



Weekly Review of Select International Events

(28 November - 4 December, 2016)

Africa

Ghana: What You Need to Know About Ghana's Elections¹

Ghana goes to the polls for presidential and parliamentary elections on 7 December for its seventh multi-party ballot since the end of military rule in 1992. The presidential race is expected to be a closely fought contest between incumbent President John Dramani Mahama and opposition challenger Nana Akufo-Addo. Ghana is frequently described as one of the most stable democracies in West Africa and has witnessed several peaceful transfers of power.

Incumbent Mahama assumed the presidency in July 2012 following the death of former president John Atta Mills. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) party flag bearer then went on to win the December 2012 election beating Akufo-Addo with 50.7 per cent of the vote.

Akufo-Addo, head of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), is making his third attempt at the country's top job having lost in his bid for the presidency in 2008 and 2012. He served as foreign minister under President John Kufuor from 2003 to 2007 and trained as a lawyer before becoming a politician.

Economy

The economy has emerged as one of the main issues in election campaigning. Kofi Bentil from the Imani think-tank says "people are really having to deal with a terrible economy in terms of high inflation and high unemployment."

Last year Ghana was forced to take an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout for almost one billion dollars. Inflation was more than 17 per cent in 2015, according to the IMF, while economic growth was less than 4 per cent.

Ghana is considered one of sub-Saharan Africa's middle income countries, however that status could be under threat, as according to Joel Toujas-Bernate, the IMF mission

¹ AllAfrica Global Media, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201612040145.html>, 3 December 2016

chief, "in recent years the economic situation in Ghana has deteriorated quite markedly."

Campaigning

Akufo-Addo's manifesto is entitled "Change - An Agenda for Jobs" and the NPP candidate describes his vision of Ghana as a country in which "economic opportunities for all, irrespective of their background".

Mahama is campaigning on the basis of "Putting People First" by improving education, providing reliable healthcare and looking out for the most vulnerable in society. He talks about "maintaining prudent monetary" policies and attracting investment.

Run-off vote?

The 2016 election is likely to be a tight race between the two main contenders and there is the real prospect of a second round run-off vote. According to Edward Brenya, political analyst, Kwame Nkrumah University, the election trend from 1992 to present shows that anytime an incumbent goes for a second term the incumbent decreases the percentage of vote they won the first time.

Analysts say that with the difficult economic situation the power of incumbency gives Mahama less of an advantage.

Strongholds

A number of Ghana's regions are traditionally seen as strong support bases for the two main parties. The eastern Volta region traditionally supports the NDC, while the Ashanti region throws its weight behind the NPP.

However, the role of undecided voters may be more important in determining the winner of the polls. According to Kofi Bentil from the Imani think-tank "the parties are pretty well entrenched in terms of their own support bases. So...each party will get 40 per cent almost guaranteed and the [remaining] 20 per cent is going to be the group that will really determine who wins this election."

Two-party system?

There are 22 other parties contesting the polls besides the NDC and NPP, according to Ghana's Electoral Commission website. In the last elections, Paa Kwesi Nduom of the Progressive People's Party took 0.58 per cent of the presidential election and Henry Herbert Lartey, head of the Great Consolidated Popular Party, secured 0.35 per cent of the ballots. Some experts suggest that Ghana's political system has effectively become a two-party system.

Preparations for the polls

Kwame Nkrumah University analyst Brenya says that the electoral commission has prepared well, they're doing everything it takes to ensure a free and fair election.

The Electoral Commission has spent time this year cleaning the voters register. Ghana uses a biometric system for registering voters and following a case at the Supreme Court the commission began a process of removing ineligible voters such as dead people, those registered at multiple locations, alleged minors and foreigners.

Fast facts

15,703,890 registered voters

28,992 polling stations

275 parliamentary seats

24 political parties

7 presidential candidates

Gambia: ECOWAS, AU, UN congratulate Gambian president-elect, Adama Barrow²

The ECOWAS Commission, the African Union and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) have congratulated the President-elect of The Gambia, Mr. Adama Barrow on his stunning victory in the December 1 presidential election.

The three bodies, in a joint statement issued on Saturday, also hailed the incumbent Yahya Jammeh for gracefully conceding defeat.

Jammeh, who has ruled the tiny West African nation for 22 years, lost the Thursday's election to a property developer, Barrow, who won more than 45% of the vote.

The President of the ECOWAS Commission, the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General to West Africa and Sahel commended "the people of The Gambia for peaceful, free, fair and transparent presidential election, which was in line with the provisions of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance."

They also hailed the country's Independent Electoral Commission for its relentless efforts to ensure a successful and smooth electoral process.

² Daily Trust, 3 December 2016, at <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/international/ecowas-au-un-congratulate-gambian-president-elect-adama-barrow/174371.html>

According to the statement, ECOWAS, AU and UN, expressed satisfaction with the maturity, calm and dignity with which the Gambian nation has conducted a peaceful, credible and uncontested presidential election.

The statement added "We stand in solidarity with the government and the people of The Gambia to ensure constitutional and legal transition and peaceful transfer of power. It is the wish of the International Community that the newly elected President will engage the citizenry to combat poverty by putting in place the needed programmes necessary for creating jobs for the teeming youths for a sustainable economic development."

Nigeria: Nigeria, Morocco to Build Gas Pipeline Link³

Nigeria and Morocco are set to jointly promote a gas pipeline that will connect the two countries and some other African countries. This was one of the agreements reached during the three-day visit of Moroccan King President Mohammed VI.

Speaking to State House Correspondents, The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Geoffrey Onyema, said the gas pipeline project would also accelerate energy and electrification projects across the affected member countries.

He said that "On the occasion of the visit of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to Nigeria, and following the discussion with President Muhammadu Buhari in Marrakech, on the sidelines of the Conference of the Parties (COP-22), and also in Abuja, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Federal Republic of Nigeria decided to study and take concrete steps toward the promotion of a regional gas pipeline project that will connect Nigeria's gas resources, those of several West African countries and Morocco."

He further said that Nigeria and Kingdom of Morocco also agreed to develop integrated industrial clusters in the sub-region in sectors such as manufacturing, Agro-business and fertilizers to attract foreign capital and improve export competitiveness.

Kenya: Kenya- Somalia Border Fencing⁴

The fencing of three kilometres of the Kenya-Somalia border is complete after the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) took over its construction over two months ago.

The project, initiated by the Ministry of Interior in 2015, has since been switched to wire fencing along the porous border.

Kenya decided to put up a wall after the April terror attack on Garissa University College, in the north eastern of the country that left over 140 dead last year.

³ Leadership, Abuja, 4 December 2016

⁴ East Africa nation

European Union

Poland-Ukraine Defence Agreement

Poland and Ukraine signed a defence agreement on December 2, 2016. It was stated that the agreement would take cooperation between the Polish and Ukrainian defence sectors to a “new level”.

Referendum in Italy

Referendum on the proposed constitutional reforms in Italy was held on 4 December, 2016. Result shows that people have rejected the government’s proposal for constitutional reforms. Around 59 percent of people voted against the proposed reforms and under 41 percent voted in favour of these reforms. Voters’ turnout was high and around 65 percent of the 47 million registered voters of the country casted their votes. After the result of the referendum, Prime Minister Renzi took the full responsibility and resigned. He said, “My government ends today”.

Hollande Not for Second Term as President

French President Francois Hollande said that he would not contest for second term in office. It is predicted that President Hollande’s popularity is not high. He maintained that he did not want to divide the left. President Hollande’s withdrawal from electoral contest would widely open nominations in socialists.

European Union

ISIS recruiters targeting refugees in Europe, says latest Europol report:

In a latest report released by the Europol on December 2, 2016, EU police agency Europol has warned that ISIS is likely to carry out new attacks in the European Union in the near future, probably targeting countries that are members of the US-led coalition fighting the extremist organization in Syria and Iraq. “Estimates from some intelligence services indicate several dozen people directed by IS may be currently present in Europe with a capability to commit terrorist attacks,” according to the report.⁵ Europol’s Director **Rob Wainwright said that**, “...today’s report shows that the threat is still high and includes diverse components which can be only tackled by even better collaboration.”⁶ The report also cites that some refugees from Syria and Iraq might be targeted by extremist recruiters who are likely trying to infiltrate refugee camps, especially considering that one of the terror group's goal is to polarise the

⁵ Tasch, Barbara, “Europol: Dozens of people directed by ISIS are in Europe and that number is likely to increase”, *Business Insider*, December 2, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.in/EUROPOL-Dozens-of-people-directed-by-ISIS-are-in-Europe-and-that-number-is-likely-to-increase/articleshow/55750172.cms> accessed December 5, 2016.

⁶ Press Release, “Islamic State changing terror tactics to maintain threat in Europe”, *Europol*, December 2, 2016, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/islamic-state-changing-terror-tactics-to-maintain-threat-in-europe> accessed December 5, 2016.

European population and turn them against asylum seekers and refugees.⁷ Among the ten key judgements of Europol's report was the fact that the IS was not the only terrorist organisation with the intent and capability to carry out attacks against the West, or to inspire individuals and groups residing in EU member states to do so. Al Qaeda and/or Al Nusra affiliated or inspired groups continue to pose a serious threat to the member states of the EU and to the West in general.⁸

1 million EU citizens in Britain could be at risk of deportation:

The government has been warned that up to 1 million EU citizens living in the UK could be at risk of deportation if it does not come up with a simple way of recognising their status in the country. A grassroots group called the 3 million who is lobbying for the rights of non-British citizens who have made the UK their home, has told the home secretary it would take the Home Office 47 years to process applications from EU citizens for permanent residency (PR).⁹ Meanwhile, 30 per cent of EU citizens are unable to prove their right to residence despite living here legally, leaving one million potentially at risk of deportation from the day the UK leaves the EU. The latest immigration statistics quarterly data released by the Home Office shows the number of EU citizens applying for PR increased by 36 per cent since Britain voted to leave, rising from 10,269 in the three months prior to the EU referendum to 16,009 in the three months that followed. This has reportedly led to a backlog of almost 100,000 applications, a figure that has trebled since 2015, suggesting the Home Office is struggling to cope with the surge in applications.¹⁰

Italian PM Matteo Renzi resigns after referendum defeat:

Matteo Renzi, the Italian Prime Minister resigned yesterday night after losing a constitutional referendum. Pointing to the high voter turnout – about 68% of eligible voters cast ballots in the referendum – Renzi said the vote represented a “feast of democracy”.¹¹ The outcome was a major victory for the populist Five Star Movement, which led opposition to the reform, and the xenophobic Northern League.

Luigi Di Maio, the Five Star Movement leader widely tipped to be a prime minister in any future Five Star government, said the party was now calling for

⁷ Op. Cit. No. 1

⁸ Euronews, “Europol warns of ISIL’s evolving terror threat in Europe”, December 2, 2016, <http://www.euronews.com/2016/12/02/europol-warns-of-isil-s-evolving-terror-threat-in-europe> accessed December 5, 2016.

⁹ Bulamn, May, “One million EU citizens in Britain ‘at risk of deportation’ amid surge in permanent residency applications since Brexit vote”, *The Independent*, December 2, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/immigration-eu-citizens-brexit-referendum-deportation-home-office-3-million-a7451476.html> accessed December 5, 2016.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Kirchgaessner, Stephanie, “Italian PM Matteo Renzi resigns after referendum defeat”, *The Guardian*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/04/matteo-renzis-future-in-the-balance-amid-high-turnout-in-italy-referendum> accessed December 5, 2016.

“immediate” elections.¹² With more than 90 per cent of the results in, the “No” campaign led with almost 60 per cent of the vote to slightly over 40 per cent for “Yes”. In an emotional speech, Mr Renzi declared that his “experience of government finishes here”. “We tried, we gave Italians a chance to change but we didn't make it,” he said.¹³ President Sergio Mattarella is now tasked with brokering the appointment of a new government or, if he is unable to do that, ordering early elections.

Austria far-right candidate Norbert Hofer defeated in presidential poll:
Austria's far-right presidential candidate Norbert Hofer has conceded defeat in an election rerun after exit polls showed an apparent win for his left-leaning rival.

Hofer's announcement puts Alexander Van der Bellen in the clear to assume the presidency. Official results are not expected until late Sunday or early Monday, but exit polls announced by state broadcaster ORF showed Van der Bellen with 53.6% of the vote.¹⁴ Van der Bellen, who ran as an independent, increased his lead over the far-right Freedom party candidate, Norbert Hofer, by a considerable margin from the original vote in May, which was annulled by the constitutional court due to voting irregularities.

Data from SORA (Institute for Social Research and Consulting) showed that Van der Bellen's pro-European stance was his supporters' second-strongest reason for voting for him, cited by 65 percent of them, just behind the view that he would best represent Austria abroad.¹⁵

North America

Canada

- 1) Prime minister Justin Trudeau announced that the Liberal government had cleared the way for Kinder Morgan's C\$6.8bn Trans Mountain Expansion project. Designed to transport Alberta's landlocked bitumen to international markets via Vancouver's harbour, the project will expand an existing pipeline to nearly triple capacity on the artery to 890,000 barrels a day. However, protests against the project are beginning. The opposition claims that the project will have adverse environmental impact. The team at West Coast Environmental Law has fielded a steady stream of phone

¹² “Matteo Renzi steps down as prime minister after defeat in crucial Italian referendum”, *The Telegraph*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/04/renzi-battle-survival-italians-go-polls-vote-seen-referendum/> accessed December 5, 2016.

¹³ Sims, Alexandra, “Italian PM Matteo Renzi resigns after crushing 20-point defeat in constitutional referendum”, *The Independent*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italian-pm-matteo-renzi-resigns-after-crushing-defeat-in-constitutional-referendum-a7455726.html> accessed December 5, 2016.

¹⁴ Dewan, Angela and Laura Smith Spark, “Austria election: Far-right nationalist Hofer concedes defeat”, *CNN*, December 5, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/12/04/europe/austria-presidential-election-rerun/> accessed December 5, 2016.

¹⁵ Murphy, Francois and Kirsti Knolle, “Austrian roundly reject far right in presidential election”, *Reuters*, December 4, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-austria-election-idUSKBN13SoWo> accessed December 5, 2016.

calls from First Nations groups curious about the possibility of legally challenging the project. Of the 120 aboriginal groups consulted by Kinder Morgan, just 39 have written letters of support for the project.¹⁶

- 2) Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan said Canada has committed to a three-year deployment in Africa that will be reassessed each year to ensure it has an “enduring” impact. It will be spread among a number of unspecified African countries, have a major focus on training and increasing “capacity” of the host nation as well as other countries’ troops, and build on existing social, economic and de-radicalization programs on the ground. Canadian troops headed to Africa will operate in dangerous territory where peacekeepers have been killed but the minister added, there are also risks to Canada of doing nothing to counter insurgent groups that are terrorizing populations and radicalizing new recruits, and suggested he and the Liberal government have made this clear to Canadians from “day one.”¹⁷
- 3) Officials in Canada are readying for a potential surge in Mexican migrants, as a promise to scrap a visa requirement comes into effect amid uncertainty over Mr. Donald Trump’s promises to crack down on undocumented immigrants. Mexican visitors to Canada will no longer need visas. The move has left the government anticipating an increase in Mexican tourists and business travellers, a spokesperson for Canada’s immigration ministry said. Canada’s minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship has downplayed any concerns, arguing that the visa lift will yield deeper ties between Canada and Mexico and boost tourism. The government will continue to closely monitor migration from Mexico, he said, and could move to reinstate the visa if it sees a spike in the number of Mexican asylum seekers.¹⁸

The United States

- 1) President-elect Donald J. Trump is broadening the field of candidates for secretary of state as his transition team remains divided nearly a month after the election over how to fill the most prominent gap in his prospective cabinet. Kellyanne Conway, a top adviser to Mr. Trump, told reporters on Sunday that the search had expanded beyond the four men thought to be under consideration and that Mr. Trump planned to interview additional candidates early this week. Those new candidates

¹⁶Ashifa Kassam, “Kinder Morgan pipeline: Canadians intensify huge opposition to expansion,” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/03/canada-kinder-morgan-pipeline-expansion-protest>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

¹⁷ Tonda Maccharles, “Canada committed to three-year deployment in Africa,” <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/11/11/canada-committed-to-three-year-deployment-in-africa.html>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

¹⁸ Ashifa Kassam, “Canada prepares for surge of Mexican immigrants after visa lift and Trump win,” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/01/canada-mexico-immigrants-visas-asylum-tourism>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

appeared to include John R. Bolton, an ambassador to the United Nations under President George W. Bush; Jon M. Huntsman Jr., the former Utah governor and ambassador to China under President Obama; Rex W. Tillerson, the president and chief executive of Exxon Mobil; and Senator Joe Manchin III, Democrat of West Virginia.¹⁹

- 2) The Pentagon said that it had sent a Yemeni detainee from the wartime prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to Cape Verde, the island nation off the west coast of Africa. It was the first transfer from the prison since the election victory of Mr. Trump, who vowed during the campaign to reverse President Obama's effort to close Guantánamo. Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter recently gave a 30-day notice to Congress that eight detainees on that list would be transferred several weeks from now, according to officials who discussed the notices on the condition of anonymity because they are not yet public. The White House spokesman, Josh Earnest, said last week that the Obama administration intended to continue transferring detainees approved for release, in cases in which diplomats can strike appropriate security arrangements, until Mr. Trump's inauguration.²⁰
- 3) U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to Rome, Italy, and Vatican City on December 2-3 for bilateral meetings and to participate in the Rome Mediterranean Dialogues. In Rome, the Secretary met with Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni to discuss cooperation on a range of regional and global issues, including Libya, Syria, Iraq, and the enduring strength of the Transatlantic Alliance. At the Rome Mediterranean Dialogues, Secretary Kerry worked with other senior leaders to deepen cooperation on a range of challenges and opportunities across the Mediterranean region, including advancing the Dialogues' vision of a "positive agenda" in areas such as entrepreneurship, innovation, and people-to-people exchanges. In Vatican City, the Secretary met with Holy See Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin to discuss international issues and peace efforts, including the humanitarian crisis in Syria, violence in Ukraine, and the ongoing dialogue in Venezuela.²¹

¹⁹ Nicholas Fandos, "Trump Expands Search for His Secretary of State," <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/04/us/politics/trump-expands-search-for-secretary-of-state.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fus>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

²⁰ Charlie Savage, "Guantánamo Detainee Is Sent to Cape Verde in First Transfer Since Trump Victory," <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/04/us/politics/guantanamo-detainee-is-sent-to-cape-verde-first-transfer-since-trump-victory.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fus&action=click&contentCollection=us®ion=rnk&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=8&pgtype=sectionfront>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

²¹ US Department of State, "Travel to Rome, Italy and Vatican City 02-03 December," <http://www.state.gov/secretary/travel/2016/t33/index.htm>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

Region: South America

Brazil

- 1) Tens of thousands of Brazilians have joined street protests against a vote which they say threatens to undermine a major anti-corruption investigation. Demonstrators were angry after the lower house of Congress on Tuesday passed a number of amendments to a landmark anti-corruption bill. Organisers say politicians have tried to intimidate the investigators. Politicians, who are themselves being investigated, watered down the proposal, protesters say. Controversially, they included in the bill the prospect of harsh punishment for judges and prosecutors who abuse their powers. The bill still needs to be approved by the Senate before it becomes law.²²

Colombia

- 1) Colombia's House of Representatives has voted unanimously in favor of the nation's revised peace agreement to end more than a half-century of conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Congressional ratification is believed to be the final logistical hurdle before the deal can be officially implemented, although the 130-0 vote — just like the 75-0 vote in the Senate — was marked by the opposition party boycotting the proceedings. A 180-day window has begun for the guerrillas to demobilize and hand over their weapons to the United Nations monitors assigned to oversee the end of the organization as a military faction. Demarcated zones are being finalized, and some FARC members will begin move into these areas within the next week.²³

Cuba

- 1) Cuban Leader Field Catsro was laid to rest in the Cuban city of Santiago, nine days after his death at 90. Opinion on Fidel Castro, who ruled Cuba as a one-party state for almost half a century, remains divided. Supporters say he returned Cuba to the people and praise him for some of his social programmes, such as public health and education. But critics call him a dictator, who led a government that repressed opposition and dissent. Raul Castro took over when his brother's health deteriorated in 2006. He has announced that Cuba will ban naming any monuments or roads after Fidel Castro, at the request of the late leader who "strongly opposed any manifestation of cult of personality".²⁴

²² BBC, "Brazil: Thousands marches against 'watered down anti-corruption bill'," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-38203791>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

²³ Jared Wade, "Colombian Congress Approves Peace Accord in Final Hurdle to End Half-Century of Conflict," <http://www.financecolombia.com/peace-last-colombian-congress-approves-accord-final-hurdle-end-half-century-conflict/>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

²⁴ BBC, "Fidel Castro's ashes buried in Santiago de Cuba," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-38201169>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

Venezuela

- 1) South American nations suspended Venezuela from the Mercosur trade group over what they said was its failure to comply with the commitments made when it joined the group in 2012. Argentina's foreign ministry said in a statement that Venezuela had failed to meet a Thursday deadline to adopt certain standards required for membership. The foreign ministers of the four founding members— Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay — notified Venezuela's government of the decision in a letter. This strong rebuke from Venezuela's one-time friends could open the door to stronger action from countries and regional blocs. The head of the Organization of American States for months has threatened moves against Venezuela for its increasing authoritarianism.²⁵

Russia

- US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher said that US, Russia, India and Japan should form an alliance to preserve world peace and stability and secure freedom against radical Islam and China. The Congressman said that India is particularly poised to grow into a world power if it adopts the right policies. He said that Japan, India, Russia and the US share common interests, common rivals and by working together would create a peaceful and prosperous world.²⁶
- On November 30, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavel Klimkin after a meeting of Foreign Ministers of Russia, France, Germany, and Ukraine - the countries making up the so-called Normandy Four format said that Ukraine and Russia cannot come to terms on the provisions of a roadmap for settling the conflict in Donbass. "The discussion on the logic of the roadmap was brief," Klimkin said. "The Russian side doesn't agree to the key priorities. We have fundamental differences in our outlooks." "The discussion was very superficial and it will continue in various other formats," he said. Klimkin said in part Ukraine was insisting on the access of the staff of the European security organization to the Donbass section of the Ukrainian-Russian border and on the deployment of an OSCE armed mission. He also admitted that the parties to the talks had not looked into how the future local elections in Donbass could conform to the OSCE standards, in part in what concerned security provisions.²⁷
- Armenia and Russia are set to sign a treaty on a joint task force, which would give legal grounds for Russia to use its military to protect Armenia from foreign aggression. Armenia is among the few nations hosting Russian troops on its

²⁵ The Associated Press, "MERCOSUR Suspends Venezuela For Failure To Follow Rules," <http://www.thenews.mx/world/mercosur-suspends-venezuela-for-failure-to-follow-rules/>, Accessed on 05 Dec. 16.

²⁶ "US Lawmaker Suggest Global Alliance of India, US, Russia and Japan", *Economic Times*, November 28, 2016. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/us-lawmaker-suggest-global-alliance-of-india-us-russiajapan/articleshow/55671476.cms> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

²⁷ "Kiev has basic differences with Russia over Donbass roadmap", *TASS*, November 30, 2016. <http://tass.com/world/915452> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

territory. The new Joint Task Force (JTF) agreement set to be signed this later week between Moscow and Yerevan upgrades an existing military cooperation mechanism, going into far greater detail about how troops would be used in case of a hypothetical attack. *“If Armenia is attacked, the Russian military base in Gyumri would be involved in our defense, but this requires legal grounds. This international agreement will provide such grounds,”* Armenian Defense Minister Vigen Sarkisyan told Armenian media.²⁸

- Russia’s conservative media has celebrated the victory of François Fillon in the French Republican Party’s presidential primary. They believe he is their best hope for ending the EU’s sanctions on Moscow. The Kremlin was restrained in its response to Fillon’s victory in the French centre-right primary. Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov said on November 28 in response to questions about Vladimir Putin’s preference that “President Putin has already expressed his attitude towards the [French] primaries in his recent response to journalists’ questions. Moscow follows elections in other countries, including France, respectfully and keeping the required distance.” The Russian president feels no need to publically take sides one way or the other and risk an embarrassing situation if his preferred candidate loses. But the message from Putin’s subordinates, the state media and their approved commentators is unambiguous.²⁹
- Russian Ambassador Igor Khovaev told reporters on November 29 that Russia is interested in having a long-term military cooperation with the Philippines. It also came on the heels of Duterte’s pronouncements that the Philippines could get Russian arms if its treaty ally the United States would not provide the weapons. Khovaev said aside from weapons, Russia was willing to share defense technology.³⁰
- Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on November 29 that the Russian military has completed the deployment of two newly formed motorized infantry divisions at the nation’s Western borders. The two divisions are stationed in the Belgorod, Voronezh and Smolensk regions near Russia’s border with [Ukraine](#) and [Belarus](#).³¹

²⁸“Russia, Armenia inch closer in collective defense with upgraded joint task force,” *RT*, November 28, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/368445-russia-armenia-collective-defense/> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

²⁹[Emmanuel Grynszpan](#), “Russia rejoices as France turns towards Moscow”, *Euractiv.com*, November 29, 2016. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/news/russia-rejoices-as-france-turns-towards-moscow/> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

³⁰“Russia wants long-term defense cooperation with PHL, envoy says”, *GMA*, November 29, 2016. <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/590585/news/nation/russia-wants-long-term-defense-cooperation-with-phl-envoy-says> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

³¹“Russia Fully Deploys 2 New Divisions Near Western Border”, *ABC News*, November 29, 2016. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-fully-deploys-divisions-western-border-43849565> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

- A senior Russian government source said that Russia has termed recent Pakistani suggestion of Moscow using Gwadar Port and joining China Pakistani Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a false propaganda amid the country's options available with Iran for the use of warm water ports. The official said that the news was incorrect and false.³²
- Senior Russian diplomat and President Putin's envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov on 4 December during the sideline of Heart of Asia conference said that that Russia is not strengthening its ties with Pakistan at India's cost and it has explained its position to India at the highest level. He said that Russia has a different history with Pakistan and is trying to explore cooperation with Pakistan primarily to counter terror.³³
- Senior Russian diplomat and President Putin's envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov also said that all parties involved in the war-torn country's reconstruction must work together and that the Heart of Asia was not the platform for India and Pakistan to score brownie points. Downplaying Russia's military exercise with Pakistan two months ago, Zamir Kabulov, who overseas Russia's engagement in Afghanistan, referred to India's increasing cooperation with the US. India has close cooperation with the US, does Moscow complain? Then why complain about much lower level of cooperation with Pakistan, he asked when referred to Russia-Pakistan military exercise. He said bilateral issues should not cloud forums like the Heart of Asia, replying to a question on Pakistan supporting terror groups operating from its soil.³⁴
- Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte revealed he is keen to forge closer relationships with Russia and China - as he hit out at the US for blackmailing his country. The president called Chinese President Xi Jinping "a great guy" who made him realise his country had "missed out on chances in our history" despite their ongoing battle over islands in the South China Sea. He also said he "made friends" with Vladimir Putin who "went out of his way to shake hands with me".³⁵
- The Russian Foreign Ministry on November 28 said that Russia is profoundly disappointed with the results of the 8th Review Conference of the Biological

³²Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Russia Dubs Pakistan report on CPEC as Propaganda", *Economic Times*, November 30, 2016. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/russia-dubs-pakistan-report-on-cpec-as-propaganda/articleshow/55694763.cms> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

³³"Ties with Pakistan not at India's Cost: Vladimir Putin's Envoy to Kabul", *Economic Times*, December 4, 2016. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/ties-with-pakistan-not-at-indias-cost-vladimir-putins-envoy-to-kabul/articleshow/55799153.cms> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

³⁴"Heart of Asia Summit: Russian envoy says India, Pak shouldn't use HoA to score brownie points", *Firstpost*, December 5, 2016. <http://www.firstpost.com/india/heart-of-asia-summit-russian-envoy-says-india-pak-shouldnt-use-hoa-to-score-brownie-points-3139614.html> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

³⁵Alix Culbertson, "Philippines president keen to forge close ties with Russia and China - but NOT the US", *Express.co.in*, November 29, 2016. <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/737508/Rodrigo-Duterte-Philippines-president-Russia-China-US-Vladimir-Putin-Donald-Trump> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). The conference was held in Geneva on November 7-25. The task of the conference which is held every five years is to review the convention's implementation in the previous five-year period and adopt a program for the next five years. "Major discussion at the conference focused on the parameters of the work under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention for the period from 2017 to 2020," the ministry said. "It was planned to set up four open-composition working groups to consider concrete topics and the states' initiatives, and to prepare possible recommendations. It could be a serious step forward for the convention." "Despite certain gaps between the participants in the negotiating process, it was really possible to reach agreements on a generally acceptable basis," the Russian Foreign Ministry said. "Nevertheless, the United States delegation at the final stage refused to try to reach a compromise and use all possibilities to ensure success of the talks." "As a result, the conference's outcome has turned to be inferior to potential possibilities and expectations pinned on it. Russia is profoundly disappointed with this situation," the ministry underscored.³⁶

Bangladesh

- Indian defence minister Manohar Gopalkrishna Prabhu Parrikar paid a two days visit to Bangladesh from 30 November to 1 December 2016. There he said that India has been working to establish peace in the region. He is the first-ever defence minister to tour Bangladesh in the past 45 years. ³⁷The visit is taking place a month after Chinese president Xi Jinping's historic visit to the country and weeks after Beijing delivered submarines to the Bangladesh navy. During the meeting with the president of Bangladesh, the Indian minister stressed the need for taking joint efforts to enhance defence relations between India and Bangladesh. Parrikar led a defence delegation that included vice chiefs of army, air force, and navy along with the director general of the coast guard. The Bangladesh president recalled with gratitude the contribution of people and the government of India in the country's liberation war in 1971. Many valiant soldiers of Indian defence forces embraced martyrdom in the war.³⁸
- Vowing "zero tolerance" against terrorism, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 1 November 2016 assured India that Bangladesh will not allow its soil to be used for terror acts against any country as defence minister Manohar Parrikar called on her to discuss bolstering security ties. "We won't tolerate any sorts of terrorism and militancy and won't allow our land to be used for carrying out terrorist acts against any country," Hasina told Parrikar. ³⁹Dhaka. According to Hasina's press secretary Ihsanul Karim, she recalled with gratitude the contribution of Indian armed forces to Bangladesh's Liberation War and told Parrikar that during her upcoming visit to India she would honour those Indian

³⁶"Russia profoundly disappointed with results of BTWC Review Conference — foreign ministry", *TASS*, November 28, 2016. <http://tass.com/world/915188> (Accessed on December 5, 2016).

³⁷ Retrieved from <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/131063/India%E2%80%99s-Parrikar-speaks-of-%E2%80%99regional-peace%E2%80%99>. Cited verbatim

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.news18.com/news/world/wont-allow-bangladesh-soil-to-be-used-for-terror-sheikh-hasina-1318424.html>. Cited verbatim.

soldiers who died during the 1971 freedom war. On his part, Parrikar said "it was our moral responsibility to extend help to Bangladesh in the War of Liberation as a friendly country and we provided that assistance." ⁴⁰After the meeting, he handed over Hasina a replica of a helicopter that India used during Bangladesh's liberation war and photographs of paratroopers who took part in that war.⁴¹ Parrikar, who was accompanied by a high-level defence delegation, offered Indian expertise to train Bangladesh Coast Guards for enhanced capacity to guard the country's southern coastlines along the Bay of Bengal.⁴² Hasina thanked the Indian Coast Guards for rescuing Bangladeshi fishermen recently. Parrikar appreciated Bangladesh's tremendous socio-economic development, particularly the women empowerment under Hasina's leadership, saying "Bangladesh made impressive development in various sectors, especially women empowerment, which India could not do yet".⁴³ During the visit the Indian defence minister also met premier's security adviser Major Gen (retd.) Tariq Ahmed Siddiqui.⁴⁴

- Describing 2019 as the election year for Bangladesh, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged Awami League followers, both at home and abroad, to carry out campaign for the party to retain power as it works for development. "Country's development will continue only if Awami League is in power. The country will fall behind if any other party other than AL comes to power," she said. The PM said this while speaking at a civic reception organised by All European Awami League in Budapest. She said the next general election is getting closer.⁴⁵ "It's coming, it is not far away; 2019 is the time for election." Hasina said the Awami League sincerely wants the country's development as it sacrificed a lot for Bangladesh. The prime minister also urged the expatriate Bangladeshis to start their campaign over the next general election. "When you'll return to your own areas back home, you'll have to ask your fellow villagers one question whether they want development or not," she said.⁴⁶ Regarding agitation programmes by a section of people against development activities, she said there are some people who dislike everything. "They always look for faults in everything and go for a movement. It's quite normal there'll be movement on each issue.⁴⁷ Let them carry out their agitations, and let's do our development work," she said. About the war crimes trial, Hasina said the trial of war criminals is going on and some of the verdicts have already been executed. Alleging that Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia had given the national flag to the war criminals, she said those who presented the nation flag to the war criminals should face the same punishment like the war criminals. ⁴⁸Mentioning various

⁴⁰ ibid

⁴¹ ibid

⁴² ibid

⁴³ ibid

⁴⁴ ibid

⁴⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/next-election-hasina-asks-al-men-start-campaign-early-1323328>. Cited verbatim.

⁴⁶ ibid

⁴⁷ ibid

⁴⁸ ibid

destructive politics of the BNP and its chief Khaleda, Hasina said what could they give to the country as they killed people in the name of a movement? On the all-party election-time government in 2013, the prime minister said she had phoned Khaleda and invited her to join the election-time all-party government. "Even, I had offered her [Khaleda] the home ministry, but she didn't join it, she even didn't join the election; she tried to resist holding the election. It was a conspiracy to destroy democracy," she said. Hasina criticised Khaleda as she did not get a chance to enter Khaleda's house as the gate was closed from inside when she went there to console her after her younger son Arafat Rahman Koko died.⁴⁹ Describing the expatriates as Bangladesh ambassadors, she urged them to uphold the country's image through their positive activities.⁵⁰

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 30 November 2016 said Dhaka and Budapest agreed to work together for the common prosperity alongside joining hands with the international community to fight against terrorism and violent extremism. "We've reached an understanding that there is much scope for Bangladesh and Hungary to deepen bilateral cooperation in trade and investment," she said in a statement during her joint outreach with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. ⁵¹Terming Hungary, which supported the Liberation War, a trusted friend of Bangladesh, Hasina said: "As friendly countries, we can work together and distance between the two countries can't be a barrier. We can shorten this distance as our hearts are close." ⁵²She thanked her Hungarian counterpart for his commitment to help Bangladesh. She said high-powered business delegations from both the countries will exchange views and have the chance to look deeper into the trade and investment opportunities available in the two countries. The PM said she discussed with the Hungarian premier the important issues of global concern like countering terrorism and violent extremism.⁵³ "Bangladesh maintains a 'zero tolerance' policy against terrorism. We vow to fight this global menace together with the international community." Hasina said both Bangladesh and Hungary had signed three memorandums of understanding in the fields of political consultations, water management and agriculture. Besides, two chambers of both the countries are set to sign today another MoU which would facilitate collaboration between the business communities. "Bangladesh and Hungary will share experiences and knowledge on water management. I sought Prime Minister Orbán's active support to my proposal to establish a Global Fund for Water SDG. I want him to lead from the front to build the much-needed global consensus on water-related issues," she added. ⁵⁴She also hoped that Hungary would participate in the 9th Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) to be hosted by Bangladesh in Dhaka in December 2016. She said Bangladesh wants to see a

⁴⁹ ibid

⁵⁰ ibid

⁵¹ Retrieved from <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/hasina-meets-hungary-pm-1322629>. Cited verbatim.

⁵² ibid

⁵³ ibid

⁵⁴ ibid

world which is free from poverty, hunger, injustice and inequality. “We're obligated to build a peaceful world for our children. Our common resolve is to work together for shared prosperity of our people through mutually beneficial economic cooperation.”⁵⁵

- As Rohingyas continue to pour into Bangladesh in the face of "ethnic cleansing" in Myanmar, diplomats and experts have suggested that Bangladesh should take a firm stance and make effective diplomatic moves to mobilise international support for resolving the crisis. Without any hesitation, Bangladesh should go for bilateral and multilateral moves to put pressure on Myanmar because the Southeast Asian country itself created the crisis and must resolve it also, they say. Through an effective diplomatic campaign, Dhaka should also make the international community understand that Bangladesh alone cannot deal with the issue and that the global community has a responsibility to resolve the humanitarian crisis. ⁵⁶Talking to The Daily Star, several former and serving diplomats, and foreign affairs experts said Bangladesh government has long been trying to resolve the Rohingya crisis through “persuasion and mutual understanding”, which apparently encouraged Myanmar to create the crisis over and over again.⁵⁷ But time has come for Dhaka to take a firm position and move forward to end this longstanding problem once and for all, they say. “It is now time to make the Rohingya crisis an international issue, and seek support from all to resolve it permanently. Bangladesh is the worst sufferer of this Rohingya situation. The international community must come forward to shoulder the responsibility and ensure the rights of Rohingyas,” said international affairs expert Maj Gen (Retd) Abdur Rashid. The former ambassador said the government appears hesitant to take a firm stance on the issue and convey the message that it would no longer tolerate such an uncalled-for situation created by Myanmar. ⁵⁸“We shouldn't think that Myanmar may be unhappy or BCIM [Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic forum] or BIMSTEC [the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation] may be affected if we take a firm stance on the Rohingya crisis that is adversely affecting Bangladesh. We must uphold our national interest and security first,” he said.⁵⁹ Foreign ministry officials said the ministry has directed the Bangladeshi envoys in more than 60 countries and the UN bodies to brief the officials concerned in their countries of stay on the influx of Myanmar Rohingyas to Bangladesh in the face of persecution. ⁶⁰At a diplomatic briefing on 1 December 2016, foreign envoys in Dhaka expressed their strong support in resolving the longstanding crisis in a peaceful manner and through dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. The foreign ministry officials were critical of the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR. They alleged that the UNHCR always puts

⁵⁵ ibid

⁵⁶Retrieved from <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/its-not-responsibility-bangladesh-alone-1322047>. Cited verbatim.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ ibid

⁵⁹ ibid

⁶⁰ ibid

undue pressure on Dhaka, and in the name of safety and dignity of the refugees, it delayed repatriation of Rohingyas for decades, which apparently encouraged more Rohingyas to enter Bangladesh. A high official of the foreign ministry said, “The UNHCR is requesting us to allow refugees to enter Bangladesh but it is not saying anything to Myanmar... Are we responsible for violence in Myanmar?”⁶¹ Responding to a query on UNHCR's call for letting Rohingyas in, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali told journalists on Thursday, “It has become the only duty of the organisation to ask Bangladesh to open its border whenever a crisis is created in Myanmar.” Now, around 32,000 registered Rohingyas are living in two refugee camps in Ukhia and Teknaf. The government has introduced free education up to class VI, vocational skill training, computer training, and primary and secondary healthcare to prepare the Rohingyas for a better life when they voluntarily return to their homeland. Besides, three to five lakh undocumented Rohingyas are staying in different parts of Bangladesh.⁶²

Pakistan

- **India and Pakistan:** Before the commencement of the Heart of Asia dialogue in Amritsar, Pakistan High Commissioner Abdul Basit on November 28th, in an interview with an Indian TV channel Aaj Tak said that Pakistan is ready for a dialogue with India on the sidelines of the Heart of Asia conference in Amritsar. Urging for resumption of dialogue process between the two neighbouring countries, a solution to the problems between India and Pakistan can only come through dialogue, and therefore, both nations must sit and discuss all the issues that confront them.⁶³ In Amritsar, while attending the Heart of Asia Summit, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz stated on Saturday, December 3rd, that Pakistan was ready to talk with India and discuss the issue of terrorism within the framework of a comprehensive dialogue agreed upon on the sidelines of last year's Heart of Asia. He further said that his presence in India was an indication that Pakistan was ready for bilateral talks. “Whenever India is ready, we will be ready. Terrorism is a subject under the comprehensive dialogue, when we meet, we can discuss that also,” he said.⁶⁴ In the conference, both Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani urged their neighbour to ‘stop offering shelter and support to militants who commit violence in the region’.⁶⁵ Pakistan was criticised roundly as a base for militant groups whom the conference statement described as a big threat to peace and security in the region. The statement named Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Haqqani group as posing threats to region together with other groups

⁶¹ ibid

⁶² ibid

⁶³“Pakistan ready to hold talks with India, says Abdul Basit”, *Dawn*, November 28, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1299196/pakistan-ready-to-hold-talks-with-india-says-abdul-basit>

⁶⁴“Pakistan ready for talks with India: Sartaj Aziz”, *The Nation*, December 4, 2016,

<http://nation.com.pk/national/04-Dec-2016/pakistan-ready-for-talks-with-india-sartaj-aziz>

⁶⁵ “Modi, Ghani assail Pakistan”, *Dawn*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300551/modi-ghani-assail-pakistan>

fomenting terrorism in the neighbourhood and beyond. Foreign Affairs Adviser Sartaj Aziz countered the claim, calling the criticism 'simplistic'. He stated that "It is simplistic to blame only one country for the recent upsurge in violence. We need to have an objective and holistic view." However, there was relief for Pakistan as the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan too came up for criticism together with Jundullah. It was over the demands for regional connectivity and trade that Sartaj Aziz seemed to insert the core issue of Kashmir albeit without digressing from the main theme. He stated "Pakistan is committed to enhancing facilitation for transit of Afghan goods through Pakistan. We believe the two sides need to work together for extension of and improvements in the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement. In this context, let me emphasise that peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes will further improve prospects of regional cooperation and connectivity."⁶⁶ After returning to Pakistan, Aziz expressed serious reservations over the remarks and attitude of the Indian prime minister and Afghan president. Addressing a press conference soon after his return from India, Aziz described as shocking the Afghan leader's criticism of Pakistan at the meet and said that Ashraf Ghani's remarks were in fact an outcome of Indian provocation. The adviser elaborated that no improvement was expected in relations between New Delhi and Islamabad in next two months because of Indian elections, adding that there was an international pressure that there must be talks between the two countries.⁶⁷

- **Back to Centralisation of Powers:** After three decades of devolution, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government has silently restored powers of the prime minister to sack heads of public sector entities (PSE) without assigning reasons. The government or the prime minister did not have the powers to remove a chief executive officer or managing director of a PSE under the Companies Ordinance of 1984 which had ensured that heads of such entities took independent commercial decisions in the best interest of the companies. The chief executives of companies will now tend to follow written or verbal directives of the ministries concerned to save their jobs and, at the same time, try to balance rights and powers with boards of directors. Amendments to the law were made following resistance in recent years by some chief executives who approached high courts against removal orders issued by respective ministries with the approval of the prime minister. The high courts had set aside the removal orders. Under the 1984 law, only "the directors of a company by resolution passed by not less than three-fourths of the total number of directors" could remove a chief executive before the expiration of his term of office notwithstanding anything contained in the articles or in any agreement between the company and the chief executive. The government has changed this protection available to chief executives by adding a sub-clause to Section 191 of the Companies Ordinance 2016 promulgated on November 11, which says that the protections and conditions provided in the sections 186 and 187 shall

⁶⁶ "Aziz says it's simplistic to blame one country for violence", *Dawn*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300553/aziz-says-its-simplistic-to-blame-one-country-for-violence>

⁶⁷ Syed Irfan Raza, "India meet sought action against all terrorists: Aziz", *Dawn*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300582/india-meet-sought-action-against-all-terrorists-aziz>

not apply to a person nominated by the government. Another new clause empowering the government to remove a chief executive or managing director of a state-owned company said the chief executive would “hold the office during the pleasure of the government”. The change in the law will now enable the government to directly remove chief executives of about 100 public sector companies without requesting or manipulating the boards of directors in case heads of these companies decide to take independent decisions against the wishes of federal ministers and the Prime Minister Office. The new law also empowered the government to nominate and appoint the chief executive of a company where majority of directors are nominated by it and such a nominee will “hold office during the pleasure of the government”.⁶⁸

- **Land acquisition for Diamer-Bhasha Dam:** Despite disbursement of maximum funds, more than 9,000 acres of land have yet to be acquired for the \$14 billion Diamer-Bhasha dam project. The delay threatens to put back its take-off. The government and the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) had set a target for completion of land acquisition by June 2016 before moving on to the next stage of project implementation — arrangement for funds and award of contracts for construction. The federal government has already made a full disbursement of Rs. 14bn in the first three months of the current fiscal year — nine months before the stipulated date of June next year. The government had so far disbursed about Rs. 72bn, and the National Economic Council (NEC) had allocated Rs. 14bn for the project for 2016 which has disbursed Rs. 14bn within the first quarter. The water and power ministry informed parliament last week that 28,247 acres of land had been acquired so far against a total requirement of 37,419 acres. About 9,172 acres (25 per cent of the total land) has yet to be acquired. The project on completion would have an installed capacity of 4,500MW, with annual power generation of about 19,208 gigawatt hour (GWH). The construction of Diamer-Bhasha dam has already been delayed. The project was originally scheduled for completion in 2016, and then 2019.⁶⁹
- **Senate Committee to meet on Defence:** The Senate Standing Committee on Defence will meet on December 8th for a briefing from military officials on the ongoing military operations along the Line of Control (LoC). Adviser to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif already made policy statements on the floors of the National Assembly and the Senate after debates in the two houses of parliament in November 2016. Both the cabinet members had reiterated that Pakistan vowed to defend its borders, waters and space against any attacks by the neighbouring country. When contacted, chairman of the Senate’s defence committee Mushahid Hussain Sayed of the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) defended the committee’s decision to call the meeting after the debates in parliament,

⁶⁸Khaleeq Kiani, “PM takes back powers to sack heads of public entities”, *Dawn*, December 01, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1299920/pm-takes-back-powers-to-sack-heads-of-public-entities>

⁶⁹ Khaleeq Kiani, “Land acquisition for Diamer-Bhasha dam awaits finalization”, *Dawn*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300579/land-acquisition-for-diamer-bhasha-dam-awaits-finalisation>

saying that they had asked the military leadership to update the members on the latest situation along the LoC and provide details of the losses which Pakistan had suffered. Hussain said that they had heard the government's point of view in parliament, but they wanted to know from the military high command as to what was their assessment of the whole situation. Prominent members of the Senate's committee are: Farhatullah Babar and Farooq Naek of the Pakistan People's Party, Ilyas Ahmed Bilour of the Awami National Party, retired Tahir Hussain Mashhadi of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, retired Brig John Kenneth Williams of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf and retired Lt-Gen Salahuddin Tirmizi and retired Lt-Gen Abdul Qayyum of the PML-N.⁷⁰

- **Pakistan Poverty Line:** About 29.5pc of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line, says a document submitted in the National Assembly by the Ministry of Planning and Development. The document was submitted in reply to a question asked by PTI MNA Nafeesa Khattak who had asked for the number of people living below poverty line and the definition of the poverty line. The ministry had replied that according to the latest estimates based on the Cost Basic Needs (CBN) 2013-14, using the Household Integrated Economic Survey data, 29.5pc of the population lives below the poverty line which translates to approximately 55 million people. Pakistan's poverty line using CBN method and monetizing the consumption bundle of 2350 kcal is set up at Rs. 3,030 per adult equivalent per month. If a person's earning is less than Rs. 3,030 per month, he/she is below the poverty line. Sustainable Development Policy Institute Executive Director Dr AQ Suleri said the definition of the poverty line in the document submitted in the National Assembly defined fewer people as living under the line of poverty. He said that the document had defined those earning more than \$1 per day as being above the poverty line. However, according to international standards, those who earn between \$1.75 and \$2 are considered to be living above the poverty line. So, if international standards are followed, if a person earns over Rs. 5,000 he will be living above the poverty line. A representative of the SUN Civil Society Alliance Pakistan, Dr Irshad Danish said 69pc of the country's population is food insecure. People in Pakistan are also eating wheat which is infected with bacteria, which has a negative effect on their health, he said. Almost half the women and children in the country suffer from various deficiencies related to the lack of vitamins and minerals in their diet and 45pc of deaths in children under five years of age are attributed to the lack of nutrition.⁷¹
- **Proposed Loan for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:** The PTI-led provincial government has decided in principle to obtain Rs. 70 billion International Development Association's loan from the World Bank. The loan would be spent on those projects, which the provincial government considers capable of generating enough revenue to pay back the principal amount with interest. As

⁷⁰ Amir Wasim, "Senate committee on defence to meet on 8th", *Dawn*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300593/senate-committee-on-defence-to-meet-on-8th>

⁷¹ Ikram Junaidi, "29.5pc of the population lives below poverty line", *Dawn*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300512/295pc-of-the-population-lives-below-poverty-line>

per the government press statement, currently the provincial government's own- source revenue generation is only six per cent of its annual expenditure. It has been stated that the loan would be mostly invested in four sectors including agriculture, tourism, urban development and hydropower. The prominent schemes include Jabori hydropower project, Mansehra, Karora hydropower project Shangla, Koto hydropower project Dir Lower, missing link of the Ring Road Peshawar, installation of Saiful Maluk chairlift and establishment of IT Park in Peshawar.⁷²

- **Power of Military Courts:** The power of military courts to try civilians is likely to end in a month as the government does not appear interested in extending the relevant amendment to the Constitution, which will lapse on January 2, 2017. On January 3 2015, parliament passed the 21st Constitution Amendment, bringing the civilian suspects of terrorism under the jurisdiction of the military courts which are otherwise meant to try personnel of the armed forces for disciplinary reasons or for offences mentioned in the schedule of the Pakistan Army Act (PAA) 1952. According to Minister of State for Interior Affairs Baleghur Rehman, "since the situation is under control now, there is no need to extend such wartime legislation". The amendment extended the scope of scheduled offences of the PAA. It envisaged trial by military courts of those who claim or are known to belong to any terrorist group or organisation using the name of religion or a sect, those who take up weapons or wage a war against Pakistan or attack the armed forces or law-enforcement agencies; those involved in kidnapping for ransom; possession or storing of explosives, firearms or suicide jackets; using or designing vehicles for terrorist acts; providing or receiving funding from any foreign or local sources for terrorism; "overawing" the state or any section of the public or a sect or religious minority and creating terror or insecurity in or outside the country.⁷³ Not extending the amendment shows how the Pakistan government does not consider terrorism to be a threat to Pakistan or to the region.
- **Afghan Refugees in Pakistan:** More than 380,000 registered Afghan refugees have returned from Pakistan in 2016, the highest number since 2007, the United Nations said on December 2nd, adding it handed out \$135 million in cash assistance in the last three months alone. Fears of a crackdown on refugees in the country along with a doubling of the UN's cash grant for voluntary returnees to \$400 saw a surge over the border after July 2016. Estimates suggest that a further half a million unregistered refugees may also have returned this year, though the figure could not be verified by officials. UNHCR stated that the voluntary repatriations will be halted from December 1 for a routine winter break, resuming in March. The break will also allow the agency time to

⁷² Mohammad Ashfaq, "Govt to get Rs70bn WB loan to whip up development", *Dawn*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300529/govt-to-get-rs70bn-wb-loan-to-whip-up-development>

⁷³ Malik Asad, "Military court trials of terror cases set to end on Jan 2", *Dawn*, December 4, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1300356>

mobilise additional resources. The government has extended a deadline for the refugees to leave its territory from March 2017 to December next year.⁷⁴

- **Secret Deal in Balochistan:** Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari alleges that some Balochistan leaders are striking a clandestine deal with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, compromising rights of the people of the province. As per Bilawal, the PML-N's Balochistan government is more loyal to Takht-i-Raiwind (a reference to the Sharif's residential quarters) than the Baloch as people are being kept in the dark about many important decisions. He lamented that many in Punjab were speaking in favour of CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor), but no one was talking about rights of provinces in the corridor and the National Action Plan (NAP).⁷⁵

Israel

- **Fatah election fails to bring new group of leaders:** With the closure of the Seventh Congress on December 4th that took place in Ramallah, with the announcement of the names of those elected to the Fatah central committee, it became clear that no names of new leaders were proposed. Most younger-generation leaders such as Kadoura Fares, a former minister and associate of jailed second intifada leader Marwan Barghouti, did not get seats. Most of the proposed names for the Central Committee were supporters of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The central committee looks a lot like its predecessor. Its most popular leader, Barghouti, has symbolic resonance, but he can't go to any meetings because he is serving multiple life sentences for the murder of five people. Still, his tallying of the most votes strengthens his position in becoming a successor to Abbas. Jibril Rajoub, the head of the Palestinian Football Federation, came in second. Among holdovers from the previous committee are: Muhammad Ishtayeh, a former negotiator with Israel; Hussein Sheikh, in charge of coordinating civil affairs with Israel; Mahmoud Alul, former governor of Nablus; Tawfiq Tirawi, the former West Bank security chief; Saeb Erekat, chief interlocutor with Israel; and Nasser Qidwa, Yasser Arafat's nephew and a former foreign minister. One relatively young new face belongs to the only woman on the committee, Dalal Salameh, a former legislator from the Balata refugee camp. There is only one Gazan on the committee, Ahmed Hellis. It has been stated that the elections in the conference are not representative of Fatah as a whole, given the exclusion from the conference and thus from the central committee of Mohammad Dahlan, the former Gaza security chief and one time favorite of the Israeli defense establishment, and his followers. He was elected to the central committee in

⁷⁴ "Over 380,000 Afghans return from Pakistan in 2016: UNHCR", *The Express Tribune*, December 2, 2016, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1251454/380000-afghans-return-pakistan-2016-unhcr/>

⁷⁵ "Bilawal warns of 'secret deal' between Nawaz, Baloch leaders", *Dawn*, December 2, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1299898>

2009 but expelled from Fatah two years later after he criticized Abbas, after which all members of the Dahlan faction has been expelled.⁷⁶

- **John Kerry and Israel:** After four years as secretary of state that featured 375 public conversations with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and 40 in-person visits, John Kerry appeared frustrated on December 4th that more than 130 hours of conversation have failed to slow Israel's settlement construction in the West Bank. Israel is "heading to a place of danger," Kerry told the Saban Forum in Washington, warning of "an erosion over a period of time" of the chances for a real and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace "by virtue of this continued settlement process." This was Kerry's fourth time attending the forum, and his message has been consistent throughout: Israel cannot fulfill its founding promise without forging a lasting peace agreement with the Palestinians that provides them with a state of their own.⁷⁷
- **Israel Navy Ships:** The Defense Ministry stated on December 4th that the construction of four Israel Navy corvettes at a shipyard owned by an Abu Dhabi-based company does not jeopardize any classified information because all combat and internal systems will be installed in Israel, as the German shipyard builds only the body of the ships, all of the systems will be installed in Israel. The contract to buy protective ships was signed with the German company, with direct involvement of the German government, which is funding a third of the cost of the deal. Prior to the signing of the contracts, the defense establishment's director of security carried out checks with German government officials to confirm that no classified material from the project will be transferred to any unauthorized body that has not been approved as such. The ministry was responding to a report by Yediot Aharonot on December 4th that the German shipyard where the new vessels are being constructed is operated by Abu Dhabi MAR and owned by Iskandar Safa, a French businessman of Lebanese descent. Israel considers Lebanon as an "enemy state" and has no diplomatic ties with its northern neighbor. Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, also has no formal diplomatic ties with Israel, and Israeli passport holders are prohibited from entering the country. The construction of the four "Saar-6" class warships, which are due to arrive in Israel by 2020 to defend Israel's offshore natural gas reserves, was agreed to in a €430 million deal between Israel and the German company ThyssenKrupp in 2015. ThyssenKrupp reportedly sub-contracted the work to German Naval Yards Kiel, which was sold to Abu Dhabi MAR in 2011.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ben Lynfield, "Analysis: Fatah election fails to bring new group of leaders", *The Jerusalem Post*, December 5, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Analysis-Fatah-election-fails-to-bring-new-group-of-leaders-474449>

⁷⁷ Michael Wilner, "Kerry: 'Israel heading to a place of danger' over settlements", *The Jerusalem Post*, December 4, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Kerry-in-final-Israel-forum-laments-settlement-growth-474430>

⁷⁸ Anna Ahronheim, "Israeli warships being built in shipyard owned by Abu-Dhabi and Lebanese firm", *The Jerusalem Post*, December 4, 2016, www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Israeli-warships-being-built-in-shipyard-owned-by-Abu-Dhabi-and-Lebanese-firm-474407

- **Israel, Greece and Cyprus:** Energy issues and emergency rescue cooperation will top the agenda when leaders of Israel, Greece and Cyprus meet this week in Jerusalem for their second trilateral summit in less than a year. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades will hold a one-day summit on December 8th. The three first met together in January in Nicosia in what was hailed as the formation of a new “strategic alliance” in the eastern Mediterranean. Tsipras and Anastasiades will be accompanied by a number of their senior ministers. The three leaders are expected to issue a joint declaration after their meeting.⁷⁹

Southeast Asia

Singapore must remain open even as others turn inwards: PM Lee Hsien Loong

The trend of developed countries turning inwards and adopting a more “protectionist, nativist” approach would have an impact not only on economics and trade. Security and the international order will be affected as well, and there will be major consequences, especially for small and open countries like Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong warned on December 4. “I do not know how far this trend will go, but I do not like the direction the trend is going. Because if more countries turn this way, the world is going to change, and it’s going to change for the worse,” said Mr Lee, who was speaking in his capacity as People’s Action Party (PAP) secretary-general to party activists and union leaders at the biennial PAP Conference. Amid the global upheavals — in particular, Mr Lee expressed concerns about elections in several European countries next year — Singapore will continue to pursue trade liberalisation with others in the region and cooperate with major trade partners, said Mr Lee.⁸⁰

Myanmar

Myanmar: Northern rebels want China as peace negotiator

Four rebel groups in Myanmar’s restive Shan State called on China on Monday to mediate to end clashes after the government claimed that a major town had been brought under army control. A joint statement by the combined forces of the Northern Alliance demanded the military stop its offensives immediately and withdraw troops from ethnic areas across the whole country. “As most of the fresh fighting is on the Myanmar-China border area, we want the Chinese government’s prompt mediation for an end to fighting and to bring border stability,” it said. It added that the alliance was ready to end fighting so fair and genuine political negotiations with the government could take place. On December 4, 2016, the government announced that the strategic town of Mongkoe in northeastern Shan, which had been under attack by rebels for two weeks, had been brought under control. The State Counselor’s Office Information Committee said that the combined forces of the

⁷⁹ Herb Keinon, “Israel, Greece, Cyprus to hold second trilateral summit”, *The Jerusalem Post*, December 3, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Israel-Greece-Cyprus-to-hold-second-trilateral-summit-474350>

⁸⁰ <https://www.gov.sg/news/content/today-online---spore-must-remain-open-even-as-others-turn-inwards-pm-lee>

Northern Alliance -- the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and Arakan Army (AA) -- had withdrawn from the area after government troops fought back using military helicopters and heavy weapons.⁸¹

Malaysia

Malaysia criticises Myanmar for ethnic cleansing of Muslim minorities

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak on December 4, 2016 criticised the Myanmar government and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi over the "ethnic cleansing" of the minority Rohingya community in its Rakhine state. Addressing a mass rally in solidarity with the ethnic Rohingya community at Titiwangsa Stadium, Najib signed a giant banner to protest what he called "ethnic cleansing" of the minority muslim race in Rakhine in Myanmar. He said, Malaysia would continue to pressure its Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) counterpart to settle the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.⁸²

Aung San Suu Kyi accuses international community of 'drumming up resentment'

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has accused the international community of exacerbating communal tensions in Rakhine State by "always" seeking to stoke resentment. In a media interview on December 2 at the end of a visit to the city-state, the Nobel Peace laureate also said the government had managed to bring the situation in northern Rakhine under control and to "calm it down". She noted that attacks by militants in October had triggered the massive security operation in the Muslim-majority area that has led to accusations of human rights abuses.⁸³

Thailand

Thai Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn crowned as the new King of Thailand

Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn kneels during a succession ceremony to become King Rama X in Bangkok, Thailand, on December 1, 2016. Thailand Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn was crowned the new King on December 1, 2016, even as the country continues its year-long mourning over the death of his father King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The public crowning ceremony will only take place late-2017 after the previous king's cremation. The 64-year old will adopt the new title King Rama X of the

⁸¹ <http://aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/myanmar-northern-rebels-want-china-as-peace-negotiator/699327>

⁸² http://www.business-standard.com/article/international/malaysia-criticises-myanmar-for-ethnic-cleansing-of-muslim-minorities-116120400542_1.html

⁸³ <http://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/daw-suu-accuses-international-community-of-drumming-up-resentment>

Chakri dynasty, leading one of Asia's richest and most powerful monarchies. The crown regularly invests in businesses and real estate across Thailand.⁸⁴

Indonesia

Indonesia blasphemy protest draws 200,000; ends peacefully

At least 200,000 conservative Muslims rallied peacefully in the Indonesian capital on December 2, 2016 in the second major protest against its minority Christian governor, who is being prosecuted for alleged blasphemy. President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, a political ally of the governor who angered hard-liners by being out of the city during their first protest, unexpectedly went to the national monument to join Friday prayers with the sprawling crowd. He called for protesters to leave peacefully. They cheered and then broke into chants calling for Gov. Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja’s arrest, but later, people streamed peacefully out of the area and marched to a major traffic circle before dispersing.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/01/thailands-new-monarch-watched-for-signs-of-unity.html>

⁸⁵ <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/12/194594/indonesia-blasphemy-protest-draws-200000-ends-peacefully>