will-remain-syria-afghanistan-long-haul.html>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

⁶⁴ Dolia Estevez, "Mexico's Pro Business Candidate Tells Citigroup He Can Defeat Leftist Frontrunner," <https://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2018/04/30/mexicos-pro-business-candidate-tells-citigroup-he-can-defeat-leftist-frontrunner/#450cee757193>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

⁶⁵ Anthony Harrup, "Mexico's Economy Picked Up Pace in First Quarter," <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mexicos-economy-picked-up-pace-in-first-quarter-1525097131>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Brazil

- **Brazil's Lula, Workers Party leader hit by new corruption charges**

Imprisoned former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, along with the current leader of the Workers Party he founded, were hit with fresh corruption charges by federal prosecutors. Authorities allege that Lula, along with Senator Gleisi Hoffmann, who is leading the beleaguered Workers Party, were given access to a \$40 million slush fund in 2010 funded by construction company Construtora Odebrecht [ODBES.UL], in exchange for government decisions that would benefit the company. The Workers Party said in a statement that the accusations were unfounded. Also charged in the alleged scheme were Antonio Palocci, who served as Finance Minister under Lula and who last week signed a plea deal with prosecutors, along with Paulo Bernardo, who was Lula's planning minister. Palocci has been in jail since 2016 and was found guilty in a different graft trial last year. Lula was jailed on April 7 and is serving a 12-year sentence for a bribery conviction. The former leader already faces another six separate trials on graft charges.⁶⁶

Colombia

- **Colombia, Seeking to Calm Storm, Denies It Is Investigating Ex-Rebel**

The Colombian government denied reports it is investigating a top former rebel commander for conspiring to traffic drugs, allegations that have added further uncertainty to fragile peace accords that ended a half-century of conflict. President Juan Manuel Santos and other officials, concerned that the former rebels could lose further confidence in the process, insisted that Colombian law enforcement agencies aren't investigating Mr. Marin, also known as Ivan Marquez. Attorney General Nestor Humberto Martinez, in a press conference, also said there was no investigation against Mr. Marin, but he criticized FARC leaders for accusing him of using his office to torpedo the peace process. The roiling political tensions come as Colombia prepares for May 27 presidential elections in which the leading candidate, according to the polls, is a conservative who has been strongly critical of the process. His closest rival is a former guerrilla from the long demobilized M-19 guerrilla movement who supports the pact.⁶⁷

Cuba

- **What to Expect from a Post-Castro Cuba**

⁶⁶ Reuters Staff, "Brazil's Lula, Workers Party leader hit by new corruption charges," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-politics/brazils-lula-workers-party-leader-hit-by-new-corruption-charges-idUSKBN1I22J7>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

⁶⁷ Juan Forero, "Colombia, Seeking to Calm Storm, Denies It Is Investigating Ex-Rebel," <https://www.wsj.com/articles/colombian-officials-seeking-to-calm-a-storm-deny-ex-rebel-being-investigated-1525138704>, Accessed on 01 May 2018.

For the first time in almost 60 years, a Castro is no longer Cuba's head of state. On April 19, Miguel Diaz-Canel was sworn in as Cuba's president, elevated from his previous role as first vice president. He has promised to modernize the country's social and economic model, including dismantling its dual-currency system and leveraging the internet for greater good, but he also committed to retain its socialist trappings. However, many Cubans are skeptical of how much good Diaz-Canel could bring them and, in fact, are worried about making ends meet in the new regime. Diaz-Canel has limited powers because his predecessor Raul Castro will continue to head the Communist Party of Cuba and control the military that runs much of the country's businesses. Among the other challenges that Diaz-Canel will face is an increasingly complicated relationship with the US, as the Trump administration has moved to roll back Obama-era policies that promoted renewed relations and business engagement with the island nation.⁶⁸

Russia

- **Russia and G7**

On 23 April, foreign ministers from Group of Seven countries united to condemn Russia for what they called "a pattern of irresponsible and destabilizing" behavior and urged Moscow to help resolve the conflict in Syria. The ministers agreed to create a working group to study Russia's "malign behavior" and said they were working on a plan to improve coordination to push back against foreign interference in elections.⁶⁹

- **Russia, International Community and Iran Nuclear Deal**

During a telephonic conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 30 April, the subject of focus was Iran's nuclear deal. President Putin reiterated Russia's position that the JCPOA, which has a paramount importance in terms of international stability and security, must be strictly observed by all its signatories. Earlier in the day, Netanyahu accused Iran of concealing its nuclear weapons program and archives. He said the Israeli intelligence data indicated that Iran was allegedly misinforming the international community about its nuclear program.⁷⁰

Russian and French Presidents Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron in a phone conversation called to preserve and implement in full the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program. US President Donald Trump has

⁶⁸ ----, "What to Expect from a Post-Castro Cuba,"

https://www.fairobserver.com/region/latin_america/cuba-raul-castro-miguel-diaz-canel-world-news-34099/ Accessed on 01 May 2018.

⁶⁹David Ljunggren, Lesley Wroughton, "G7 foreign ministers condemn Russian behavior, says it impedes cooperation", *Reuters*, April 23, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g7-summit-foreign/g7-foreign-ministers-unite-in-condemning-russian-behavior-idUSKBN1HU1OS> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

⁷⁰"Putin stresses importance of observing Iran nuclear deal by all signatories – Kremlin", TASS, April 30, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1002579> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

stated on numerous occasions that the Iran nuclear deal is flawed arguing that it did not prevent the creation of nuclear weapons by Iran but only postponed it.⁷¹

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on 23 April he had agreed with his Chinese counterpart that Moscow and Beijing would try to block any US attempt to sabotage the Iran nuclear deal. “We are against revising these agreements, we consider it very counter productive to try to reduce to zero years of international work carried out via talks between the six major powers and Iran,” he was quoted as saying after talks with Wang Yi, China’s top diplomat, in Beijing.⁷²

- **Russia and Ukraine**

Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko officially declared on 30 April that the ongoing anti-terror operation in Donbass was completed and the Joint Forces Operation (JFO) kicks off. He said that that under the law on Donbass’ reintegration the current strategy of the military operation in the region, the so-called anti-terrorist operation, would be changed to the Joint Forces Operation on April 30. The new game plan is expected to “bring drastic changes” to managing the military structure giving Ukraine’s army additional powers and control over units of the National Guard, the Security Services and the National Police.⁷³

Meanwhile, on 30 April, President Poroshenko confirmed that Ukraine received a batch of US-made Javelin anti-tank missile systems. He did not reveal the number of Javelin systems that had been delivered.⁷⁴

- **Russia and Korean Peninsula**

South Korean President Moon Jae-in on 29 April told Russian President Vladimir Putin about his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in a telephone conversation. The parties positively regard the agreements reached during this meeting. Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed Russia’s intention to further contribute to the development of cooperation between North and South Korea, in particular through the implementation of large trilateral infrastructural and energy projects, was confirmed. He highlighted the importance of continuing efforts by all parties concerned for a politico-diplomatic solution of the Korean Peninsula

⁷¹“Putin, Macron call for implementing Iran nuclear deal in full – Kremlin”, *TASS*, April 30, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1002545> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

⁷²“Russia, China to obstruct U.S. attempt to sabotage Iran nuclear deal: TASS”, *Reuters*, April 23, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-russia-china/russia-china-to-obstruct-u-s-attempt-to-sabotage-iran-nuclear-deal-tass-idUSKBN1HU126> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

⁷³“Poroshenko announces beginning of Joint Forces Operation in Donbass”, *TASS*, April 30, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/1002548> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

⁷⁴“Poroshenko says Ukraine has received US-made Javelin missile systems”, *TASS*, April 30, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/1002571> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

problems, including with regard to milestones contained in the Russia - China roadmap.⁷⁵

South Korea's Ambassador to Russia Woo Yoon-keun on 30 April said that South Korea will continue strategic cooperation with Russia on the Korean Peninsula's nuclear problem. "South Korea is well aware that Russia is playing a constructive role in the settlement of the North Korean nuclear problem and establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula," he said. "Now, our countries continue close discussion of the Korean Peninsula's problems." Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov said that the fact that Russia was not mentioned in the Panmunjom declaration in no way meant that Moscow could "fall out" of the process of the settlement of the Korean Peninsula's problems.⁷⁶

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Peace in Afghanistan Central to Regional Security: India**

In her address at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers in Beijing on 24 April 2018, India's External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj supported inclusive peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. The Minister said, "This can only be achieved through political dialogue and reconciliation within the framework of the Afghan constitution. India actively supports the activation of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, the Moscow Consultation Format and other mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation for restoration of peace and development in Afghanistan". Calling terrorism as an enemy of the basic human rights she asked all countries to recognize states that encouraged and supported terrorist groups.⁷⁷

- **Kabul, Kandahar Record Highest Voter Registration Turnout**

The Independent Election Commission on 24 April 2018 in its first weekly reports showed that Kabul and Kandahar were the leading provinces with regard to highest voter registration. In Kabul, 118,264 people registered whereas, the southern province of Kandahar witnessed 66,134 registered voters. "Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar and Helmand province followed suit with 19,508; 18,166; 13,953 and 13,636 respectively".⁷⁸

⁷⁵"Putin, Moon Jae-in positively regard agreements reached between Pyongyang and Seoul", TASS, April 29, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1002487> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

⁷⁶"Seoul to continue cooperation with Moscow on North Korean nuclear problem", TASS, April 30, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/1002566> Accessed on May 1, 2018.

⁷⁷"Peace in Afghanistan Central to Regional Security: India," *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 25, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20787, accessed on April 25, 2018.

⁷⁸"Kabul, Kandahar Record Highest Voter Registration Turnout," *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 25, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20786, accessed on April 25, 2018.

- **Billion Dollars in Afghanistan Funding at Risk of Misuse: SIGAR**

A watchdog appointed by the US congress on 25 April 2018 in a report said that the World Bank and Afghan government have not sufficiently monitored funds contributed by donors across the world under Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund which is around more than \$10 billion managed by the World Bank. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) stated, “Once the US or any other donor provides its contributions to the fund, neither the World Bank nor USAID can account for how those funds are specifically spent”, adding that funds are utilised to pay salaries of Afghan government workers.⁷⁹

- **Afghanistan, Regional Countries to Conduct Military Exercises**

As per some media reports, China’s Defense Ministry has planned for joint military exercises in a multi-lateral framework. According to Senior Colonel Wu Qin, a spokesman for China’s Defense Ministry, “We will organize several joint exercises and trainings within a multilateral framework such as China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan”. This whole military exercise and training would aim to combat terrorist activities in the region.⁸⁰

- **Modi-Xi ‘Agree’ to Joint Project in Afghanistan**

India and China have agreed on joint efforts for an economic project in Afghanistan, during two-day summit on 27-28 April 2018, held in the Central Chinese city of Wuhan between Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Discussing terrorism as an issue of common threat, the two countries would cooperate on counter-terrorism actions. In addition, both countries are committed for positive bilateral ties. According to Chinese President, “We have paid reciprocal visits, met on multiple occasions, and reached many important consensuses over the past three years, which acted as guidance to the positive development momentum of bilateral ties. The two countries should regard each other as a positive factor in the balance of global power and take each other as partners for realizing the dream of development.⁸¹

- **Ball in Taliban’s Court to Reconcile and End Fighting: NATO SCR**

Talking at the round table with Afghan journalists in Brussels, during the meeting of 29 NATO Foreign Ministers on 26-27 April 2018, the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) in Afghanistan Ambassador Cornelius Zimmermann reminded that the alliance would remain in Afghanistan on the invitation of Afghan government

⁷⁹ “Billion Dollars in Afghanistan Funding at Risk of Misuse: SIGAR,” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 26, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20797, accessed on April 26, 2018.

⁸⁰ “Afghanistan, Regional Countries to Conduct Military Exercises,” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 29, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20806, accessed on April 29, 2018.

⁸¹ “Modi-Xi ‘Agree’ to Joint Project in Afghanistan,” *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 30, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20816, accessed on April 30, 2018.

and it would not withdraw its troops until and unless peace is achieved in Afghanistan.⁸²

Bangladesh

- **UNSC to press Myanmar for quick Rohingya solution**

The UN Security Council will press Myanmar to ensure that Rohingya who fled the country can return home in safety and freedom, an envoy said on Monday (April 30) after UN diplomats ended a tour of Bangladesh's refugee camps. "This is a humanitarian crisis and a human rights issue," Kuwait's ambassador to the UN, Mansour al-Otaibi, told reporters after the delegation ended a three-day visit to Bangladesh and headed for Myanmar.⁸³

- **Khaleda instructed to continue movement: Fakhru**

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir on Saturday (April 28) said their chairperson Khaleda Zia asked her party leaders and activists to continue the movement for 'restoration' of democracy. "Our leader (Khaleda) has urged people to pray for her early recovery and for an end to the bad time the nation is passing through," he said while talking to reporters. Fakhru further said, "She's asked our leaders and activists to continue their movement with courage for the restoration of democracy."⁸⁴

- **Court to decide Khaleda's participation in polls: Quader**

Awami League (AL) General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader on Saturday (April 28) said the government has nothing to do over the issue of BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia's participation in the next general election as it will be decided by the court. "The government also has nothing to do regarding the release of Khaleda from jail. It is the matter of the court," he told journalists.⁸⁵

- **AL to be in dire straits if fair polls held: Mosharraf**

Claiming that the ruling party has no popularity, BNP senior leader Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain on Friday (April 27) said Awami League will face dire

⁸² "Ball in Taliban's Court to Reconcile and End Fighting: NATO SCR," *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 30, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=20815, accessed on April 30, 2018.

⁸³ "UNSC to press Myanmar for quick Rohingya solution," *Prothom Alo*, April 30, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/174875/UNSC-to-press-Myanmar-for-quick-Rohingya-solution>, accessed on April 30, 2018.

⁸⁴ "Khaleda instructed to continue movement: Fakhru," *The Independent*, April 29, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/147715>, accessed on April 29, 2018.

⁸⁵ "Court to decide Khaleda's participation in polls: Quader," *The Independent*, April 28, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/147702>, accessed on April 28, 2018.

consequences if a fair election is held. "The government has got panicked as the country's people don't support it. Awami League will be thrown into dustbins if a fair election is held," he said.⁸⁶

- **AL hopeful of Teesta deal**

Ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday (April 26) expressed optimism that Bangladesh and India would reach an agreement to resolve the longstanding Teesta water-sharing issue. "We talked about the crisis over the Teesta river water. If the Teesta water-sharing deal is signed during the tenure of the two prime ministers, it will create a tremendous goodwill in both countries," said Quader, also road transport and bridges minister.⁸⁷

नेपाल

मोदी की नेपाल यात्रा की तैयारियाँ प्रारंभ:

पारस्परिक यात्राओं के क्रम में दोनों देशों के संबंधों को मजबूती देने हेतु भारत के प्रधानमंत्री 11 मई को नेपाल की दो दिवसीय यात्रा पर रहेंगे. प्रधानमंत्री मोदी की वर्ष 2014 के बाद नेपाल की यह तीसरी यात्रा होगी. नेपाल के प्रधानमंत्री ओली ने अपने उच्च अधिकारियों के साथ बैठक कर उन्हें इस यात्रा की आवश्यक तैयारी की निर्देश दिए. दोनों देशों के आधिकारिक सूत्रों ने 11-12 मई की तारीख पर सहमती जताई है लेकिन यात्रा के दिनों में वृद्धि हो सकती है.⁸⁸

तीन देशों के मध्य बस सेवा शुरू:

ढाका से काठमांडू तक बस सेवा के लिए ट्रायल किया गया जिसमें नेपाल, भारत और बांग्लादेश के प्रतिनिधिमंडल शामिल हुए. इस बस ने 1197 किमी की यात्रा पुरी की. यह बस सेवा बी बी आई एन के मोटर वीकल समझौते की दिशा में महत्वपूर्ण कदम है.⁸⁹

भारत हवाई मार्ग प्रदान करे: ओली

प्रधानमंत्री ओली ने प्रांत संख्या पांच में एक सभा को संबोधित करते हुए कहा कि हमने भारत यात्रा के दौरान कुछ महत्वपूर्ण मुद्दों को उठाया था. हम भारत से भूमि ही नहीं हवाई मार्ग से भी आबद्ध है, अभी तक हमें भारत द्वारा केवल एक हवाई मार्ग ही उपलब्ध है. इस मुद्दे को हमने भारत के दौरे के समय उठाया था और कहा था कि हमें केवल एक ही रास्ता क्यों दिया गया इससे हमें काफी दिक्कत होती है.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ "AL to be in dire straits if fair polls held: Mosharraf," *The Independent*, April 27, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/147563>, accessed on April 27, 2018.

⁸⁷ "AL hopeful of Teesta deal," *The Daily Star*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/al-hopeful-teesta-deal-1567288>, accessed on April 27, 2018.

⁸⁸ Anil Giri, "Preps begin for Modi's visit starting May 11", *The Kathmandu Post*, 24 April 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-04-24/1>

⁸⁹ Sanjeev Giri, "Trial run boosts tri nation bus, cargo services plan", *The Kathmandu Post*, 27 April 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-04-27/1>

⁹⁰ "Oli for wider airspace for Nepal", *The Kathmandu Post*, 30 April 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-04-30/1>

Pakistan

- **General Bajwa and Zero Sum Game**

While meeting Chief of General Staff of Russian Armed Forces Gen Valery Vasilevich Gerasimov on his maiden visit to Moscow, General Qamar Javed Bajwa on April 25th stated that Pakistan wants to get out of the zero-sum dynamics of Cold War era that is still prevalent in South Asia. Gen Gerasimov said Russia supported Pakistan's efforts towards reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan and it was willing to play a role towards that end.⁹¹

- **Pakistani High Commissioner in Amritsar**

Pakistan's High Commissioner to India Sohail Mahmood paid obeisance to the Golden Temple and met the Chief Minister of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar and Chief Minister of Punjab, Capt Amarinder Singh on April 23rd to 25th. He underscored the importance of people-to-people contact and the unity of SAARC. He had broad-ranging interaction with state dignitaries, academics, businessmen and representatives of the media. Mr Mahmood later visited the Punjab University in Chandigarh for interaction with Vice Chancellor Dr Arun K. Grover and other members of the faculty. A group of students also participated in the discussions. He also visited the office of the daily newspaper The Tribune, headquartered in Chandigarh. In Amritsar, Mr Mahmood had interaction with members of the Confederation of Indian Industries and businessmen associated with Pakistan-India trade.⁹²

- **Hike in Defence Budget**

The defence spending is proposed to increase to Rs 1.1 trillion (approximately \$9.6 billion) in 2018-19. The defence ministry has insisted that increase in the defence budget for the next financial year was necessitated by the challenging security environment. The proposed allocation of Rs1.1tr is being compared with the original allocation of Rs920bn for the outgoing year, which has been computed as an 18 per cent hike. The outgoing year's allocation was increased by around 8pc during the course of the year to Rs 998bn.⁹³

Indian Ocean Region

- **Iran Assumes Presidency of IONS**

⁹¹ "Pakistan wants to avoid zero-sum game: Bajwa", *Dawn*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1403950/pakistan-wants-to-avoid-zero-sum-game-bajwa> as accessed on May 1, 2018

⁹² "Pakistani diplomat visits Golden Temple in Amritsar, meets CMs", *Dawn*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404334> as accessed on May 1, 2018

⁹³ "Ministry justifies defence budget hike", *Dawn*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404840/ministry-justifies-defence-budget-hike> as accessed on May 1, 2018

During the 6th Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in Tehran, the Chief of Naval Staff of Bangladesh, Admiral Mohammad Nizamuddin Ahmed, handed over the rotating presidency of the IONS for two year term to Iran by giving a telescope to the Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi.⁹⁴ Bangladesh was holding IONS presidency for 2016 to 2018. During the symposium, "a commemorative stamp for the 2018 IONS was also jointly stamped by Iranian Army Chief Bagheri, Rear Admiral Khanzadi, and the Bangladeshi Chief of Naval Staff."⁹⁵ The three-day IONS meeting commenced in Tehran on Monday. According to a media report, "military officials from 35 countries attended the first day of the meeting."⁹⁶

Indian Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba attended the IONS meeting. Admiral Lanba, during his five days visit to Tehran, also attended conclave of chiefs of major naval powers of the region and hold bilateral talk with the Commander of Iranian Navy. He also had discussion with Navy chiefs of many other nations.

- **Indian Ocean Commission Ministerial Conference Agrees on Regional Maritime Security Mechanisms**

According to press release issued by Government of Mauritius, during the Ministerial meeting of the Indian Ocean Commission on maritime security issues held on 28th - 29th April 2018 at Balaclava, ministers in charge of security in the Indian Ocean region and representatives of regional and international organisations were agreed on Regional (western Indian Ocean) Maritime Security Mechanisms.⁹⁷ "The Conference adopted the Declaration on Maritime Security in Western Indian Ocean, called "Mauritius Declaration on Maritime Security", on 29 April 2018 at Balaclava, and indicated its appreciation of the joint Plan of Action."⁹⁸

- **Government of Japan Funds Maritime Security Courses in Djibouti**

A five day workshop (22-26 April, 2018) on regional maritime security held at the Djibouti Regional Training Centre (DRTC).⁹⁹ The workshop, funded by the Government of Japan, was the "first in a series of regional maritime course."¹⁰⁰ Aimed to share ideas for domain awareness and promote regional cooperation, officials from

⁹⁴ Iran takes over IONS presidency, April 23, 2018, <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/133551/iran-takes-over-IONS-presidency> (Accessed on April 30, 2018).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Indian Ocean States Should Close Ranks to Improve Maritime Security, April 24, 2018, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/national/85202/indian-ocean-states-should-close-ranks-to-improve-marit> (Accessed on April 30, 2018).

Navy chief Admiral Sunil Lanba heads for five-day visit to Iran ime-security

⁹⁷ Mauritius: Ministerial Conference Agrees On Regional Maritime Security Mechanisms, Press Release, Government of Mauritius, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201804300823.html> (Accessed on April 30, 2018).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Japan Funds Maritime Security Courses in Djibouti, April 29, 2018, <https://www.marinelink.com/news/maritime-security436938> (Accessed on April 30, 2018).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

10 countries (Djibouti, Kenya, Comoros, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Somalia, Madagascar, Mauritius, South Africa and United Republic of Tanzania) participated in the workshop.¹⁰¹ This Japanese initiative is accordance to objectives of Jeddah amendment to the Djibouti Code of Copnduct. Under the code, "participatory States pledge to work together, with support from IMO and other stakeholders, to build national and regional capacity to address wider maritime security issues, as a basis for sustainable development of the maritime sector."¹⁰² Koji Yonetani, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Djibouti, commenced the five day workshop.

Sri Lanka

- **Ranil promises more reforms in the UNP**

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe assured further reforms to the United National Party (UNP) as recommended by the Ruwan Wijewardene Committee. The party leader said in a statement that Deputy Leader Sajith Premadasa would be given more powers while Subject Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries would also be appointed and the Constitution of the party would also be amended¹⁰³.

- **Sooka sends alleged STF perpetrators list to UN**

The International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) headed by Yasmin Sooka has prepared a list of names of 56 Sri Lankan Special Task Force (STF) personnel whom it said should be barred from serving in UN peacekeeping missions. Sooka was one of the three-members of the panel of experts appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to advise him on the alleged human rights violations during the final stages of the war in Sri Lanka. The report compiled by the panel is known as the Darusman Report¹⁰⁴.

- **LTTE supporters sentenced to jail by court in Tamil Nadu**

The Ramanathapuram district court in India has convicted two supporters of the proscribed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who had procured cyanide capsules in a bid to revive the militant organisation, under the provisions of Unlawful activities (prevention) Act, 1967 and awarded them 10 years imprisonment. Passing orders in the three-year-old case, Principal District Judge A. Kayalvizhi convicted the accused K. Krishnakumar (42) and his accomplice V. Subashkaran (41), holding that the prosecution – the Q branch police had proved the case that the duo had indulged

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Japan Funds Maritime Security Courses in Djibouti,

¹⁰³ Ranil promises more reforms in the UNP, 29 April 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Ranil-promises-more-reforms-in-the-UNP-149263.html>

¹⁰⁴ Sooka sends alleged STF perpetrators list to UN, 29 April 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Sooka-sends-alleged-STF-perpetrators-list-to-UN-149261.html>

in unlawful activities in the State in a bid to revive LTTE (after it was defeated by the Sri Lankan forces in the civil war in May 2009)¹⁰⁵.

- **OMP to meet families of the disappeared from May**

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP) is to meet families of the disappeared from May, the chairman of the OMP Saliya Pieris said. He tweeted saying the OMP will from May onwards visit different places to speak to families of the missing and disappeared to share their plans and obtain their views on how they should proceed¹⁰⁶.

Maldives

- **Nasheed indicates he would be allowed to contest in election ‘last-minute’**

Former President Mohamed Nasheed has indicated that a last-minute decision would allow him to compete in the upcoming presidential election slated for September. During the Q&A session after his speech at the 41st annual convention of The Capital Maharaja Organisation Limited (TCMOL) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, the former president asserted that the current political situation in the Maldives does not allow him to contest in the election. Nasheed said that Maldives’ political climate would remain unchanged for some time; however, when the election dawns closer, he said that the circumstances would allow him to contest in the election. Nasheed added that he was hopeful of winning the presidential election again, too¹⁰⁷.

- **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 week¹⁰⁸.

- **Maldives politicians criticised by EU**

¹⁰⁵ LTTE supporters sentenced to jail by court in Tamil Nadu, 29 April 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/04/29/ltte-supporters-sentenced-to-jail-by-court-in-tamil-nadu/>

¹⁰⁶ OMP to meet families of the disappeared from May, 28 April 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/04/28/omp-to-meet-families-of-the-disappeared-from-may/>

¹⁰⁷ Nasheed indicates he would be allowed to contest in election ‘last-minute’, 28th April 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/nasheed-indicates-he-would-be-allowed-to-contest-in-election-last-minute>

¹⁰⁸ Human rights in Maldives imperilled by ‘deterioration of democracy’
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>

The European Union criticized politicians for the lack of electoral reform in the Maldives. It said such changes were not a priority on the domestic political agenda, meaning there was no progress in implementing EU recommendations. “Domestically, neither the government nor the People’s Majlis nor the opposition have sought to address the issue of electoral reforms,” said an EU statement. “To date, the political and institutional environment of the Republic of Maldives has not been conducive for the adoption of meaningful and concerted electoral reforms.”¹⁰⁹

- **President Yameen compares Feb 1 to coup of Nov 1988**

President Abdulla Yameen compared the landmark ruling issued by the Supreme Court on February 1 to the attempted coup of November 3, 1988, declaring that the two incidents had taught similar lessons. The president made the remark at a function held late Wednesday in Kalhuthukkala Koshi to mark the 126th anniversary of Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF). Looking back at one of the bloodiest dates in the recent history of the Maldives when two conspirators had paid a Sri Lankan militant organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, to help overthrow the then Maldivian government, Yameen declared that February 1 with the Supreme Court’s verdict to free political prisoners was also a similar “attack”¹¹⁰.

- **Joint opposition creates ‘manifesto’ for single presidential candidate commitment**

Main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party’s (MDP) parliamentary group leader and Hinnavaru MP Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has said that the opposition coalition has compiled a manifesto to back a single candidate for the upcoming presidential elections. Amidst ruling party’s allegations of conflict between the opposition coalition, MP Solih spoke at a press conference held at Jumhoory Party (JP) main party hub and stated that the opposition coalition will be backing a single candidate for the elections under their manifesto¹¹¹.

West Asia

Iraq and GCC

- **Major combat operations against ISIS in Iraq have ended, says US-led coalition**¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Maldives politicians criticised by EU, 19th April 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-politicians-criticised-by-eu-137576>

¹¹⁰ President Yameen compares Feb 1 to coup of Nov 1988, 26 April 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/president-yameen-compares-feb-1-to-coup-of-nov-1988/>

¹¹¹ Joint opposition creates ‘manifesto’ for single presidential candidate commitment, 25th April 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/joint-opposition-creates-manifesto-for-single-presidential-candidate-commitment/>

¹¹² <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/major-combat-operations-against-iraq-have-ended-says-us-coalition-562204833>

The US-led coalition signaled on Monday the end of major combat operations against the Islamic State (IS) group in Iraq by announcing the “deactivation” of its land forces command headquarters.

In a statement, the US-led coalition said its relationship with the Iraqi armed forces would evolve “from supporting and enabling combat operations to the training and development of self-sufficient Iraqi security-related capabilities.”

“The Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command Headquarters was deactivated today at a ceremony in Baghdad, signifying the end of major combat operations against ISIS in Iraq and acknowledging the changing composition and responsibilities of the coalition,” the coalition said, using a different acronym for IS.

NATO nations agreed in February to a bigger “train-and-advise” mission in Iraq as part of a broader international effort to help rebuild the country after more than a decade of war as combat operations wind down. The United States wants to avoid a repeat of its 2011 withdrawal from Iraq and the subsequent rise of militant groups as security unraveled. “The lesson learned from Iraq [is that] it is dangerous to leave too early because we may be forced back into combat operations,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said in February.

- **Iraq awards some oil and gas blocks as Exxon and Total drop out**¹¹³

Iraq awarded contracts for just over half of the energy deposits offered in an auction that failed to attract bids from most of the big oil companies that initially expressed interest. Crescent Petroleum Co. of the United Arab Emirates, China’s Geo-Jade Petroleum Corp. and United Energy Group, with headquarters in Hong Kong, won contracts at the auction in Baghdad attended by Oil Minister Jabbar al-Luaibi. Exxon Mobil Corp., Total SA, Zarubezhneft OAO, Lukoil PJSC and Gazprom PJSC decided not to bid, Abdul Mahdy Al-Ameedi, director-general for upstream oil contracts, said at the bidding event, without giving any reason.

Crescent Petroleum was awarded development and production contracts for the Gilabat and Qumar gas fields, with a remuneration of 9.21 percent net profit to the company, the lowest of all bids, al-Luaibi said. Its contract for the Khashim Ahmar and Injana gas fields has a remuneration of 19.99 percent, and its third agreement covers the Khider Al-Mai block in southern Iraq, with a remuneration rate of 13.75 percent.

Blocks that didn’t get any offers are Zurbatia and Shihabi on the border with Iran and Fao and Jabal Sanam on the Kuwait border. Zurbatia and Shihabi were operating fields during the Iraq-Iran war and the area is now polluted and possibly contains buried explosives, al-Ameedi said. The possibility of sanctions being re-imposed against Iran by the U.S. may also have discouraged bidding for those blocks, he said.

¹¹³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-30/texas-oil-production-climbs-to-all-time-high-amid-strong-prices>

Earlier this month, more than two years of negotiations on awarding the U.S. firm a project to build a water treatment facility and related pipelines needed to boost Iraq's oil production capacity have hit difficulties because the two sides differ on contract terms and costs.¹¹⁴

- **French troops enter Syria from Iraq 'in support of Kurdish forces'**¹¹⁵

French soldiers have repeatedly crossed the Syrian-Iraqi border and have even participated in operations near Syrian cities Manbij, Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor, the media outlet said. The forces are stationed at five military bases in the areas controlled by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

President Emmanuel Macron met with a delegation of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) last month and assured the alliance of France's support in the stabilisation in northeastern Syria. After the meeting a senior Kurdish official said France will send more troops to northern Syria.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in response: "If the remark by the French Presidency that 'we can mediate between Turkey and the SDF' is true, it far exceeds the capacity of the person who said it." Turkey is currently engaged in an aggressive campaign to remove the Kurdish YPG - which is the armed wing of the SDF - from Afrin, northern Syria. Ankara considers the YPG to be terrorists, but the groups are US allies in the fight against ISIS and are not considered terrorists in Western countries.

French military personnel have met with the leaders and have even provided weapons and military equipment, according to sources cited by Anadolu Agency.

- **Japan, UAE agree to expand cooperation during Abe's visit**¹¹⁶

In a joint-statement issued during Abe's UAE visit, the two countries "stressed the importance of further enhancing trade, investments, and business such as renewable energy, sustainable water desalination ... artificial intelligence, health care and medical equipment." On Monday, Abe hailed cooperation with the UAE as a "strategic relationship" and welcomed Abu Dhabi's renewal of oil concessions with Japanese oil firms.

The UAE is Japan's main trading partner in the Middle East, accounting for about a third of Tokyo's trade in the region. It is also Japan's second-largest supplier of crude oil, accounting for almost a quarter of its needs and more than half the trade volume between them last year -- \$28 billion -- was energy-related.

¹¹⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-oil-exxon-mobil/exxon-faces-setback-in-iraq-as-oil-and-water-mix-idUSKBN1H00M4>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/952371/Syria-news-French-troops-Syria-Iraq-USA-Kurdistan-Turkey-YPG-SDF>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/05/01/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-uae-agree-expand-cooperation-abes-visit/#.Wuf6By5ubIU>

Norio Maruyama, press secretary of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, told reporters in Abu Dhabi the two countries are expected to sign a memorandum of defense cooperation next month.

He also said the agreement for the promotion and protection of investment will likely boost bilateral investments. Abe held talks with the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and the deputy supreme commander of UAE armed forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahayan.

- **Muhammad Bin Zayed receives Chinese President's Representative¹¹⁷**

Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi received Yang Jiechi, Chinese President Xi Jinping's Special Representative, Member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and Director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee, at Al Bahr Palace in Abu Dhabi.

Shaikh Mohammad and Jiechi discussed ways to develop co-operation in various investment, economic, scientific, technological, and cultural fields. Last week, Shanghai Stock Exchange agreed a deal in principle with the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) to a joint exchange, called Belt and Road Exchange that would support business and investors along the Belt and Road economic route.¹¹⁸

Turkey

- **Turkish Cypriot leader believes solution 'still possible' in the divided island¹¹⁹**

Turkish Cypriot President Mustafa Akıncı on Monday said that the Turkish side is ready to adopt the Guterres framework as a strategic package agreement if the Greek side accepts the proposal as it is. Addressing Turkish Cypriots on the third anniversary of his presidency, Akıncı said both sides still use diplomatic channels and dialogue in the reunification talks, but warned that repeating the same strategies will not yield results.

"It is possible for both sides to benefit from a solution in Cyprus. However, we need a new approach and cooperation for this, not conflict," Akıncı said. The Turkish leader

¹¹⁷ <https://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/mohammad-bin-zayed-receives-chinese-president-s-representative-1.2214408>

¹¹⁸ <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/24/china-and-uae-move-a-step-closer-to-opening-a-belt-and-road-exchange.html>

¹¹⁹ Daily Sabah, 1 May 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/04/30/turkish-cypriot-leader-believes-solution-still-possible-in-the-divided-island>

said that reunification talks in Geneva and Crans-Montana were held thanks to the Turkish side's eagerness to take initiative, adding that the talks failed despite the Turkish side's constructive approach. "The Greek side should tell us immediately whether they are ready to accept the Guterres framework as a strategic package agreement without making changes to the proposal."

- **PM Yıldırım announces large scale debt restructuring and reform package¹²⁰**

Turkey will roll out a debt restructuring and social reforms package costing nearly \$6 billion, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım announced on Wednesday, mere weeks before snap elections slated for June 24. Yıldırım, in an unusual speech after a cabinet meeting, said the measures would cost the government between 22-24 billion Turkish liras (\$5.4-\$5.9 billion). He said the measures being taken in the package would earn the government more than it spends.

He said the package would provide citizens with new opportunities to pay debts, fines and social security premiums to public institutions. Accordingly, 90 percent of the interest owed due to debt will be written off in single payments. With the package, the 3-year income tax exemption for entrepreneurs between 18 to 29 years of age was also extended with the state taking over social security payments for a year.

An amnesty has been introduced for former university students who have been expelled or have discontinued their education so they can re-register and study, Yıldırım said, adding that some 500,000 youngsters could benefit from the amnesty, which does not cover students who were discharged due to terror charges.

A bonus payment of TL 1,000 for 12 million retirees will also be given on each Qurban Bayram (Feast of Sacrifice, also known as Eid al-Adha) and Ramadan Bayram (Eid al-Fitr), Yıldırım said. He said that the monthly old-age pension given to persons 65 or older has been increased from TL 266 to TL 500, and some 600,000 currently benefit from these payments. Yıldırım also announced a zoning reform that would affect some 13 million unregistered buildings throughout Turkey.

- **EU delegation to visit Turkey mid-May over visa waiver issue¹²¹**

A delegation from the European Union will visit Turkey in mid-May to discuss a visa-free deal and the issue of refugees, EU sources told state-run Anadolu Agency on April 30. A working plan for Turkish citizens to travel to Schengen countries visa-free, submitted by Turkey to Brussels in February, is currently being examined, said the source, who requested anonymity due to restrictions on speaking to the media. The technical delegation from the EU Commission will convey its views on the seven outstanding criteria out of a total of 72 that Ankara was expected to fulfill.

¹²⁰ Daily Sabah, 1 May 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2018/04/30/pm-yildirim-announces-large-scale-debt-restructuring-and-reform-package>

¹²¹ Hurriyet Daily news, 1 May 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/eu-delegation-to-visit-turkey-mid-may-over-visa-waiver-issue-131104>

On April 4, Turkey's EU Affairs Minister Omer Celik told lawmakers in parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee that they had already discussed the proposal of visa-free travel with European Commission's First Vice-President Frans Timmermans. "They will send a technical delegation [on visa liberalization] to Turkey this month and they will convey their views [on visa liberalization] to us," Çelik said.

Saudi Arabia

- **Booming ITC in Saudi Arabia**

ITC sector in Saudi Arabia is making a rapid headway. In 2017, ITC sector has registered a growth rate of 6 per cent and is predicted to surpass the value of previous year of US\$ 36 billion to US\$ 40 billion.¹²² While speaking a Smart Transformation Summit in Riyadh, DR. Moataz Bin Ali, Vice President of Trend Micro, the leading company in Middle East and North Africa (MENA), said that total connectivity is expected to surpass 26 million. Looking at the pace of ITC growth and increasing cyber crimes in the world, Bin Ali underlined that the Kingdom needs an advance digital security system. Last year, 'global ransomware treats stood at 1.6 billion and 8,800,000 of these threats were seen in the Kingdom'. He also said that there is need to develop a well-defined security standard and regulation, otherwise the planned benefits of the digital transformation envisioned by 2030 Vision, would result into unforeseen problems. The same report showed that Saudi Arabia's education sector was most affected by malware, followed by government, and telecommunications. Other sectors also affected were healthcare, manufacturing, and oil & gas. The security vendor also predicted that there will be significant rise in threats in the Kingdom for 2018.¹²³ Dr. Ben Ali also underlined that there is also a need to vigil the digital security of the growing urbanization in the Kingdom.

- **Saudi Troops Participate in Joint Military Exercise with Turkey**

Saudi Arabia forces arrived in Turkey's western city of Izmir on Friday to take part in the "EFES 2018" military exercises scheduled to take place from 7-8 May 2018. The present military exercise s a multipartite and multi-national exercise is considered one of the biggest military drills in the world, especially in terms of participating number of forces and diversity of its nature and fields. The exercise aims at exchanging military expertise among the participating countries, training soldiers to plan and coordinate joint operations in different operational environments, increasing combat efficiency and enhancing military cooperation.¹²⁴

¹²² [http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/533909/BUSINESS/Saudi-Arabias-ICT-spend-to-reach-\\$40-billion-this-year](http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/533909/BUSINESS/Saudi-Arabias-ICT-spend-to-reach-$40-billion-this-year)

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180430-saudi-arabia-troops-participate-in-joint-military-drills-in-turkey/>

Israel

- **Israel and Iran**

A senior Iranian security official vowed on April 24th that Iran will punish Israel for killing its military advisers in an air raid on Syria. On April 8, Israel reportedly launched airstrikes on Syria's T4 air base, killing 14 people including Iranian military advisers.¹²⁵ The Syrian army confirmed on April 30th that several military bases in northern Syria were struck in another attack on the same day. The explosions following the strike registered as a 2.6 magnitude earthquake. Over 18 people were killed and another 60 were wounded as per Sky News Arabia.¹²⁶ Tensions in the region remain high.

- **Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech on Iran's Nuclear Programme**

While delivering a speech in the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv on April 30th, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that Israeli intelligence Mossad has been able to gather 55,000 files on 183 CDs that has details of Iran's nuclear programme. He stated that these files contained documents, charts, presentations, blueprints, photos, videos and more, which details the existing nuclear programme.¹²⁷ In reaction to the speech, US President Donald Trump stated that he was right when he stated that the Iran nuclear deal was unacceptable in its present form.¹²⁸ White House said on April 30th that the trove of information released earlier in the day by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "provides new and compelling details about Iran's efforts to develop missile-deliverable nuclear weapons." Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the documents were authentic and much of it was new to US experts.¹²⁹ Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Abbas Araghchi considered PM Netanyahu's claim to be 'childish' and 'ridiculous', and stated that the speech on file trove relating to Tehran's weapons program was coordinated with US in order to justify Trump nixing nuclear accord.¹³⁰

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

¹²⁵ "Iran vows retaliation over Israeli air raid on Syria", *Xinhua New China*, April 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/25/c_137134228.htm as accessed on May 1, 2018

¹²⁶ Anna Ahronheim, "Iranians killed in alleged Israeli strike on military site in Syria", *The Jerusalem Post*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iranians-killed-in-alleged-Israeli-strike-on-military-site-in-Syria-553099> as accessed on May 1, 2018

¹²⁷ "Full text of Netanyahu on Iran deal: '100,000 files right here prove they lied'", *Times of Israel*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-netanyahu-on-iran-deal-100000-files-right-here-prove-they-lied/> as accessed on May 1, 2018

¹²⁸ Eric Cortellessa, "After Netanyahu's speech, Trump says 'I've been 100 percent right' on Iran", *Times of Israel*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-netanyahus-speech-trump-says-ive-been-100-percent-right/> as accessed on May 1, 2018

¹²⁹ Eric Cortellessa, "W. House says Israel info shows 'new and compelling details' on Iran nuke effort", *Times of Israel*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/white-house-says-trove-provides-new-and-compelling-details-on-iran-nuke-effort/> as accessed on May 1, 2018

¹³⁰ "Iran dismisses Netanyahu's nuclear exposé as 'childish' and 'ridiculous'", *Times of Israel*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-dismisses-netanyahus-nuclear-expose-as-childish-and-ridiculous/> as accessed on May 1, 2018

Pakistan

S.No	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 24	Balochistan	<p>At least six soldiers were killed and eight others were injured when a suicide bomber riding an explosives-laden motorbike hit a truck carrying Balochistan Constabulary personnel on Airport Road. Hizbul Ahrar claimed the responsibility for the attack.</p> <p>In another incident, two suicide bombers attempting to enter the Frontier Corps camp were killed in an exchange of fire with the FC personnel in the Western Bypass area. Eight FC personnel were injured in the attack.¹³¹</p>	8	16
2	April 26	FATA	<p>A soldier, identified as Sepoy Farman Ullah (21), deployed at a border checkpost in Mohmand Agency was killed in an exchange of fire with militants who raided the post from across the border.</p> <p>The Inter-Services Public Relations claimed that the Pakistani forces “effectively responded” and killed three “terrorists”.¹³²</p>	4	0
3	April 26	FATA	At least two people were killed	2	33

¹³¹ Saleem Shahid, Six policemen martyred, 16 hurt in Quetta suicide blasts, *Dawn*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1403734/six-policemen-martyred-16-hurt-in-quetta-suicide-blasts>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹³² Soldier martyred in cross-border attack in Mohmand Agency, says ISPR, *Dawn*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404003/soldier-martyred-in-cross-border-attack-in-mohmand-agency-says-ispr>, accessed on April 30, 2018

			and 33 others were injured when unidentified militant hurled a hand grenade at a wedding ceremony in Saidgai area of North Waziristan Agency. ¹³³		
4	April 28	Balochistan	Two shopkeepers belonging to the Shia Hazara community were killed in a targeted killing in Jamaluddin Afghani Road area of provincial capital Quetta. The victims were identified as Jaffar and Muhammad Ali. No outfit claimed responsibility for the attack. ¹³⁴	2	0

Afghanistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 25	Faryab	At least nine Afghan security forces were killed and 15 others were wounded in Taliban attack on several check posts in Chaghatak village of Almar district. ¹³⁵	9	15
2	April 27	Logar	At least 72 military operations have been carried out in Logar province in last three months but residents and local officials said the province is still insecure. One member of Logar Provincial Council said Taliban and other militant groups are	Logar insecure despite 72 military operations	

¹³³ Jawed Hussein, 2 killed, 33 injured in grenade attack on wedding in North Waziristan, *Dawn*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404215/2-killed-33-injured-in-grenade-attack-on-wedding-in-north-waziristan>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹³⁴ Syed Ali Shah, 2 Hazara men shot dead in fourth 'targeted' attack this month in Quetta, *Dawn*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404396/2-hazara-men-shot-dead-in-fourth-targeted-attack-this-month-in-quetta>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹³⁵ Nine Afghan Soldiers Killed In Taliban Attack In Faryab, *Tolo News*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/nine-afghan-soldiers-killed-taliban-attack-faryab>, accessed on April 30, 2018

			active in parts of all the six districts in the province, including provincial capital Pul-e-Alam. ¹³⁶		
3	April 28	Helmand	At least one civilian was killed and four soldiers were wounded in a car suicide bomb near the Afghan National Army's third brigade in Loya Bagh village in Nad Ali district. ¹³⁷	1	4
4	April 29	Baghlan	At least 18 Taliban militants were killed and 33 others were injured in clashes in Baghlan. The clashes started after dozens of Taliban militants attacked security check posts in different parts of the province. ¹³⁸	18	33

Iraq

S.No	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 26	Baghdad	The Central Criminal Court in Baghdad sentenced 10 foreign female terrorists, including two and three from Kyrgyzstan to death over involvement with Islamic State (IS).	Death sentence	
2	April 26	Kirkuk	Two police personnel were killed and three others were injured in an attack launched by IS militants in Rubeida village. ¹³⁹	2	3
3	April 29	Nineveh	An IS leader, identified as Ibrahim el-Yassin, was killed by the 90th brigade of al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular	1	0

¹³⁶ Logar Still Insecure After 72 Military Operations, *Tolo News*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/logar-still-insecure-after-72-military-operations>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹³⁷ One Civilian Killed In Helmand Suicide Bombing, *Tolo News*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/one-civilian-killed-helmand-suicide-bombing>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹³⁸ 18 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Baghlan Clashes, *Tolo News*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/18-taliban-insurgents-killed-baghlan-clashes-0>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹³⁹ Nehal Mostafa, Five policemen killed, injured in attack by Islamic State, south of Kirkuk, *Iraqi News*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/five-policemen-killed-injured-in-attack-by-islamic-state-south-of-kirkuk/>, accessed on April 30, 2018

			Mobilization Forces) in an ambush in al-Safina village. ¹⁴⁰		
4	April 29	Mosul	The 20th division of the Iraqi Military Intelligence killed three IS terrorists, who were carrying food supplies to a terrorist hotbed from Nimrud city to Qayyarah sub-district in Mosul. ¹⁴¹	3	0
5	April 30	Kabul	At least 30 people were killed and 49 others were injured in two suicide explosions in Shashdarak area of Kabul city. The second suicide explosion occurred 20 minutes after the first explosion in the presence of emergency personnel and journalists who were covering the area. ¹⁴² Resultantly, the death toll included nine journalists. ¹⁴³	30	49

Syria

S.No	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	April 28	Homs	A 'commander' of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, identified as Abu Khaled Al-Hamwi, was killed by the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) in	1	0

¹⁴⁰ Mohammed Ebraheem, Iraqi security: Dangerous Islamic State leader killed in Mosul, *Iraqi News*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraqi-security-dangerous-islamic-state-leader-killed-in-mosul/>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹⁴¹ Mohammed Ebraheem, Iraqi intelligence services kill 3 Islamic State logistics officials in Mosul, *Iraqi News*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraqi-intelligence-services-kill-3-islamic-state-logistics-officials-in-mosul/>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹⁴² Death Toll Rises To 29 In Kabul Explosion, *Tolo News*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/death-toll-rises-25-kabul-explosion>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹⁴³ Nine Journalists Killed While Covering Kabul Explosion, *Tolo News*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/nine-journalists-killed-while-covering-kabul-explosion>, accessed on April 30, 2018

			'Ezzeddine town in northern Homs. ¹⁴⁴		
2	April 29	Syria	An Al-Qaeda branch in Syria has recently merged their group with another jihadist faction to form a new terrorist legion in the northern part of country. According to a statement from Tanzim Hurras Al-Deen, their organization has merged with another jihadist group, Ansar Al-Tawhid (formerly Jund Al-Aqsa), to form a new legion called "Nusret Islam." ¹⁴⁵	Terror groups merge	
3	April 29	Damascus	The Syrian Army and allied Palestinian forces squeezed IS militants in southern Damascus from three directions – the north, south and west. The forces seized Al-Qadam district as well as the neighborhoods of Al-Madaniyah and Al-Asali. Following this, ISIS terrorists regrouped in the districts of Yarmouk Camp and Hajjar al-Aswad and took up positions originally established by them some five years ago. ¹⁴⁶	SAA squeezes IS territory	

International Economic Issues

¹⁴⁴ Leith Aboufadel, Top jihadist commander in northern Homs killed by Syrian Army, *Al Masdar News*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/top-jihadist-commander-in-northern-homs-killed-by-syrian-army/>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹⁴⁵ Leith Aboufadel, Al-Qaeda branch in Syria merges with jihadist group to form new terrorist legion, *Al Masdar News*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/al-qaeda-branch-in-syria-merges-with-jihadist-group-to-form-new-terrorist-legion/>, accessed on April 30, 2018

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Illingworth, Map update: Syrian Army squeezes ISIS pocket in south Damascus from three directions amid unrelenting assault, *Al Masdar News*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/map-update-syrian-army-squeezes-isis-pocket-in-south-damascus-from-three-directions-amid-unrelenting-assault/>, accessed on April 30, 2018

- **India and World Bank Signs Agreement to Improve Rural Road Network in Madhya Pradesh**

The Government of India, the Government of Madhya Pradesh and the World Bank on April 24, 2018 signed a US\$ 210 million loan agreement for the Madhya Pradesh Rural Connectivity Project. The Project is expected to improve the durability, resilience and safety of the gravel surfaced rural roads and enhances the capacity of the state to manage its rural roads network. The Project will cover 10,510 km stretch of rural roads in Madhya Pradesh that fall under the Chief Minister's Gram Sadak Yojana (CMGSY) program. Of this 10,000 km will be upgraded from existing gravel to bituminous surface roads, while 510 km of new roads will be built to the same bituminous surface standard.¹⁴⁷

- **India signs loan agreement with World Bank for US\$ 125 million for “Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project”**

On April 24, 2018, a Loan Agreement for IBRD credit of US\$ 125 (equivalent) for the “Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project” was signed with the World Bank in New Delhi. **The objective of the project is to nurture indigenous innovation, foster local product development and accelerate commercialization process by bridging critical skill and infrastructure gaps to promote affordable and innovative healthcare products generation for inclusive development and increasing competitiveness in India.**

The project consists of the following parts:

- (i) *Strengthening of pilot-to market innovation ecosystem*
- (ii) *Acceleration of the pilot -to-market process for specific products and*
- (iii) *Project Management and monitoring & Evaluation.*¹⁴⁸

- **China seeks FTA with India to boost trade opportunities**

On April 28, 2018, China said that a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India would facilitate more commerce between the two countries. Speaking at an interactive

¹⁴⁷ Press Bureau of Information, Government of India, “Government of India and World Bank Signs Agreement to Improve Rural Road Network in Madhya Pradesh”, April 24, 2018, <http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PMO=3&PRID=1530022> (accessed on April 25, 2018)

¹⁴⁸ Press Bureau of Information, Government of India, “India signs loan agreement with World Bank for US\$ 125 million for “Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project””, April 25, 2018, <http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1530113> (accessed on April 25, 2018)

session organised by the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Chinese Consul General in Kolkata Ma Zhanwu said, “I hear... that there are certain barriers to trade and investments in both the countries. A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will help facilitate more commercial exchanges between the two countries.” He further added, “We are keen to import more from India, mostly from the eastern Indian states.”¹⁴⁹

- **Inter-Governmental Committee Meeting between India and Nepal held on 26-27 April 2018 at Kathmandu**

A meeting of the Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) was held on April 26-27, 2018 in Kathmandu, Nepal. IGC on Trade, Transit and Cooperation to Control Unauthorised Trade is functioning under the India-Nepal Treaty of Trade and India-Nepal Treaty of Transit. It provides a platform for discussing and reviewing bilateral trade and transit related issues. During the meeting both countries agreed to initiate, by July 2018, a comprehensive review of the bilateral Treaty of Trade which governs the bilateral trade and was last revised in 2009, considering all factors. The meeting discussed amendments to the bilateral Treaty of Transit, signed in 1999, to further facilitate transit movement of Nepal’s trade with third countries by expanding transit points, simplification of procedures, electronic cargo tracking and also enabling movement of Indian cargo through Nepali territory. Additionally, both sides agreed to consolidate all earlier amendments to the Treaty of Transit, within a month. The two countries also agreed on synchronised development of border trade infrastructure so as to ensure timely utilisation of the investment in border infrastructure. In order to enhance the volume of trade, the two countries emphasised the need for bilateral harmonisation of standards and expediting progress on MoUs between concerned agencies including BIS and FSSAI from the Indian side. The two sides further agreed to work towards mutual recognition of each other’s testing and certifications.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ “China seeks FTA with India to boost trade opportunities”, *Livemint*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/YSK6poamZ5unLf6OoY3WCL/China-seeks-FTA-with-India-to-boost-trade-opportunities.html> <http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=153013> (accessed on April 30, 2018)

¹⁵⁰ Press Bureau of Information, Government of India, “Meeting of Inter-Governmental Committee between India and Nepal held on 26-27 April 2018 at Kathmandu”, April 29, 2018, <http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1530697> (accessed on April 25, 2018)