



Weekly Review of Select International Events

(22-28 August, 2016)

Central Asia

1. Kyrgyz Migrants Die in Moscow Fire

More than a dozen migrants, including 14 from Kyrgyzstan, died in a fire in Moscow warehouse on 27 August 2016. Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Ministry confirmed that 14 of the 16 people killed in the fire were Kyrgyz nationals. The warehouse is thought to belong to a local printing company and the fire was probably caused by a broken lamp in a room with large quantities of flammable liquids and paper products. The probe is on to determine the incident due to arson or negligence.

Russia is home to a large number of migrants from Central Asia, including from Kyrgyz Republic. Abdygani Shakirov, heading an organisation that represents the Kyrgyz people in Moscow, said all of the dead were young women, who were working in Moscow to earn money. Kyrgyzstan has declared August 29 as a day of national mourning for those killed in the fire in Moscow.

2. Islam Karimov in Hospital

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, who is 78 years old, has reportedly been admitted to a hospital undergoing examination and treatment that would "take a certain period of time". This is first time that the government has issued a statement on President's health. Uzbekistan is celebrating its 25 years of independence President Karimov is expected to attend events marking the anniversary on Thursday – September 1.

Uzbekistan is the most populous country in the region and only Central Asian republic sharing boundary with all regional republics and Afghanistan. Stability in Uzbekistan is important for the region and there seems no clear successor to the President. According to Fergana international news agency, the Uzbek leader suffered a stroke.

3. Kazakhstan President Visits Serbia, Poland

Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Poland on August 22 and met with Polish President Andrzej Duda. Continuing his visit to the region, he next went to Serbia. It was his first official visit to Serbia. In Poland, the two leaders discussed issues of trade, economic, investment, agriculture, culture, transit and transport cooperation, and regional and international developments.

Nearly 40,000 Poles live in Kazakhstan, creating a "bridge of friendship" between the two nations, he said. Duda noted Nazarbayev's visit demonstrated strengthening relations between the two countries. The talks in Belgrade with Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic had similar approach, as the two leaders spoke about collaboration in trade, culture, economic and investment sectors. Kazakh President said he intends to increase cooperation in the fields of agriculture, industry, construction, medicine and pharmacy.

During the visit Kazakhstan signed several agreements with Poland and Serbia. Nazarbayev and Duda inked a document outlining partnerships in energy, transport, space research, science, technology, finance, environmental protection and agriculture. Nazarbayev and Nikolic signed agreements on legal assistance in criminal matters and the extradition and transfer of sentenced persons.

4. Tajik Parliament Adopts Law on Mass Amnesty

Tajikistan's parliament on August 24 adopted a new law on amnesty proposed by President Emomali Rahmon. According to the law, amnesty will benefit more than 12,000 people. More than 3,000 inmates will be released from prison and more than 4,000 people with suspended sentences will be pardoned according to the new legislation. The prison terms of more than 5,000 people will also be lessened.

The amnesty was proposed to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Tajikistan's independence from Soviet Union, which will be marked on September 9.

5. Uzbekistan Launches Inter-city High-Speed Rail

Uzbekistan Railways launched the high-speed rail operation on the Tashkent-Bukhara route through Samarkand. The high-speed train named 'Afrosiyob' made its first trip on the route on August 25. The length of the railway section is 259 kilometres and the cost of the project is about US\$ 400 million. The project was financed by Uzbekistan Railways.

Two high speed trains will run on the Tashkent-Bukhara route cutting the travel time by half. The train will take 3 hours and 20 minutes to cover 600 km route from Tashkent to Bukhara. Earlier, the travellers had to spend 7 to 8 hours in covering the distance.

Africa

VI Tokyo International Conference on African Development ¹

The long awaited Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) is going underway (August 27) and Nairobi's international airport has been a beehive of activity, as some 10,000 delegates and participants from around the world have begun to arrive in Kenya.

38 Heads of State and Government from across Africa will visit Nairobi to participate in the event. Some 4,000 Japanese are expected, as part of the official TICAD delegation, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is accompanied by representatives of hundreds of Japanese companies seeking to invest in Africa or trade with Africa. From across Africa some 6,000 government officials and private sector participants are expected.

All previous summits have taken place in Japan, starting with the inaugural event in 1993 and the fact that it was Kenya which was chosen to host the first ever such summit in Africa is neither lost on the Kenyan government nor on the other governments from the continent.

Trade volumes, in comparison with China and India, have some way to catch up, as the annual exchange of goods and services, according to economic data available, stands at only just over \$92 billion, compared with \$330 billion for China and \$260 billion for India.

¹ Global travel Industry News,AUG 26, 2016<http://www.eturbonews.com/74035/vi-tokyo-international-conference-african-development-fills-all->

Kenya's and East Africa's agricultural sectors are keenly eyeing an increase in trade for coffee and tea with Japan, while flower farms and agro processing and produce exporting companies too are prepared to make a bid to increase Japan's imports of such products from the region.

Top economies dare not under value Africa²

It is true that there are several human development indicators that do not paint a nice picture about sub-Saharan Africa. However the leading economies of the world dare not risk ignoring a region that within 40 years will gain a tremendous demographic dividend from a high population growth rate that can propel a sustainable economic takeoff. The leading industrialised nations will be looking for customers and sub-Saharan Africa looks the best bet for the next half century or more.

Although African purchasing power is still relatively low, it is the only region that holds out immense potential. It has the resources, it is also important to note that several key ingredients used in the latest technology are found in abundance in Africa. Remember how coltan became such an issue 10 and 15 years ago. Wages are rising in China, which means there will be pressure to push some global trade and production to African markets.

This is reason enough for these high-profile summits which is all an aggressive drive to make friends and sell goods and services. Nowadays we have the US-African Leaders Summit; EU-Africa Summit; the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation; the India–Africa Forum and most recently the Japanese inspired Tokyo International Conference of African Development (TICAD) which for first time was held outside of the Japanese capital and hosted by Nairobi.

China's defiant behaviour in the Pacific region have forced Japanese to assert some more influence. Japan wants a seat on the Security Council and among the large delegation that accompanied Prime Minister Abe were lobbyists charged with the task of drumming up support for a future bid. The Japanese economy has been in doldrums for several years now though it is still the fourth biggest in the world and a country that can go toe-to-toe with any in terms of technological advances.

According to the Japanese media, Tokyo considers Africa the world's last major growth market and aims to offer high-quality, safety-focused infrastructure technology as an alternative to China's.

TICAD has previously been held in Japan every five years since 1993. Abe made a strong case for Japan's role in African economic development. Japan wants a favorable environment for Japanese companies looking to enter African markets. The suggestions of special economic zones where Japanese companies can invest in Africa by establishing industrial parks, providing generous tax benefits and easing regulations is already causing some excitement. This is because many African countries are doing just that, building economic zones. Note that this is the way Japan invested in the Chinese market during the late 1980s.

The Japanese also want measures to improve the overall business environment to include signing investment agreements and trade pacts, and expanding financing for Africa's private sector, including small and midsize companies. At the same time, Japan intends to expand its conventional assistance, such as providing highly efficient power generation and transmission technology and cooperating on railway and other public transportation infrastructure projects. It is already heavily involved in the geothermal sector in Kenya.

² Editorial East African Business Week , August 28, 2016 ,
<http://www.busiweek.com/index1.php?Ctp=2&pI=5576&pLv=3&srI=75&spI=116>

On the other hand, the Japanese market is one of the hardest to get into. It took the Americans years before they could even sell a car there. The Japanese, like the Americans also cloak their farmers with huge subsidies and it is a subject they do not like to talk about much. So as much as Africans would like to do business with Japan, there is the big question of what do we sell to them that can earn money to buy their highly prized goods?

The choice to change Africa oil & gas review - pwc³

A report by PWC on ‘*The choice to change Africa Oil and Africa Gas*’ published last week throws light on the biggest challenge for oil dependent countries in Africa. Africa’s share of global oil production has decreased slightly since last year, moving it from 9.3% to 9.1% of global output. Proven oil reserves on the continent are still estimated to be 7.6% of the global total, which is the same as the previous year. This comes as no surprise as much of the exploration and appraisal activity has been put on hold with the global oil price downturn. Despite this, Africa boasts eight of the top-20 discoveries in 2015 and already 9 out of the top-20 discoveries at the time of writing in 2016. That said, average discovery sizes are on the decline worldwide.

From a proven oil reserve totalling 129.1 billion barrels, Africa produced 8.4 million barrels of crude oil per day (bbl/d) in 2015 with over 77% of this oil production coming from Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt and Angola.

Despite what may seem like a time to shut-in producing assets to wait out the oil prices storm, many oil & gas companies see production to be their only route to a continuous stream of income. In many cases, production has actually increased!

The emergence of ISIS as well as the civil war in Libya has meant that production levels in North Africa continue to be low, though they have increased slightly due to increased production in Egypt.

Libya saw another decline of 13.4%, though there is speculation that production levels there will soon be on the rise. After the newly formed national oil company of the east failed to export crude (thus temporarily further slashing countrywide production), there has been an accord between the rival Tobruk-led Government and the Government of National Accord to combine the two national oil companies (NOCs) under the National Oil Company of Libya and relocate the headquarters to Benghazi in the east. This seems like a sign of positive things to come for Libya though it may flood the market with additional crude, which is the last thing needed for an oil price rebound.

As of the end of 2015, Africa has a proven natural gas reserve base of 496.7 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), down marginally from 2014. More than 90% of the continent’s natural gas production is being driven by Nigeria, Libya, Algeria and Egypt. This is a slight uptick in production (4.5%) compared to 2014.

Africa has dropped from nearly 70 years of natural gas production available down to 66.4 years, given higher current production rates and a slow rate of reserves replacement.

With six of the nine largest African discoveries being gas in 2016, there is likely to see growth in the continent’s overall proven natural gas reserves. Since gas is positioned to be a bridging fuel in the eventual transition to a lower-carbon economy, this could prove a lucrative natural resource to fuel the emerging economies on the continent.

China – Economic Affairs and OBOR

³ Proshare Intelligent <https://www.proshareng.com/news/Oil%20Sector/The-choice-to-change-Africa-oil---gas-review---pwc/32156>

President Xi urges independent R&D for aviation engines, gas turbines

President Xi Jinping on 28 August called for acceleration of independent research, development and manufacturing of aircraft engines and gas turbines to make China an aviation industry power. His words came on the heels of the establishment of the Aero Engine Corporation of China (AECC) on 28 August in Beijing.

The founding of the firm is a strategic move that will help enhance national power as well as the capacity of the armed forces, Xi said in a written instruction. The move will also benefit the reform of state-owned enterprises and the restructuring of the aviation industry, he added.

Xi encouraged AECC employees to be bold in innovating to make the country an aviation power. The AECC received investment from the State Council, the Beijing Municipal Government, Aviation Industry Corporation of China and Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China, with a registered capital of 50 billion yuan (around 7.5 billion U.S. dollars). The firm has 96,000 employees.⁴

China's top 500 firms report first revenue decline in 15 yrs

China's top 500 enterprises reported their first annual decline in combined revenues in 15 years with a 0.07-percent drop last year.

Among the top 500 firms, 155 reported declines in revenues in 2015, 61 more than a year ago, with many of them representing the overcapacity-plagued coal, steel, oil and chemicals industries. Meanwhile, 72 firms reported losses, 15 more than a year ago.

China Enterprise Confederation and China Enterprise Directors Association unveiled the 2016 edition of the Top 500 Chinese Enterprises list Saturday. The list is based on revenues from 2015.⁵

Cargo train leaves Nantong on first journey to Afghanistan

The first train carrying freight containers from China to Afghanistan left the eastern Chinese city of Nantong on August 25.

The train will leave China through the Alataw Pass in Xinjiang. It will then pass through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan before arriving in Hairatan, a border town and a port in the north of Afghanistan. Two trains are scheduled each month. The new railway route is part of efforts to improve logistics linking nations under the "Belt and Road" Initiative.⁶

G20 Hangzhou Summit: expected outcomes

While replying to a question on upcping G-20 summit in Hangzhou, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang on August 24 noted:

⁴ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-08/28/c_135640184.htm

⁵ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0828/c90000-9106497.html>

⁶ http://english.gov.cn/news/video/2016/08/26/content_281475426219081.htm

The G20 Hangzhou Summit is expected to reach nearly 30 outcomes if all of us work together. That will make the Summit one of the most fruitful ones. As the Summit is drawing near, we can sense the international community's expectation for the Summit. Countries all hope to ensure the success of the Summit through intensified cooperation and inject strong impetus to world economic growth.

As for the participation of developing countries, indeed, the number of developing countries invited to the Hangzhou Summit is larger than any previous meetings. Developed and developing countries will sit down as equal partners and explore how to realize long-term and steady world economic growth at the Summit, which showcases that this Summit is much more representative and inclusive. Developing countries' voice will be clearly heard at the Hangzhou Summit. Developed and developing countries making decisions on global economic affairs through consultation on an equal footing reflects a major change in the world economic landscape. It answers the trend of the times, and is a historical progress.⁷

Global Times says “China-India relations aren’t simply black and white”

Global Times published an article by Lin Minwang (Associate Professor of the Institute of International Relations at China Foreign Affairs) titled “China-India relations aren’t simply black and white” The article notes:

...In reality, ties between big nations have always been complex and require a multi-dimensional perspective. Viewed in this more rounded way, the conclusion on China-India relations becomes quite different....However, at the regional level, China and India face competition against each other. China's One Belt, One Road initiative aims to promote multi-dimensional connectivity in finance, infrastructure and other areas and open up markets in the East and West. This has been viewed by many observers as a challenge to India's ambition in the South Asia region. At the same time, India proposed its own integrative plans with countries in the region including the regional bloc BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal), Project Mausam and Link West. This competition also spills over to Southeast and Central Asia, the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean.⁸

China – Domestic and PLA, Southeast Asia

1. Tibet veteran named new Party chief⁹

Wu Yingjie has been appointed as Party chief of the Tibet autonomous region by the Communist Party of China Central Committee, Xinhua News Agency reported. The official, previously the deputy Party chief, is the first person to hold the position after spending his entire political career in the region. Born in the eastern province of Shandong, Wu, 59, has worked in Tibet since 1974. He spent several years on livestock farms and at a power plant before gaining a bachelor's degree in Lhasa between 1979 and 1983. He joined the regional government's education department in 1983 and gradually rose up the ranks to become head of the department between 2000 and 2003. Wu went on to be vice chairman of the region from 2003 to 2013, a member of the standing committee of the Tibet committee of the CPC from 2005 to 2011, and had been deputy Party chief since 2011. He holds a master's degree in Party history from the Party School of the CPC Central Committee.

2. Ex-statistics chief, senior lawmaker expelled from CPC¹⁰

⁷ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665309/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1391577.shtml

⁸ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1002636.shtml?ut>

⁹ Tang Yue, “Tibet veteran named new party chief”, *China Daily*, 29 August 2016, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-08/29/content_26624217.htm (accessed 29 August 2016).

Wang Baoan, former head of the National Bureau of Statistics, has been expelled from the Communist Party of China and removed from public office, the country's top anti graft watchdog said on Friday. Wang, 53, was vice minister of finance before he was appointed as head of the bureau in April 2015, according to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. He was put under investigation for "serious violations of discipline" by the CCDI in January. On Feb 22, the State Council, China's Cabinet, announced that Wang was relieved from his post. "With absolutely no political beliefs, Wang chronically conducted superstitious activities and seriously violated the Party's political discipline and rules. He also made speeches that went against the CPC Central Committee on key issues," the commission said. It said he "countered investigation" and disobeyed an eight point code to cut bureaucracy and maintain close ties with the people, and visited high end hotels and expensive entertainment venues".

In another development, Zheng Yuzhuo, a senior legislator in Northeast China's Liaoning province, has been expelled from the Communist Party of China and removed from all public posts for corruption charges and electoral fraud. The decision was approved by the CPC Central Committee, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection announced on Friday. It said Zheng, former deputy head of the Standing Committee of the Liaoning Provincial People's Congress, was found to have accepted bribes and been involved in buying votes in elections. The announcement didn't give details. The CCDI found that Zheng had seriously violated Party discipline rules. He was alleged to have solicited bribes, engaged in buying votes and instructed others to rig elections.

3. Japan urged to work on relations¹¹

China hopes that Japan will take the action and create conditions necessary for the two countries to maintain high level contacts, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said on Friday. "The contacts themselves bear great significance for developing the China Japan relationship," he said at a regular news conference in Beijing. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has recently expressed his desire to have a meeting with President Xi Jinping during the upcoming G20 summit in Hangzhou next month. It has been widely speculated that the goal of a recent visit to China by Shotaro Yachi, a key foreign policy adviser to Abe, was to pave the way for such a meeting. Yachi attended the third China Japan High Level Political Dialogue in Beijing from Aug 24 to 26 and met with Premier Li Keqiang and State Councillor Yang Jiechi on Thursday. Li said that both countries should properly handle disputes and safeguard the momentum of stabilizing and improving their bilateral relationship. Lu did not confirm that Abe and Xi would meet, but he said that many leaders who are coming to the summit have expressed their desire to meet with Xi.

4. Taiwan's tussle with mainland China over ties with the Vatican and why it matters¹²

Mainland China's tussle with Taiwan to forge ties with the Vatican has intensified since the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party took power on the island earlier this year and Beijing tries to reduce its limited number of allies around the world, according to analysts. Relations between Beijing and the Holy See were cut in 1951 after the mainland launched a crackdown on organised religion and the Vatican is Taiwan's only formal ally in Europe.

¹⁰ China Daily, "Ex-statistics chief, senior lawmaker expelled from the CPC" 27 August 2016, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-08/27/content_26613065.htm (accessed 29 August 2016).

¹¹ Mo Jingxi, "Japan urged to work on relations", *China Daily*, 27 August 2016, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/China-Japan-Relations/2016-08/27/content_26612965.htm (accessed 29 August 2016).

¹² Kristin Huang, "Taiwan's struggle with mainland China over ties with the Vatican and why it matters", *South China Morning Post*, 29 August 2016, at <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2010542/taiwans-tussle-mainland-china-over-ties-vatican-and-why> (accessed 29 August 2016).

Deteriorating ties between Beijing and President Tsai Ing-wen's government in Taiwan since she took office have prompted mainland China to step up efforts to poach its allies, including the Vatican, analysts said. "Under the governance of Tsai, who refused to acknowledge the '1992 consensus', mainland China will inevitably accelerate the speed in establishing relations with the Vatican," said Liu Xiangping, the deputy director of Taiwan affairs institute at Nanjing University.

Mainland China has its own authorised Catholic church and it appoints bishops without the Vatican's consent. However, in a lengthy article in the diocesan publication *Kung Kao Po* in Hong Kong earlier this month, Cardinal John Tong Hon said the Vatican and Beijing had reached an initial agreement that the Pope would choose from a list of candidates recommended by a conference comprising bishops from the official and unauthorised Catholic churches in China. Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin also appeared upbeat this month about ties with Beijing. He said there was "much hope and expectation that there will be new developments and a new season in relations with China". Zhou Tailiang, the head of secretariat of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association in Beijing, said it would like to see any agreement with the Vatican signed swiftly. Liu Jiayan, a researcher at the Taiwan affairs institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said it was "just a matter of time" for Beijing and Vatican to establish formal diplomatic relations after a resolution on the appointment of mainland bishops was agreed.

5. Xinjiang Communist Party chief 'on his way out' as Beijing reshuffles top provincial jobs¹³

Xinjiang Communist Party chief Zhang Chunxian is tipped to be replaced soon following Beijing's announcement on Sunday of a reshuffle of party chiefs. Tibet's party boss Chen Quanguo, 61, is expected to become Xinjiang's party boss, while Zhang, 63, will be reassigned to a semi-retired role similar to that of his predecessor in Xinjiang, Wang Lequan, sources said. In a first round of reshuffles unveiled since a gathering of top incumbent and retired leaders in the resort of Beidaihe, Wu Yingjie, 59, Tibet's deputy party chief since 2011, has been promoted to the top official in the Himalayan region, Xinhua reported. Notably, Wu has come up through the ranks in Tibet over the past four decades.

Political analysts said the reshuffle showed power-jockeying had gathered pace in the lead-up to the party congress to be held late next year. Zhang, who was parachuted into Xinjiang after the 2009 riots, has long been rumoured to be replaced due to his inability to curb the rise of ethnic unrest and separatist violence in the region. Chen Quanguo is believed to be Premier Li Keqiang's protégé. He worked as Li's deputy in Henan between 1998 and 2004.

European Union

Earthquake in Italy

Earthquake has caused massive damage in central Italy. At least 284 people are reportedly killed and hundreds are injured. Number of injured and dead may further rise. Around 2500 people are estimated to be left homeless by earthquake in the country. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi has declared

¹³ SCMP, "Xinjiang Communist Party chief 'on his way out' as Beijing reshuffles top provincial jobs", *South China Morning Post*, 29 August 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2010366/xinjiang-communist-party-chief-his-way-out-beijing> (accessed 29 August 2016).

'state of emergency' and provided crisis fund of 50 million euro for affected areas. He also cancelled the taxes of residents.

German Chancellor Meeting with Visegrad Leaders

German Chancellor held a meeting with four countries of Visegrad grouping on 26 August 2016 in Warsaw. After meeting with Italian Prime Minister Renzi and French President Hollande in Italy, Chancellor Merkel travelled to Prague, Tallinn and Warsaw. Her visit was to ensure unity among the EU members after the Brexit vote. Chancellor Merkel's travel to Eastern European capitals was intended to prepare background for forthcoming summit in Bratislava in September, 2016. The Visegrad countries expressed their difference over refugee policy of Germany. They also talked strengthening European security.

The New Civil Defense Plan Approved by Germany Cabinet

German cabinet has approved a new civil defense strategy for dealing with new security challenges including terrorism, cyber warfare and infrastructure attacks. The new strategy lists the conventional, biological and chemical weapons attacks. Details of the strategy are not available yet. As per the media reports; the new strategy has acknowledged that security environment has changed and the country should be adequately prepared to deal with these challenges.

The Burkini Ban Overturned

French Administrative Court has overturned burkini ban in the country. The Court stated that the burkini ban insulted 'fundamental freedoms' for instance, 'freedom to come and go, the freedom of conscience and personal liberty.' A network of local mayors and officials across France imposed bans on the burkini. Their main argument is that traditional Muslim dress somehow hinders the rights of women in France. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said the suit was a means of 'enslavement'. Human rights groups have welcomed the court decision.

European Union

Germany expects up to 30,000 refugees in 2016, official says:

The Federal Office for Migrants and Refugees (BAMF) has said that it expects up to 300,000 refugees to arrive in 2016, less than one-third of the total during 2015's record influx.¹⁴

Frank-Jürgen Weise, the head of BAMF, told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper that Germany's healthy economy and improvements to refugee services in 2015 meant that the country was well able to absorb new arrivals, particularly as their numbers have dropped off.

"We are preparing for between 250,000 and 300,000 refugees this year," he said. "We can ensure optimal services for up to 300,000. Should more people arrive, it would put us under pressure, then we would go into so-called crisis mode. But even then we would not have conditions like last year."

Last year, nearly 1.1 million refugees arrived in Germany.

¹⁴ France-Presse, Agence, "Germany expects up to 300,000 refugees in 2016, official says", *The Guardian*, August 28, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/28/germany-300000-refugees-2016-bamf> accessed August 29, 2016.

The closure of the so-called Balkan migrant trail and the EU deal with Turkey to keep refugees from reaching Greece – a main entry point into the bloc – has driven down arrivals from the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Weise said his agency had made major strides in working through a large backlog in asylum claims but that it would not manage to clear the remaining 530,000 cases by the end of the year. He said integrating those allowed to stay in Germany into the labour market would be a lengthy and costly process. Weise also expressed positivity about the long term prospects of Germany's ability to take in refugees this year.¹⁵

German Minister says UK must pay for Brexit or the EU is in 'deep trouble':

Germany's Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel warned recently saying that Britain must take the responsibility for the fallout from Brexit and must not be allowed to enjoy the benefits which come from EU membership. He also commented that if other member countries followed the footsteps of UK, then Europe would go 'down the drain'. Speaking to a group of journalists at a news conference, the Minister said that, "Brexit is bad but it won't hurt us as much economically as some fear – it's more of a psychological problem and it's a huge problem politically. Due to the Brexit referendum, Gabriel has expressed that the world now regards the EU as an 'unstable continent'.¹⁶

Earlier in an interview with German broadcaster ARD, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "We all agree in the European Union that Britain's exit, the result of the referendum, has a big impact." She said that the remaining member states must listen to each other carefully and avoid rushing into policy decisions.

British Prime Minister orders her Cabinet ministers to come up with a blueprint for EU exit:

Amidst concerns that Britain was trying to delay its exit from the EU, British PM Theresa May has ordered every cabinet ministers to come up with a blueprint for Brexit and how to go ahead with it.

Mrs May has challenged each minister – more than three quarters of whom campaigned for Britain to stay in the EU – to identify Brexit opportunities in their areas of responsibility.

It comes as senior government sources privately complained that pro-EU civil servants who are jealous of the new department are trying to frustrate the work of Brexit ministers. A Cabinet meeting in the coming Wednesday of the week is likely to discuss the 'next step in the negotiations' as the new Prime Minister attempts to give momentum to Britain's decision to leave the EU.

Her aides said she would use the chance "to highlight the wealth of opportunities that will arise from Brexit" and allow them to discuss "mutually beneficial trade relationships in the future".¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "UK must pay for Brexit or EU is in deep trouble", *The Guardian*, August 29, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/aug/29/uk-must-pay-for-brexit-or-eu-is-in-deep-trouble-says-german-minister> accessed on August 29, 2016.

¹⁷ Hope, Christopher, "Theresa May, the Brexit enforcer, orders her Cabinet Ministers to come up with blueprint for the EU exit", *The Telegraph*, August 28, 2016,

North America

Canada

- 1) In spite of relentless pressure to help Syrians flee the perils of civil war, Canada's former Conservative government twice rejected a proposal in 2015 to make it easier for Canadians to sponsor them, newly disclosed documents show. First in March, then again in July as the refugee crisis escalated — federal bureaucrats proposed exempting Syrians and Iraqis from a rule requiring them to have official UN refugee status in order to be sponsored by small groups of people to come to Canada. On both occasions, the recommendation as described in documents obtained by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act was rejected by then-immigration minister Chris Alexander. The Conservatives eventually agreed to the change, but not until September, when the original policy became linked to the story of Alan Kurdi - the three-year-old Syrian boy whose tragic drowning galvanized global sympathy for the Syrian refugee crisis. On Sept. 19, a notice would appear on the Immigration Department's website, with the Minister's signature. It established "sufficient public policy considerations" warranting an exemption from the rule for "for Iraqi and Syrian nationals who have fled their country of nationality or habitual residence as a result of the current conflicts in Syria and Iraq, in order to facilitate the sponsorship of these persons by groups of five and community sponsors." But the challenges in processing the paperwork clearly remain. Since September, over 30,000 Syrians have arrived in Canada. By May, only 195 came under the groups of five program, which the Liberals announced late last week they would extend.¹⁸
- 2) Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper has given up his seat as an MP of Calgary, leaving Canadian politics after more than 20 years to focus on his businesses. The news comes 10 months after Mr Harper lost the election to Justin Trudeau and then resigned as Conservative leader.¹⁹
- 3) Prime Minister Trudeau's government announced it would spend \$450-million over three years "to support peace operations." The announcement mentioned "peace" 35 times. But it only used the word "peacekeeping" twice, and that was only in reference to an existing RCMP program that has that word in its name. Other than that, it was all about "peace operations" and "peace building." Peacekeeping, in short, is over. This is a departure from the federal election campaign last year when the Liberal Party had stated that, "We will renew Canada's commitment to peacekeeping operations."²⁰
- 4) A Canadian man, Mr. Tamim Chowdhury, killed by Bangladesh police on Saturday for his suspected role in plotting a deadly terrorist attack at a Dhaka café was linked to a cluster of radicals from Calgary who are collectively responsible for more than 70 deaths overseas. Bangladeshi officials believe he was the architect behind last month's attack that killed 24 in the name of the Islamic State movement. The death of Mr. Chowdhury as an alleged senior terrorist comes just two weeks after the RCMP shot and killed a suspected

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/27/theresa-may-the-brexit-enforcer-orders-her-cabinet-ministers-to/> accessed August 29, 2016.

¹⁸ Stephanie Levitz, The Canadian Press, "Tories Twice Rejected Proposal That Could Have Helped More Refugees," http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/08/28/tories-twice-rejected-rule-change-that-could-have-opened-doors-for-more-refugees_n_11752240.html?utm_hp_ref=canada, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

¹⁹ BBC World, "Ex-PM Stephen Harper quits Canada politics," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-37198235>, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

²⁰ The Globe and the Mail, "The end of peacekeeping, and what comes next for Canada's soldiers," <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/the-end-of-peacekeeping-and-what-comes-next-for-canadas-soldiers/article31583016/>, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

would-be suicide bomber in London, Ont. Aaron Driver, whose radicalization appears to have occurred largely online, is not known to have spent any time with the Calgary cluster. In coming days, the Liberal government is poised to announce a new office on deradicalization, increasing the millions Canada spends on programs to deter radicalization. On the campaign trail last year, the Liberals said they would hire a “community outreach and counter-radicalization co-ordinator” because law and order approaches to terrorism do not get to the root of the problem.²¹

United States

- 1) Mr. Donald Trump’s experiment with “softening” his immigration policy came to a dramatic end at a campaign speech when he promised deportations within an hour of his inauguration. “We are going to rid of the criminals, and it’s going to happen within one hour after I take office,” he said. “We will move justly, but we will move fast. Believe me.” Mr. Trump has made the forcible deportation of the 11 million people in the country without documentation a cornerstone of his presidential campaign from its start in 2015. It made him a favourite among a segment of the Republican base, and helped him win the nomination over a dozen Republican senators and governors. However, last week, he explained in an appearance on Fox News that “thousands and thousands” of people he had met with on the issue had urged him not to deport undocumented immigrants who have been in the country for years and have no criminal record, but rather stable jobs and families. That new tack brought an immediate backlash from some of his hardcore supporters. Mr. Trump backtracked on his new position later in the week – including in a CNN interview, where he claimed the modification was not a “softening” but actually “a hardening.” The new remarks appear to complete the process, with Mr. Trump suggesting that undocumented immigrants commit a significant percentage of the country’s crimes and making zero mention of finding some way for those who have not committed any crimes to stay.²²
- 2) Emboldened by Mr. Trump’s struggles in the presidential race, Democrats in Congress are laying the groundwork to expand the list of House Republicans they will target for defeat as part of an effort to slash the Republicans’ 30-seat majority and even reclaim control if Mr. Trump falls further. Mr. Trump’s unpopularity, which has already undermined the party’s grip on the Senate, now threatens to imperil Republican lawmakers even in traditionally conservative districts, according to strategists and officials in both parties involved in the fight for control of the House. Democrats are particularly enticed by Mr. Trump’s dwindling support in affluent suburban areas — including those near Kansas City, Kan.; San Diego; Orlando, Fla.; and Minneapolis — where Republicans ordinarily win with ease. Mr. Trump is so disliked among college-educated voters, especially white women, that he is at risk of losing by double digits in several districts that the 2012 Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, carried comfortably.²³

²¹ Leyland Cecco, The Globe and the Mail, “Canadian shot by Bangladesh police linked to Calgary terrorists,” <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/canadian-shot-by-bangladesh-police-linked-to-calgary-terrorists/article31589279/>, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

²² S.V. Date, “Trump Goes Back To Original Immigration Position With Second 180 Flip,” http://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/trump-immigration-flip-iowa_us_57c21d25e4b085ciff29b41f, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

²³ Alexander Burns And Jonathan Martin, The New York Times, “Democrats Step Up Pursuit of House Republicans Left Limping by Donald Trump,” http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/us/politics/donald-trump-congress-gop-voters.html?_r=0, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

- 3) Clashes between Syrian rebels and Kurdish-aligned forces, both backed by the United States, intensified Sunday in northern Syria, as the rebels seized villages from the Kurds and Turkish warplanes pounded Kurdish positions, killing dozens. The fresh fighting suggested that Turkey and its Syrian proxies are increasingly focused on stopping Kurdish forces from gaining more territory in northern Syria, particularly along Turkey's border, potentially signaling a widening of the conflict. And it threatens to divert resources and attention away from the campaign against the Islamic State. At the same time, Turkey, a NATO ally, risks fueling friction with Washington, which views the Kurds and their allies as the most effective U.S. partners against the Islamic State.²⁴
- 4) Secretary of State John Kerry travelled to Nairobi, Kenya, on August 22 to meet with President Kenyatta to discuss regional security issues and counterterrorism cooperation, as well as bilateral issues and to discuss key challenges in East Africa, including the prospects for resumption of a political process in South Sudan and support to Somalia's political transition and ongoing fight against al-Shabaab. The Secretary travelled to Sokoto, and Abuja, Nigeria, on August 23-24. He met with President Buhari to discuss counterterrorism efforts, the Nigerian economy, the fight against corruption, and human rights issues. On August 24-25, Secretary Kerry travelled to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, for a series of meetings with senior Saudi leaders, his counterparts from the Gulf Cooperation Council, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen. His discussion focused on the ongoing conflict in Yemen and efforts to restore peace and stability. Additionally, the leaders discussed the region's most pressing challenges, including Syria and our global effort to counter Da'esh and violent extremism. His visit ended in Geneva, Switzerland with his talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Friday, August 26. Mr. Lavrov said that the talks with Secretary Kerry in Geneva helped to reduce mutual levels of misunderstanding. Both countries will boost their cooperation on Syria, including on the military level, he said. In addition to that, the cooperation between Russia's Khmeimim air base and representatives of the American armed forces in the US base in Jordan is going to be ramped up. Secretary Kerry outlined the steps that can be undertaken to separate the terrorists from the armed opposition, reiterating that Al-Nusra should be treated like a terrorist group despite the recent rebranding.²⁵

Mexico

- 1) President Enrique Peña Nieto received Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes Jara in the National Palace. After the official ceremony, the two presidents met in private to sign an agreement regarding seven different areas of bilateral relations, including health, security and communication. In order to facilitate commerce, the two countries made an agreement to update the Partial Scope Agreement 38 underwritten in the 1983 Economic Complementation Agreement. Paraguayan President Cartes Jara agreed that his country believes that their relationship with Mexico is very important and that they have found

²⁴ Sudarsan Raghavan, The Washington Post, "Clashes intensify between U.S.-backed groups in northern Syria," https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/clashes-intensify-between-us-backed-groups-in-northern-syria/2016/08/28/77f46cea-6d32-11e6-993f-73c693a89820_story.html, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

²⁵ US Department of State, "Travel to Kenya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland, August 22-28, 2016", <http://www.state.gov/secretary/travel/2016/t24/index.htm> and RT, "Russia, US reduce areas of misunderstanding on Syria as Lavrov & Kerry agree concrete steps", <https://www.rt.com/news/357335-kerry-lavrov-talks-syria/>, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

ways to encourage mutual growth. He noted that scientific and technological collaboration is key for development and added that included in the agreement are solutions to combat organized crime internationally.²⁶

- 2) In the fourth day of sessions of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (CoIDH) in Mexico City Friday, Foreign Relations Secretary Claudia Ruiz Massieu Salinas said that Mexico is not evading its responsibility to protect human rights and is opening itself up to international scrutiny regarding the case of the 43 disappeared students of the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College.²⁷

Russia

1. Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said on August 22 that the Russian Air Force warplanes have left the base in Iran and are stationed back in Russia. The Russian Air Force planes had used the air bases in Iran last week from which they bombed terrorist targets in Syria. Moscow and Tehran said the deployment had achieved its goals. Meanwhile, Iranian Defence Minister Hossein Dehghan said the Russian deployment was temporary, but would last "as long as needed." *The US has criticized Russia and speculated that it might have violated a UN Security Council resolution which bans the transfer of combat aircraft to Iran.* According to Mikhail Ulyanov, head of the ministry's non-proliferation and arms control department, it was a bilateral agreement on the use of Iranian airfield by Russian planes and not an arms sale hence "no approval from the UN Security Council on such operation is required by definition."²⁸
2. **Lithuania on August 22 signed its biggest ever arms deal for German-made armoured vehicles, as it seeks to allay concerns of a military resurgence of Russia on its doorstep.** In its biggest-ever arms purchase, the Baltic NATO member will buy 88 Boxer armoured fighting vehicles for €386 million. The vehicles are fitted with Israeli-made turrets. The first vehicles are expected to arrive in Lithuania in 2017 and the rest by 2021. "It's a long-term investment into national defence and also a signal that Lithuania takes its security and investing in it seriously," Defence Minister Juozas Olekas said after inking the deal. Lithuania has increased its defence budget by about a third each year since 2014, when Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine. For 2017, the nation has earmarked €725 million for defence, or 1.79 percent of economic output.²⁹
3. Georgia's State Security Service said on August 22 that it has prevented an attempt of blowing up a part of a gas pipeline that supplies the Russian natural gas to Armenia. Five Georgian nationals were detained on August 20 for illegal purchase and storage of firearms, ammunition

²⁶ The News, "President Enrique Peña Nieto Meets With Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes Jara," <http://www.thenews.mx/mexico/president-enrique-pena-nieto-meets-with-paraguayan-president-horacio-cartes-jara/>, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

²⁷ The News, "Inter-American Human Rights Court Continues Mexico City Sessions," <http://www.thenews.mx/mexico/fourth-day-of-coidh-sessions/>, Accessed on 29 August 2016.

²⁸ "All Russian planes back from Iran base, future missions possible – Moscow", *RT*, August 22, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/356757-russian-planes-back-iran/> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

²⁹ "Lithuania signs major German arms deal over Russia fears", *The Local de*, August 22, 2016. <http://www.thelocal.de/20160822/fears-of-russia-prompt-lithuania-to-make-major-arms-deal-with-germany> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

and explosives "with the goal of carrying out a terrorist attack," the security service said in a statement. The suspects prepared to carry out an explosion of an open section of the gas pipeline near the Saguramo village, some 20 kilometers from Georgia's capital Tbilisi.³⁰

4. On August 28, Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed an order to lift the ban for chartered flights between Russia and Turkey. The document reads the air companies serving chartered flights between Russia and Turkey should provide additional security measures. Press service of the Ministry of Transport said on August 27 that the ban for chartered flights between Russia and Turkey is off.³¹
5. On August 27, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry have rounded up the talks on Syria, which they have been holding in Geneva for more than 12 hours. Coordination of Moscow and Washington's efforts in fighting with terrorists in Syria was the main issue on the agenda. They also discussed on Ukraine. Lavrov said that Russia and the US have practically agreed on all steps to ensure the humanitarian access to the citizens of Syria, especially in Aleppo. However, he said that the task to coordinate airstrikes on terrorists in Syria remains one of the key unsolved issues in the Russian-US talks. On Kurds, Lavrov said "We, with our American colleagues, have confirmed the necessity of an urgent resumption, start of the political process involving all Syrian sides." He also said that other countries who has their armed forces in Syria must realise that fighting terrorism should be the priority rather than weakening the regime.³²
6. On August 28, a group of young people gathered near the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow to protest against an attack by Ukrainian radicals on a Russian federal agency in Kiev on August 27. The protesters chanted the slogans: "Hands Off Our Diplomats!" "Fascism Won't Pass!" and "Junta Must Be Brought to Account!" The protesters set alight flares and pelted the embassy with eggs. The young people also chanted slogans such as "We Remember Odessa, Remember Donbass!" and "We Won't Forget, We Won't Forgive!"³³
7. After a Riga Castle meeting with the three Baltic presidents: Raimonds Vejonis of Latvia, Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania and Toomas Hendrik Ilves of Estonia on August 23, US Vice President Joe Biden reaffirmed America's determination to defend the Baltic nations of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia against any aggression from neighbouring Russia. He dismissed comments from Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump that, were he to win November's election, he might withdraw U.S. backing for the Baltics' defence. Biden said NATO forces would strengthen security along their shared eastern border with Russia.³⁴
8. The recent Democratic National Committee email leaks that many experts and US officials have blamed on the Kremlin appear to be further hardening anti-Western attitudes and

³⁰"Georgian Security Service thwarts attempt to blow up part of gas pipeline", *TASS*, August 22, 2016. <http://tass.com/world/895272> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

³¹"Medvedev signs order lifting ban off chartered flights between Russia and Turkey", *TASS*, August 28, 2016. <http://tass.com/economy/896316> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

³²"Lavrov, Kerry round up 12-hours-long talks in Geneva", *TASS*, August 28, 2016. <http://tass.com/politics/896183> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

³³"Protesters pelt Ukrainian embassy in Moscow with eggs", *TASS*, August 28, 2016. <http://tass.com/politics/896288> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

³⁴"Biden: U.S. Committed to Protecting Baltic States from Russia", *NBC News*, August 23, 2016. <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/biden-us-committed-protecting-baltic-states-russia-n636631> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

benefiting Russian President Vladimir Putin's standing at home ahead of his September re-election bid. "The anti-Western narrative does seem to be one of the most effective narratives that the Russians are able to use," says Robert Ortung, assistant director at the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at the George Washington University. "The main idea is simply to distract the Russian public from the problems they face at home," he says. "Putin is using that as a way of maintaining his power."³⁵

9. On August 25, the Head of the Russian military department General of the Army Sergei Shoigu has held a meeting with the key personnel of the Russian Defence Ministry at the National Center for State Defence Control. He declared that in accordance with the decision of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (President Vladimir Putin) another unannounced inspection had begun. Troops of the Southern MD, separate formations and units of the Western and Central Military Districts, the Northern fleet, the Main Command of the Aerospace Forces and the Airborne Troops Command are put on full combat alert. In the course of the first 24 hours, the ability of troops to perform missions under conditions of full combat alert is to be checked. The next step is the deployment of formations and units at military ranges and training areas and their preparation for training task performance. During the redeployment of troops, readiness of the Southern MD to deploy self-sufficient groupings within short time limits for localization of crisis situations is to be estimated. Mobilization readiness and capabilities to perform missions of territorial defence and mobilization of separate military administrative bodies are to be inspected. The full procedure of preparation of the Armed Forces for protection of national interests in case of security treat is to be carried out. The inspection must be conducted on August 25-31. Intensive preparations for the Caucasus-2016 strategic exercise are held in the Southern MD.³⁶
10. On August 25, Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov has informed foreign military attachés accredited in Moscow of the unannounced combat readiness inspection of the Russian Armed Forces which had started in the Central, Southern and Western Military Districts upon the decision of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. He stressed that the activities were conducted in strict compliance with the Vienna Document 2011. "We have informed in good faith the OSCE member-states as well as China and Iran of the started unannounced inspection through the official channel," said Anatoly Antonov.³⁷
11. On August 24, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces met his Pakistani colleague, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan General Rashad Mahmood in Moscow. According to the Russian Chief of the General Staff, in recent years, meetings of defence ministers of Russia and Pakistan have boosted the relationships between the Armed Forces of both countries. He noted that in 2016, the programme of joint military

³⁵ Jack Detsch, "How the DNC hack is boosting anti-US sentiment in Russia", *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 24, 2016. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Passcode/2016/0824/How-the-DNC-hack-is-boosting-anti-US-sentiment-in-Russia> (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

³⁶ "Upon decision of Supreme Commander-in-Chief, unannounced inspection of the Southern, Western and Central Military Districts, Northern Fleet, Aerospace Forces Main Command, Airborne Troops Command has started", *Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation*, August 25, 2016. http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12093710@egNews (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

³⁷ "Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov informed military attaches of the unannounced combat readiness inspection of the Russian Armed Forces", *Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation*, August 25, 2016. http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12093734@egNews (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

cooperation activities of Russia and Pakistan was very rich and included “negotiations of General Staffs, joint exercises, exchange of military delegations”. According to Rashad Mahmood, the visit of the Russian Defence Minister General of the Army Sergei Shoigu in Pakistan, which took place on November 2014, became a breakthrough in the relationships between the military departments of both countries and their Armed Forces”. In 2016 servicemen of the Southern MD will for the first time take part in the joint Russian-Pakistani tactical exercise “Friendship – 2016”, which is to take place on the territory of Pakistan. It will be participated by about 200 servicemen from both countries.³⁸

12. Southern MD servicemen will take part in the Russian-Pakistani tactical exercise “Friendship-2016 for the first time. The training activities will take place on September 23 – October 10 on the territory of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in mountainous region. The exercise will be held for the first time and will be participated by over 200 servicemen. The military servicemen will exchange experiences and practice interaction while performing combat training tasks in the mountains, in particular, during fighting against conventional illegal armed groups. The goal of the joint exercise is strengthening and development of military cooperation of Russia and Pakistan.³⁹
13. On August 23, the scheduled joint exercise of the CSTO peacekeeping forces “Unbreakable brotherhood-2016” has started under the command of the Deputy Defence Minister of the Republic of Belarus Major General Sergei Potapenko at the 230th combined-arms range Obuz-Lesnovsky in Belarus. The main goal of the exercise is obtaining practical experience by commanders in organization of a peacekeeping operation and management of units of the CSTO Collective peacekeeping units during joint actions as well as strengthening of relationships and cooperation among CSTO member-states. The exercise is participated by national contingents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Tajikistan.⁴⁰

Afghanistan

1. ERC Skeptical Over Govt's New Election Plan

The Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) on Monday (22 August) raised doubts over a government plan to conduct Afghanistan's parliamentary elections under a new procedure. Although the new plan is still under consideration, the Afghan government reportedly hopes to hold parliamentary elections on a single-seat basis, replacing the current system. The ERC argues that the single-member constituency plan will undermine election transparency and fairness and that this will help local lawbreakers exploit the poll for their own benefit. In addition, a number of election observer groups have also said that the new plan does not fit in with the abilities of the election commission.

³⁸“Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces met his Pakistani colleague in Moscow”, Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, August 24, 2016.
http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12093612@egNews (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

³⁹“Southern MD servicemen to take part in the Russian-Pakistani tactical exercise “Friendship-2016 for the first time”, Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, August 23, 2016.
http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12093479@egNews (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

⁴⁰“CSTO peacekeeping forces started exercise “Unbreakable brotherhood-2016” in Belarus”, Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, August 23, 2016.
http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12093563@egNews (Accessed on August 29, 2016).

"I think that single-seat elections would face some problems," ERC chief Shah Sultan Akefi said. Based on the government's draft plan, all provinces will be divided into several constituencies, however only one candidate will make his way to parliament from amongst these constituencies.⁴¹

2. OIC to Host Conference on Afghan Reconciliation

A three-day international conference of religious scholars will be organised in the holy cities of Makkah and Madina on promoting peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Secretary-General Iyad Amin Madani informed Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Foreign Minister Syed Salahuddin Rabbani about the event. "The conference is a good opportunity for Ulema to make a decision about the ongoing war and brutalities in Afghanistan in light of the Islamic injunctions," Dr. Abdullah said during a meeting with Madani. A statement from Abdullah's office said the two sides conferred on the role of the upcoming conference in bringing durable peace to Afghanistan. To be hosted by Saudi Arabia, the gathering will feature elite scholars from Islamic countries.⁴²

3. Majority of Afghans support semi-presidential system: survey report

The majority of the Afghan people want a change in the current presidential system in the country and want a president and prime minister, according to a new survey report by the Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS). Amin Ahmadi of AISS who was presenting the survey findings told reporters in Kabul today that 51 percent of the Afghan people want to see a change in the system.

He said a broad spectrum of the people was interviewed during the survey which focused on the importance of the constitution of Afghanistan. According to the survey report, around 39 percent of the Afghan people want a parliamentary system while 19 percent others have said they want a federal system installed in the country. Around half of the survey participants have said they want a prime minister installed, the report said, adding that 9 percent of the people want the authorities of the president to be increased.

In the meantime, more than 93 percent of the people have emphasized on the importance of the constitution, saying the constitution has ensured people's participation in the local governance.⁴³

4. More Mi-25s on wish list as Afghan army chief visits India on next week

Afghanistan will ask for the delivery of more Mi-25 gunship helicopters from India as the Afghan National Army (ANA) chief of staff Gen. Qadam Shah Shaheem visits New Delhi next week. Sources in New Delhi have said Gen. Shaheem will hand over a wish list of Afghanistan that will include more Mi-25 gunship helicopters, small choppers and medical emergencies as well as spares for the existing Russian-origin aircraft.

The Afghan Ambassador to India Shaida Abdali told Reuters regarding Gen. Shaheem's visit to New Delhi "We are grateful for the four helicopters. But we need more, we need much more. Today we are heading into a situation that is worrisome for everyone in the region including India." India started the delivery of lethal military equipment to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces late in December 2015. The Afghan Air Force received 3 of the 4 Mi-25 gunship helicopters late in the

⁴¹ *Tolo News*, August 22, 2016. <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/26871-erc-skeptical-over-govts-new-election-plan>

⁴² *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 23, 2016. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=16056

⁴³ *Khaama Press*, August 23, 2016. <http://www.khaama.com/majority-of-afghans-support-semi-presidential-system-survey-report-01758>

month of December which coincided with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Afghanistan. The Indian sources have said India is preparing the fourth gunship helicopter for the delivery to the Afghan armed forces and hope that the delivery will be done in the near future.⁴⁴

5. Karzai says Loya Jirga key to resolve the current political deadlock

The former Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said the Loya Jirga could help resolve the current political issues in the country as deadlock persists between President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah regarding the agreement on Government National Unity.

In interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Karzai said the traditional Loya Jirga should be organized to be find out a solution regarding the current political deadlock in the country. Karzai further added that Afghanistan is a country of 'Jirgas' or gathering of local tribal elders which resolve issues such as the current deadlock between President Ghani and CEO Abdullah.

According to Karzai, the traditional Jirga could help resolve the issue which would in the better of the two leaders of the unity government if constitutional Loya Jirga could not be organized. The remarks by Karzai came as President Ghani and CEO Abdullah are still at odds as the unity government has completed its two years since its formation. CEO Abdullah accused President Ghani for remaining unfit for the office earlier this month as he alleged that the President does not have time for his CEO to discuss the main issues of the government.⁴⁵

6. Abdullah Says Committed to Political Stability

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah on Wednesday (August 24, 2016) said he was committed to political stability in the country and the unity government deal was the backbone of a stable political process. The CEO was talking to European Union (EU) Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini over the telephone, a statement from the CEO's media office said.

Abdullah also conveyed his condolences to Mogherini over a recent earthquake that claimed at least 60 precious lives in Italy. The magnitude 6.2 quake hit north-east of Rome, not far from Perugia, causing most of the fatalities in Accumoli, close to the epicentre. Abdullah also discussed with Mogherini recent political developments in Afghanistan and thanked the EU for continued support to the war-torn country. The CEO said he was committed to political stability which resulted from the unity government deal struck two years back. Mogherini stressed political stability in Afghanistan and said both the leaders should to work jointly which was necessary for the continuation of international support to Afghanistan.⁴⁶

7. US vows support in Kabul attack probe as Kabul says culprits based in Pakistan

The US Embassy in Kabul has vowed support to Afghanistan in investigating and bringing the culprits of the deadly attack on the American University in Kabul.

"The U.S. Embassy stands ready to assist Afghan authorities with their continuing investigation in bringing those responsible to justice," a statement by the Embassy said. Condemning the attack on the

⁴⁴ *Khaama Press*, August 23, 2016. <http://www.khaama.com/more-mi-25s-on-wish-list-as-afghan-army-chief-visits-india-on-next-week-01761>

⁴⁵ *Khaama Press*, August 24, 2016. <http://www.khaama.com/karzai-says-loya-jirga-key-to-resolve-the-current-political-deadlock-01770>

⁴⁶ *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 25, 2016. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=16076

university compound, the US Embassy said “The targeting of Afghan students and university staff who are working to improve the future of Afghanistan is a cruel and cowardly act.”

“Our thoughts and prayers are with those killed and injured, as well as with the victims’ families, colleagues, and friends,” said U.S. Ambassador P. Michael McKinley. “We remain strongly committed to the people of Afghanistan who are dedicated to establishing lasting peace and security and building the brightest possible future for their children.”⁴⁷

8. Taliban’s headquarter, mine making factory destroyed in Helmand airstrikes

A headquarter of the Taliban group was destroyed in an airstrike in southern Helmand province of Afghanistan along with a mine making factory of the group. Local authorities in Helmand said the headquarter used by the Taliban was destroyed in Nad-e-Ali district during a special night operation conducted on Thursday (August 25, 2016) night.

The authorities further added that the headquarter was destroyed after the Afghan forces conducted a surveillance operation that lasted for almost 72 hours to ascertain the exact location. However the Taliban militants group has claimed that a prison run by the group was targeted in airstrikes carried out by the US forces. According to a statement released by the Taliban group, at least 22 soldiers and policemen kept inside the prison were killed in the airstrikes.⁴⁸

9. University Attack Managed from Across Durand Line: NSC

The National Security Council (NSC) on Thursday (August 25, 2016) said Wednesday’s attack on the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul was managed from the other side of the Durand Line. The Taliban-style attack involving three heavily armed gunmen began at 7pm when one of the three exploded an explosives-laden car against the university wall, allowing the two others to enter the campus, with the siege lasting 10 hours.

According to a statement from the Presidential Palace, one teacher, seven students, two university security guards and three Afghan security personnel had been killed and 36 students and university workers and nine security personnel injured in the assault. The NSC held an extraordinary meeting at the Presidential Palace and reviewed details of the attack, the statement said. The statement said evidence and findings of the spy service showed the attack was managed and orchestrated from the other side of the Durand Line. President Ashraf Ghani, who presided over the NSC meeting, spoke over the phone to Pakistan Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif and demanded serious and practical measures against the perpetrators of the attack, the statement said.⁴⁹

10. Badakhshan Gold Mine A Source Of Income For Taliban: Officials

Badakhshan local officials said Saturday (August 27, 2016) that a gold mine in Raghistan district of Badakhshan has become a key source of income for the Taliban. Badakhshan provincial council warns that it will be impossible to clear the province of Taliban unless their revenue source is cut. The council

⁴⁷ *Khaama Press*, August 26, 2016. <http://www.khaama.com/us-vows-support-in-kabul-attack-probe-as-kabul-says-culprits-based-in-pakistan-01778>

⁴⁸ *Khaama Press*, August 26, 2016. <http://www.khaama.com/talibans-headquarter-mine-making-factory-destroyed-in-helmand-airstrikes-01779>

⁴⁹ *Daily outlook Afghanistan*. August 27, 2016. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=16079

said if Raghistan's gold mine and the lapis mine in Karan and Manjan districts are not released from the control of Taliban and powerful elements the insurgent group will strengthen in the province.

"Those two mines in Badakhshan helped Taliban a lot to have heavy weapons and fight for months against the government. In my opinion while the mines are controlled by the Taliban clearance operations will not be successful," said Abdullah Naji Nazari, a Badakhshan provincial council member. According to Badakhshan police, terrorists annually receive up to five million Afghani and with this money they buy heavy and light weapons.⁵⁰

11. Afghanistan, Iran Exchange Prisoners

The Afghan foreign minister and the Iranian ambassador to Kabul said (August 28, 2016) that a prisoner exchange program has been finalized between the two countries based on an agreement signed few years ago. According to the Afghan-Iran prisoner agreement, prisoners swapped will serve out their sentences in prisons in their own countries.

In the first phase of this exchange, 21 Iranian prisoners who were sentenced for various crimes were transferred to Iran on Saturday. The Afghan prisoners included in the swap, which are believed to number more than 200, will be returned to their home country within the next ten days. The number of Iranian prisoners currently in Afghan prisons is not known, but officials have said they all committed crimes.

An Iranian prisoner said: "I was sentenced here to prison. Now I am happy that they transfer us to Iran." These prisoners have been transferred based on an agreement made between the two countries which will see the prisoners serve out the rest of their sentences in their own countries.⁵¹

Maldives

Maldives Opposition Meets in Sri Lanka to Hatch Plan

The Maldives' dissident former president met opposition groups in neighbouring Sri Lanka to hatch a plan to topple strongman president Abdulla Yameen, opposition sources told AFP. Ex-president Mohamed Nasheed, who recently won asylum in Britain after being jailed by Yameen's government, was among several exiled opposition groups meeting in Colombo, two people in Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party said. "The opposition leaders are meeting in Colombo to work out strategies to legally topple Yameen," one MDP member told AFP. The MDP is part of a new coalition opposed to Yameen, called the Maldives United Opposition (MUO), formed in London in June where Nasheed sought asylum while on leave from prison for medical treatment.⁵²

Maldives president faces 'removal plot', BBC learns

By Olivia Lang & Justin Rowlett

A move to oust the President of the Maldives is being planned, the BBC has reported. According to the BBC report, sources say opponents of Abdulla Yameen in the tiny island nation are looking to move

⁵⁰ *Tolo News*, August 27, 2016. <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/26956-badakhshan-gold-mine-a-source-of-income-for-taliban-officials>

⁵¹ *Tolo News*, August 28, 2016. <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/26985-afghanistan-iran-exchange-prisoners>

⁵² *The Sunday Leader*, <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2016/08/28/maldives-opposition-meets-in-sri-lanka-to-hatch-plan/>

against him within weeks. Government spokesman told the BBC they knew of claims of an attempt to "overthrow" the government, describing it as a "clear breach of international norms".

The Maldives has seen frequent protests amid fears Mr Yameen's rule could see a return to its repressive past. The luxury tourist destination only became a democracy in 2008 when Mohamed Nasheed became its first freely elected leader, ending three decades of autocratic rule under Mr Yameen's half-brother, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

The details of what is being planned remain obscure, but when put to the government they described it as a "formal attempt at 'legally' overthrowing the government". "As in every democracy it is the people, via the ballot, who will decide who will next take office," a spokesman for the government said. Mr Yameen came to power in 2013. Under his rule, hundreds of political activists have faced charges and several senior figures have been given long jail sentences including Mr Nasheed, who now lives in self-imposed exile in the UK.

'Worst it's ever been'

But despite heavy restrictions, rallies regularly take place against his rule in the cramped streets of the capital, Male, away from the white sand beaches of tourist resorts. Last Friday, hundreds of opposition activists gathered near the island's artificial beach, loudspeakers blaring out opposition songs. An image of the president gazed down from a billboard close by. There were some scuffles with police forces, but heavy tropical rains sent most people to shelter. On the other side of the congested island, a weekly protest prayer was being held at a prominent mosque. Many of the protesters agitated during Mr Gayoom's time in office, pushing for a democratic transition, and are worried about losing their recently gained freedoms.

This month has already seen a strict defamation law come in to force, with stiff punishments for comments or actions considered insulting to Islam or which "contradict general social norms", and tighter restrictions on demonstrations. The death penalty is also being reintroduced, after a 60-year unofficial moratorium. The moves have drawn criticism from the UN, the UK, the EU and the US. "It's the worst it's been," says Zaheena Rasheed, the editor of the Maldives Independent, a prominent English-language news website. She says journalists are finding it increasingly hard to report in the current climate, and even operate at all. Three major news outlets have already closed this year.

One of her reporters, and an active blogger, went missing two years ago, and is thought to have been murdered. It is not clear who was responsible. After his abduction, Ms Rasheed received a message saying she would be next, and arrived at her office to find a machete embedded in the door. "Journalists are already facing death threats, harassments, murder attempts," she says. "Now we are seeing the courts and the laws silence journalists."

The government defends the new defamation law, saying it seeks to "safeguard ordinary citizens against baseless allegations" and encourages a "higher standard of reporting". But instead of bolstering his authority, his critics say the new legislation simply exposed just how threadbare the government's support really is.

Politically isolated

The government has said it remains committed to human rights, and that any legal action is a matter for the judiciary. But politically, Mr Yameen has become increasingly lonely. He is battling a broad opposition coalition led by his former deputy, Mohamed Jameel, and which includes former President Nasheed, now in exile in the UK. Meanwhile, his own party has split, with a breakaway faction led by his half-brother and former ally, former President Gayoom. Last month, Mr Yameen admitted that the

break was a "gift" to the opposition. "The people of the Maldives will find a way to get rid of this dictator," says Eva Abdulla, an outspoken opposition MP, from her airy apartment in central Male.

"He's lost all support from within his own political party," she says. "He doesn't have any kind of support from the independent institutions, he doesn't have support from the security forces." Credible sources have told the BBC that moves will be made against the president soon. "The feeling is there is no other way out of this," one source said. The president's spokesperson confirmed to the BBC that the "administration is aware of claims, by those organising outside of the Maldives, of this move. Such a plot is "disingenuous to the people of the Maldives and in clear breach of international legal norms," Mr Ibrahim Shihab said.⁵³

Business lobby calls for ban on foreign press over 'damage to Maldives tourism'

A business lobby group has urged President Abdulla Yameen to ban foreign journalists from working in the Maldives, citing damage to the economy and the tourism sector. The Maldives National Chamber of Commerce and Industries said foreign journalists were "biased in their coverage of the Maldives." A ban would also increase opportunities for "hardworking and young local journalists," the group said. "Therefore this organisation advice government authorities to ban foreign journalists from working long-term in the Maldives," the MNCCI said in a statement.⁵⁴

Embattled Maldives President Faces Accusations of Corruption, Past and Present

President Abdulla Yameen of the Maldives, who is under pressure to step down, faces allegations of corruption dating back more than a decade, including oversight of questionable oil sales to a Myanmar dictatorship under economic sanctions. Mohamed Nasheed, who became the country's first democratically elected president in 2008 but was forced to resign in 2012, contends that a state-owned company once led by Mr. Yameen sold nearly \$300 million worth of oil to Myanmar's military dictatorship in the early 2000s. Later, Mr. Nasheed said, nearly half the money disappeared. At the time, the Myanmar regime faced strict sanctions from the United States and the European Union. Mr. Nasheed said the oil shipments had helped the regime circumvent the sanctions and hold on to power.

In his first public comments on the oil deal, Mr. Nasheed said he believed that his attempt as president to recover as much as \$137 million of the missing money had been a significant factor in his ouster and subsequent imprisonment. He also contended that Mr. Yameen was now using the presidency to enrich himself, and that Mr. Yameen and his associates had received kickbacks from the sale of government-owned islands. "President Yameen is very, very corrupt, and all the evidence is available," Mr. Nasheed said in a recent telephone interview from London, where he lives in exile. "We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars."

Ibrahim Hussain Shihab, a spokesman for Mr. Yameen, said by email that the state's trading organization had never sold oil to Myanmar during Mr. Yameen's tenure. The spokesman also denied that Mr. Yameen had received illegal payments, whether from oil or land transactions or any other type of deals.⁵⁵

⁵³ Maldives president faces 'removal plot', BBC learns, By Olivia Lang & Justin Rowlett, BBC News, 25 August 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37166170>

⁵⁴ Maldives independent, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/business-lobby-calls-for-ban-on-foreign-press-over-damage-to-maldives-tourism-126223>

⁵⁵ Embattled Maldives President Faces Accusations of Corruption, Past and Present , By RICHARD C. PADDOCKAUG. 27, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/world/asia/maldives-mohamed-nasheed-abdulla-yameen.html?_r=0

Nasheed ordered to repay 'misused' money

Former President Mohamed Nasheed and six senior officials of his administration have been ordered to repay government funds they had "misused," the finance ministry has said. The seven were told to reimburse the treasury within seven days or face lawsuits. The order comes amid renewed tension in Malé amid speculation of a plot to oust President Abdulla Yameen, who has been dogged by allegations of corruption over the theft of some US\$80million from state coffers. A finance ministry spokesman declined to reveal details of the amount each of the former officials were ordered to pay back, but said the figures were based on reports by the auditor general's office and investigations by the anti-graft watchdog.

Mohamed Aslam, a former housing minister, said he is being asked to reimburse MVR312,928 (US\$20,294) he had used on mobile phone calls. "This is politically motivated," he said. Others on the finance ministry list were Mohamed Shihab, former home minister, Ahmed Naseem and Dr Ahmed Shaheed, former foreign ministers, Hussain Rasheed Ahmed, former minister of state for Islamic affairs, and Mohamed Aswan, former commissioner general of customs. Critics said the move was aimed at diverting attention from an upcoming corruption expose by Al Jazeera.⁵⁶

नेपाल

चुनावों से पहले संविधान में संशोधन हो: यूडीएमएफ

संयुक्त लोकतान्त्रिक मधेश मोर्चा की बैठक में यह निर्णय लिया गया कि सरकार किसी भी प्रकार के चुनाव कराने से पहले संविधान में संशोधन करके उनको मांगों को पूरा किया जाए. मोर्चा के वरिष्ठ नेता राम नर्ष राय ने कहा कि यदि चुनाव की तिथि तय हो चुकी है तो पहले संविधान में संशोधन किया जाए वरना हम इस चुनाव में हम भाग नहीं लेंगे.

निधि ने कहा कि भारत यात्रा सफल रही:

उप प्रधानमंत्री एवं गृह मंत्री बिमलेंद्र निधि ने कहा कि उनकी इस भारत यात्रा से भारत नेपाल के संबंधों में आये ठहराव में गति संचालित हो गयी है. उन्होंने कहा कि भारत के राष्ट्रपति प्रणव मुखर्जी की नेपाल यात्रा तथा नेपाल के प्रधानमंत्री पुष्प कमल दहाल और राष्ट्रपति बिद्या देवी भंडारी की भारत यात्रा तय हो चुकी है. नेपाल के प्रधानमंत्री की भारत यात्रा १५ सितम्बर को होगी लेकिन अभी आधिकारिक रूप से पुष्टि होना बाकी है.

नेपाली कांग्रेस मंत्रियों के नाम देने में असमर्थ:

नेपाली कांग्रेस के दो खेमे, पार्टी अध्यक्ष शेर बहादुर देउबा तथा वरिष्ठ नेता रामचंद्र पौडल आपसी असमझ के कारण पार्टी की तरफ से मंत्रियों के नाम देने पर कोई निर्णय नहीं हो सका. नेपाली कांग्रेस के लिए इस सरकार में १३ मंत्रियों की सीट आरक्षित है और सात मंत्री अभी दहाल सरकार में भेजने की तैयारी है.

संविधान संशोधन पर बहस आपतिजनक: यूएमएल

⁵⁶ Maldives Independent, 27th August, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/nasheed-ordered-to-repay-misused-money-126193>

सीपीएन-यूएमएल ने कहा कि अभी संविधान संशोधन पर बहस आपत्तिजनक और अर्थहीन है. यूएमएल ने इस बात को ऐसे मौके पर उठाया है जब शासित सरकार मधेश मोर्चा की मांगों को पूरा करने के लिए संविधान में संशोधन हेतु संशोधन बिल पंजीकृत करने जा रही है.

नए मंत्रियों ने शपथ ग्रहण की:

शुक्रवार को नेपाल की राष्ट्रपति बिद्या देवी भंडारी के समक्ष नए १३ मंत्रियों ने शपथ ग्रहण की. इन मंत्रियों में अर्जुन नर्सिंह केसी, नगरीय विकास मंत्रालय, प्रकाश सरन महत, विदेश मंत्रालय, बाल कृष्ण खंड, रक्षा मंत्रालय, सूर्य मान गुरुंग, श्रम एवं रोजगार मंत्रालय, केशव कुमार बुद्धठोकी, सामान्य प्रशासन मंत्रालय, रोमी ठाकली, वाणिज्य मंत्रालय, सीता देवी यादव, शांति और पुनर्निर्माण मंत्रालय, जीवन बहादुर साईं, संस्कृति, पर्यटन और नागरिक उड्डयन मंत्रालय, दीपक गिरी, सिंचाई मंत्रालय, नाबिन्द्र राज जोशी, उद्योग मंत्रालय, शंकर भंडारी, वन एवं मृदा संरक्षण मंत्रालय, गगन कुमार थापा, स्वास्थ्य मंत्रालय तथा हरिध्यान राम थानी, सहकारिता एवं निर्धनता उन्मूलन मंत्रालय.

Nepal

The Government is Committed to the Three Point Programme: DPM Nidhi

Nepal's new government is committed to the three point agreement signed among Nepali Congress, CPN-Maoist Centre and Federal Alliance. The Government is ready to give martyrdom status to those who were killed during Madhes agitation and form a probe panel to withdraw false cases against United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF).⁵⁷

On 28 August 2006, the three-member taskforce of the UDMF met DPM Bimalendra Kumar Nidhi and urged him to implement point no-2 of the three-point agreement without further delay. Mr. Nidhi ensured UDMF members that government is committed to the three point agreement and will work soon to move the constitutional amendment bill.

According to Ram Naresh Ray, one of the member of three member Task Force, "Nidhi told the task-force that the government could withdraw some of the cases soon, but it would have to follow more procedures to withdraw other cases." ⁵⁸ Some task force members mentioned, "DPM Nidhi would consult the Attorney General and officials of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs on the proposal to withdraw cases against the agitating parties."⁵⁹

(Source: The Himalayan Times)

World Bank loan for Nepal road, bridge upgrade

The World Bank approved US \$ 55 million (Nepali Rs 5.91 billion approx) loan to upgrade some of its roads and bridges under the Road Sector Development Programme (RSDP) and post earthquake reconstruction initiatives. According to Kathmandu Post, " the RSDP project intended to provide

⁵⁷ Nidhi urged to implement second point of pact with UDMF, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/bimalendra-nidhi-urged-implement-second-point-pact-untied-democratic-madhesi-front/>, 29 August, 2016

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid

residents in 10 beneficiary districts, including the poorest, in the Mid-Western and Far Western regions of Nepal, with all-season road connectivity, reduced travel time and improvements in access to economic centres and social services."⁶⁰ The Nepal government's RSDP project at present serves a population of 10 million (approx) in 10 districts of Nepal. Now, after the World Bank Assistance, the project will cover 25 districts and serve another 10.2 million population of Nepal.

(source: The Kathmandu Post, Business Standard)

PM Panchanda wants Constitution Amendment Bill before India Visit

Although the formal dialogue between ruling coalition, UDMF and other stake holder has not been initiated, PM Panchanda is committed to move a constitution amendment bill before his India visit in mid September. As media reported, informal talks between ruling coalition, UDMF and other stakeholders are being held at different levels. On 26 August 2016, PM Panchanda and President of the Nepali Congress Deuba hold talks with Federal Socialist Forum-Nepal Chair Upendra Yadav and Tarai Madhes Democratic Party Chair Mahantha Thakur.⁶¹

(Source: The Himalayan Times)

India to Help Reconstruct Hydro Power Plant in Nepal's Chandannath

India and Nepal have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to renovate and reconstruct damaged hydropower plant at Chandannath Municipality in Jumla district of Nepal. According to MoU, India will provide financial assistance of NRs 26.37 million under Small Development Programme Scheme for reconstruction of this plant.

The MoU was signed by "Gyanveer Singh, Second Secretary in the Embassy of India, Kathmandu, Rajesh Poudel, Local Development Officer, Jumla and Bishnu Bahadur Budthapa, Chairman, User Committee Chandannath Municipality in presence of Member of Parliament Lalit Jung Shahi"⁶²

The Chandannath plant was built in 1983 by Nepal Electricity Authority. The plant suffered damage during insurgency period and since then it is operating on sub-optimal capacity.⁶³ Government of India took the decision to provide financial assistance for renovation and reconstruction of the plant on the request of the user committee of the small hydropower. This is India's second project in the Jumla district of North west Nepal.

(source: ETEnergyworld.com, Business Standard, etc.)

Compiled by Amit Kumar

⁶⁰ WB Okays \$55m Loan for Roads, Bridges, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-08-27/wb-okays-55m-loan-for-roads-bridges.html>, 27 August, 2016.

⁶¹ PM committed to tabling bill before his India visit', <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/prime-minister-pushpa-kamal-dahal-committed-tabling-bill-india-visit/>, 27 August, 2016

⁶² India to help reconstruct hydro power plant in Nepal's Chandannath municipality, <http://energy.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/renewable/india-to-help-reconstruct-hydro-power-plant-in-nepals-chandannath-municipality/53876237>, 26 August, 2016

⁶³ Ibid.

Pakistan

1. **Human Rights Commission and Balochistan** - The role of law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in the disappearance of publisher and author Abdul Wahid Baloch cannot be ruled out, vice chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)'s Sindh chapter, Asad Iqbal Butt stated on August 22, 2016. It was the crux of a report prepared by a fact-finding mission formed by the HRCP on August 3 after Wahid Baloch was allegedly picked up by two men in plain clothes from a bus at the Super Highway toll plaza on July 26. The SHO of the Gadap police station, situated right next to the toll plaza, admitted that he did not register a first information report (FIR) about the disappearance of Wahid Baloch. The SHO also admitted that registering a case against law enforcement agencies would put them (police) in trouble. That is why they refrain from registering such cases.⁶⁴
2. **MQM and Pakistan** - Muttahida Qaumi Movement leader Altaf Hussain's speech on August 22, 2016 convinced many that state institutions will use the speech as a justification for a strong action against MQM activists. The speech delivered by a microphone attached to a phone, was delivered at Karachi, where MQM workers were protesting outside the Karachi Press Club against "enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of workers". Altaf stated in the speech that "Pakistan is cancer for entire world...Pakistan is the epicentre of terrorism for the entire world."⁶⁵ Two media houses were ransacked as activists chanting pro-MQM slogans agitated after listening to the speech of their London-based chief. This led to a violent protest, firing and arson that left at least one person dead and dozen others wounded. A police mobile van and a motorbike were torched while several other vehicles were damaged. Police fired teargas shells to disperse the mob besides resorting to baton charge and firing, to control the agitating crowd. Later, the Sindh Rangers launched a full-scale crackdown against the MQM, arresting its senior leaders — Dr Farooq Sattar, Khawaja Izhar-ul-Hasan and Aamir Liaquat Hussain — raided the party's Nine Zero headquarters and its Khurshid Begum Complex, which were in control of the MQM women activists.⁶⁶ While such stringent measures were adapted, Interior Minister Chaudary Nisar Ali Khan formally contacted British authorities to take action against Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) chief Altaf Hussain for his recent "anti-Pakistan remarks".⁶⁷ One faction of the MQM, under Dr Farooq Sattar distanced itself from Hussain stating that MQM is run from Pakistan and not from abroad.⁶⁸ Both the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI), opposed the idea of banning MQM or its political activities and advised elements within the MQM to distance themselves from Altaf Hussain and the party's 'militant wing'.⁶⁹ It can be noted here that Waseem Akhtar of the MQM on August 24, 2016, became the first candidate in the city's history to win the election of Karachi mayor from behind bars, defeating his rival candidate fielded by a six-party alliance formed to contest against MQM. The mayor-elect asked the government to set up an office for him in the central

⁶⁴ Saher Baloch, "LEAs may be involved in disappearance of missing person: HRCP", *Dawn*, August 23, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279391>

⁶⁵ "What Altaf said...", *Dawn*, August 23, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279393>

⁶⁶ Imtiaz Ali, "Media houses attacked, vehicles set on fire after Altaf's vitriolic speech", *Dawn*, August 23, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279376>

⁶⁷ Imran Ayub, "UK formally contacted over Altaf's remarks, says Nisar", *Dawn*, August 25, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279856>

⁶⁸ Saher Baloch, "MQM in throes of power struggle", *Dawn*, August 24, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279636>

⁶⁹ Amir Wasim, Iftikhar A. Khan and Ikram Junaidi, "PPP, PTI oppose ban on Muttahida", *Dawn*, August 24, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279635>

prison, where he can run the day-to-day affairs of the city or pass a law to help him undertake his duties.⁷⁰

3. **Russia, Romania and Pakistan** - It is vital to strengthen relations between Moscow and Islamabad for regional and international security, said Gen Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, during a meeting with Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Rashad Mahmood in Moscow on August 24, 2016. He said that meetings between the Russian and Pakistani defence ministers ‘‘have given a powerful stimulus’’ for developing relations between the armed forces. Russia and Pakistan are planning ‘‘an intensive programme’’ of joint events for the current year, including talks between the two countries general staff, military exercises and exchange of military delegations.⁷¹ Pakistan and Romania have also agreed to explore different ways to enhance cooperation in the defence sector with special regard to defence production. An agreement was reached between the two countries on Tuesday after various meetings between Pakistan’s delegation led by Minister for Defence Production Rana Tanveer Hussain and the leaders in defence, economics and defence production sectors of Romania. The Pakistani delegation held meetings with the Romanian secretary of state and the general manager of ROMARM National Company, along with the minister of economy, trade and relations. Minister Hussain said he appreciated Romania’s support for Pakistan at various international forums.⁷²
4. **Chaman Border Blockade Continues** – As the border remains closed for more than 10 days, after a flag burning incident on the Afghan, relations between nations near the borders remain tensed. Pakistani border authorities told their Afghan counterparts that the border would be reopened only after the Afghan government apologised for an incident of the burning of the Pakistani national flag, which had led to the border closure. Multiple border meetings have taken place already which has though not been able to resolve the stalemate.⁷³ While the deadlock persists, Afghanistan has reportedly deported 250 Pakistani workers.⁷⁴
5. **Balochistan** - From partial to complete shutter down was observed on August 26, 2016, in the Baloch Mainland paying rich tributes to Shaheed Nawab Akbar Bugti who was assassinated along with 60 other comrades in a military action in 26 August 2006. The main strike call was given by the Jamoori Watan Party (JWP) which was founded by the late leader in 1990, along with Baloch Republican Party (BRP) and other Baloch nationalist political groups. The strike was complete and people responded fully and voluntarily in all parts of Balochistan. In Quetta, all the major shopping centres, schools, commercial establishments, business houses and even some of the chemists and druggists’ shops were also closed in response to the strike call. Police and heavily armed FC personnel with sub-machineguns fitted on top of their vehicles patrolled the provincial Capital during the whole day. It was part of the official alert in such situation in

⁷⁰ Hasan Mansoor, ‘‘MQM’s jailed leader Waseem wins mayor poll’’, *Dawn*, August 25, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279840>

⁷¹ ‘‘Russia-Pakistan ties seen vital for regional stability’’, *Dawn*, August 25, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279850/russia-pakistan-ties-seen-vital-for-regional-stability>

⁷² ‘‘Defence cooperation discussed with Romania’’, *Dawn*, August 24, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279627/defence-cooperation-discussed-with-romania>

⁷³ ‘‘Deadlock over Chaman border closure persists’’, *Dawn*, August 24, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1279623>

⁷⁴ ‘‘Afghanistan deports 250 Pakistani workers as deadlock persists near Chaman’’, *Khaama Press*, August 28, 2016, <http://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-deports-250-pakistani-workers-as-deadlock-persists-near-chaman-01785>

the city. However, unknown people torched a truck carrying goods in Kalat district of Balochistan.⁷⁵

- 6. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan** - Saudi Defence Minister Mohammad bin Salman, while flying to China for a three-day visit, made a stopover in Islamabad on August 28, 2016. The visiting minister and the premier discussed bilateral relations in reference to defence cooperation, security, fight against terrorism and regional situation. The Saudi defence minister left for Beijing for the Aug 29-31 visit to participate in the first-ever Saudi-China Intergovernmental Joint Committee meeting.⁷⁶

Sri Lanka

On Reconciliation

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to visit Sri Lanka Featured

At the invitation of the Government, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, accompanied by Mrs. Ban Soon-taek, will visit Sri Lanka from 31 August to 2 September 2016. The Secretary-General is expected to arrive in Sri Lanka in the evening of 31 August from Myanmar, and leave Sri Lanka late night on 2 September for China to participate in the G20 Summit.⁷⁷

Cabinet approval for National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict Affected Displacement Featured

The Cabinet of Ministers adopted a “National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict-Affected Displacement” for persons displaced as a result of the conflict. The policy was drafted by the Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs, at the request of President Maithripala Sirisena.

Seven years after the conclusion of the war, there are over 12,000 internally displaced families of whom over 900 families remain in welfare centers in the Jaffna district, and more than 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees reside in India and elsewhere. Furthermore, there are many other communities who have been officially resettled under the previous government but they continue to struggle to find durable solutions and are in a vulnerable situation.

The policy sets out the rights and entitlements of the displaced and seeks to ensure that all those affected – both internally displaced persons and refugee returnees - can secure durable solutions. It covers a number of areas including assistance for resettlement but also draws attention to particularly vulnerable persons among the displaced, including the differently abled, female headed-households and elderly, protection and psycho-social needs, and transitional justice processes. While addressing key aspects of displacement and durable solutions, the policy will better ensure resettlement is integrated into reconciliation and development policies. The policy is rooted in a rights and community based approach and underscores the Government’s determination to finding durable solutions for conflict-affected displaced populations, irrespective of region, gender, ethnicity, age, language, political belief, caste or creed, or year of displacement.

⁷⁵ Syed Ali Shah, “Shutter-down strike observed in Balochistan”, *Dawn*, August 27, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1038499>; “Shutter Down Strike in Balochistan”, *Daily Balochistan Express*, August 27, 2016, <http://www.bexpress.com.pk/2016/08/shutter-down-strike-in-balochistan/>

⁷⁶ “Saudi defence minister arrives in Islamabad today”, *Dawn*, August 28, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1280503>

⁷⁷ news.lk, <http://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/14293-un-secretary-general-ban-ki-moon-to-visit-sri-lanka>

‘No compulsion’ to implement UN resolution insists Sri Lankan president

Sri Lanka’s president said his government was under “no compulsion” to implement a United Nations Human Rights Council resolution calling for an internationalised accountability mechanism, as he addressed a gathering of Sri Lankan soldiers on 22nd August. The official Ministry of Defence website quoted Maithripala Sirisena as telling the soldiers “it is his duty and responsibility to protect war heroes who fought to bring freedom to the country”. Calling the UN resolution a set of “proposals”, Mr Sirisena added that his government would follow them only to clear “allegations” that loomed over Sri Lanka’s armed forces. He went on to assure the soldiers that his government was not engaged in a “so called witch hunt of war heroes”.⁷⁸

UN Committee calls for legislation against hate speech

A UN Committee called for comprehensive legislation on hate speech in Sri Lanka fulfilling the requirements which ensure State parties prohibit ideas based on racial superiority and hatred, the incitement to racial hatred, acts of violence against any race or groups of persons of another colour or ethnic origin, and incitement to such acts. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) also recommended that the State party ensure that its criminal legislation defines racial motivation as an aggravating circumstance. CERD made the recommendations after reviewing Sri Lanka and hearing statements made by the Sri Lankan delegation.⁷⁹

India-Sri Lanka Relations

India provides a grant of Rs 300 million

The cabinet of ministers has approved the signing of an agreement between Sri Lanka and India on a proposal made by Mahinda Amaraweera Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development. Indian government has agreed to provide a grant of Rs 300 million for livelihood development including fisheries in the Hambantota district. Part of the grant is expected to be used for developing fisheries villages under the Wewak Samaga Gamak.⁸⁰

Govt wants Indian subcontinent firm involved in \$400 million port contract

Sri Lanka is seeking a consortium that must include a company from the Indian subcontinent to bid for a \$400 million contract to build a port terminal, the ports minister said. The move to include an Indian subcontinent firm could neutralise growing Chinese influence in Colombo's port. Arjuna Ranatunga, Sri Lanka's ports minister, said at least a 20 percent stake in consortia bidding for the Colombo East terminal construction contract must be held by a firm from the Indian subcontinent. The planned terminal is near Colombo International Container Terminals (CICT), operated by China Merchants Holdings on a 35-year build-operate-transfer basis, and a \$1.4 billion 269-hectare reclaimed port city, also built by a Chinese firm.⁸¹

Sri Lanka –China Relations

⁷⁸ Tamil Guardian, [http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/%E2%80%98no-compulsion%E2%80%99-
implement-un-resolution-insists-sri-lankan-president](http://www.tamilguardian.com/content/%E2%80%98no-compulsion%E2%80%99-implement-un-resolution-insists-sri-lankan-president)

⁷⁹ Colombo Gazette, [http://colombogazette.com/2016/08/26/un-committee-calls-for-legislation-
against-hate-speech/](http://colombogazette.com/2016/08/26/un-committee-calls-for-legislation-against-hate-speech/)

⁸⁰ News.lk, <http://news.lk/news/business/item/14287-india-provides-a-grant-of-rs-300-million>

⁸¹ Times Online, [http://www.sundaytimes.lk/article/1007813/govt-wants-indian-subcontinent-firm-
involved-in-400-million-port-contract](http://www.sundaytimes.lk/article/1007813/govt-wants-indian-subcontinent-firm-involved-in-400-million-port-contract)

Chinese bank to set up South Asian branch in Sri Lanka: PM

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told in Parliament that a Chinese bank has agreed to set up their South Asian branch here in Sri Lanka. "China agreed to set up the branch here in Colombo at the proposed financial city," Wickremesinghe said. Prime Minister also said the concept paper and proposal for the financial city is being discussed and it could be revealed before the end of this year.⁸²

Non-Traditional Security Threats

US, Russia oppose Kurdish autonomy in Syria⁸³

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov both opposed an autonomus Kurdish region inside Syria, following a 12-hour meeting in Geneva on Aug. 26. While Lavrov said Kurds should be included in future Syria talks, Kerry said they did not support an independent Kurdish initiative. "We are for a united Syria. We do not support an independent Kurd initiative," Kerry said after the meeting.

"There has been some limited engagement, as everybody knows, with a component of Kurdish fighters on a limited basis, and we cooperated very closely with Turkey specifically to make sure that there was a clearer understanding of the rules by which that engagement would take place," he added.

"They understand that. Now that Manbij city has been liberated, I think there are other expectations of what will take place, but we understand the sensitivities of our friends in Turkey with respect to this," Kerry stated.

The U.S. Secretary of State also referred to the recent visit of U.S. vice president Joe Biden to Ankara that angered Syrian Kurds for calling on the Kurdish forces to withdraw from Manbij, and supporting the Turkish operation in Jarablus.

"Vice President Biden just visited and had lengthy conversations about it, and we will continue to work together for inclusivity within Syria as we seek a political solution," he added.

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said Kurds should fully participate in the political process as part of a united Syrian state.

"I'm convinced the Kurds should have a full-fledged representation in that process, should remain an integral part of the Syrian state and be part of a solution to the problem, rather than a factor that someone will be using to split Syria, as the latter will trigger a chain reaction throughout the region while no one is interested in it," Lavrov said.

"As for various aspects of Turkish presence on the Syrian territory, including the Kurdish factor which is so much written about these days, our U.S. counterparts and we confirmed the importance of an emergency resumption and start of a political process where all the Syrian parties should participate," he added.

⁸² Lankabusiness online, <http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/chinese-bank-to-set-up-south-asian-branch-in-sri-lanka-pm/>

⁸³ 28 August <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-russia-oppose-kurdish-autonomy-in-syria.aspx?pageID=238&nID=103316&NewsCatID=352>

Parties to shape mini constitutional package⁸⁴

The Constitution Conciliation Committee is expected to meet on Aug. 31 to define articles to be included in the upcoming "mini-constitution" legislative package. The committee which will gather to write the articles includes members from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the opposition People's Republican Party (CHP) and National Movement Party (MHP).

The committee is chaired by AK Party Secretary-General Abdülhamit Gül, CHP Deputy Chairman Bülent Tezcan and Mehmet Parsak from the MHP central executive board, and are currently discussing articles with the authorized boards from their own parties, as the committee will hold five meetings in total.

The first round of meetings started on Aug. 12 and Aug. 19, and revising the electoral system became an important topic of discussion.

Iran Unveils National Information Network⁸⁵

The ceremony was attended by Iranian First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri, Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mahmoud Vaezi, the secretary of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, and a number of other high-ranking officials.

The national network will offer a new internet system with higher security which will be up to 60 times faster than the best speeds currently available. It will be more secure compared to other networks in the country against potential cyber attacks.

On Saturday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani hailed efforts made by relevant officials in completing the internet system, saying that the information network "can be regarded as one of the key components of the country's independence."

"If people feel they have easy access to a national, reliable, stable, and safe (information) network, they will play a more effective role in the process of the country's development," he said.

The first phase of the country's national network became operational after a gap of eleven years. Since the government first announced its plans for the national internet in 2005, it has clearly invested a lot in state of the art technology infrastructure - fiber optic cables, and new data centers to enable many more sites to be hosted inside the country rather than abroad.

Back in May, Vaezi announced that the country has completed its national information network and started providing various electronic services.

Speaking at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in the Swiss city of Geneva, he highlighted governments' role in directing the internet, stressing that "using communications and information technology should pave the way for realization of a knowledge-based society and economy, cultural and scientific development, narrowing of social gaps in societies and improvement of their economic prosperity."

He further emphasized that development of ICT (information and communications technology) is high on the agenda of President Rouhani's administration.

⁸⁴ <http://www.dailysabah.com/legislation/2016/08/29/parties-to-shape-mini-constitutional-package>

⁸⁵ 28 August 2016 <http://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2016/08/28/1170368/iran-unveils-national-information-network>

Israeli firm to set up cyber security academies in India⁸⁶

Acting on the recent bilateral agreement on homeland security between Israel and India, a cyber security company from Israel, Vital Intelligence Group, announced on Wednesday that it will establish cyber security academies in the country.

The firm is expected to kick off operations in Mumbai next April, following which it will establish branches in New Delhi and Hyderabad. The academies will give defence training to the government and citizens.

Members of the company said the academies will provide training in various disciplines of cyber security that will meet the needs of “emergency management, law enforcement, disaster management and safety organisations, military and governmental agencies, private security groups.”

It plans to provide courses ranging from a diploma to a four-year specialisation in cyber security and cyber defence to private organisations and citizens. The members also said the company could provide special training to the government and its security agencies, including the military, should the Centre approach them.

Marc Kahlberg, Chief Executive Officer of the company and former Israeli Defence Force and National Police Officer, said experts from his team researched for six months on crime rates in Mumbai before planning to establish themselves here. He claims the institute can provide vital knowledge, with which security agencies can effectively investigate various crimes.

He says the experts working with the company have technological knowledge that can be used to “locate the spots where rapes and other crimes are happening, and to track down the perpetrators of the crime.”

The company hopes to strike a dialogue with authorities in the government, and plans to work with the cyber cells of police and security agencies to improve the cyber security of the country.

Turkey

Turkish military strikes YPG in Syria after soldier killed⁸⁷

Turkey’s Operation Euphrates Shield started on 24 August has hit positions of the Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) with jets and artillery on Aug. 28, one day after a Turkish soldier was killed in attack on Turkish tanks in northern Syria. The strikes came one day after one Turkish soldier was killed and three more wounded in a rocket attack by YPG militants on two tanks taking part in Turkey’s military offensive in northern Syria.

Turkish officials have openly stated that their goal in Syria is as much about ensuring Kurdish forces do not expand the territory they already control along Turkey’s border, as it is about driving ISIL from its strongholds.

⁸⁶ 26 August 2016 <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/news/israeli-firm-to-set-up-cyber-security-academies-in-india/article9032644.ece>

⁸⁷ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-military-strikes-ypg-in-syria-after-soldier-killed.aspx?pageID=238&nID=103296&NewsCatID=352>

The Kurdish-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition that includes YPG, has support from the United States, which sees the group as an effective Syrian ally against ISIL. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group with a network of sources in Syria, said Turkish-allied forces had seized two villages south of Jarablus, Jub al-Kousa and al-Amarna that were held by militias loyal to the SDF. The Observatory said rebels backed by Turkish tanks fought until dawn against rival militias allied to the SDF around al-Amarna, with SDF-allied militia damaging three Turkish tanks. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, during a visit to Ankara last week, said the YPG would withdraw to the east of the Euphrates river. “We have made it absolutely clear that they [pro-Kurdish forces] must go back across the [Euphrates]. They cannot and will not, under any circumstances, get American support if they do not keep that commitment,” Biden told reporters at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım on Aug. 24 in the Turkish capital.

“We have a full agreement with the United States on what’s happening, which is that the [Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party] PYD shouldn’t cross west of the Euphrates or engage in activities west of the river,” Yıldırım said at the same event.

On Aug. 26, the PYD stated its armed wing the YPG was leaving Manbij to prepare for another move on ISIL.

Southeast Asia

Myanmar President U Htin Kyaw on four-day India visit

In his first overseas trip after assuming charge of the top office, President of Myanmar U Htin Kyaw is on a four-day India visit to step up overall bilateral engagement with a major focus on ensuring better management of over 1,600 km-long Indo-Myanmar border. Continuing with the high-level engagement, Aung San Suu Kyi, who is the de facto leader of the new government, will pay a visit later this year to attend a conclave of regional grouping BIMSTEC.⁸⁸

Kofi Annan to head Commission on Rakhine state

The establishment of a high-level commission headed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is a welcome step towards addressing the human rights situation in Myanmar’s Rakhine state.

The announcement is a sign that Myanmar’s authorities are taking the situation in Rakhine state seriously. But it will only have been a worthwhile exercise if it paves the way for the realization of human rights for all people in the state. Rakhine state on the western coast of Myanmar is home to many minority groups that have faced decades of human rights violations and abuses, in particular, the persecuted Rohingya minority. The situation there has deteriorated markedly since 2012, when clashes between different groups sparked waves of violence, culminating in scores of deaths, destruction of property and mass displacement.⁸⁹

Rakhine Nationalists Reject Annan's Commission on Myanmar Ethnic Violence

Rakhine nationalists in Myanmar have rejected the news that former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi

⁸⁸http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/53877874.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

⁸⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/kofi-annan-to-head-commission-on-rakhine-state/>

Annan will head a commission to discuss ethnic conflict and clashes in Myanmar's Rakhine state. The creation of a commission led by foreigners with no background knowledge or capacity to understand the circumstances in Rakhine state would undermine the rights of all of Burma's ethnic groups, as well as Myanmar's sovereignty, said Arakan National Party vice chairperson Aye Nu Sein. She said it was not necessary to form another commission, since the administration of former President Thein Sein had created a Rakhine affairs investigating commission.⁹⁰

Philippines Threaten 'Bloody Confrontation' with Beijing Over South China Sea

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte unleashed a fiery batch of rhetoric this week that threatens to light a match under the South China Sea powder keg threatening a "bloody confrontation" against any country that infringes on Manila's sovereignty and suggesting that he would "happily beat up" any party that attempts to take control of the disputed Scarborough Shoals.⁹¹

Vietnamese President embarks on three-day state visit to Singapore

Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang kicked off a three-day state visit to Singapore on August 28, with trade and finance likely to feature prominently on the agenda. Mr Quang is visiting the Republic at the invitation of Singapore President Tony Tan Keng Yam. His visit marks the 43rd anniversary of diplomatic relations and the third anniversary of the bilateral strategic partnership between both countries this year.

According to a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday, Dr Tan will host an official welcome ceremony at the Istana for Mr Quang on Monday while Mrs Mary Tan will separately host Madam Nguyen Thi Hien – spouse of Mr Quang — to tea. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will also meet the Vietnamese president and host him to lunch.⁹²

⁹⁰ <http://www.voanews.com/a/rakhine-nationalists-reject-kofi-annan-commission-myanmar-ethnic-violence/3482531.html>

⁹¹ <http://sputniknews.com/asia/20160827/1044700577/philippines-duterte-china-bloody-war.html>

⁹² <http://www.todayonline.com/world/vietnamese-president-embarks-three-day-state-visit-singapore>