

Weekly Media Updates **(13- 19 August, 2018)**

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Africa

- **Seychelles: China Writes Off U.S.\$5.5 Million Loan to Reduce Seychelles' Debt Load'**

The Chinese government has written off a loan to Seychelles worth 37,816,400 renminbi -- or \$5.5 million -- after an agreement aimed at supporting Seychelles' economy and reducing its debt load was signed this week.

Ambassador Yu Jinsong, representing the Republic of China, and Maurice Loustau-Lalanne minister for Finance, Trade, Investment and Economic Planning, formalised the agreement at a signing at the ministry's headquarters at Liberty House in the capital city of Victoria.

According to a press communique from the ministry, the loans from the Chinese government were for the provision of economic and technical cooperation.

In the field of infrastructure development, China was involved in the construction of the national swimming pool at Roche Caiman, educational institutions including primary and secondary schools, the Seychelles Polytechnic as well as different housing projects such as in the eastern district of Les Mamelles.

In more recent years, China has constructed the Palais de Justice and the National Assembly buildings on Ile de Port, a manmade island in the north of the main island of Mahe.

The state of the art SBC House to house both the island nation' national TV and Radio station is also a grant from the government of China. Under the agreement signed two years ago, the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation is getting financial assistance to build a new broadcast house and purchase new equipment under the new economic and technical cooperation agreement Seychelles signed with China.

- **Southern Africa: Magufuli to Chair Next SADC Summit²**

Tanzania is scheduled to host the 39th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which will be held in August next year.

A statement issued in Dar es Salaam on 18 August 2018, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation said that the 38th Summit of Heads of State and Government of SADC that was held in Windhoek, Namibia for two days (August 17 to 18) nominated President John Magufuli as Vice Chairman for SADC for a period of between August 2018 to August 2019. The statement said that president Magufuli will officially assume the chairmanship of SADC during the 39th summit of August 2019, which will be held in Tanzania.

¹ Seychelles News Agency, 18 August 2018,

https://allafrica.com/stories/201808180007.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkwtb

² Tanzania Daily news, 19 August 2018, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201808190007.html>

The two day summit focused on the theme "Promoting Infrastructure Development and Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development."

The theme builds on the focus of the past four SADC Summits that sought to advance industrial development and takes into account the need for adequate infrastructure to support industrialisation and the need to engage the youth, who are the bulk of the SADC population.

- **Angolan Scholarship Holders Continue Study in China³**

At least sixteen Angolan scholarship holders leave at the end of August and beginning of September for the People's Republic of China, where they will continue their studies at several universities in the Asian country.

The presentation of the students was held on 17 August 2018, Friday in Luanda, at the headquarters of the National Institute of Management of Scholarships (INGBE) and was attended by officials of the Chinese Embassy.

The beneficiaries, aged between 17 and 24 years, will attend for four to five years courses in Clinical Medicine, Chinese Medicine, Pediatrics, Civil Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Mechanics, Computer Science and Finance

- **South Africa's ANC Calls for Compulsory Land Seizures⁴**

The chairman of South Africa's ruling African National Congress has called for the state to forcibly take over land from those who own more than a certain amount, fuelling fears among predominantly white landowners and sending the rand tumbling. "You shouldn't own more than 12,000 hectares of land and therefore if you own more, it should be taken without compensation," ANC Chairman Gwede Mantashe, a close ally of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa who is also the country's mines minister, told the News24 website. Government figures show whites, who make up just 9 per cent of the population, own 72 per cent of the farmland that is held by individuals.

- **South Africa's Chief Prosecutor Ordered to be Removed from Office⁵**

South African president Cyril Ramaphosa's campaign to tackle state corruption was given a boost after the country's highest court ruled that the chief public prosecutor appointed by former head of state Jacob Zuma must be removed from office. South Africa's constitutional court said on Monday, August 13, 2018 that Mr Zuma abused his powers when he paid a previous national director of public prosecutions R10m (US\$700,000) to step down in order to appoint Shaun Abrahams to the post in 2015. Mr Abrahams "benefited from this abuse of power" and could not continue in his position, the court added. The court also ruled that reinstating the former prosecutor, Mxolisi Nxasana, "would not vindicate the rule of law", requiring Mr Ramaphosa to make his own pick. The ruling gives Mr

³ Angola Press, 17 August 2018, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201808200552.html>

⁴ The Week, August 16, 2018, <http://www.theweek.co.uk/95860/south-africa-s-anc-calls-for-compulsory-land-seizures>

⁵ Financial Times, August 13, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/0643022a-9ee3-11e8-85da-eeb7a9ce36e4>

Ramaphosa one of his biggest chances to remould battered state institutions since he won a battle within the ruling African National Congress to replace Mr Zuma earlier this year (2018).

- **More Than Half of South Africans Say ANC's Future is Uncertain, Poll Shows⁶**

More than half of South Africans say that the future of the ANC is uncertain because of leadership within the party, an Ipsos market survey released on Saturday, August 18, 2018 has shown. The Ipsos Pulse of the People poll, which was conducted from May to June 2018, found that more than 54 per cent of South Africans agreed on this. A total of 3619 randomly selected South Africans were interviewed face-to-face in their homes and home languages by trained interviewers. According to Ipsos, the "feeling of uncertainty is widespread". Over 52 per cent of ANC supporters had also agreed that the future of its party was uncertain, and one in five South Africans felt certain about the future of the party. Ipsos' leadership approval ratings showed that South Africans supported the notion that President Cyril Ramaphosa should be more decisive, adding that his role as a political leader has grown over the last few years and he had enjoyed strong support from many quarters.

- **Angola Unveils New Oil Regulator in Restructuring of Sonangol⁷**

Angola will set up a new regulator for the country's oil industry as the government restructures state-owned Sonangol and seeks to revive falling oil and gas output. Sonangol's role as national concessionaire will be transferred to the National Agency of Petroleum and Gas in the first half of 2019 in a reorganization scheduled for completion in 2020, Oil Minister Diamantino Azevedo said in a statement handed to reporters Wednesday, August 16, 2018. Sonangol, which partners with companies including Total SA and BP Plc to pump oil in the southwest African nation, will focus on the exploration, production, refining and distribution of oil and gas. "The agency will be tasked with conducting bids for new oil concessions, managing production-sharing agreements as well as representing the state in the sharing of profits from oil concessions," Azevedo said. Sonangol will focus on its "core business, making it more efficient and agile."

- **Angola to Exhume Body of Rebel Chief Jonas Savimbi for 'Dignified' Burial⁸**

The body of Angola rebel chief Jonas Savimbi, killed in 2002, will be exhumed before the end of the year so it can be buried "with dignity," his party said Wednesday, August 16, 2018. Isaias Samakuva, the current leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita) made the announcement to reporters after meeting the state president, Joao Lourenco in Luanda. He said he had "received guarantees" from Lourenco that the remains of Savimbi "would be

⁶ News24, August 18, 2018, <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/more-than-half-of-south-africans-say-ancs-future-is-uncertain-poll-shows-20180818>

⁷ Bloomberg, August 16, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-16/angola-unveils-new-oil-regulator-in-restructuring-of-sonangol>

⁸ Daily Nation, August 16, 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Angola-to-exhume-body-of-rebel-chief-Jonas-Savimbi-/1066-4714606-8ceb4s/index.html>

exhumed before the end of the year". The vicious, charismatic and controversial warlord, who fought Angola's socialist government in a 27-year civil war, was killed in a battle against the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government forces on February 22, 2002.

- **Zambia, Angola Visa Abolition Effected⁹**

The Visa abolition agreement which Zambia and Angola signed for diplomatic, official and ordinary passports holders will come into effect on August 16, 2018 to see citizens of the two countries cross borders without visa requirements. Zambia and Angola agreed on May 2, 2018 to waive Visa requirements for their citizens traveling between the two countries. Journalists were told at a briefing in Lusaka on August 15, 2018 that the agreement applies to nationals of respective countries who hold valid diplomatic, official and ordinary passports who intend to enter the territory of the other for tourism, family visits, official and private business as well as in transit without a visa.

- **Angola Court Acquits 13 Cabinda Separatists¹⁰**

Thirteen separatists in an oil-rich enclave on Africa's west coast ruled by Angola have been acquitted of charges of crimes against state security, local media said on Friday, August 17, 2018. The activists are members of a small secessionist group, the Cabinda Independence Movement, whose organisation is seeking "dialogue" with Luanda on holding a referendum on self-determination. They were arrested during a meeting to organise a public debate on the enclave's autonomy. They were charged with crime against state security. The interior ministry said "hostile propaganda material" had been seized. In court, the activists said they had informed the authorities of the planned debate and even invited Cabinda's provincial governor, political parties and churches to participate in it. The judge ruled that the meeting was not illegal.

- **UN Accuses Zambia of Breaking International Refugee Law¹¹**

The United Nations (UN) has started investigating Zambia for abrogating international law when it arrested and sent back Zimbabwean nationals who were seeking asylum in Zambia. The asylum seekers were led by that country's opposition leader Tendai Biti. The UN says returning an asylum seeker to a country where he/she is fleeing is a serious violation of international refugee law. The USA has already threatened to impose sanctions on Zambia and the Watchdog understands that EU countries might do the same. But the Zambian government has already said it does not regret sending the asylum seekers to their enemies. Zambian government spokeswoman Dora Siliya says Zambia does not keep criminals like Biti who are fleeing the law. Siliya said Zambia is a sovereign state and can't be bullied by colonial powers.

⁹ Lusakatimes.com, August 15, 2018, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/08/15/zambia-angola-visa-abolition-effected/>

¹⁰ News24, August 17, 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/angola-court-acquits-13-cabinda-separatists-20180817>

¹¹ Zambian Watchdog, August 13, 2018, <https://www.zambiawatchdog.com/un-accuses-zambia-of-breaking-international-refugee-law/>

- **Police ‘Cooked Up’ Documents Used to Drag Biti from Zambia¹²**
 Police "cooked up" documents used to drag MDC Alliance principal Tendai Biti from Zambia, where he had sought asylum, a court heard on August 17, 2017. This was revealed by Biti's lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa who appeared together with Alec Muchadehama and Harrison Nkomo during the continuation of the former Finance minister's trial. Biti is challenging the court's authority to prosecute him. Mtetwa proved to the court that the investigating officer, Jealous Nyabasa, did not have deportation documentation authorising Biti's extradition from Zambia. She also accused Nyabasa of ignoring a court order showing that the Lusaka High Court was due to hear Biti's asylum petition on August 8, 2018.
- **38th SADC Summit Kicks Off in Namibia¹³**
 The 38th Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has kicked off in Windhoek, Namibia. The two day summit will focus on the theme Promoting Infrastructure Development and Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development. Issues of economic integration - the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement, as well as the recent Zimbabwean elections are among some of the other topics expected to come up over the weekend.
- **Zim, Botswana Upgrade Ties¹⁴**
 Zimbabwe and Botswana have upgraded their relations from a Joint Commission to Bi-National Commission in a move that will see the presidents of both nations meeting annually to digest important socio-political and economic matters. President Mnangagwa and Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi witnessed the signing of the Bi-National Commission by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Minister Dr Sibusiso Moyo and Botswana's International Affairs and Cooperation Minister, Dr Unity Dow, on Saturday, August 18, 2018 on the sidelines of the just-ended 38th sadc summit held in Windhoek, Namibia.
- **Botswana's Role in Addressing Climate Change Raises Eyebrows¹⁵**
 Botswana, among other African governments that are signatories to the Paris Agreement, is trying to juggle development with climate change mitigation and adaptation. To this end, Botswana has not phased out the use of coal, in fact, its plans to increase its coal fleet from seven plants to twenty-seven point to its increasing reliance on fossil fuels. The country's actions are inspired by the fact that Botswana is heavily dependent on neighbours, largely South Africa, for its energy sources. With a view of harmonising its balance of trade by reducing the import bill, Botswana decided to tap on its massive coal reserves to produce

¹² Buylawayo 24 News, August 18, 2018, <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-143315.html>

¹³ 702, August 17, 2018, <http://www.702.co.za/articles/315839/38th-sadc-summit-kicks-off-in-namibia>

¹⁴ The Herald, August 20, 2018, <https://www.herald.co.zw/zim-botswana-upgrade-ties/>

¹⁵ News Day, August 16, 2018, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/08/botswanas-role-in-addressing-climate-change-raises-eyebrows/>

electricity for its domestic consumption and exportation. This resolution has raised eyebrows.

- **Tanzania's Ruling Party Responds to US Criticisms Over By-election¹⁶**

Tanzania's ruling party on Saturday, August 18, 2018 responded to criticisms by the United States over its August 12 by-election, saying it is an independent country and cannot be intimidated. The United States Embassy in Tanzania had said the East African nation's local by-election was marred by violence and irregularities. Bashiru Ally, Secretary General of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party also known as the Party of the Revolution, told a public meeting that it is not ready to "accept any interference on our governance, adding "we will continue to govern ourselves". The United States is one of Tanzania's largest donors.

- **Pressure Piles on Tanzania, Burundi to Approve EAC Deal on Double Taxation¹⁷**

Pressure is piling on Tanzania and Burundi to ratify tax harmonisation agreement signed eight years ago to boost trade among East African Community partner states. East African Business Council noted that slow pace in ratifying the document makes it difficult for Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda to implement the agreement which would make it attractive for businesses to expand operations in East Africa. "We have witnessed a decline in intra-trade among the Partner States as many companies shy away from expanding within the region due to the fear of double taxation, this needs not to be the case as we have a document to address all these," said Adrian Njau, East African Business Council Trade and Policy Advisor. The Agreement was signed by five-EAC Partner States on November 2010 but so far, it's only Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda who have ratified the agreement.

- **India, Mauritius Discuss Maritime Cooperation¹⁸**

India and Mauritius on Sunday, August 19, 2018 discussed maritime cooperation during a meeting between Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth on the sidelines of the 11th World Hindi Conference. "Connecting with a maritime neighbour!" Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar tweeted following the meeting. Both leaders discussed how to deepen special ties between the two countries, Kumar said. India and Mauritius agreed to cooperate in the Blue Economy sector in the Indian Ocean during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit here in 2015.

¹⁶ Africa News, August 19, 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/08/19/tanzania-s-ruling-party-responds-to-us-criticisms-over-its-by-election/>

¹⁷ Standard Digital, August 15, 2018, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2001292035/tanzania-burundi-delay-eac-deal-on-double-taxation>

¹⁸ Financial Express, August 19, 2018, <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/india-mauritius-discuss-maritime-cooperation/1285549/>

- **11th World Hindi Conference Starts in Mauritius Capital Port Louis**¹⁹
 The 11th World Hindi Conference has started in Port Louis the capital of Mauritius. In her opening address, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said that language and culture has deep rooted relation and the theme of this year conference is “Hindi World and Indian Culture”. After the inauguration session, a condolence meeting was held in the memory of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. During the three day conference more than 2000 delegates from 20 countries including India will deliberate on eight sub topics related to language and Culture.
- **Somalia: Daesh Imposes Tax on Local Businesses**²⁰
 A militant group associated with Daesh in Syria and Iraq has started levying taxes on businesses in Somalia, *Garowe Online* reported on August 15, 2018. “The traders and businesses in Bosaso city continue to work in fear after being asked huge sums of money by Islamic State [Daesh] branch in the region,” a local businessman said anonymously. “Al-Shabaab has been and is collecting taxes in the past without killing anyone or threatening. This is a new problem initiated by the Islamic State-linked group in the region.” In early August this year, Abdullahi Ali Omar, a deputy manager of a telecommunications company Golis was killed as he walked out of a mosque. The Daesh-backed group closed the company in the town of Qandala, some 75 kilometres east of Bosaso, days before Omar’s targeting. It is unconfirmed whether the killing is related to unpaid taxes. According to *Garowe Online*, Somalia’s Daesh fighters collect some US\$72,000 in taxes from businesses and the wealthy. This is to be noted that Al-Shabaab has ordered a special unit to hunt down and target any of its members that have defected to Daesh. Any form of pro-Daesh sentiment in Al-Shabaab territory leaves people liable for arrest or death.
- **Uganda President’s Car Attacked, Damaged in Campaign**²¹
 A hotly contested by-election in Northern Uganda turned violent Monday, August 13, 2018 evening, when unknown assailants shot a driver on the opposition side. A window in President Yoweri Museveni’s car was smashed in the chaos. Police have since arrested two journalists and dozens of opposition supporters, an act that human rights groups are calling an abuse of power. Violence rocked the Arua district of Northern Uganda as President Yoweri Museveni and legislator Robert Kyagulanyi, commonly known as Bobi Wine, campaigned for candidates in the by-election. The chaos erupted just after candidates and their supporters were heading back to their offices and homes after campaigning.

¹⁹ All India Radio, August 18, 2018, <http://www.newsonair.com/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=351677>

²⁰ Middle East Monitor, August 16, 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180816-somalia-daesh-imposes-tax-on-local-businesses/>

²¹ Voice of America, August 14, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/uganda-president-s-car-attacked-damaged-in-campaign/4528197.html>

- **At Least 40 Killed by Paramilitaries in Eastern Ethiopia**²²

At least 40 people were killed by paramilitary forces in eastern Ethiopia over the weekend (11-12 August), a senior regional official said on Monday, August 13, 2018 in the latest spate of violence driven by ethnic divisions. Unrest first broke out along the border of the country's Somali and Oromiya provinces in September 2017, displacing nearly a million people, though the violence had subsided by April 2018. The Oromiya regional administration's spokesman Negeri Lencho, on August 13, said heavily armed members of a paramilitary force from the Somali region had carried out cross-border attacks in Oromiya's East Hararghe district. "We still do not know why Liyu forces raided the areas on Saturday and Sunday," he said, referring to the paramilitary soldiers. "But we know that all the victims were ethnic Oromos. At least 40 were killed in the attacks." A week earlier, mobs looted properties owned by ethnic minorities in the Somali region's capital Jijiga. The central government said the unrest had been stoked by regional officials who had fallen out with central authorities trying to address rights abuses in the region.

- **SADC Demands End to Sanctions on Zimbabwe**²³

The 38th SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government ended on August 18, 2018 with a call for the international community to lift all sanctions on Zimbabwe. The call by SADC, contained in a communique, comes after the United States renewed its economic embargo on Zimbabwe on August 8, 2018 despite significant strides by President Emmerson Mnangagwa's administration to entrench democracy, open up the economy, respect human rights, and hold free, fair, transparent and credible elections. SADC said: "Summit urged the international community to lift its sanctions against Zimbabwe, and support the Republic of Zimbabwe in her economic and social development efforts." The country has been under Western economic sanctions for 17 years. The embargo prevents Zimbabwe from accessing lines of credit from multilateral financiers like the IMF and World Bank Group in which the US has substantial shareholding.

West Africa and Central Africa

- **Drilling activities of France in Senegal and Mauritania**

France's major oil company Total would start drilling exploratory wells in Senegal and Mauritania by early 2019 as announced by Guy Maurice, Total's head of exploration and production in Africa. Total has increased its exploration activities in Sub-Saharan Africa which is nearly around \$1.3bn in 2017 as published by its annual report. The company has invested billions of dollars in recent projects in Nigeria, Uganda and bought oil fields in Guinea, Namibia, SA and Kenya. It was expected that these projects would increase "African production 7% to 750,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day in 2020"²⁴

²² Euronews, August 13, 2018, <http://www.euronews.com/2018/08/13/ethiopian-forces-kill-at-least-40-in-east-regional-official>

²³ Bulawayo 24 News, August 19, 2018, <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-143335.html>

²⁴ *Business Day* 16 August 2018, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/companies/2018-08-16-total-to-start-drilling-exploratory-wells-in-senegal-and-mauritania/>

- **Mali Election**

On 16 August 2018, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita won Mali's Presidential election for a second term. Ibrahim Keita received 67.2 percent of vote defeating his immediate contender Soumaila Cisse who got 32.8 percent. Presidential election was completed in two rounds. The first round occurred on 29 July whereas the second round was on 12 August that witnessed low turnout, only 35 percent out of Mali's eight million eligible voters on account of volatile security situation. UN recently reported that armed violence increased in Mali's central and northern regions. Before election, there had been allegations of corruption and lack of transparency during registration process. European Union closely monitored the election process.²⁵ Despite this, on 18 August 2018 supporters of Opposition candidate Soumaïla Cissé led a protest against re-election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, claiming that the election was rigged. The protestors, mostly consisted of youths refused to accept Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta as the newly elected President. This section of youth was led by Cheikh M' Bouye Haidara, Mali's most prominent religious leader and popular radio personality Mohammad Youssouf Bathily, known as Ras Bath. Ras Bath said, "It's not because France congratulates you, it's not because Macron congratulates you, it's not because Holland congratulate you, it is not because the United Nations welcomes, Macron is not Ngolo, Holland is not the 'decision maker'. Mali is the only one to decide".²⁶

- **Rise of Ebola in DRC**

On 17 August 2017, the World Health Organisation reported that recent outbreak of Ebola in North Kivu and Ituri provinces nearly killed 44 people. In addition, 51 people had been infected with the virus which included 10 health workers. The epi-centre of the outbreak was Mangina and it was bigger than the previous outbreak, reported 53 cases. The situation became worsened with the growing armed violence that prevented aid workers from giving treatment to Ebola victims. The virus transmitted in entire eastern Congo. WHO has speed up providing a prototype drug called as mAb114, developed in US to treat patients and contain the outbreak in other provinces.²⁷

- **DRC issued global arrest warrant for opposition leader Katumbi**

Presidential election of the DRC is scheduled to be held on 23 December 2018. It was announced earlier that 8 August would be the deadline to register as a

²⁵ "Mali re-elects Ibrahim Boubacar Keita", Al-Jazeera, 18 August 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/mali-elects-ibrahim-boubacar-keita-180817182856703.html>

²⁶ "Mali: opposition supporters protest Keïta's re-election", <http://www.africanews.com/2018/08/18/mali-opposition-supporters-protest-keita-s-re-election/>, 18 August 2018.

²⁷ CNN, 17 August 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/08/17/health/congo-ebola-outbreak-update-bn/index.html>

candidate for presidential election. Moise Katumbi, multi millionaire businessman expressed a desire to return to country to contest Presidential election. This earlier leading presidential contender was living in self imposed exile in Belgium since 2016. He was the former governor of mineral rich Katanga province and had fall out with President Joseph Kabila and received a three year jail term for property fraud. The government of DRC on 16 August 2018 declared an international arrest for leader Moise Katumbi. The arrest warrant was issued to many African and European countries.²⁸

- **China finances construction of a motorway in Guinea-Bissau**

On 14 August 2018, Ministry of Public Works, Buildings and Urban Development of Guinea Bissau announced that People’s Republic of China would provide nearly US\$16.5 to construct a motorway in the country. The announcement came at a meeting held between Minister Óscar Barbosa and the Chinese ambassador to China, Jin Hongjun. Chinese based company would carry out the project with a local work force. With the aim of connecting Bissau to Safim town, the motorway will have “three lanes in each direction and its own lighting.”²⁹

- **Canada and US to boost Sierra Leone’s development**

At the heart of Sierra Leone’s capital Freetown, Alie Kabba, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation met with Canadian Minister of International Development Marie-Claude Bibeau on 14 August 2018. Both countries are committed to strengthen bilateral cooperation. Leaders of both nations discussed common priorities such as women and girls’ rights, issues of sustainable and inclusive development and security issues. Canada contributed immensely in improving Sierra Leone’s health sector especially reproductive health. Earlier this month, Alie Kabba had talks with Khadijat Mojidi, country coordinator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Accordingly US would fund \$2 million for the development of a cross boundary solar energy project, aiming to fulfil country’s growing demand for power grid. Khadijat Mojidi said, “The partnership will achieve these goals while increasing total energy generation capacity, increasing the penetration of clean energy technologies in Sierra Leone”. Appreciating both US and Canada’s efforts, Alie Kabba, Sierra Leone’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said, “This will clearly demonstrate that Sierra Leone is a viable investment destination”.³⁰

²⁸ Al-Jazeera, 16 August 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/drc-issues-global-arrest-warrant-opposition-leader-katumbi-180816135118122.html>,

²⁹ <https://macauhub.com.mo/2018/08/15/pt-china-financia-construcao-de-auto-estrada-na-guine-bissau>, 15 August 2018.

³⁰ <http://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/canada-to-help-boost-sierra-leones-development/>, 15 August 2018.

- Opening of First border crossing between Algeria and Mauritania**
 On 19 August 2018, Algeria and Mauritania inaugurated first ever border crossing between both countries in the presence of Algeria's Interior Minister Noureddine Bedoui and his Mauritanian counterpart Ahmedou Ould Abdallah. The border post was opened near Algerian town Tindouf. The border crossing was funded by Algeria at a cost around \$10 million. Border between Algeria and Mauritania stretched over 460 kilometres, often used for smuggling and other illegal activities by terrorist groups.³¹
- US financial assistance for Ghana's agricultural development**
 US hosted a meeting in Accra on 15 August 2018 focussing on U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Feed the Future Initiative experience in Ghana. US government joined hands with Ghana under the theme of 'Ghana beyond Aid' with the objective of promoting agricultural sector in the country. During the event, Steven E. Hendrix, Acting USAID/Ghana Mission Director viewed, "We believe that two mutually-reinforcing factors determine a country's self-reliance. The first is commitment. This is the degree to which a country's laws, policies, actions, and informal governance mechanisms such as cultures and norms support progress towards self-reliance. Second, capacity: how far a country has come in its journey across the dimensions of political, social, and economic development, including the ability to work across these sectors". It is noteworthy to mention that Ghana in recent years committed to become a self sufficient nation, not dependent upon western assistance. US support would be a major boost for Ghana's development to achieve self reliance in that direction.³²

Central Asia

- Tajikistan President Visits Uzbekistan**
 President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon paid a two-day visit to Uzbekistan on 17-18 August 2018 at the invitation of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He held talks with President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at Tashkent and also went to Samarqand. The two leaders discussed issues of bilateral importance and the prospects for further deepening the ties in various areas. They also exchanged views on current regional and international developments that are of mutual interest.³³ Tajik President Emomali Rahmon visited the memorial complex of Islam Karimov in Samarqand. He was accompanied by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.³⁴

³¹ The Punch, 19 August 2018, <https://punchng.com/algeria-mauritania-open-first-border-crossing>

³² <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2018/august-17th/us-govt-partners-ghana-to-promotes-agricultural-sector.php>, 17 August 2018

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Joint Statement of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the President of the Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon," 18 August 2018, <https://mfa.uz/ru/press/news/2018/08/15806/?print=Y>

³⁴ UzDaily, "Tajik President wraps up his state visit to Uzbekistan," 18 August 2018, <https://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-45346.htm>

The two countries signed 26 documents following the talks between the Presidents. The two leaders signed a Joint Statement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The other documents include an agreement on cooperation between the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan and the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, cooperation in the field of television and radio, an inter-region agreement between Khatlon and Sughd regions of Tajikistan and Surkhandarya and Samarqand regions of Uzbekistan.³⁵

China

- **China releases guideline on winning battle against poverty**

On August 19, 2018, China released a guideline on winning the battle against poverty in the next three years to prepare the nation for eradicating poverty by 2020. It is an arduous task to lift a further 30 million people out of poverty in the next three years, said the guideline released by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council. The guideline reiterates the country's target of lifting all rural poor and impoverished counties out of poverty and eliminating absolute poverty by 2020 to build a moderately prosperous society. Poor population should be guaranteed food and clothing and children from poor families should be guaranteed nine-year compulsory education. Basic medical needs and living conditions of poor population should also be guaranteed, according to the guideline. The guideline said poverty relief work should be focused on areas in deep poverty, such as Tibet, mountainous Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province and Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province.³⁶

- **China celebrates first Medical Workers' Day**

Activities were held and promotion videos released for the celebrations of China's first Medical Workers' Day on 19 August to call for respect from society for the country's 11.7 million medical and health workers. The State Council last year approved an application from the health authorities on designating Aug. 19 every year as the country's Medical Workers' Day. Zhang Yanling, President of the Chinese Medical Doctor Association, said the day will be remembered as a milestone in the history of China's health cause and the country's doctors.³⁷

- **Xi requires strengthening CPC leadership, Party building in military**

President Xi Jinping has called for efforts to comprehensively strengthen the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Party building in the

³⁵ UzDaily "Uzbekistan and Tajikistan sign 26 new documents," 18 August 2018, <https://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-45340.htm>

³⁶ "China releases guideline on winning battle against poverty", *XinhuaNet*, August 19, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/19/c_137402580.htm (accessed on August 20, 2018).

³⁷ "China celebrates first Medical Workers' Day", *XinhuaNet*, August 19, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/19/c_137402789.htm (accessed on August 20, 2018).

country's armed forces to ensure a solid political guarantee for the building of a strong military. Xi made the remarks at a CMC meeting on Party building, which was held on August 17 – 19, 2018 in Beijing.³⁸

- **Chinese Premier congratulates Pakistan's new PM on election**

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on August 17 sent a congratulatory message to Imran Khan on his election as Pakistan's new prime minister.

In the message, Li said the relationship between China and Pakistan, which enjoy an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, has witnessed healthy and steady development despite the challenges of time and changing international situation. In recent years, the two countries have deepened political mutual trust, made remarkable achievements in the Belt and Road cooperation, and achieved fruitful results in building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which in all have brought tangible benefits to the two countries and peoples, Li said.

Li expressed appreciation for Imran Khan's positive remarks on firmly supporting the development of China-Pakistan relations, saying he is willing to establish a sound working relationship and personal friendship with the new prime minister, in a bid to carry on the traditional friendship between China and Pakistan, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields, and strive to build the China-Pakistan community of a shared future.³⁹

- **Ark Peace arrives in Tonga for goodwill visit, to provide medical service**

The Chinese naval hospital ship 'Ark Peace' arrived in the Tongan capital of Nukualofa on August 13 for an eight-day goodwill visit and humanitarian medical service. As part of the Mission Harmony- 2018, Ark Peace arrived at Vuna Wharf of Port Nukualofa. Tonga is the fourth stop of Ark Peace's current mission, which had visited Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji.⁴⁰

- **China, Russia vow to safeguard "just and equitable" international order**

On August 15, 2018, Yang Jiechi, a member of the Political bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, and Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev made the remarks when co-hosting the 14th round of China-Russia strategic security consultation in Moscow. Yang said both countries should firmly support each other on issues of major concern, increase coordination within multilateral frameworks, and jointly push for the settlement of international hot-spot issues. The two sides also discussed issues concerning the

³⁸ "Xi requires strengthening CPC leadership, Party building in military", August 20, 2018 <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0820/c90000-9492125.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018).

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Peoples Republic of China, August 18, 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1586409.shtml (accessed on August 20, 2018).

⁴⁰ "Ark Peace arrives in Tonga for goodwill visit, to provide medical service", *The People's Daily*, August 14, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0814/c90000-9490598.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018).

Korean Peninsula, the Middle East and the Iran nuclear deal, and they reached broad consensus.⁴¹

- **First national-level barracks opening activity held in China**

On August 15, 2018, the first opening of barracks to public at national level took place in Wuhan. Soldiers in the two barracks gave performances reflecting their military training. Citizens were also able to take a close look at military equipment and experience daily military life. The participants, including students, civil servants and enterprise employees, were mainly selected via an online test on national defense and a national-defense-themed essay competition. The general office of China's Central Military Commission issued a guideline on opening barracks of the People's Liberation Army in October 2017, and China this July announced plans to open more than 600 barracks to the public during major festivals and days of commemoration.⁴²

- **Xi requires strengthening CPC leadership, Party building in military**

On August 19, 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for efforts to comprehensively strengthen the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Party building in the country's armed forces to ensure a solid political guarantee for the building of a strong military. He made the remarks at a Central Military Commission (CMC) meeting on Party building held from August 17 to August 19, 2018, in Beijing. Xi urged the military to comprehensively implement the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress while noting that strengthening CPC leadership and Party building in the military is a requisite for advancing the “great new project” of Party building and the building of a strong country with a strong military.⁴³

- **China's major land port sees more China-Europe freight trains**

The Alataw Pass port administrative office reported that Alataw Pass recorded an increase in the number of China-Europe freight trains and freight volume in the first seven months of 2018. According to the port's administrative office, more than 1,320 China-Europe freight trains carrying 577,600 tonnes of goods passed through the port in Xinjiang Autonomous Region between January and July this year recording an increase of 32.4 percent year on year. Ten China-Europe railway routes pass through Alataw, reaching 36 cities in 13 European countries.⁴⁴

⁴¹ “China, Russia vow to safeguard “just and equitable” international order”, August 15, 2018, MOFA, PRC, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1585662.shtml (accessed on August 16, 2018).

⁴² “First national-level barracks opening activity held in China”, *Xinhuanet*, August 16, 2018, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-08/16/content_9254546.htm (accessed on August 20, 2018).

⁴³ “Xi requires strengthening CPC leadership, Party building in military”, *The People's Daily*, August 20, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0820/c90000-9492125.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018).

⁴⁴ “China's major land port sees more China-Europe freight trains”, *The People's Daily*, August 15, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0815/c90000-9491130.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018).

European Union

- **Russian President Met German Chancellor Merkel**

Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel met on 18 August 2018 at the Meseberg residence, Germany.⁴⁵ It was seen as largely private ‘working meeting’, and ‘no special’ outcome was expected. Chancellor Merkel stressed on ‘permanent dialogue’ with Russia, despite ‘very serious conflicts worldwide.’ It was the first bilateral visit of President Putin to Germany after 2014. Chancellor Merkel travelled to Sochi to President Putin in May 2018.⁴⁶

- **Travel Ban on German Journalist Tolu Removed**

A Turkish court has removed a travel ban on German journalist Mesale Tolu. She was arrested by Turkish authorities on terrorism-related charges in April 2017, released in December, but a travel ban was placed on her. The trial against Mesale Tolu would continue.⁴⁷

- **Polish President’s Visit to Australia and New Zealand**

Polish President Andrzej Duda reached Melbourne on 17 August 2018. President Duda is on five-day official visit to Australia and New Zealand. It is first ever official visit by a Polish head of state to Australia and New Zealand. Reportedly, he would open Polish-Australia energy forum and meet leaders of both countries and sign ‘contracts and bilateral documents’ on defence cooperation.⁴⁸

Italy

- **Italy demands sanctions on Malta as row over Mediterranean boats escalates**

Italian Transport Minister Danilo Toninelli accused Malta of shirking its responsibility by not rescuing stricken vessels making the dangerous journey from North Africa. His comments came as a response to deliberations over which of the two European countries should take in 190 migrants rescued this week enters its fourth day. Malta refused to come to the aid of a migrant vessel which got into difficulties on Wednesday (15 August) but insists it followed international law. The boat was in international waters when it broadcast a distress message. Once closer to the Italian island of Lampedusa, the Italian coastguard vessel Diciotti picked it up. But the ship has been set off Lampedusa for the past four days as officials in Italy and Malta continue to argue over where it should dock. Mr Toninelli, part of Italy’s anti-establishment 5-Star Movement, demanded the European Union open

⁴⁵ President of Russia, Russian-German talks, August 18, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58328>

⁴⁶ Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin tackle tough global topics, DW, August 18, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkel-vladimir-putin-tackle-tough-global-topics/a-45133060>

⁴⁷ Turkey removes travel ban for German journalist Mesale Tolu, DW, August 20, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-removes-travel-ban-for-german-journalist-mesale-tolu/a-45139330>

⁴⁸ Polish president touches down in Melbourne, Radio Poland, August 17, 2018, <http://thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/378210,Polish-president-touches-down-in-Melbourne>

“its ports to solidarity” and agree to take in migrants rescued in the Mediterranean.⁴⁹

Germany

- **Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin tackle tough global topics**

Chancellor Angela Merkel has received Russian President Vladimir Putin on his first bilateral visit to Germany since 2014. Their agenda listed Ukraine, Syria and piped gas for Europe but she dampened expectations. Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Saturday (18 August) she expected "no special" outcomes from her largely private "working meeting" with Putin at Meseberg Palace, a German state guest house an hour's drive north of Berlin. "Controversy" was likely, Merkel said, adding her main goal was to maintain a "permanent dialogue" with Russia, despite "very serious conflicts worldwide." The two leaders had last met in Sochi in southern Russia in May. Putin on arriving in Meseberg called on Europe to assist with refugee returns and reconstruction in war-scarred Syria, where Russia backs President Bashar Assad. Merkel responded that Syria needed constitutional reform and elections.⁵⁰

United Kingdom

- **Jeremy Hunt: EU must change its approach to avoid no-deal Brexit**

Jeremy Hunt has called on the EU to change its approach on Brexit, and said the risk of failing to reach a deal has risen in recent weeks. The British foreign secretary was speaking at the start of three-day tour of continental Europe aimed at persuading member states to back Theresa May's Brexit plan. "I think the risk of a no Brexit deal has been increasing recently," Hunt told journalists in Helsinki. "But it's not what anyone wants and I hope very much that we'll find a way to avoid that." He added: "We do need to see a change in approach by the European commission." Hunt, who became foreign secretary last month after Boris Johnson resigned in protest at May's plan, is also due to meet counterparts in Latvia, Denmark and the Netherlands. While the countries have been strong UK allies, none has budged from the EU's common position on Brexit. Over the summer the prime minister has sent senior ministers on trips across the continent in an attempt to persuade governments of her plan while circumventing the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier. Last month (July) David Lidington, the Cabinet Office minister, went to Paris, while the home secretary, Sajid Javid, was in Portugal, and the business secretary, Greg Clark, took the government's no-deal warning to Rome. May has been to Austria, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, while Hunt went to Berlin. So far the government's attempt to go over the head of Barnier, whose mandate has been agreed by the EU's 27 leaders, has not yielded visible results.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Express, 20 August 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1005515/migrant-crisis-italy-malta-migrant-boats-mediterranean-danilo-toninelli>

⁵⁰ DW, 18 August 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkel-vladimir-putin-tackle-tough-global-topics/a-45133060>

⁵¹ The Guardian, 14 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/aug/14/jeremy-hunt-eu-must-change-approach-avoid-no-deal-brexit>

Greece

- **Greece emerges from Eurozone bailout but under enhanced EU surveillance**
The Greece bailout is reaching its end. In nearly a decade, the country received more than €300bn (£270bn) from a plan agreed by the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund – the “Troika” – in return for a programme of economic austerity that caused significant domestic strife. Having been hit hard by the global financial crash of 2008 and 2009, Greece came as close as any member nation has of crashing out of the eurozone. Salvation has come at a cost however. In the eight years to 2016, a remarkable 400,000 people – most of them young – decided to cut their losses and seek a better life elsewhere.⁵² Mario Centeno, board chairman of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), said in a statement: “For the first time since early 2010 Greece can stand on its own feet. This was possible thanks to the extraordinary effort of the Greek people, the good cooperation with the current Greek government and the support of European partners through loans and debt relief.”⁵³ The country might have achieved budget surpluses – excluding debt repayments – of about 4% in 2016 and 2017, but its hands remain tied on social welfare spending. Greece has already legislated for new reforms for 2019 and 2020 and will remain under supervision for several years.

European Union

- **EU Migrants receive right to remain in UK in the event of no deal**
According to some sources, EU migrants living in Britain will be given the right to remain in the country in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Leaked cabinet papers show ministers plan to take the “moral high ground” by unilaterally granting the 3.8 million EU nationals in the UK the right to stay, *The Daily Telegraph* reported. However the move was also said to reflect concerns of potential labour shortages in key sectors of the economy once Britain is outside the EU.⁵⁴ *The Telegraph* reported that the details would be set out in one of around 80 technical notes due to be published by the government, starting on Thursday, setting out its preparations for a no deal break across a wide range of sectors. It will mean EU citizens in the UK would be able to continue accessing the NHS and the benefits system, regardless of whether British nationals in the EU are granted reciprocal rights.
- **Romanian PM Tells EU: Force Against Protesters Was Justified**
Romania's prime minister on Friday defended the use of force by riot police during a violent anti-government protest that left more than 450 people injured earlier this month. Prime Minister Viorica Dancila sent a letter to EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in which she alleged that other politicians,

⁵² *The Independent*, 20 August 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/editorials/end-greek-bailout-eu-facing-difficulties-brexit-britain-a8498371.html>

⁵³ *The Guardian*, 20 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/20/greece-emerges-from-eurozone-bailout-after-years-of-austerity>

⁵⁴ *Independent*, 20 August 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-latest-eu-migrants-right-remain-uk-no-deal-a8498746.html>

including Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, had tried to "violently remove a legitimate government." She said demonstrators tried to break through police lines protecting the government offices and officers legally responded to the violence. Romania's riot police have been accused of being heavy-handed with the mainly peaceful protesters in the Aug 10 anti-corruption protest. More than 200 criminal complaints have been filed against police. Dancila said authorities were investigating the claims.⁵⁵

Russia

- **Russia and India**

On 19 August, Yuri Slyusar, president of Russia's United Aircraft Corporation (UAC), said that India is not withdrawing from the joint project with Russia for the development of a fifth generation fighter jet. It was in response to a news carried by one of the Indian newspaper which said that India planned to withdraw from the joint project with Russia for the development of a fifth generation fighter jet as India's Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) claimed there was every possibility to develop corresponding technologies independently.⁵⁶

- **Russia and Germany**

Before her talks with President Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel told reporters on 18 August that disagreements in relations with Russia must be resolved through dialogue.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, President Putin on the same day before meeting the chancellor said that Russia attaches great importance to the development of mutually beneficial cooperation with Germany in political, economic and other areas. One of the priority areas is energy. The President recalled that "Germany is the largest buyer of Russian energy resources." Putin noted that Germany is not only a market for the supply of hydrocarbons from Russia, but also an important link in their transit to other European countries. Merkel told reporters ahead of the meeting that Ukraine must maintain its role as a country of transit of Russian gas to Europe, despite the implementation of the Nord Stream-2. Putin, in his turn, replied that the Nord Stream-2 pipeline project would enable Europe to meet its growing demand for energy resources and it does not close off the possibility of gas transit through Ukraine. Putin stressed that Nord Stream-2 is "an exclusively economic project, and it does not close off the possibility of continuing transit supplies of Russian gas through the territory of Ukraine."⁵⁸ Meanwhile on Ukraine, both the leaders said they were ready to

⁵⁵ US News, 17 August 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-08-17/romanian-pm-tells-eu-force-against-protesters-was-justified>

⁵⁶"India, Russia continue joint development of 5th generation fighter jet", TASS, August 19, 2018. <http://tass.com/defense/1017788> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

⁵⁷"Thorny issues in relations with Russia can only be resolved through dialogue — Merkel", TASS, August 18, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/1017734> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

⁵⁸"Energy is one of the priorities of Russian-German cooperation — Putin", TASS, August 18, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1017722> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

continue working on the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. The Minsk Agreement remains the basis of the solution.⁵⁹ At the end of the talks there was no press conference. However, Russian Vice President of the Center for Political Technologies Alexey Makarkin on 19 August said that Berlin is interested in Moscow's initiative concerning the return of Syrian refugees to their home country; it was a focus of talks between the two leaders.⁶⁰ President Putin told Chancellor Merkel that he supports the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland, warning that Europe can't afford another migration crisis. "I remind you that there are a million refugees in Jordan and a million in Lebanon," Putin told reporters alongside Merkel before they went for the talks. He also noted about the 3 million refugee in Turkey which according to him is a huge burden on Europe and needs quick action to resolve it.⁶¹ According to a Russian analyst, the Russian president and German chancellor deliberately decided not to address the media after their meeting "in order not to give Russian and western reporters a chance to misinterpret some specific things."⁶²

- **Russia and Iran Nuclear Deal**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on 18 August, while talking to reporters before talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel stressed the importance of maintaining Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear program.⁶³ For all their differences, Merkel and Putin agreed that they want to preserve the nuclear accord with Iran after Trump withdrew US support for the deal.⁶⁴

- **Russia, Turkey and Iran on Syria**

On 18 August, Russian State Duma [lower house of parliament] Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin and Turkish Parliament Speaker Binali Yildirim noted the success of coordinated actions of Moscow, Ankara and Tehran concerning Syria.⁶⁵ On 15 August, the Russian military said that its forces in Syria will help U.N. peacekeepers fully restore patrols along the volatile frontier between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. "The Russian flag is the guarantor of peace and security on that land," said Lt. Gen. Sergei Kuralenko. He noted that Russian and Israeli officials have maintained regular communications, adding that "operations by Russian military police help ensure the security of Israel." He noted that a top priority for the Russian military police is to help clear mines left by militants. He

⁵⁹"Putin, Merkel ready to keep searching for solutions to Ukrainian crisis", TASS, August 18, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1017720> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

⁶⁰"Experts: Berlin interested in implementing Russia's refugee initiative", TASS, August 19, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1017784> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

⁶¹"Vladimir Putin tells Angela Merkel: EU can't afford a new Syria refugee crisis", *The Strait Times*, August 19, 2018. <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/vladimir-putin-tells-angela-merkel-eu-cant-afford-a-new-refugee-crisis> August 20, 2018.

⁶²"Experts: Berlin interested in implementing Russia's refugee initiative", TASS, op.cit.

⁶³"Putin stresses importance of Iranian nuclear deal", TASS, August 18, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1017721> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

⁶⁴Vladimir Putin tells Angela Merkel: EU can't afford a new Syria refugee crisis", *The Strait Times*, op.cit.

⁶⁵"Russia, Turkey, Iran helped Syrian government fight IS - Russian official", TASS, August 18, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1017689> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

said Russian forces have inspected the demilitarized zone and adjacent areas to help UNDOF map safe routes.⁶⁶

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit North Korea in September**

On August 17, 2018, Singapore's *Straits Times* newspaper reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping is set to visit Pyongyang next month at the invitation of North Korea leader Kim Jong Un to attend the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of North Korea's founding. It will be the Chinese leader's first visit to the North Korean capital since he took power in 2012, and 13 years after the last visit by a Chinese President, when Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao visited in 2005. North Korea's celebrations are set to take place on Sept. 9 and the *Straits Times* said that Xi's visit could still be subject to last-minute changes.⁶⁷

- **Two Koreas agreed to have 3rd Moon-Kim summit in Pyongyang in September**

On August 13, 2018, during a high-level meeting North Korea and South Korea agreed to have their leaders' Summit in Pyongyang next month. Ri Son-gwon, chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, which handles relations with the South, made the announcement after a meeting with his South Korean counterpart, Cho Myoung-gyon, at the border village of Panmunjom. However, the two sides did not agree on an exact date. A summit in September will be tricky to schedule because North Korea celebrates the anniversary of its founding on September 9. Another variable is the United Nations General Assembly, which starts on September 18. There is a chance that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un could push for a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in before the assembly.⁶⁸

- **Act ties Trump's hands on drawdown of troops**

On August 13, 2018, US President Donald Trump signed a defense authorization bill that restricts him from unilaterally reducing the number of American troops in South Korea to below 22,000 military personnel. The John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for 2019, which will be implemented from October,

⁶⁶Dmitry Kozlov and Sergei Gritis, "Russia to help UN with patrols along Syria-Israel frontier", *Fox News*, August 15, 2018.

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/08/14/russia-to-help-un-with-patrols-along-syria-israel-frontier.html> Accessed on August 20, 2018.

⁶⁷ "China's Xi Jinping to visit North Korea next month - *Straits Times*", *Nikkei Asia Review*, August 10, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/North-Korea-at-a-crossroads/China-s-Xi-Jinping-to-visit-North-Korea-next-month-Straits-Times> (accessed on August 16, 2018).

⁶⁸ "3rd Moon-Kim summit in Pyongyang in Sept", *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 14, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3051862 (accessed on August 15, 2018).

allocates \$716 billion to the Pentagon and, in large, focuses on threats posed by China. Under the act, the total number of troops on active duty deployed to South Korea cannot be dropped below 22,000 unless the U.S. Defense Department certifies to Congress that such a reduction is in its “national security interest” and “will not significantly undermine the security of United States allies in the region.” There are about 28,500 U.S. troops currently stationed in South Korea. The bill also notes that North Korea’s nuclear program “poses a critical national security threat” not only to the United States, but threatens the “security and stability of the entire Indo-Pacific region,” including South Korea, Japan and Australia.⁶⁹

- **Moon proposes ‘rail community’**

On August 15, 2018, South Korean President Moon Jae-in proposed using railroads to bring together the two Koreas, Japan, China, Russia, and Mongolia and having the United States as a project partner in an address commemorating the 73rd Liberation Day. “I propose the creation of the East Asian Railroad Community today, encompassing six Northeast Asian countries and the United States,” said Moon. The proposal is in line with Moon’s “New Northern Project,” in which the president envisions re-connecting railroads between the two Koreas so that movement of goods and people can expand as far as into the European continent from South Korea, which has been boxed in geographically due to the peninsula’s division for 70 years.⁷⁰

- **Pompeo hopes for ‘big step’ in nuclear talks**

On August 16, 2018, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that he was hoping for a “big step” in progress with North Korea on denuclearization, raising hopes for some kind of breakthrough in the seemingly stalled Pyongyang-Washington talks. When asked by President Donald Trump how things stood with North Korea during a White House cabinet meeting, Pompeo recounted a series of achievements with the Kim Jong-un regime this year and said his team was “continuing to engage in conversation with them about a path toward a brighter future for the North Koreans. “So continuing to make progress and hoping that we can make a big step here before too long,” Pompeo said. Reports also suggest that Pompeo is expected to visit Pyongyang in the coming days.⁷¹

⁶⁹ “Act ties Trump’s hands on drawdown of troops”, *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 15, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3051902 (accessed on August 16, 2018).

⁷⁰ “Moon proposes ‘rail community’”, *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 16, 2018, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3051952> (accessed on August 17, 2018).

⁷¹ “Pompeo hopes for ‘big step’ in nuclear talks”, *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 18, 2018, koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3052045 (accessed on August 20, 2018).

- **Setting himself apart from Abe, Shigeru Ishiba says he's opposed to Article 9 revision for now**

On August 17, 2018, Former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's main political foe, said that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party should not rush moves to revise the Constitution's war-renouncing Article 9. Ishiba's remark came in response to a statement made by Abe that he will make the issue a major point of contention in the upcoming LDP presidential election. "Revising the Constitution is something every party member really wishes to achieve," the prime minister said. "Whoever becomes president, the party must fulfill that responsibility." Abe also stressed that the LDP should submit constitutional revision proposals to the extraordinary Diet session starting in the fall, presumably including his own proposal to revise Article 9. Ishiba is set to challenge Abe in September's LDP presidential election, which will also determine the next prime minister. Whether the ruling party should push for Article 9 revision is likely to be a focus of policy debates in the two-way race for the LDP presidency. Ishiba has called for deletion of the second graph of Article 9, which denies Japan "the right of belligerency of the state." While Abe wants to retain the second paragraph, however, proposed to add a new clause that would stipulate the legal grounds for the existence of Japan's Self Defense Force.⁷²

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Indonesia to finalise the purchase of Sukhoi fighters with Russia**

Indonesia's international trade director general Oke Nurman on August 13, stated that the Indonesian and Russian governments would soon meet to discuss the technical aspects of purchasing 11 Sukhoi fighter aircraft through a countertrade scheme. Indonesia has agreed to purchase 11 Sukhoi aircraft worth US\$ 1.14 billion from Russia. In exchange, Russia is required to buy at least \$570 million – about half of the aircraft's value – in several Indonesian commodities, such as palm oil, coffee, rubber and tea. Through the working group, he said, Indonesia would prepare a list of commodities it would offer to Russia, while Russia would prepare a list of commodities it wanted to buy, and discuss other goods that did not appear on both lists. Indonesia and Russia had already agreed initially to the commodities that Russia will purchase, but a more detail agreement was needed before the final transaction.⁷³

⁷² "Setting himself apart from Abe, Shigeru Ishiba says he's opposed to Article 9 revision for now", *The Japan Times*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/08/17/national/politics-diplomacy/setting-apart-abe-shigeru-ishiba-says-hes-opposed-article-9-revision-now/#.W3pMfugzaM9> (accessed on August 20, 2018).

⁷³ "Indonesia-Russia working group to discuss Sukhoi 'counterpurchase' details", *The Jakarta Post*, August 14, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/08/14/indonesia-russia-working-group-to-discuss-sukhoi-counterpurchase-details.html> (accessed on August 14, 2018).

- **Malaysia and the US begin their 24th edition of CARAT Malaysia naval exercises**

The U.S. and Royal Malaysian Navy commenced the 24th iteration of Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Malaysia in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, on August 10. The CARAT exercise focuses on the full spectrum of naval capabilities and is designed to strengthen the close partnership between both navies while cooperatively ensuring maritime security, stability and prosperity. According to Rear Adm. Joey Tynch, Commander Task Force 73, “in nearly a quarter of a century of CARAT exercises, we have continued to ensure forward presence, deterrence and sea control each time when U.S. and Royal Malaysian ships get underway together and conduct cooperative exercises”. In this years edition of the exercise fast transport ship USNS Millinocket (T-EPF 4) and a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft will conduct nearly a dozen at-sea exercises with the Royal Malaysian Navy including a gunnery exercise (GUNNEX) to maintain Sailors’ readiness with onboard weapon systems, visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) exercise to increase and maintain proficiency in boarding vessels that may harbour illegal weapons and drugs, and division tactics (DIVTACS) to enhance cooperative fleet manoeuvres. After more than two decades of annual training events between the armed forces, CARAT Malaysia remains a model for cooperation that has evolved in complexity and enables both navies to refine operations and tactics in response to traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges.⁷⁴

- **President Duterte ask China to rethink its actions in the South China Sea**

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in a speech on August 14 stated that China should rethink its conduct in the South China Sea. “You cannot create an island. It’s man-made and you say that the air above this artificial island is yours. That is wrong because those waters are what we would consider international sea. And the right of innocent passage is guaranteed,” he said. According to President Duterte, China’s action in the SCS could lead to a confrontation, possibly with treaty ally the United States in which the Philippines was close enough to be put in danger.⁷⁵

- **PM Hun Sen’s Party wins all 125 seats in the July 29th Cambodian General Elections**

Official results released by Cambodia’s National Election Committee (NEC) on August 15 reveal that the long-ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) has won all 125 seats in the country’s National Assembly after the July 29 general election. According to the NEC the CPP won 4,889,113 of 6,362,241 valid votes, or roughly 77% of the popular vote. It is a much higher percentage than the party, in power since 1979, has ever won at any other election. The Parliament is expected to reconvene on September 5, while the government will be installed the following

⁷⁴ Christopher Veloicaza, “US Malaysia Commence 24th CARAT Exercise”, *America’s Navy*, August 13, 2018, <http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/Pages/US-Malaysia-Commence-24th-CARAT-Exercise.aspx#.W3JlMs4zYdU> (accessed on August 14, 2018).

⁷⁵“Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte says China wrong to police airspace over disputed sea”, *The Straits Times*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippine-president-rodrido-duterte-says-china-wrong-to-police-airspace-over-disputed> (accessed on August 16, 2018).

day. However, as Prime Minister Hun Sen has himself noted, the transition can take place earlier if he wishes. The CPP already controls 58 of the Senate's seats (the other four are held by independents) after elections for the upper house in February. By one estimate, the CPP also controls about 95% of all official positions at the local level. The United States, Japan and Australia, as well as the European Union, has called the general election "illegitimate" after the only viable opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), was dissolved by court order last November and was barred from participating at the polls.⁷⁶

Myanmar

- **Rakhine State advisory panel submits its final report to government**

The Thai-led Rakhine advisory panel on August 16, 2018, submitted to State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi its final report consisting of 12 points to boost the government's implementation of the recommendations of the Kofi Annan-led commission on northern Rakhine. U Win Mara, a member of advisory board, said in a press conference that the most important recommendations the panel made, which the government already implemented was the establishment of an independent inquiry commission on accusations of human rights abuses in northern Rakhine.⁷⁷

- **US sanctions Myanmar military commanders over alleged abuses in Rakhine**

The US government on August 17, 2018 hit four Myanmar military commanders and two military units with punitive sanctions, accusing them of "serious human rights abuses" and "ethnic cleansing" in violently expelling minority Rohingya from their homes. Military and border guard commanders Aung Kyaw Zaw, Khin Maung Soe, Khin Hlaing, and Thura San Lwin were accused of leading violent campaigns against the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine state as well as minorities in Kachin and Shan states.⁷⁸

- **Myanmar asks Bangladesh to stop aid to stranded refugees**

Myanmar has asked Bangladesh to stop providing aid to 6,000 Rohingya refugees stranded on the border between the two countries since a military crackdown prompted a mass exodus of the Muslim minority last year, the foreign ministry in

⁷⁶David Hutt, "Cambodia is now officially a one-party state", *Asia Times*, August 16, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/cambodia-is-now-officially-a-one-party-state/> (accessed on August 16, 2018).

⁷⁷"Rakhine State advisory panel submits its final report to government", *The Myanmar Times*, 17 August 2018, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/rakhine-state-advisory-panel-submits-its-final-report-government.html> (accessed on August 17, 2018)

⁷⁸"US sanctions Myanmar military commanders over alleged abuses in Rakhine", *Mizzima News*, 18 August 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/us-sanctions-myanmar-military-commanders-over-alleged-abuses-rakhine> (accessed on August 20, 2018)

Dhaka said. They are now stuck in a narrow “no man’s land” relying on international aid sent by Bangladesh.⁷⁹

- **UN stands ready to offer more support for Myanmar**

The United Nations agencies stand ready to offer more support to the implementation of recommendations that will provide a lasting solution to the northern Rakhine crisis, said Knut Ostby, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar. “Our intent is to provide Myanmar Government with adequate support to succeed in carrying out all the recommendations in addressing the root causes of the crisis, including freedom of movement, safety and identity for all residing in Rakhine,” he said.⁸⁰

Oceania

- **Australia’s Soft Power Review**

On August 14, 2018, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop, launched the nation’s first ever review of soft power to ensure Australia remains a persuasive voice in our region. The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper committed the Australian Government to conducting a review of the nation's unique soft power strengths and capabilities. The review will explore options for the Government to maximise the country’s soft power, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.⁸¹ The minister argued that “by leveraging our soft power strengths, we can advance Australia’s global reputation and prosperity. These strengths include our economy, multicultural society, world-class education system and sporting prowess, as well as our attractive lifestyle, values, culture, and reputation as a reliable partner, a trusted friend, and a nation of friendly and enterprising people”. She further said that “I encourage industry, academia and the non-government sector, as important soft power actors, to be involved in the review”.⁸²

- **Australia’s WTO Dispute against Canada**

The Turnbull Government is taking the next step in its World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute against Canada’s discriminatory measures affecting Australian wine. In January this year, Australia launched formal WTO consultations against Canada in the hope that it would remove its restrictions on the sale of imported wine in grocery stores, and give Australian wines equal access to the Canadian market. It was the first time since 2003 Australia had initiated formal WTO action.

⁷⁹ “Myanmar asks Bangladesh to stop aid to stranded refugees”, *Mizzima News*, August 13, 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-regional/myanmar-asks-bangladesh-stop-aid-stranded-refugees>

⁸⁰ “UN stands ready to offer more support for Myanmar”, *The Myanmar Times*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/un-stands-ready-offer-more-support-myanmar.html>

⁸¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia, “Soft Power Review”, <https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/soft-power-review/Pages/soft-power-review.aspx> (accessed on August 16, 2018)

⁸² Minister for Foreign Affairs, “Review of Australia’s soft power”, Media Release, August 14, 2018, https://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2018/jb_mr_180814.aspx (accessed on August 16, 2018)

The Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment said that “we are disappointed that Canada has not taken concrete action to respond to our concerns, which unfairly restricts Australia’s wine trade, and is inconsistent with Canada’s WTO obligations”. Australia has now requested the WTO establish a panel to resolve our dispute with Canada. Wine is an important export for Australia and helps create and support Australian jobs. Canada is Australia’s fourth largest export market for wine, currently valued at \$187 million. The minister also said that “consistent with our strong bilateral relationship, Australia remains open to discussing resolution of our concerns with Canada”.⁸³

- **Malcolm Turnbull’s Prime Ministership is in a critical condition**

Malcolm Turnbull’s government is undergoing a tough situation. A growing number of Liberals over recent days has despaired of Turnbull’s leadership and lined up to ask Peter Dutton to challenge him. Supporters of Peter Dutton say the Home Affairs Minister is leaning towards challenging Malcolm Turnbull for the Prime Ministership and has the numbers to win, amid a crisis over energy policy and a new poll showing support for the Coalition has slumped. From the beginning, many liberals were resentful of Turnbull for tearing down a conservative Prime Minister in the form of Tony Abbott. And they were suspicious of his ideological identity. Dutton is the candidate of the Liberal conservatives’ faction. There is also a possibility of Julie Bishop, the leading moderate alternative, may decide to run.⁸⁴ An exclusive Fairfax-Ipsos poll shows the Coalition has suffered a horror slump in its primary vote from 39 to 33 per cent over the past month amid open disputes on energy and speculation over the leadership.⁸⁵ However, when asked by the media whether his leadership was under threat, the Prime Minister Turnbull declared, “I enjoy the confidence of the cabinet and my party room.”⁸⁶

- **Former UNDP head in Solomons to encourage women candidates**

The former head of the United Nations Development Programme, Helen Clark, is opening a women’s summit in Solomon Islands on August 20, 2018. The National Women’s Leadership workshop focuses on supporting women’s participation in the country’s upcoming general elections. Ms Clark, who is also a former New

⁸³ Minister of Trade, Tourism and Investment, Government of Australia, Media Release, August 15, 2018, https://trademinister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2018/sc_mr_180815.aspx (accessed on August 17, 2018)

⁸⁴Peter Hartcher, “Malcolm Turnbull’s prime ministership is now in a critical condition”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/malcolm-turnbull-s-prime-ministership-is-now-in-a-critical-condition-20180819-p4zyf6.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018)

⁸⁵ Peter Hartcher & David Crowe, “Fairfax-Ipsos poll: Voter support collapses as Peter Dutton leans towards challenging Malcolm Turnbull”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/fairfax-ipsos-poll-voter-support-collapses-as-peter-dutton-leans-towards-challenging-malcolm-turnbull-20180819-p4zye9.html> (accessed on August 17, 2018)

⁸⁶David Crowe, “Malcolm Turnbull removes all climate change targets from energy policy in fresh bid to save leadership”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/malcolm-turnbull-removes-all-climate-change-targets-from-energy-policy-in-fresh-bid-to-save-leadership-20180820-p4zyht.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018)

Zealand prime minister, is to share her experiences as a parliamentarian with women, youth and national leaders. She is due to give the workshop's keynote address titled "Inclusion and Equality: Why women's political leadership matters". The Honiara meeting seeks to connect local, intending women candidates with established female political leaders from around the Pacific region. Ms Clark is expected to stay in the country for four days.⁸⁷

- **Tonga's Supreme Court rules in favour of PM in China space case**

The transfer of nearly \$US50 million in Chinese aid grants to the company managing Tonga's orbital space, Tongasat, was not approved by government, the country's Supreme Court has ruled. On Friday, the court found in favour of Prime Minister 'Akilisi Pohiva and Tonga's Public Service Association, in their five year battle against Tongasat. The case concerns two payments totalling \$US49.9 million, which China made to Tonga after it was found to have placed a satellite in Tonga's orbital space in 2006. Despite a revenue sharing agreement between Tonga's government and Tongasat, 93 percent of the funds were transferred to the privately owned company. The Supreme Court ruled that because the funding was grant aid, it was public money for the government to use. It ruled it was satisfied that Tonga's cabinet had agreed to accept the grant aid funds and not to share them with Tongasat. The judgement argued that "it is difficult to see why the PRC (People's Republic of China) would have any interest in advancing the commercial interests of Tongasat".⁸⁸

North America

Canada

- **Trudeau formally announces he'll run again in next year's election**

The Liberal leader formally announced his nomination at a party event in his Montreal riding of Papineau. The partisan crowd cheered as Trudeau reaffirmed his belief in what he called "positive politics," and took jabs at Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer, whom he accused of exploiting fear and division. The Liberal leader also promised to tackle a number of challenges that include protecting Canada's oceans, raising the standard of living for Indigenous Peoples and narrowing the gap between rich and poor.⁸⁹

⁸⁷"Helen Clark in Solomons to encourage women candidates", *RNZ*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/364479/helen-clark-in-solomons-to-encourage-women-candidates> (accessed on August 20, 2018)

⁸⁸"Tonga's Supreme Court rules in favour of PM in China space case", *RNZ*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/364491/tonga-s-supreme-court-rules-in-favour-of-pm-in-china-space-case> (accessed on August 20, 2018)

⁸⁹ The Canada Press, "Trudeau formally announces he'll run again in next year's election," <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/trudeau-run-papineau-1.4791248>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

- Justin Trudeau feels heat over open-door policy for asylum-seekers**

It was a single tweet, but it is one that has come to haunt Justin Trudeau. On January 28 last year, only days after Donald Trump was sworn in as US President, the Canadian Prime Minister took a deliberate shot at Trump's hardline immigration policies by trumpeting how Canada had an open door for refugees. Eighteen months on, Trudeau's tweet has rebounded on him. Canada is facing a reckoning about what sort of country it wants to be as a surge in the number of asylum-seekers tests its tolerance and its self-proclaimed pride as a traditional haven for refugees. Now Trudeau, who initially was feted for his generosity to asylum-seekers, is facing a political and public backlash for failing to control Canada's borders. "Justin Trudeau had a message of asking Canadians to have trust in our immigration system," leader of the opposition Conservative Party Andrew Scheer says. "The problem is Canadians don't have trust in the Liberals to manage it."⁹⁰
- Canada on the Sidelines as U.S. and Mexico Near an Agreement on Nafta**

When officials from the United States, Canada and Mexico gathered a year ago to begin negotiations over the North American Free Trade Agreement, many of those involved in the talks assumed there would be a hard road ahead. But few of them would have anticipated the current state of affairs: frayed relations between the United States and Canada, traditionally close economic and political partners, and a growing bond between the United States and Mexico, which President Trump has accused of stealing American manufacturing jobs. The United States and Mexico appeared close to agreeing on how to revise the 24-year-old Nafta deal. Canada, which has become one of Mr. Trump's favorite foils in his fight over global trade, was not party to the talks. Negotiators from the three countries have sought to present the situation as normal. They say the United States and Mexico are focused on working out differences that are specific to them, especially in relation to the agriculture and automobile industries, and that Canada would return to the talks once those matters were resolved. In a statement, Adam Austen, a Canadian government spokesman, said the country's foreign minister, ambassador to the United States and negotiating team were "in regular contact with their counterparts" and looked forward "to continuing these important discussions in the coming weeks."⁹¹

The United States

- Iran likely to be a thorny issue at the upcoming India-US 2+2 dialogue**

: Iran will remain a thorny issue between India and US as both countries prepare for the first high-level 2+2 dialogue between Sushma Swaraj-Nirmala Sitharaman and Mike Pompeo-James Mattis here in a couple of weeks. The key problem India is wrestling with is this — during the Obama administration sanctions on Iran,

⁹⁰ Camroon Stewart, "Justin Trudeau feels heat over open-door policy for asylum-seekers," <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/justin-trudeau-feels-heat-over-opendoor-policy-for-asylumseekers/news-story/2d2ae0ad53fa870189ba81faf4a6731d>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

⁹¹ Ana Swanson, "Canada on the Sidelines as U.S. and Mexico Near an Agreement on Nafta," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/17/us/politics/nafta-canada-mexico.html>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

"significant reductions" in oil imports from Iran was quantifiable to a 20 percent reduction every six months. In the Trump administration, India is not clear what that means, especially as it pushes for some understanding from the US. The US's newly appointed special representative on Iran, Brian Hook, told reporters, "... our goal is to reduce every country's import of Iranian oil to zero by November 4, and we are prepared to work with countries that are reducing their imports on a case-by-case basis. Those sanctions will come into effect on November 5. Those will include sanctions on Iran's energy sector, transactions by foreign financial institutions with the Central Bank of Iran, Iran's shipping and shipbuilding sectors, among others. The atmosphere between US and India is considerably lighter after India got a waiver in the CAATSA provisions and a tier-1 approval in the strategic trade authorization (STA) by the US. However, some concerns remain.⁹²

- **Mattis Criticizes Chinese Aggression During South American Tour**

Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis has cautioned South American allies against Chinese aggression, slamming what he called China's "predatory economics" and its militarization of increasingly important areas in both sea and space. Speaking to a group of military students in Rio de Janeiro, Mattis called for partnering with Brazilians to defend American assets in space, adding that steps toward building a U.S. Space Force were reactionary based on Chinese and Russian attack capabilities. He provided the example of when China used a missile to destroy one of its satellites in space in 2007. Mattis also criticized China's placement of weapons and other defense assets in the disputed South China Sea, home to one of the world's most important trade routes. Mattis also criticized China's placement of weapons and other defense assets in the disputed South China Sea, home to one of the world's most important trade routes. Mattis cautioned against Chinese deals in the Americas, citing last December when Sri Lanka had to handover a port to Beijing for 99 years, after failing to make its payments on loans from China.⁹³

- **Pompeo to visit Pak. on September 5**

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is likely to visit Pakistan in the first week of September to hold talks with Prime Minister Imran Khan, a media report said. Mr. Pompeo, who is expected to be in Islamabad on September 5, would be the first foreign dignitary to meet Prime Minister Khan, Dawn reported, quoting diplomatic and official sources. The paper said Mr. Pompeo may focus on the flagging bilateral ties and the Afghan peace process.⁹⁴

⁹² Indrani Bagchi, "Iran likely to be a thorny issue at the upcoming India-US 2+2 Dialogue," <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/iran-likely-to-be-a-thorny-issue-at-the-upcoming-india-us-22-dialogue/articleshow/65465039.cms>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

⁹³ Carla Babb, "Mattis Criticizes Chinese Aggression During South American Tour," <https://www.voanews.com/a/mattis-south-america-trip/4529266.html>, Accessed on 18 August 2018.

⁹⁴ PTI, "Pompeo to visit Pak. on September 5," <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/pompeo-to-visit-pak-on-september-5/article24733554.ece>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

Mexico

- **Mexico to get a taste of Indian culture in October**

With India's participation as Guest of Honour at Cervantino Festival in 2018 and International Book Festival in 2019, India's cultural, literary, touristic and people to people ties will be greatly reinforced."No other country has received this kind of honour to be chief guest at two biggest festivals consecutively. This will no doubt enhance the soft power footprint of India in Latam region to an unprecedented scale," Muktesh Pardeshi, ambassador of India to Mexico. Also, at the inauguration at the 46th Cervantino International Festival in October, India will present A passage to Bollywood by Ashley Lobo, which has been carefully selected to promote Bollywood in Latam region.

This programme will be presented before an audience of 8000 people, the envoy informed. The event starting from October 10 will have more than 100 Indian cultural events, covering 30 cities in Mexico. It is considered to be the largest event of its kind in the Spanish speaking world, hosting over 20,000 book professionals from 47 countries each year. It also welcomes over 800 writers from across the globe.⁹⁵

- **U.S. drops agriculture demand from NAFTA talks: Mexico farm lobby**

The United States has dropped a contentious demand from the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement to impose restrictions on Mexican agricultural exports, Mexico's top farm lobby said. Andrade said the move followed a lobbying effort that sought to show that the "seasonality" demand stood to benefit a small fraction of U.S. agricultural producers while putting many other U.S. farmers at risk from Mexican retaliation. The withdrawal of the seasonality measure would allow U.S. and Mexican negotiators to focus on the remaining outstanding issues when they reconvene for talks. Officials say that Canada, which has not taken part in the latest talks while the United States and Mexico resolve their differences, could soon be asked back to the negotiating table.⁹⁶

- **Mexico's new president has a radical plan to end the drug war**

Since the military took to the streets to fight the increasingly powerful and violent cartels producing and trafficking drugs north to consumers in the United States, tens of thousands of Mexicans have died. And a broken police and judicial system means perpetrators are almost never held accountable for a disappearance or murder. But Mexico's next president, Mr. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has promised national reconciliation and peace and an end to more than a decade of the drug war. His advisers have proposed sending drug war-fighting soldiers back to their barracks, pardoning nonviolent drug offenders, and boosting social

⁹⁵ Huma Siddiqui, "Mexico to get a taste of Indian culture in October," <https://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/mexico-to-get-a-taste-of-indian-culture-in-october/1278002/>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

⁹⁶ Sharay Angulo, "U.S. drops agriculture demand from NAFTA talks: Mexico farm lobby," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-nafta/u-s-drops-agriculture-demand-from-nafta-talks-mexico-farm-lobby-idUSKCN1L400A>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

programs, repeating slogans like, “Hugs, not gunshots,” on the campaign trail. If the incoming president gets his way, this will be Mexico’s first major split from the US on crime-fighting and drugs in decades. But the obstacles are many, and it remains to be seen if the new president has the lasting support and the resources to end the drug war.⁹⁷

Region: Latin America and the Caribbean

Argentina

- **With recession looming, Argentina's Macri lacks options to defend peso**
With interest rates sky-high and the economy heading for recession, Argentina’s President Mauricio Macri is running short of options to stem a slide in the peso, economists say, leaving the battered currency at the mercy of volatility in emerging markets. Macri’s government has already taken a series of measures to restore confidence in the peso since it came under pressure in May, reviving memories of a painful 2002 economic crisis in Latin America’s third-largest economy. But jitters returned in recent weeks as Turkey’s financial crisis roiled emerging markets, after Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan clashed with U.S. President Donald Trump. Emerging market investors were already unnerved by the U.S.-China trade tensions and the Federal Reserve’s tightening. Confidence in Argentina was also shaken by a major corruption scandal in the construction sector, expected to damage economic growth already hit by a drought that crippled vital agricultural production.⁹⁸
- **Argentina to File Case Against Venezuela at Hague, Macri Says**
Argentina plans to ask the International Criminal Court to investigate Venezuela’s government for crimes against humanity, as other nations in the region step up efforts to isolate Venezuela. Argentina is working with Chile, Paraguay and Colombia on the request and may file something before the court in the coming weeks, President Mauricio Macri told CNN in an interview. Macri also said chances were low that an attack carried out near Maduro as he spoke at an Aug. 4 military parade was an attempt on the leader’s life. Maduro cracked down on opposition members last week after blaming political opponents and neighboring Colombia for explosions at a Caracas military parade. Maduro called the incident an attempt to kill him and usher in change in Venezuela, the world’s largest holder of oil reserves. The U.S. has placed a series of sanctions on government officials as it seeks to cut off the supply of money to those around Maduro.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ James Fedrick, “Mexico’s new president has a radical plan to end the drug war,” <https://www.vox.com/2018/8/15/17690420/mexico-president-amlo-drug-war-cartels-violence-legalization>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

⁹⁸ Hugh Bronstien, “With recession looming, Argentina's Macri lacks options to defend peso,” <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-economy-peso-analysis/with-recession-looming-argentinas-macri-lacks-options-to-defend-peso-idUSKCN1L40I6>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

⁹⁹ Andres R. Martinez, “Argentina to File Case Against Venezuela at Hague, Macri Says,” <https://www.bloombergquint.com/politics/2018/08/20/argentina-to-file-case-against-venezuela-at-hague-macri-says#gs.TVIQ6uY>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

Bolivia

- **Bolivia to supply gas to Paraguay, eyeing regional pipeline**

Bolivia and Paraguay will work on an agreement to export Bolivian natural gas to Paraguay and explore building a regional pipeline, Bolivian Energy Minister Luis Alberto Sanchez said. Sanchez told reporters that the presidents of Bolivia and Paraguay will negotiate the possibility of Bolivia exporting gas to Paraguay in the next few weeks. Sanchez also noted the possibility of constructing a pipeline to link the two countries along the Chaco region, so that up to 4 million cubic meters of gas can be exported daily. The semi-arid Chaco region, which stretches across Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina, was the site of the 1932-1935 Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay, sparked in part by the belief that the area was rich in oil. Bolivia hopes to position itself as a regional energy supplier. Paraguay is already a major consumer of Bolivian liquefied petroleum gas (GLP), with around 95 percent of Paraguay's consumption coming directly from Bolivia. Bolivia now plans to expand its GLP exports to other countries, said Sanchez.¹⁰⁰

Cuba

- **Cuba proposes biggest constitutional reform in decades**

Cuba is undertaking its most significant political change in over 40 years, and the government is encouraging citizens to get involved. Thousands of community meetings are being held across the country, so people can share their thoughts on the new draft constitution.¹⁰¹

Paraguay

- **Paraguay's new president takes office, promises to cut poverty**

Former senator Mario Abdo Benitez took office as Paraguay's new president, pledging to cut poverty and fight corruption after winning national elections in April, but major changes to economic policy were not expected. The presidential ceremony was attended by South American leaders and Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen. Paraguay is one of the few countries to maintain regular diplomatic relations with Taiwan. More than a quarter of Paraguayans live in poverty, according to World Bank statistics. While Abdo campaigned on a promise to continue Cartes' business-friendly policies, he also said the country would pursue more aggressive tax policies to increase government coffers. The landlocked South American country is one of the world's largest exporters of soybeans¹⁰².

¹⁰⁰ Xinhua, "Bolivia to supply gas to Paraguay, eyeing regional pipeline," http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/17/c_137397216.htm, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

¹⁰¹ ----, "Cuba proposes biggest constitutional reform in decades," <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/cuba-proposes-biggest-constitutional-reform-decades-180814093108107.html>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

¹⁰² Reuters, "Paraguay's new president takes office, promises to cut poverty," <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1781867/3-paraguays-new-president-takes-office-promises-cut-povert/>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

Venezuela

- **Venezuelan Crisis Escalates as President's Economic Plans Fuel Tensions**

The exodus of Venezuelans gained pace as the government's plans to address the collapsing economy fueled anxiety, while tensions grew in neighboring countries that have strained to absorb refugees. Venezuela's battered business sector warned that President Nicolás Maduro's plans—including a leap in the minimum wage, new taxes and a currency devaluation—would paralyze the economy and drive more people out. About 2.3 million have fled since 2014, according to United Nations estimates. For many who remain, it seems as if Venezuela is splitting at the seams. Rolling blackouts have crimped oil output, energy consultants said. Venezuela's opposition, its leaders at odds over how to deal with the crisis, joined with representatives of some oil workers' unions to call for a national strike, the day Mr. Maduro's economic measures are to take effect. The president's new measures include a new currency called the sovereign bolivar, which will lop five zeros off the existing tender. Many economists said the move fails to address the real cause of inflation: uncontrolled printing of money. The rollout comes as Mr. Maduro plans to raise the minimum wage to about \$30 a month from less than \$1. The president has also pledged to raise the price of subsidized gasoline, which in the past has sparked riots. The plan is for subsidies to be maintained with the national identification Fatherland Card, which critics said is used for social control. Information Minister Jorge Rodríguez said new gasoline prices wouldn't be announced before late September. For ordinary people, Mr. Maduro's measures mean more anguish and uncertainty.¹⁰³

South Asia

Afghanistan

Domestic

- **Ghani announces Conditional Ceasefire**

President Ashraf Ghani on August 19 announced a three month long conditional ceasefire, which would start on August 20 and end on November 19, 2018. He said the ceasefire would only be implemented if the Taliban respect it.

Soon after Ghani's announcement, Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's Secretary-General, welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire. "I encourage the Taliban to demonstrate their concern for Afghans by respecting it," Stoltenberg tweeted.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Kejal Vyas and Ryan Dube, "Venezuelan Crisis Escalates as President's Economic Plans Fuel Tensions," <https://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuelan-crisis-escalates-as-presidents-economic-plans-fuel-tensions-1534723307>, Accessed on 20 August 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Ghani Announces Conditional Ceasefire, *Tolo News*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/ghani-announces-conditional-ceasefire>, accessed on August 20, 2018

- **Taliban reject Afghan ceasefire, kidnap nearly 200 bus passengers**
The Taliban rejected Afghan government's offer of a ceasefire and said they would persist with their attacks, militant commanders said, while insurgents ambushed three buses and nearly 200 passengers travelling for a holiday. Two Taliban 'commanders' said their supreme leader rejected President Ashraf Ghani's offer of a three-month ceasefire.

A Taliban 'commanders' said that the June ceasefire had helped US forces, who the Taliban are trying to drive out of the country. Taliban leader Sheikh Haibatullah Akhunzada rejected the new offer on the grounds that it too would only help the American-led mission.¹⁰⁵

- **IECC Claims Efforts Being Made To Change Election Law**
The Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) said on August 20 that there are some indications that certain elements are trying to bring changes to the final list of Parliamentary candidates and even want to amend the election law. But the IECC did not name those who are allegedly trying to use their influence to change decisions.

IECC secretary Ali Reza Rouhanithat some candidates have not accepted the decision made by the IECC and now they are threatening the IECC and government. Meanwhile, supporters of disqualified candidates are continuing their protests in front of IEC offices in Kabul and several other provinces. According to the IECC, government has announced its support to the commission about the disqualification issue.¹⁰⁶

Foreign/International Affairs

- **Ghazni Is Not Safe For Aid Workers To Enter, says UN**
United Nation (UN) officials said on August 18 that it was not possible for aid workers to safely enter the city of Ghazni after the Taliban attack earlier this week. Jens Laerke, spokesperson for UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that there is no safe way for civilians or humanitarian workers to enter Ghazni. "One of the main reasons for that is that there are IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and mines on the way. We do have capacity to actually spot and map where these mines are, but we do not have the capacity to remove them. That is the responsibility and within the capacity of the national government to do so," Laerke said.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Taliban reject Afghan ceasefire, kidnap nearly 200 bus passengers, *Reuters*, August 20, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-afghanistan-attack/taliban-reject-afghan-ceasefire-kidnap-nearly-200-bus-passengers-idUKKCN1L50HC>, accessed on August 20, 2018

¹⁰⁶ Anisa Shaheed, IECC Claims Efforts Being Made To Change Election Law, *Tolo News*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/elections-2018/iecc-claims-efforts-being-made-change-election-law>, accessed on August 20, 2018

¹⁰⁷ Ghazni Is Not Safe For Aid Workers To Enter: UN, *Tolo News*, August 18, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/ghazni-not-safe-aid-workers-enter-un>, accessed on August 20, 2018

- **US Says It Supports Afghan-Taliban Talks as Kabul Declares Conditional Cease-Fire**

The United States is ready to “support, facilitate and participate in direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban,” U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on August 19, the same day Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced details for a new cease-fire. “The United States welcomes the announcement by the Afghan government of a cease-fire conditioned on Taliban participation. This plan responds to the clear and continued call of the Afghan people for peace,” Pompeo said in a statement.¹⁰⁸

- **Taliban to Attend Afghanistan Talks in Moscow**

The Taliban have accepted a Russian invitation to travel to Moscow to join regional talks on Afghanistan’s future that are likely to exclude the US, people familiar with the decision said. The Taliban’s decision to accept the invitation comes at a time when the group is extending its political engagement with the US, in what appears to be a continuing effort to hedge between rival powers.

Zamir Kabulov, Russia’s Presidential Representative to Afghanistan said that the Taliban had been invited to the talks on September 4, 2018. He said the meeting was “in line with efforts to launch the process of national reconciliation in Afghanistan.” The Afghan Ambassador to Russia, Abdul Kayum Kuchay, said Russian officials had met several times with representatives of the Taliban. “It’s good news that Russia is calling on the Taliban (to come) and wants them to talk with representatives of the government and find a solution to the problem of Afghanistan,” he said.¹⁰⁹

Bangladesh

- **Khaleda too was involved in plot: PM**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday (August 16) said there is no doubt that BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was also involved in the August 15 carnage conspiracy. “Zia's wife [Khaleda] brought self-confessed killer of the Father of the Nation [Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] to parliament by rigging votes. What does it mean? It was not only Zia but also his wife was involved in the conspiracy of the August 15 carnage. There is no doubt,” Hasina said.¹¹⁰

- **US sanctions Myanmar**

The US government yesterday (August 17) hit four Myanmar military commanders and two military units with punitive sanctions, accusing them of “serious human rights abuses” and “ethnic cleansing” in violently expelling minority Rohingya from their homes. Military and border guard commanders Aung Kyaw Zaw, Khin Maung

¹⁰⁸ Ayaz Gul, US Says It Supports Afghan-Taliban Talks as Kabul Declares Conditional Cease-Fire, *Voice of America*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-overruns-northern-afghan-district/4534884.html>, accessed on August 20, 2018

¹⁰⁹ Jessica Donati, Taliban to Attend Afghanistan Talks in Moscow, *Wall Street Journal*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-to-attend-afghanistan-talks-in-moscow-1534776652>, accessed on August 20, 2018

¹¹⁰ “Bangabandhu Killing: Khaleda too was involved in plot: PM,” *Daily Star*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/country/khaleda-zia-also-involved-august-15-carnage-conspiracy-pm-sheikh-hasina-1621723>, accessed on August 17, 2018.

Soe, Khin Hlaing, and Thura San Lwin were accused of leading violent campaigns against the Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine state as well as minorities in Kachin and Shan states. The US Treasury said the sanctions on individuals were meant as a warning to security forces to cease abuses of ethnic and religious minorities and to respect their rights.¹¹¹

- **AL plotting to keep BNP away from polls: Fakhru**

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir on Sunday (August 19) alleged that the ruling Awami League is again 'plotting' to keep BNP away from the next general election. "Awami League doesn't want BNP to join the polls. They're trying to put obstacles in the way of BNP's participation in the election by repeatedly talking about 1/11-like conspiracy," he said. The BNP leader came up with the remarks while talking to newsmen after placing wreaths at BNP founder Ziaur Rahman's grave together with the leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Swechchhasebak Dal, marking its 38th founding anniversary. Fakhru voiced their party's strong resolve to join the next general election overcoming all the obstacles and freeing their chairperson Khaleda Zia from jail.¹¹²

- **BNP won't accept EVM use in election: Rizvi**

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Sunday (August 19) said it will not accept the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in the 11th parliamentary elections as it can create a scope for 'digital vote rigging.' "We've come to know from the media reports that the election commission has taken a move to hurriedly buy 1.5 lakh EVMs. It's in no way possible to hold a fair election using the EVMS," said BNP senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.¹¹³

- **Myanmar tactfully delaying Rohingya repatriation**

Though nervous amid sustained pressure, Myanmar is apparently trying to delay the repatriation process without taking any quick step to create conducive environment in Rakhine for the safe return of Rohingyas. Citing an example, the diplomatic source told UNB that Myanmar made a request to Bangladesh not to use 'forcibly displaced' but to write 'displaced people' during Bangladesh delegation's recent visit to Myanmar. A day after Myanmar's request, Bangladesh side issued a press statement where it mentioned 'forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals'. "This is a clear indication that Bangladesh has not changed its policy while identifying Rohingyas," said the source.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ "Rohingya, Minority Rights Abuses: US sanctions Myanmar," *Daily Star*, August 18, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/backpage/rohingya-minority-rights-abuses-us-sanctions-myanmar-1622356>, accessed on August 18, 2018.

¹¹² "AL plotting to keep BNP away from polls, alleges Fakhru," *Prothom Alo*, August 19, 2018, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/181920/AL-plotting-to-keep-BNP-away-from-polls-alleges>, accessed on August 19, 2018.

¹¹³ "BNP won't accept EVM use in election: Rizvi," *Prothom Alo*, August 19, 2018, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/181928/BNP-won%E2%80%99t-accept-EVM-use-in-election-Rizvi>, accessed on August 19, 2018.

¹¹⁴ "Myanmar tactfully delaying Rohingya repatriation," *The Independent*, August 20, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/163095>, accessed on August 20, 2018.

Pakistan

- **Imran Khan takes oath as 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan**

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan on August 18th formally assumed the office of the country's chief executive following an oath-taking ceremony at President House which was attended by senior PTI members, parliamentarians, services chiefs, diplomats and celebrities.¹¹⁵ PM Imran Khan on August 19th vowed to transform Pakistan into a true "Islamic welfare state" with the focus of his government on overcoming foreign debt, austerity, reforms in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and other institutions, eradication of corruption, retrieving the money stashed abroad and creation of jobs.¹¹⁶ US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo is likely to visit Islamabad in the first week of September for consultations with Prime Minister Imran Khan and his team on issues of mutual interests. He is expected in Islamabad on Sept 5, will likely be the first foreign dignitary to meet the newly elected prime minister.¹¹⁷

- **Afghanistan and Pakistan**

When the Afghan forces fought the Taliban at Ghazni, Afghan Defence Minister Tariq Shah Bahrami alleged that Ghazni attack had been carried out by Taliban with the support of external elements, including Pakistanis. The New York Times had reported that Afghan officials had claimed the Taliban were aided by foreign fighters, including Pakistanis and Chechens, and even some Al Qaeda affiliates. Pakistan Foreign Office rejected on August 16th allegations made by Afghan defence minister and the foreign media.¹¹⁸ The Foreign Office (FO) said on August 18th that Pakistan "strongly rejects" reports alleging that Taliban fighters involved in the Ghazni attack were offered medical treatment in Pakistani hospitals.¹¹⁹

- **Twitter in Pakistan**

On August 15th, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) informed the Senate Standing Committee on Cabinet Secretariat that while Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms complied with requests from the government to block objectionable content, Twitter did not oblige. Director General of PTA's Internet Policy and Web Analysis, Nisar Ahmed informed the committee about last week's Islamabad High Court (IHC) directive to the regulatory body to serve

¹¹⁵ Amir Wasim, "Imran takes oath as PM, picks 21-strong cabinet", *Dawn*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1427897> as accessed on August 20, 2018

¹¹⁶ Syed Irfan Raza, "Imran outlines his vision, says change will begin at top", *Dawn*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1428064/imran-outlines-his-vision-says-change-will-begin-at-top> as accessed on August 20, 2018

¹¹⁷ Anwar Iqbal, "Pompeo to hold talks with Imran next month", *Dawn*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1428061/pompeo-to-hold-talks-with-imran-next-month> as accessed on August 20, 2018

¹¹⁸ "FO rejects charges Pakistanis aided Taliban in Ghazni", *Dawn*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1427500> as accessed on August 20, 2018

¹¹⁹ Naveed Siddiqui, "FO rejects accusation Pakistan provided medical support to militants involved in Ghazni attack", *Dawn*, August 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1427783> as accessed on August 20, 2018

Twitter with a final notice, asking the website to respond to requests from Pakistan or face the risk of being blocked in the country.¹²⁰

- **Switzerland, NAB and Zardari**

The National Accountability Bureau on August 8th told the Supreme Court of Pakistan that Swiss cases against PPP co-chairman President Asif Ali Zardari cannot be reopened as they were time-barred and their statutory limitation period has elapsed. The NAB today submitted a two-page report to the apex court, detailing its findings on the National Reconciliation Ordinance as well as the cases against Zardari.¹²¹

Indian Ocean Region

- **China finds polymetallic sulphide deposits in the western Indian Ocean**

According to the Global Times, China's unmanned submersible Qianlong 2 has found polymetallic sulphide in the western Indian Ocean after operating a record time and voyage length for 257 hours in nine separate underwater missions and covering 654 km of the water body.¹²² "Chinese research vessel Xiangyanghong 10 reached Zhoushan, East China's Zhejiang Province on 12 August 2018 after 250 days in the Indian Ocean, where Chinese scientists surveyed the distribution of polymetallic sulphide, the hydrothermal area, as well as ocean microplastics for the first time, covering southwest and northwest Indian Ocean"¹²³, Global Times reported. In 2011, China got the right from the International Seabed Authority to explore polymetallic sulphide in the area 10,000 square km in the Indian Ocean for 15 years.¹²⁴

- **US grant of \$39 million to Sri Lanka**

The United States announced on 19 August 2018 that it would grant approximately \$39 million in Foreign Military Financing for Sri Lanka, pending Congressional approval.¹²⁵ US embassy in Colombo said, "We look forward to discussing with the government of Sri Lanka how this contribution can support our Bay of Bengal initiative and Sri Lanka's humanitarian assistance and disaster response priorities," it said. It comes as China, the world's second-largest economy, increases investment in ports and other building projects in Sri Lanka -- a key link in its ambitious "Belt and Road" infrastructure initiative."¹²⁶ The US funding of \$ 39

¹²⁰ Jamal Shahid, "Twitter threatened with shutdown in Pakistan", *Dawn*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1427274> as accessed on August 20, 2018

¹²¹ Haseeb Bhatti, "Swiss cases against Zardari cannot be reopened, NAB tells Supreme Court", *Dawn*, August 8, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1425750> as accessed on August 13, 2018

¹²² China finds sulfide deposits in Indian Ocean, 13 August 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1115198.shtml> (Accessed on 20 August 2018)

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ China finds polymetallic sulphide deposits in Indian Ocean, 13 August 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-finds-polymetallic-sulphide-deposits-in-indian-ocean/articleshow/65400113.cms> (Accessed on 20 August 2018)

¹²⁵ Indo-Pacific Funding Announcement, 13 August 2018, <https://lk.usembassy.gov/indo-pacific-funding-announcement/> (Accessed on 20 August 2018)

¹²⁶ Ibid

million for Sri Lanka is part of a US\$ 300 million US package for selected countries of South and Southeast Asia to ensure a "free, open, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region"¹²⁷.

The statement of U.S. Department of State Spokesperson Heather Nauert on August 7, 2018 read "the investment focuses on four key areas that are critical to ensuring a free, open, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. This includes maritime security, humanitarian assistance, and disaster response, also peacekeeping capabilities and countering transnational crime. As part of the maritime security theme, we launched the Bay of Bengal Initiative to help enhance the capacity of civilian and military maritime actors in this vital region, which is home to important sea lanes linking the Indian Ocean to East Asia."¹²⁸

- **Japanese defence minister Itsunori Onodera called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi**

Visiting Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on 19 July 2018. While interacting with visiting Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera, Prime Minister Narendra Modi "welcomed the strengthening of various defence dialogue mechanisms between the two countries, and the enhanced linkages between the armed forces of India and Japan. The Prime Minister also appreciated the progress in defence technology cooperation between the two countries."¹²⁹ "The visit of Japanese Defence Minister was aimed to strengthening military cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the sphere of maritime space, especially with China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean."¹³⁰

Sri Lanka

- **US Foreign Military Financing for Lanka**

The U.S. Department of State announced it will provide about \$39 million in Foreign Military Financing for Sri Lanka, pending Congressional approval. "We look forward to discussing with the Government of Sri Lanka how this contribution can support our Bay of Bengal initiative and Sri Lanka's humanitarian assistance and disaster response priorities," it said in a statement.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Sri Lanka gets US military funding as China looks to gain influence, <http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-sri-lanka-gets-us-military-funding-as-china-looks-to-gain-influence-2649559> (Accessed on 20 August 2018)

¹²⁸ Indo-Pacific Funding Announcement, 13 August 2018, <https://lk.usembassy.gov/indo-pacific-funding-announcement/> (Accessed on 20 August 2018)

¹²⁹ Prime Minister Narendra Modi says Defence cooperation is a key pillar of relationship between Indian and Japan, August 20, 2018, <http://www.newsonair.com/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=351757> (Accessed on 20 August 2018)

¹³⁰ On a visit to India, Japan's defence minister calls on PM Modi, <http://www.ddinews.gov.in/national/visit-india-japans-defence-minister-calls-pm-modi> (Accessed on 20 August 2018)

¹³¹ US Foreign Military Financing for Lanka, 14 August 2018, <https://news.lk/news/world/item/21822-us-foreign-military-financing-for-lanka>

- Pentagon report to Congress notes Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka**
 The Pentagon's annual report to the US Congress on military and security developments involving China, has taken note of Sri Lanka's deal with China on the Hambantota Port. The report says China's leaders increasingly seek to leverage China's growing economic, diplomatic, and military clout to establish regional pre-eminence and expand the country's international influence.¹³²
- Tamils who fled Sri Lanka during the war urged to return**
 Deputy Minister of National Integration, Reconciliation and Official Languages, Seyed Ali Zahir Moulana has appealed to Sri Lankan Tamils, who left the island nation during the three decade-long ethnic war, to return to the country. The Minister said the Sri Lankan Government had taken steps to facilitate those who want to return to the country, especially to the Tamil dominated North-eastern province. "However, people who are settled in different countries are hesitant to return, as they have settled down with families" he said.¹³³
- It is political revenge: MR**
 Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa claimed that the government was using journalist Keith Noyahr's abduction and assault to achieve its political ends and described it as yet another case of political revenge. He told the media who had gathered outside his residence that five CID detectives had questioned him for about three hours in connection with this incident.¹³⁴
- UK Govt. to provide US\$ 1.3 Mn for resettlement in SL**
 The Government of the United Kingdom in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a project worth US\$ 1.3 Million to support more than 2,500 people returning to their homes in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Batticaloa Districts. The UNDP in Sri Lanka recently entered into a partnership agreement with the Government of the United Kingdom to extend support for Sustainable Resettlement of recently released lands in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, a statement issued by the UNDP said.¹³⁵

Maldives

- EU denies Maldives president's claim of fish export ban**
 The European Union Thursday denied claims made by President Abdulla Yameen that the Maldives has been warned of a ban on fish exports as part of threatened targeted sanctions. Yameen said the measures were prompted by his defence of Islamic principles, slamming the alleged meddling in domestic affairs ahead of the

¹³² Pentagon report to Congress notes Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka, 19 August 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/08/19/pentagon-report-to-congress-notes-chinese-involvement-in-sri-lanka/>

¹³³ Tamils who fled Sri Lanka during the war urged to return, 16 August 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/08/16/tamils-who-fled-sri-lanka-during-the-war-urged-to-return/>

¹³⁴ It is political revenge: MR, 17 August 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/It-is-political-revenge-MR-154216.html>

¹³⁵ UK Govt. to provide US\$ 1.3 Mn for resettlement in SL, 16 August 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/UK-Govt-to-provide-US-Mn-for-resettlement-in-SL-154146.html>

September 23 presidential election. “Alarm bells are ringing that our exports could be banned at any time,” he said during a campaign stop on Dhiyamigili island.¹³⁶

- **Ex-pres Nasheed to head opposition candidate Ibu's presidential campaign**
Former President Mohamed Nasheed has taken up the role of campaign manager for the opposition coalition's presidential candidate, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (Ibu). Nasheed, who resides in the United Kingdom under political asylum, is overseeing Ibu's campaign activities from Sri Lanka. In an interview to local media outlet Mihaaru, Ibu had countered the criticism levied against Nasheed which accuses the former president of not being wholly involved in Ibu's presidential campaign.¹³⁷
- **No UN involvement in presidential elections**
The United Nations has decided against being involved in any of the aspects of the upcoming Presidential Election in September, revealed the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator to the Maldives. Aminath Hudha from the Office confirmed that the UN would not observe or monitor the election, telling local media outlet Mihaaru, "The UN Security Council has to make a decision in these cases, but the council has not approved [to be involved in this year's election]."¹³⁸
- **Maldives wants to ‘rid itself of excessive Indian influence’**
The Maldives wants to rid itself of excessive Indian influence and maximize its interests by developing diplomatic ties with all major powers, Chinese state media said. A curious editorial in the Global Times said the Maldives’ request for the withdrawal of the helicopters and personnel was an embodiment of such a desire and sent an important message to all major powers in the Indo-Pacific region. “New Delhi has long regarded the South Asian island nation as its backyard and sphere of influence, with a strong desire to tighten its grip on the capital city of Malé and exclude other countries’ influence,” said the Beijing-based tabloid on 12th August.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ EU denies Maldives president’s claim of fish export ban, 16 August 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/alarm-bells-ringing-of-export-ban-claims-maldives-president-140220>

¹³⁷ Ex-pres Nasheed to head opposition candidate Ibu's presidential campaign, 19 August 2018, <https://edition.mv/news/6893>.

¹³⁸ No UN involvement in presidential elections, 16 August 2018, <https://edition.mv/news/6864>

¹³⁹ Maldives wants to ‘rid itself of excessive Indian influence’, 14 August 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-wants-to-rid-itself-of-excessive-indian-influence-140133>

West Asia

Iraq and GCC

- **Iraqi Sunnis form ‘National Axis Alliance’ to have voice in new government**
Iraqi Sunni leaders established the ‘National Axis Alliance’ in a bid to unite the Sunni political house and have a stronger position in government formation. “We today stand to announce for you a national political alliance seeking to serve the nation and build a state,” read the declaration of the formation of the alliance on August 14. The alliance seeks to depend on a new administrative and political program for running the state. “In a new era, and a new phase through which our honorable nation passes, and in days the Iraqis all look to the future, while they are suffering a great malfunction in all that they need, in services and achievements, and on the basis of unifying the national ranks...” added the statement. Members include: businessman Khamis al-Khanjar, Iraqi VP Osama al-Nujaifi, humanitarian Jamal al-Karboli, former parliament speaker Saleem al-Jabouri, former governor of Saladin Ahmed Abdullah al-Jubouri, among others. The Sunnis will ponder over a candidate to send to the parliament for the position of speaker, like in the past. A prominent Sunni politician, Saleh al-Mutlaq, told Rudaw they haven’t agreed on a candidate yet. Sources have told Baghdad Today that Anbar Governor Mohamed Rikan al-Halbousi has been floated as a candidate for the parliament speaker position.¹⁴⁰
- **Sadr, Abadi form ‘core’ parliamentary bloc with Hikma, Watanyah**
Iraq took a major step closer to forming a new government on August 19, hours after the Federal Court finally ratified the May 12 election result. The joint statement issued after talks between Muqtada al-Sadr, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Ammar Hakim, and representatives of al-Watanyah, reads: “In a national Iraqi decision springing from the interest of our country, and responding to the demands of the people, we agreed today to form the core of an alliance that will seek to form the parliamentary bloc that can form the government.”

The parties said they are open to other partners joining them, insisting the alliance is “cross sectarian and refuses partisanship in all of its forms”. The new alliance “will seek to seriously and actively contribute to forming a government that works seriously to provide services, rebuilds, return IDPs, fights corruption, and holds the corrupt accountable,” the statement added.

The rival bloc is led by former Iraqi PM Nouri al-Maliki. It includes Maliki’s State of Law coalition and Hadi Amiri’s Fatih (Conquest) alliance – a coalition of Hashd al-Shaabi paramilitias. Kurdistan parties are in the middle with each side

¹⁴⁰ ‘Iraqi Sunnis form ‘National Axis Alliance’ to have voice in new government,’ Rudaw, 15 August, 2018, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/150820181>.

competing for their support. “It is clear there are two axes competing on forming the biggest bloc, and this is good politically. But the question is what if one of those axes fails? Will it concede to becoming the opposition? Or will it throw that out of the window and demand to join, even if it means a government of partisanship? On our side, we will commit,” Qais al-Khazali, leader of Asaib Ahl al-Haq, and prominent pro-Iran leader, said in a tweet on Sunday.¹⁴¹

- **US troops to remain in Iraq for post-ISIS stabilization process: spokesman**
“We’ll keep troops there as long as we think they’re needed,” Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) spokesman Colonel Sean Ryan told a press conference in Abu Dhabi, as reported by Reuters. “The main reason, after ISIS is defeated militarily, is the stabilization efforts and we still need to be there for that, so that’s one of the reasons we’ll maintain a presence,” he added.

The Iraqi government announced the defeat of ISIS in Iraq in December 2017, approximately five months after the US-led coalition captured the militant group’s stronghold of Mosul. However, there have since been several ISIS attacks on villages and security forces in Diyala, Saladin, Kirkuk, and elsewhere, indicating remnants of the group have been allowed to regroup in some areas. Ryan said there are roughly 5,200 US troops currently stationed in Iraq, but the number could fall once other NATO member states send their militaries to assist in training the Iraqi army. “Possibly, there could be a drawdown, it just depends on when NATO comes in and they help train the forces as well,” Ryan said.

- **Iran says no OPEC member can take over its share of oil exports**
In a meeting with OPEC Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo, a senior Iranian diplomat urged him to keep the group out of politics. “No country is allowed to take over the share of other members for production and exports of oil under any circumstance, and the OPEC Ministerial Conference has not issued any licence for such actions,” Iran’s oil ministry news agency SHANA quoted Kazem Gharibabadi, the permanent envoy to Vienna-based international organisations, as saying. Trump has called on OPEC to pump more oil to bring down prices. Energy ministers of Saudi Arabia, a U.S. ally, and Russia said in May they were prepared to ease output cuts to calm consumer worries about supply. “Iran believes that OPEC should strongly support its members at this stage and stop the plots of countries trying to politicise this organisation,” Gharibabadi said.¹⁴²
- **Iran finance minister target of impeachment proceedings as sanctions bite**
Iranian members of parliament began impeachment proceedings against the finance minister on Sunday, increasing pressure on the president, who is already facing attacks from hardliners over his handling of the economy amid new US sanctions. A group of 33 MPs signed a motion accusing the minister, Masoud

¹⁴¹ ‘Sadr, Abadi form ‘core’ parliamentary bloc with Hikma, Watanyah,’ August 20, Rudaw, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/190820185>

¹⁴² Iran says no OPEC member can take over its share of oil exports, August 19, The Economic Times, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/iran-says-no-opec-member-can-take-over-i>

Karbasian, of being incapable of managing the economy or forming and implementing policies.

That was enough votes to summon Karbasian to parliament in the next 10 days to answer questions about his record. If lawmakers are unhappy with his answers, they can vote to impeach and sack him - a move they took two weeks ago against Iran's then minister of cooperatives, labour and social welfare, Ali Rabiei, after questioning his achievements.

President Hassan Rouhani is facing a growing domestic backlash since US President Donald Trump in May pulled out of an international accord that had curbed Iran's nuclear ambitions in return for sanctions relief.¹⁴³

- **UAE hits out at Qatar's pledge to invest in Turkey**

In a post on his Twitter page, Gargash referred to a recent visit to Ankara by the Qatari emir and his pledge to help Turkey overcome an ongoing currency crisis and described it as an attempt to "buy sovereignty". "Full sovereignty cannot be bought with money but is achieved by establishing sincere and reliable relations with surrounding countries," Gargash said in his tweet, the daily *Gulf News* reported.

On August 15, Qatar announced that it would provide Turkey with "a host of economic projects, investments and deposits" worth a collective of \$15 billion in a bid to support Turkey's economy. The pledge was announced after the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani held a private meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara. The announcement helped the Turkish national currency lira recover from record lows against the US dollar. Only one day after Qatar pledged the investment, the lira strengthened some 4 percent against the greenback to around 5.75 per dollar.¹⁴⁴

Turkey

- **Italy expects economic attack similar to Turkey**

Italy's Prime Minister Undersecretary Giancarlo Giorgetti said his country could face an economic attack similar to Turkey. In an interview to local newspaper *Libero* on 1 August, he said they were expecting a similar crisis by the end of August or beginning of September as market assaults were affected by small summer trading volumes. "The markets are populated by hungry speculative funds that choose their prey and pounce," he said.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ 'Iran Finance Minister target of impeachment proceedings as sanctions bite,' August 19, The Middle East Eye, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-finance-minister-target-impeachment-proceedings-sanctions-bite-540065481>

¹⁴⁴ 'UAE hits out at Qatar's pledge to invest in Turkey,' August 17, PressTv, <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2018/08/17/571440/Qatar-Turkey-UAE>

¹⁴⁵ "Italy expects economic attack similar to Turkey", World Bulletin, 13 August 2018. <http://www.worldbulletin.net/todays-news/204944/italy-expects-economic-attack-similar-to-turkey>

- Imran Khan lends support to Turkey in economic crisis**
 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman and prime-minister-in-waiting Imran Khan tweeted on Tuesday to lend support to Turkey in face of the economic crisis brought on by sanctions imposed by the United States (US). In his tweet, Imran Khan assured President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that the people of Pakistan “are praying for their success in dealing with the severe economic challenges confronting them” as Turkey is a nation with a “glorious history”.¹⁴⁶
- Turkey crisis: Indian rupee hits new record low as European markets rally**
 European markets turned positive on Tuesday morning, despite the ongoing crisis in Turkey, which pulled the Indian rupee to a fresh record low. The FTSE 100 opened relatively flat but rose in early trading, while the Euro Stoxx 50 was up 0.5 per cent at the open, while Germany’s Dax also added 0.5 per cent. The Turkish lira avoided another sharp decline, despite a lack of progress in addressing Turkey’s economic problems, which “allowed the markets to get off to a decent start on Tuesday”, according to Connor Campbell, financial analyst at Spreadex.¹⁴⁷
- Turkey’s economy under attack not in crisis: MHP leader**
 The recent fall in the value of the Turkish Lira is the result of an attack by the United States, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli has said. “I should stress that Turkey is not in an economic crisis. There is no crisis; there is an attack,” Bahçeli said at a press conference on Aug. 15. Bahçeli vowed his party “will support the government and the state amid this economic difficulty.” The MHP had entered the June 24 parliamentary elections in an alliance with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and endorsed President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the presidential elections.¹⁴⁸
- China: Turkey can overcome 'temporary' economic crisis**
 The Turkish lira has lost about 30 percent of its value against the US dollar since the beginning of August. The currency crash occurred in the wake of tensions with the United States. The detention of Andrew Brunson, an American pastor, in Turkey has cast doubts over the future of Ankara's partnership with Washington.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ “Imran Khan lends support to Turkey in economic crisis”, Pakistan Today, 14 August 2018. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/08/14/imran-khan-lends-support-to-turkey-in-economic-crisis/>

¹⁴⁷ “**Turkey crisis: Indian rupee hits new record low as European markets rally**”, Independent, 15 August 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/turkey-crisis-latest-lira-india-rupee-financial-low-european-markets-ftse-100-a8490666.html>

¹⁴⁸ “**Turkey’s economy under attack not in crisis: MHP leader**”, Hurriyat Daily News, 15 August 2018. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-economy-under-attack-not-in-crisis-mhp-leader-135838>

¹⁴⁹ “China: Turkey can overcome 'temporary' economic crisis”, Press TV, 17 August 2018. <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2018/08/17/571458/Turkey-economic-crisis-China>

Saudi Arabia

- **Yemen war: Saudi Arabia forced to act, says Riyadh's envoy to New Delhi**
In response to "Endless War", the editorial published in The Hindu on August 11, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to India, His Excellency Saud Al Sati, writes:
I am writing to present certain facts that may not have been taken into consideration while writing the editorial. It is important to understand that the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition is providing military assistance to Yemen based on an official request from its internationally recognised government headed by President Hadi to counter the violence of the Houthi terrorist groups. The UN Security Council, in its Resolution 2216, imposed an arms embargo on Houthi terrorists and categorically placed the onus on the rebels to end any provocations or threats to neighbouring States, release all political prisoners and end the recruitment of children.¹⁵⁰
- **36 Saudi Arabian students forced to leave University of New Brunswick**
Thirty-six students at the University of New Brunswick must leave because of the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Canada over human rights. The students have been left scrambling to find new universities after being forced to withdraw from their studies and leave the country by Aug. 31. Saudi Arabia announced earlier this August that it was ordering thousands of Saudi students leave Canadian universities. As a result, the students have been left scrambling, forced to withdraw from their studies and leave the country by Aug. 31.¹⁵¹
- **14 Bonded Labourers from Odisha Stranded In Saudi Arabia**
As many as 14 persons from Ganjam district who had gone to Saudi Arabia in search of work are allegedly being tortured and are stranded in the gulf country. According to sources, two agents who are yet to be identified lured the labourers to the Middle East country promising them lucrative jobs. However, the labourers alleged that they are not being paid and even denied of basic necessities like two meals a day. They also alleged that they are being forced to work 12 hours a day.¹⁵²
- **Qatar accuses Saudi Arabia of blocking Hajj access to its residents amid diplomatic row; Riyadh denies claim**
Qatar on 19 August said its citizens were unable to take part in the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia as the two countries remain bitterly locked in a diplomatic dispute. "There is no chance this 2018 for Qatari citizens and residents to travel for hajj," a government official told *AFP*. "Registration of pilgrims from

¹⁵⁰ "Yemen war: Saudi Arabia forced to act, says Riyadh's envoy to New Delhi", The Hindu, 14 August 2018. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/yemen-war-saudi-arabia-forced-to-act-says-riyadh-s-envoy-to-new-delhi/article24693172.ece>

¹⁵¹ "36 Saudi Arabian students forced to leave University of New Brunswick", CBC News, 17 August 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/saudi-arabia-university-of-new-brunswick-1.4788738>

¹⁵² "14 Bonded Labourers From Odisha Stranded In Saudi Arabia", Odisha TV, 18 August 2018. <https://odishatv.in/odisha/14-bonded-labourers-from-odisha-stranded-in-saudi-arabia-316363>

the state of Qatar remains closed and residents of Qatar cannot be granted visas as there are no diplomatic missions," added the official.¹⁵³

- **Ban unemployed Nigerians from travelling to Saudi Arabia, Envoys urges FG**
Muhammadu Modibbo, Nigeria's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, has urged the federal government to ban unemployed Nigerians from traveling to the Kingdom in search of jobs, to save Nigeria's image. Mr Modibbo made the appeal in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁴

Israel

- **Lebanon and Israel**

Lebanon's military police arrested a senior Lebanese military officer on suspicion of collaborating with Israel. The officer was suspected of releasing Lebanese detainees in exchange for large sums of money. Additional officers were also arrested on suspicion of membership in the officer's cell.¹⁵⁵

- **Russian Army Games**

Israel is participating in Russia's International Army Games for the second year in a row, sending delegations to the games, which will also see the participation of teams from Iran and Syria. The games were opened by Russian Defense Minister Gen. Sergei Shoigu in Patriot Park on July 28th and will last until August 11. Participating are 189 teams from 32 countries, including for the first time personnel from Algeria, Vietnam, Sudan, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines.¹⁵⁶

- **ISIS driven out from Golan Heights**

Islamic State was driven out from the last major villages it still held near the Golan Heights – in an area called the Yarmouk Basin – on July 30th. The ISIS affiliate group, Jaysh Khalid bin Walid, has held the area for several years but has only clashed with Israeli forces once. In mid-July the Syrian regime, after defeating the rebels near the Golan, attacked ISIS with a major offensive. Syrian regime media SANA claimed that the last group of ISIS fighters had been defeated in the town of

¹⁵³ "Qatar accuses Saudi Arabia of blocking Hajj access to its residents amid diplomatic row; Riyadh denies claim", First Post, 19 August 2018. <https://www.firstpost.com/world/qatar-accuses-saudi-arabia-of-blocking-hajj-access-to-its-residents-amid-diplomatic-row-riyadh-denies-claim-4997401.html>

¹⁵⁴ "Ban unemployed Nigerians from travelling to Saudi Arabia, Envoys urges FG", Premium Times, 19 August 2018. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/280741-ban-unemployed-nigerians-from-travelling-to-saudi-arabia-envoys-urges-fg.html>

¹⁵⁵ "Lebanon arrests senior army officer for collaboration with Israel — report", *Times of Israel*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/lebanon-arrests-senior-army-officer-for-collaboration-with-israel-report/> as accessed on August 05, 2018

¹⁵⁶ Anna Ahronheim, "Israel, Iran And Syria Brace For Russia's Army Games", *The Jerusalem Post*, July 31, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/IDF-teams-participate-in-Russias-2018-International-Army-Games-563858?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=31-7-2018&utm_content=idf-teams-participate-in-russias-2018-international-army-games-563858 as accessed on August 05, 2018

Shajarah. The report indicated that regime forces swept along the Golan border cease-fire fence, pushing ISIS from the villages of Abidin and Maariyah and taking back the whole border area with Israel.¹⁵⁷ It can be noted here that Russia and Israel have reached an agreement on the removal of Iranian forces at least 85 kilometers from Israel's Golan Heights, Russia's special envoy for Syria told the Sputnik news agency on August 1st.¹⁵⁸ Further, Israel struck and killed seven ISIS fighters who were 200 meters from the Israeli border in an air strike on the Syrian-held Golan Heights August 1st, the army confirmed on August 2nd.¹⁵⁹ Citing the "situation in the south," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on August 3rd cancelled his planned trip to Colombia next week to attend the inauguration of newly-elected president Ivan Duque.¹⁶⁰ The Jordanian army said on Thursday it killed several Islamic State militants who approached its border as they fled a Syrian offensive that drove them out of Golan Heights.¹⁶¹

- **Israeli start-up company sold**

Mimecast, a UK based company, specializing in cloud-based email management for Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft Office 365, as announced July 31st that they have acquired the Israeli cyber security company Solebit, which was a start up, for \$88 million. Solebit specializes in providing approaches to malware and other unknown online threats.¹⁶²

- **Israel and Syria**

A research director at a military agency linked to Syria's chemical weapons program was assassinated, a newspaper close to the Syrian government reported August 5th, blaming Israel's Mossad for his death. The pro-government al-Watan

¹⁵⁷ Seth J. Frantzman, "Report: ISIS Loses Last Villages Near Golan Heights" *The Jerusalem Post*, July 30, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Report-ISIS-loses-last-villages-near-Golan-Heights-563805?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=31-7-2018&utm_content=report-isis-loses-last-villages-near-golan-heights-563805 as accessed on August 05, 2018

¹⁵⁸ Anna Ahronheim, "Russian Envoy: Israel Agrees To Removal Of Iranian Troops 85km From Golan", *The Jerusalem Post*, August 1, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Russian-Envoy-Israel-agrees-to-removal-Iranian-troops-85km-from-Golan-563909?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=1-8-2018&utm_content=russian-envoy-israel-agrees-to-removal-iranian-troops-85km-from-golan-563909 as accessed on August 05, 2018

¹⁵⁹ Anna Ahronheim, "IAF Strikes Kill 7 ISIS Militants 200 Meters From Golan Heights Border", *The Jerusalem Post*, August 2, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/IAF-killed-7-militants-in-overnight-strikes-in-Syrian-Golan-Heights-564016?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=2-8-2018&utm_content=iaf-killed-7-militants-in-overnight-strikes-in-syrian-golan-heights-564016 as accessed on August 05, 2018

¹⁶⁰ Herb Keinon, "Netanyahu Cancels Colombia Trip Due To 'Situation In The South'", *The Jerusalem Post*, August 2, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Netanyahu-cancels-Colombia-trip-due-to-situation-in-the-south-564004?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=2-8-2018&utm_content=netanyahu-cancels-colombia-trip-due-to-situation-in-the-south-564004 as accessed on August 05, 2018

¹⁶¹ "Jordanian Army Confronts Syrian Isis Fighters", *The Jerusalem Post*, August 2, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Jordan-army-confronts-Syrian-ISIS-fighters-fleeing-Assad-564033?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=2-8-2018&utm_content=jordan-army-confronts-syrian-isis-fighters-fleeing-assad-564033 as accessed on August 05, 2018

¹⁶² "Israeli Company Solebit Sold For Nearly \$100 Million Dollars", *The Jerusalem Post*, July 31, 2018, https://www.jpost.com/Jpost-Tech/Business-and-Innovation/Israeli-company-Solebit-sold-for-nearly-100-million-dollars-563857?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=31-7-2018&utm_content=israeli-company-solebit-sold-for-nearly-100-million-dollars-563857 as accessed on August 05, 2018

newspaper said Israel was suspected of carrying out the attack. There was no official comment from Syria or Israel.¹⁶³

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	August 12	Balochistan	At least one person was killed and nine others, including three Frontier Corps (FC) personnel, were injured in IED blast targeting FC personnel on Mall Road area of Chaman town in Qilla Abdullah district. ¹⁶⁴	1	9
2	August 13	Balochistan	At least 14 people were injured in a hand grenade attack at a shop on Masjid road in Nushki district. ¹⁶⁵	0	14
3	August 14	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	A suspect, identified as Nural Haq, who was wanted in several terrorism cases, was killed in a Counter-Terrorism Department raid on his house in Swabi district. Haq's killing led to protests against the CTD officials with protesters demanding FIR against the personnel. ¹⁶⁶	1	0

Afghanistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	August 15	Baghlan	At least 35 Afghan soldiers and nine policemen were killed in a Taliban attack on a military outpost in Baghlan-e-Markazi district. The head of the provincial council, Mohammad Safdar Mohseni, said that the militants set fire to checkpoints, following the attack on the military outpost.	40	NS

¹⁶³ "Syrian paper blames Mossad for killing top missile expert; Israel mum", The Jerusalem Post, August 5, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/syrian-paper-blames-mossad-for-killing-top-missile-expert-israel-mum/> as accessed on August 05, 2018

¹⁶⁴ Syed Ali Shah, One dead, 9 injured in Chaman IED blast, *Dawn*, August 13, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1426584/one-dead-9-injured-in-chaman-ied-blast>, accessed on August 20, 2018

¹⁶⁵ Syed Ali Shah, 14 injured in grenade blast in Balochistan's Noshki district, *Dawn*, August 14, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1426968/14-injured-in-grenade-blast-in-balochistans-noshki-district>, accessed on August 20, 2018

¹⁶⁶ Muqaddam Khan, Suspect wanted in Raiwind blast case killed in 'encounter', *Dawn*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1427084/suspect-wanted-in-raiwind-blast-case-killed-in-encounter>, accessed on August 20, 2018

			Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack. ¹⁶⁷		
2	August 15	Kabul	At least 48 people were killed and 67 others were injured in a suicide bombing targeting Mawoud Academy in Dasht-e-Archi district. Mawoud Academy is a private education facility that provides tertiary education programs to students wanting to go to university. The district is predominantly Hazara dominated. Taliban denied responsibility for the attack. ¹⁶⁸	48	67
3	August 16	Washington	The Taliban are likely to keep up their recent surge of violence in advance of scheduled parliamentary elections in October, but Afghan defenses will not break, said US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, calling the recent siege of Ghazni a failure as the Taliban could not capture the six sites. ¹⁶⁹	Taliban to continue attacks, Jim Mattis	
4	August 18	Faryab	Bulcheragh district fell to the Taliban with 100 Afghan security forces still missing. According to the sources, Gerziwan district of Faryab is also on the verge of collapse if reinforcements are not sent to the district Taliban has confirmed the collapse of the district. ¹⁷⁰	Fall of Bulcheragh	

¹⁶⁷ Afghanistan: Dozens of security forces killed in Taliban attack, *Al Jazeera*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/afghanistan-dozens-security-forces-killed-taliban-attack-180815065025633.html>, accessed on August 16, 2018

¹⁶⁸ Death Toll Climbs To 48 In Kabul Classroom Explosion, *Tolo News*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/least-one-killed-kabul-explosion>, accessed on August 16, 2018

¹⁶⁹ Taliban Likely to Continue Attacks: Mattis, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 18, 2018, http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=21642, accessed on August 20, 2018

¹⁷⁰ Faryab's Bulcheragh District Falls To Taliban, *Tolo News*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/faryabs-bulcheragh-district-falls-taliban>, accessed on August 20, 2018

International Economic Issues

- **RCEP trade ministers to meet on Aug 30-31 in Singapore**

Trade ministers of RCEP member countries, including India and China, will hold a crucial meeting in Singapore on August 30-31, an official said. The meeting is important as the 16-member bloc now needs specific political guidance to move the negotiations further, the official added. RCEP mega trade pact aims to cover goods, services, investments, economic and technical cooperation, competition and intellectual property rights. The meeting also assumes significance as the member countries are not moving at a healthy pace even as the negotiation for the deal started in November 2012. The 23rd round of the negotiation was recently concluded without much progress in Bangkok. India is also holding comprehensive stakeholder consultations with industry as well as different ministries and departments on the pact as the grouping includes China, with which India has a huge trade deficit. An informal group of ministers, headed by Commerce and Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu, is also holding deliberations on the concerns of the industry. Pressure is mounting on India for early conclusion of the negotiation despite the fact that no member is showing flexibility in its stand. Former Commerce Secretary Rita Teotia has recently said the mega trade deal would be incomplete if the norms to promote services sector are not sufficiently liberalised by the member countries. RCEP members want India to eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on maximum number of goods it traded globally. India's huge domestic market provides immense opportunity of exports for RCEP countries. But lower level of ambitions in services and investments, a key area of interest for India, does not augur well for the agreement that seeks to be comprehensive in nature. Of the RCEP nations, India has trade deficit with as many as 10 countries, including China, South Korea and Australia, among others.¹⁷¹

- **World stocks rise as US, China agree to hold trade talks**

World stocks rose on August 17, 2018 as news of plans for US-China trade talks soothed nerves over their tariff war, while the recovery in Turkey's lira ran out of steam. The MSCI All-Country World index, which tracks shares in 47 countries, was up 0.2 per cent but set for its third straight weekly fall. Turkey's lira, meanwhile, dropped nearly 3 per cent to almost 6 per dollar again, having recovered ground rapidly in recent days.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ "RCEP trade ministers to meet on Aug 30-31 in Singapore", *Hindu BusinessLine*, August 12, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/rcep-trade-ministers-to-meet-on-aug-30-31-in-singapore/article24670376.ece> (accessed on August 13, 2018)

¹⁷² "World stocks rise as US, China agree to hold trade talks", *Hindu BusinessLine*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/markets/stock-markets/stocks-advance-as-us-china-agree-to-hold-trade-talks/article24715976.ece> (accessed on August 20, 2018)

- **US, China set to resume talks to resolve stand-off over trade**

On August 16, 2018, the US and China announced the resumption of talks later this month despite the worsening trade war and continued retaliatory measures.¹⁷³ This will be the first bilateral meeting since the Sino-US trade dispute escalated in June this year. The statement of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce reported that a delegation led by Vice Minister of Commerce and Deputy International Trade Representative Wang Shouwen will meet with the US team led by the US Treasury's Undersecretary for International Affairs David Malpass.¹⁷⁴

However, chances of a breakthrough remain bleak for the time being, according to analysts. China is sending its tenacious negotiator and vice-minister of commerce Wang Shouwen for talks at the invitation of a senior US treasury department official for international affairs, David Malpass. Significantly, the US treasury department has taken the initiative to kick-start the talks though it is not the nodal point for resolving trade frictions with other countries. The office of the US trade representative (USTR) led by Robert Lighthizer holds the dominant position for resolving and addressing bilateral and multilateral trade issues.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ D. Ravi Kanth, "US, China set to resume talks to resolve stand-off over trade", *Livemint*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/AhzssbLl9qSqqE74NMWfTL/US-China-set-to-resume-talks-to-resolve-standoff-over-trad.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018); Chao Deng and Bob Davis, "U.S., China to Resume Trade Talks as Tariffs Bite", *Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2018, (accessed on August 17, 2018)

¹⁷⁴ "Talks to be resumed on Sino-US trade", *The People's Daily*, August 17, 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0817/c90000-9491626.html>, (accessed on August 20, 2018).

¹⁷⁵ D. Ravi Kanth, "US, China set to resume talks to resolve stand-off over trade", *Livemint*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/AhzssbLl9qSqqE74NMWfTL/US-China-set-to-resume-talks-to-resolve-standoff-over-trad.html> (accessed on August 20, 2018); Chao Deng and Bob Davis, "U.S., China to Resume Trade Talks as Tariffs Bite", *Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2018, (accessed on August 17, 2018)