



Indian Council of World Affairs

Sapru House, Barakhamba Road

New Delhi

Weekly Media Updates

(23-29 January, 2017)

Central Asia

1. Syria Talks in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan hosted the two-day 'International Meeting on Syrian Settlement' for talks between Syrian government and opposition groups at Astana on 23-24 January 2017. Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev opened the talks by saying bloodshed in Syria has caused 'misery and hardship' to the holy region regarded as an intersection of different civilizations and cultures.¹ Further, he said that 'the only way' to find a solution to the Syrian crisis is through negotiations based on 'mutual trust and understanding.'

The Syria talks are part of an initiative led by Russia, Turkey and Iran. Besides the host nations – Russia, Iran, and Turkey, the talks were attended by a UN delegation headed by the UN special envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and the US ambassador to Kazakhstan, who was given observer status in Astana.²

The parties involved in the negotiations agreed to continue the ceasefire. According to the Joint Statement released after the negotiations in Astana, the next round of talks will be under UN auspices in Geneva as of February 8, 2017.

Earlier, Kazakhstan had hosted two rounds of talks between some Syrian opposition groups in Astana in 2015. The country has also provided humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people to the tune of 500 tonnes in December 2016.³

Kazakhstan hosts the talk on Syria and it is interested in the early resolution of the crisis. The country is indirectly or directly affected by the fighting in Syria and the region as a number of people from Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries and

¹ President of Kazakhstan, "Address of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the participants of the International Meeting on Syrian Settlement," 23 January 2017,

<http://mfa.gov.kz/index.php/en/last-news/8131-address-of-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-to-the-participants-of-the-international-meeting-on-syrian-settlement>

² RT, "Armed Syrian opposition & Assad govt reps gather for talks in Kazakhstan," 23 January 2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/374734-astana-syria-peace-meeting/>

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, "Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry's Statement on Outcomes of International Meeting on Syria," 24 January 2017, <http://mfa.gov.kz/index.php/en/last-news/8144-kazakhstan-foreign-ministry-s-statement-on-outcomes-of-international-meeting-on-syria>

adjoining regions have gone to fight alongside the Daesh in Iraq and Syria,⁴ and there have been incidents of violent terror attacks in the country in recent past.

Africa

Nigeria Opposes Mass ICC Withdrawal⁵

The plan the African Union (AU) members to collectively withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC) may suffer a setback as Nigeria and some other countries are opposed to it. Foreign minister Geoffrey Onyeama said in a statement in Abuja on Friday that Nigeria did not subscribe to the AU strategy. He said Nigeria and others believed that the court had an important role to play in holding leaders accountable. Nigeria is not the only voice agitating against it, in fact Senegal is very strongly speaking against it, Cape Verde and other countries are also against it

Call to AU Members to Prioritise Agriculture⁶

The African Union (AU) has called on the member states to prioritise agriculture to grow their economies. The AU Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, Mrs Tumusiime Rhoda Peace said that experience from elsewhere indicated a positive correlation between development and modernisation of agriculture. She made the remarks Thursday afternoon in Addis Ababa ahead of the Heads of States Summit, scheduled for 30-31 January 2017

The AU commissioner urged African countries to continue implementing the Malabo and the Maputo declarations in which they pledged to invest more for the transformation of agriculture on the continent. Agriculture in Africa has been growing by around 4 per cent annually over the past few years.

The rate was envisaged to rise to least 6 per cent per annum, absorbing one third of the unemployed people on the continent, as indicated in the 2003 Maputo Protocol.

⁴ Douglas Green, "Syria talks in Kazakhstan: a possible breakthrough," 20 January 2017, <http://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/26-opinion-head/17586-syria-talks-in-kazakhstan-a-possible-breakthrough>

⁵ The East African, 27 January 2017

⁶ The East African Nation 26 January 2017

AGOA Treaty Faces Possible Repeal in Trump⁷ Administration

Sub-Saharan Africa is concerned about the future of a trade pact with the United States after President Donald Trump said it only benefits the corrupt.

President Trump's new policies may bring an end to the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa).

He had said that "most of Agoa imports are petroleum products with the benefits going to national oil companies. Why do we support that massive benefit to corrupt regimes?"

There are now fears that his administration could repeal the Act. Enacted in 2000 by the Bill Clinton administration, Agoa allows 39 eligible sub-Saharan Africa countries to export certain goods to the US market duty-free. It was renewed in September 2015 by then president Barack Obama, and is slated to expire in 2025.

Repealing the treaty would be difficult considering that the US Congress must approve. The Act has been the cornerstone of US trade policy with Africa, and over 15 years it led to an increase in trade from about \$20 billion to \$100 billion in 2008. However, this figure declined to \$36 billion in 2015.

Low trade

According to analysts, the fact that non-oil and gas exports into the US under Agoa stood at \$4.1 billion in 2015, representing just two per cent of the United States' total global trade, could have prompted President Trump to dismiss the Act as insignificant. The non-oil Agoa trade increased marginally from \$1.4 billion in 2001 to \$4.1 billion in 2015. Apart from oil and gas, textiles, manufacturing, agriculture and artefacts have benefited from the treaty.

Utilisation of Agoa has been low, as just seven out of 39 African countries have taken advantage of the Act.

Nine African Presidents Who Have Stayed in Power for a Lifetime

There are African countries where a 37 year old man or woman has only known one president in their lifetime. Africa is infamous for leaders who never want to hand over power.

They will do anything to stay in office. They ban elections. They rule by dictatorship. They intimidate, kill or jail any serious opponent. And they isolate their countries from the world.

Some of these African leaders install themselves as rulers for life. In extreme circumstances they ordain themselves as God's chosen rulers.

Gambia has just witnessed the rejection and forceful eviction from office and from the country of one such leader.

⁷ The Monitor, 27 January 2017

When Gambia went to the polls late last year, Yahya Jammeh was confident that by the end of the elections he would still be the president of Gambia where he ascended into power through a coup that installed him as its leader in July 22 1994.

The man has re-elected himself three times since and was planning to do so the fourth time. Currently, he is planning to leave the country after resigning on the Friday 19 2017 following pressure from international and regional blocs and leaders. The true winner, Adama Barrow was sworn in the Gambian Embassy in Senegal.

Here is a list of other strongmen who have refused to quit:

1. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (Equatorial Guinea) – in power for 37 years

President of Equatorial Guinea since August 1979. The man is 74 years old and shows no sign of letting go. Obiang staged a coup against the president, who happened to be his uncle. He took over office, accused his uncle of various crimes and sentenced him to death 101 times. The uncle was executed by firing squad. Ruling by an iron fist and frustrating opposition in a country that has remained a one party state, he continues to hold on to power.

2. Jose Eduardo Dos Santos (Angola) – in power for 37 years

The Angolan president has been in office since September 1979. Dos Santos was democratically elected into office. There have been serious election related wars in Angola, with the worst being the 1992 war, during which Jonas Savimbi was his main opponent. In 2001, he announced that he would step down, but he vied anyway and in 2003, he was re-elected. The next three elections in that country were never held. He is still going strong.

3. Paul Biya (Cameroon) – in power for 34 years

The 84 year old leader of Cameroon has been in power since November 1982. As of 2016, Paul Biya was said to be one of the most highly paid, if not the most highly paid African president, earning \$610,000 (Sh62million) a year. He got into office when the then president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, resigned. As he Prime Minister, he was the legally mandated successor. After that, everything went south. Paranoia and coup attempts turned him into a dictator. He once held an election where he was the only candidate and won by 99.98 percent.

4. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (Uganda) – in power for 31 years

At the Kenya-Uganda border of Busia, on the Ugandan side, there used to be a billboard that read: *Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, protecting you from rebels since 1986*, with the photo of Museveni looking at you as you get in. 1986 was the year he got into office after toppling Milton Obote through concerted rebellion and guerrilla attacks. He has been protecting Uganda from rebels since. His main political challenger, Kizza Besigye has repeatedly been thrown in jail and harassed by the police. He is known for being very generous with government posts to his family members.

5. Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe) – in power for 29 years

Robert Mugabe the 92 year old, African strongman has ruled over Zimbabwe for 29 years. He has forcefully taken farms from white citizens of Zimbabwe (because it

didn't belong to them), has criticized Western leaders, hunted down his political opponents and it appears, that he is entertaining the idea of letting his wife take over the country.

6. Omar al-Bashir (Sudan) – in power for 27 years

The military leader of Sudan has presided over the separation of South Sudan from Sudan and is currently served with an ICC arrest warrant. He took over the running of the country in June 1987 through a military coup. At 73 years, he seem not to be in a hurry to leave.

7. General Idris Deby (Chad) – in office for 26 years

A graduate of Muommar Gaddafi's World Revolutionary Center, the President of Chad has survived rebellions, won elections, had term limits on the presidential post removed and won the elections that came thereafter. Since taking office in December 1990, the 64 year old son of a herder has seen the country get crippled by poverty despite possessing oil reserves.

8. Isaias Afwerki (Eritrea) – in power for 23 years

The 70 year old leader of Eretria assumed power in May 1993 when the country attained independence. He stands accused of being very good at torturing those who disagree with him.

9. Yahya Jammeh (Gambia) – in power for 22 years.

Was forced out of office last week when ECOWAS and the international community put pressure on him and threatened military action. Jammeh is 70 years old and has been in office since July 1994.

Erdogan in Africa - Gulen and Trade Ties⁸

In Mozambique, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on his Mozambican counterpart Felipe Nyusi to take action against exiled Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom he blames for last year's failed coup in Turkey. Earlier this week, during a stopover in Tanzania, Erdogan warned at a joint press conference with President John Magufuli that he has evidence "that those elements who tried to topple our government are active in other countries as well."

"Other countries" was a reference to African states in which Gulen's Hizmet movement operates its international network of schools. These establishments have helped to spread Turkish culture and influence abroad. Since the attempted coup in July 2016, however, the Turkish government has been mounting a crackdown on Gulen's operations. Erdogan is trying to drum up support for these punitive measures on his five day African tour.

Erdogan wants the Gulen-linked schools in Africa to be closed down, yet they are the very educational establishments which are popular with Africa's middle class. They are an inexpensive alternative to French schools, Ibrahama Bano Barry, a sociologist at

⁸ Deutsche Welle, 25 January 2017

http://allafrica.com/stories/201701250676.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabljpw

the University of Sonfonia in Guinea, told DW. "If parents send their children to Turkish schools, it is not because the schools are Turkish, but because they employ good teachers. Africa's middle class want good schools," he said.

There are some 20 Turkish schools in the Guinean capital Conakry and they have sprung up all over Africa in recent years. Efforts to spread Turkish cultural values and educational standards are therefore said to be closely linked to Gulen and his operations.

New markets

Relations with Tanzania do not appear to have suffered. President Magufuli has asked Turkey for loans and investment for the construction of a rail link from Dar es Salaam to Zambia. It will connect Tanzania to Burundi, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The project has been put out to tender and a Turkish construction company has a good chance of clinching the deal. Other donor countries pulled out of Tanzania following a corruption scandal there in 2015.

Kristian Brakel from the Istanbul branch of Germany's Heinrich Böll Foundation believes that Turkey's economic interests are the chief reason for Erdogan's African tour. "Turkey is looking for new markets for its small and medium-sized firms," he said. The anti-Gulen offensive is a relatively minor affair. "Turkey is putting enormous pressure on its African partners, but that is not the primary objective of this visit even though the press often interprets it as such." In the medium and long term, Turkey wants to find a substitute for markets in the Middle East, such as Syria and Iraq, Brakel said.

Small and medium-sized companies have grown in strength in Turkey under Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). They belong to what is referred to in Turkey as the "devout trading class" which supports the AKP. Erdogan, in turn, is seeking openings in Africa on their behalf. "Erdogan is not targeting specific markets so much as raising Turkey's profile in the region.

He is, however, looking for a foothold in markets that could become more interesting in the future. The market for Turkey's construction industry in Africa is promising, and the Tanzanian rail project comes at a fortuitous time. But Turkey's involvement in Africa is far removed from the huge scale of China's engagement on the continent.

New African Railways Ride on Chinese Loans⁹

Earlier this month, the first train rumbled down the tracks of a \$3.4 billion electric railway connecting landlocked Ethiopia with Djibouti and its access to the Red Sea. The 750-kilometer (466 miles) line, expected to carry up to five million tons of goods per year, promises to have a massive impact on the economies of both countries and the region at large.

⁹ Voice of America, 25 January 2017

At the official launch of the project, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said its importance cannot be overstated.

The project was 70 percent funded by a loan from China's state-run EXIM Bank and built by China Railway Group and Chinese engineers.

Kenya railway line almost done

It is the latest in China's massive infrastructure investment in Africa. A \$13-billion railroad in Kenya, financed by the Export-Import Bank of China and built by the state-owned China Road and Bridge Corporation, is nearly complete. Other railway lines are planned to stretch into East African countries including South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

Between 2000 and 2014, China made \$24.2 billion in loans to finance transportation projects on the African continent, according to researchers at the China-Africa Research Initiative, a group at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies focusing on China-Africa relations. Eighty percent of those loans were for roads and railways.

China eyes African ports

Experts say Chinese infrastructure investment in Africa is not about altruism. Funding railways benefits China by connecting ports and facilitating the movement of raw commodities that are badly needed to fuel China's development.

East Africa, particularly the ports in Kenya, ports in Tanzania and especially ports in Djibouti, these are very important for the Chinese just for the exports.

China – Economic Affairs and OBOR

1. Trilateral partnership between China, Russia and the US

Hua Chunying, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson on January 26, 2017 replied to a question on a trilateral partnership between China, Russia and the US.

Question: Were you proposing a trilateral partnership between China, Russia and the US? If so, would you want this partnership acquire a strategic status in the future?

Answer: I was responding to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's remarks that China, the US and Russia should jointly develop an open and fair relationship with each other. As China, the US and Russia are all major countries with worldwide influence and permanent members of the UN Security Council, good interaction among the three will be beneficial not only to themselves but also to regional and world peace, stability and development. As Foreign Minister Lavrov pointed out, neither side should develop relations at the cost of a third party. This is also in line

with our initiative to build a new type of international relations featured by win-win cooperation.¹⁰

2. Protests in Sri Lanka against Chinese-invested project

While replying to a question on protests in Hambantota in Sri Lanka against Chinese-invested project, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hua Chunying on January 26, 2017 noted:

China has never asked Sri Lanka to allow only Chinese enterprises to operate in the Hambantota industrial zone. It is learned that small-scale protests occurred mainly because the local people misconstrued relevant policies on the projects. The Sri Lankan side has made an official clarification on this.

As the two countries are traditional friendly neighbors, China is willing to provide the best assistance it can to help Sri Lanka with its economic development so as to achieve common development. This is in the interests of both countries. The Chinese enterprises always discuss the Hambantota Port project with the Sri Lankan side on a voluntary basis, in the spirit of equality and mutual benefit, and following market rules. Relevant cooperation projects are expected to play a constructive role in the long-term development of Hambantota Port and other parts of Sri Lanka.¹¹

3. Xi to head a new central commission for integrated military, civilian development

Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, will head a new central commission for integrated military and civilian development, according to a decision by the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on 23 January.

The decision was made at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, which was chaired by Xi. The commission will be the central agency tasked with decision-making, deliberation and coordination of major issues regarding integrated military and civilian development. The commission will report to the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

Attendees at the meeting also heard a report on the work of leading Party groups of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the State Council,

¹⁰ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1434397.shtml

¹¹ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1434397.shtml

the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee.

In a statement released after the meeting, the political bureau called for efforts to uphold the authority of the CPC Central Committee with comrade Xi Jinping as the core, adhere to its centralized and unified leadership, and fully implement major policies of the committee.¹²

4. Xi urges continued efforts to build strong military

President Xi Jinping called on the military to improve its political awareness, push forward reform, and govern it according to law to aid the building of a strong military. Xi underscored the importance of improving combat readiness through troop training.

The president made the comments while visiting the 65th Army Group, which is stationed in northern China's Hebei Province, on 25 January.¹³

5. Chinese leaders extend Spring Festival greetings

President Xi Jinping, on behalf of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council, extended Spring Festival greetings to all Chinese at a reception in Beijing.

Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, delivered his speech to a gathering at the Great Hall of the People, greeting all Chinese in the mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and abroad.

The reception was presided over by Li Keqiang. Other leaders including Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Liu Yunshan, Wang Qishan and Zhang Gaoli were also present.

Addressing the event, Xi said China has made a good start to the country's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) and taken various works to a new level in 2016.

Economic growth continued to rank among the top in the world. The first battles have been won in the final campaign against poverty. The lives of the people have continued to improve and major achievements have been made in reform and opening-up, he said.

¹² http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-01/23/content_28030776.htm

¹³ http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2017-01/25/content_4770894.htm

China achieved breakthroughs in national defense and military reform, promoted rule of law, and advanced strict governance of the CPC, Xi added.¹⁴

European Union

German Arms Exports Declined

German arms exports have declined in 2016. The value of military equipment deals dropped from 7.86 billion euros in 2015 to 6.88 billion euros in 2016. However, opposition leaders and anti-arms trade activists pointed out that it is still very high.

French Presidential Candidate Fillion Met German Chancellor Merkel

Francois Fillon, French conservative presidential candidate, met German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on 23 January 2017. Both Germany and France face elections in 2017. Mr. Fillon stated that Franco-German cooperation is important for defending the European project. In his address at the Konard Adenauer Foundation, he sounded tough on the issues of immigration and Islamic extremism. Fillion is also known for his soft approach towards Russia.

Benoit Hamon: French Socialist Candidate for Presidential Election

French Socialist Party has nominated Benoit Hamon as its candidate for presidential election, 2017. Initial results show that Hamon received 58 per cent of the vote, while former Prime Minister Valls received 48 per cent of the vote. Mr. Hamon has supported a universal basic income and wishes to reduce work week hours.

European Union

Theresa May at White House:

¹⁴ http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2017-01/25/content_4770894.htm

In their first bilateral meeting, US President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Theresa May agreed to begin preliminary talks on a free trade deal. The two leaders signed a new U.K.-U.S. Trade Negotiation Agreement that would pave the way for a formal free-trade deal to be signed “as soon as possible” after the U.K. leaves the European Union. President Trump pledged to keep in place the same arrangements Britain currently has with the U.S. through the EU after Brexit, to increase trade between the two countries “more than ever before” and to work to put in place a new bilateral trading relationship between Britain and the U.S.¹⁵

Both the leaders also agreed to set up joint U.K.-U.S. working groups to start understanding what can be achieved together before the United Kingdom exits the European Union. Speaking after the meeting with President Trump, May said the U.K.’s outreach to Washington “underlines our commitment to use the opportunities of Brexit.”

The Trade Negotiation Agreement is designed to deal with potential stumbling blocks that could delay the completion of a free trade deal. It will also be used to bring forward measures to reduce trade barriers before Brexit such as removing roaming charges and non-tariff barriers blocking agricultural exports. The move is set to maintain the economic cooperation the US has with the EU currently and replicating that between the US and the UK.¹⁶

Meanwhile reports have also indicated that campaigners are urging people to participate in what has been termed as the “biggest protest ever” in London when Donald Trump comes to visit the UK later this year. Anti-Trump campaigners took to social media to call for a demonstration in the streets of the capital after Theresa May revealed that the US President had accepted an invitation from the Queen.¹⁷

Turkey threatens to do away with migrant deal in extradition spat with Greece:

Turkey has threatened to back out of the migration deal with the European Union, after Greece refused to extradite soldiers Ankara claims were involved in last July’s attempted coup. Greece’s Supreme Court ruled against the extradition of eight Turkish soldiers who fled to Greece by helicopter a day after the coup attempt. Erdogan’s demand that the men be returned to stand trial in Turkey has strained relations

¹⁵ McTague, Tom, “US Britain to begin preliminary trade talks”, *Politico*, January 28, 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/us-britain-to-begin-preliminary-trade-talks/> accessed January 29, 2017.

¹⁶ Henderson, Barney, “Donald Trump tells Theresa May: ‘Brexit is going to be a wonderful thing for your country’ as two leaders hold hands at White House”, *The Telegraph*, January 28, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/27/theresa-may-meets-donald-trump-white-house-live/> accessed January 29, 2017.

¹⁷ Farand, Chloe, “Donald Trump: ‘London to hold biggest protest ever’ against US President”, *The Independent*, January 28, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/donald-trump-london-protest-demonstration-us-president-theresa-may-a7550591.html> accessed January 29, 2017.

between Ankara and Athens. Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey's Foreign Minister said that Ankara was keeping its options open in response to the court's decision in relation to the six army helicopter pilots and two technicians, including the cancellation of the bilateral readmission agreement. It has been indicated that scrapping the agreement could encourage more migrants to attempt crossing the Aegean Sea to Greek shores and deal a blow to Athens' ability to deal with the arrivals. In response to a criticism from the EU members over his crackdown involving dismissal or detention of more than 100,000 people, the Turkish President had earlier threatened to end cooperation on the migrant issue with Europe.¹⁸

British government publishes bill to trigger Article 50:

The Theresa May government last week had published the bill to trigger article 50, prompting Labour MP's to table a series of proposed amendments, including one seeking to guarantee that parliament gets a final say on any deal for Brexit.

The bill, containing two clauses will be granted five days of time in the Commons during which debates would be held both in the Commons and the House of Lords. The sudden and short announcement over the bill had created concerns among some Labour MPs, according to whom it could not receive proper scrutiny in such a short period.

The bill simply says that "the Prime Minister may notify, under Article 50(2) of the Treaty on European Union, the United Kingdom's intention to withdraw from the EU."¹⁹ It also makes clear the new Act is not impacted by the provisions of the European Communities Act 1972, which laid out the terms of Britain's EU membership.²⁰ The announcement gave rise to tensions among Labour MP's as a shadow minister, Tulip Siddiq quit Labour's front bench in the aftermath of the announcement, after being told to back legislation paving the way for the UK's departure from the EU. Siddiq who has vehemently opposed exit from the EU said that Brexit presented enormous amounts of uncertainty for the constituents, with most believing that the disadvantages of leaving outweighed any potential benefits.²¹

¹⁸ Srivastava, Mehul and Kerin Hope, "Turkey threatens to scrap migrant deal in extradition spat with Greece", *The Financial Times*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/46d4bb96-e489-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a> accessed January 29, 2017.

¹⁹ Kentish, Ben, "Brexit bill: What does Theresa May's proposed Article 50 legislation say?", *The Independent*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-bill-government-publishes-article-50-parliament-european-union-theresa-may-a7547246.html> accessed January 29, 2017.

²⁰ Kentish, Ben, "Brexit bill: What does Theresa May's proposed Article 50 legislation say?", *The Independent*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-bill-government-publishes-article-50-parliament-european-union-theresa-may-a7547246.html> accessed January 29, 2017.

²¹ "Brexit: Labour tensions as Article 50 bill published", *BBC News*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-38753808> accessed January 29, 2017.

Benoit Hamon wins runoff to become French Socialist Presidential nominee:

Benoit Hamon clinched the socialist nomination for this year's French presidential election securing victory over former Prime Minister Manuel Valls. Hamon won with 58.9 percent of the vote, according to the Socialist Party website, defeating Valls who had 41.1 percent.

The win for Mr Hamon – who is in favour of a universal basic income, legalising cannabis and backing investment in renewable energy – demonstrates a rejection of the course followed by current President Francois Hollande who rolled back some of the more left-wing proposals during the second half of his presidency after public outcry.

Mr Hamon resigned as education minister in August 2014 because he believed Mr Hollande had abandoned the socialist agenda of the party after reneging on certain campaign promises such as an 85 per cent income tax.²² The challenge for Hamon may have just begun, who now faces the difficult task of reuniting a bitterly divided party decimated even further by a fractious primary campaign.

North America

Canada

- 1) Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has reaffirmed Canada's commitment to welcoming refugees amid U.S. President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith," Trudeau wrote on Twitter on Saturday. "Diversity is our strength." Canada resettled about 39,000 refugees from Syria between December 2015 and December 2016.²³
- 2) Prime Minister Trudeau may have taken to Twitter this weekend to defend immigration and diversity, but behind the scenes there's a formidable ghost bedeviling the machinery of Canadian government —Mr.Trump. The U.S. president's way of communicating — Tweets, various interview musings and executive order pronouncements — have upended the

²² Mortimer, Caroline, "Benoit Hamon wins runoff to become French Socialist Presidential nominee", *The Independent*, January 30, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/benoit-hamon-france-presidential-race-socialist-party-marine-le-pen-manuel-valls-a7552391.html> accessed January 30, 2017.

²³ Emma Paling, "Trudeau Tells Refugees: 'Canadians Will Welcome You'," http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/01/28/trudeau-refugees_n_14461906.html, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

traditional, time-honoured way of conducting the business of Canada's relations with its largest trading partner and top ally. The effect, sources tell The Canadian Press, is historic because the usual way that Canada and most western governments would make foreign policy has been thrown out the window.²⁴

- 3) Five people were killed after gunmen opened fire in a Quebec City mosque during evening prayers, the mosque's president told reporters. A witness told Reuters that up to three gunmen fired on about 40 people inside the Quebec City Islamic Cultural Centre. Incidents of Islamophobia have increased in Quebec in recent years. The face-covering, or niqab, became a big issue in the 2015 Canadian federal election, especially in Quebec, where the vast majority of the population supported a ban on it at citizenship ceremonies.²⁵
- 4) Public Safety Minister Mr. Ralph Goodale says he intends to send a clear message when he talks to U.S. President Trump's team: Canada doesn't condone torture. The Saskatchewan MP said his officials are in the process of setting up a first conversation with his U.S. counterpart, Gen. John Kelly, the new secretary of homeland security. Goodale says that going forward, improving efficiency at the the Canada, U.S. border will be a priority. The so-called pre-clearance bill passed the U.S. Congress in December. It will help kick off a number of projects aimed at speeding up travel across the border. One project will establish U.S. customs offices on the Canadian side of the border, at Montreal's train station and on Western Canada's Rocky Mountaineer train line, allowing travellers, in theory, to get screened more quickly, easing the logjams that slow travel and commerce.²⁶

The United States

- 1) President Trump signed executive orders to push forward the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, opening new fronts in his looming war with environmentalists. Keystone was rejected in 2015 by former President Barack Obama after a seven-year review. Trump's orders clear the way to continue building Energy Transfer Partners' 1,172-mile Dakota Access project, which has been stalled since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

²⁴ Mike Blanchfield, "Trump Communications Paralyzing Ottawa's Decision-Makers," http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/01/29/trump-muslim-ban-tweets-ottawa_n_14479244.html, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

²⁵ Kevin Dougherty, "Five killed in Quebec City mosque shooting: mosque president." <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-canada-mosque-shooting-idUSKBN15Eo4S>, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

²⁶ Catharine Tunney, "Ralph Goodale to tell Trump administration: Canada doesn't support torture," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/goodale-trump-torture-1.3956221> ,Accessed on 30 January 2017.

halted construction in December 2016 amid massive protests led by the Standing Rock Sioux. The moves mark the first serious step by the new president to reverse his predecessor's environmental gains in favor of propping up an oil and gas industry dogged by low prices, competition from renewable energy and regulations aimed at cutting carbon emissions.²⁷

- 2) Travelers were stranded around the world, protests escalated in the United States and anxiety rose within President Trump's party as his order closing the nation to refugees and people from certain predominantly Muslim countries provoked a crisis just days into his administration. In an executive order signed has led to suspension of the US Refugee Admissions Programme for 120 days, an indefinite ban on Syrian refugees and a 90-day suspension on anyone arriving from seven Muslim-majority countries - Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. Some visa categories, such as diplomats and the UN, are not included in the suspension. Priority will be given to religious minorities facing persecution in their countries. In an interview, Mr Trump singled out Christians in Syria. A cap of 50,000 refugees to be accepted in 2017, against a limit of 110,000 set by former President Barack Obama and a suspension of the Visa Interview Waiver Program, which allows consular officers to exempt some applicants from face-to-face interviews if they are seeking to renew their temporary visas within a year of expiry. Exceptions could be made on a case-by-case basis. The White House pulled back on part of Mr. Trump's temporary ban on visitors from seven countries by saying that it would not apply to those with green cards granting them permanent residence in the United States. By the end of the day, the Department of Homeland Security formally issued an order declaring legal residents exempt from the order. But the recalibration did little to reassure critics at home or abroad who saw the president's order as a retreat from traditional American values. European leaders denounced the order, and some Republican lawmakers called on Mr. Trump to back down. It was not clear how many were still being detained at American airports or how many others were now blocked from getting on airplanes in the first place.²⁸

²⁷ Alexander C. Kaufman, "Trump Signs Executive Orders On Keystone XL, Dakota Access Pipelines," http://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/trump-keystone-dakota-access_us_58877e02e4b070d8cad57814, Accessed on 25 January 2017.

²⁸ Peter Baker, "Travelers Stranded and Protests Swell Over Trump Order," https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/29/us/politics/white-house-official-in-reversal-says-green-card-holders-wont-be-barred.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=a-lede-package-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=0, and BBC, "Trump executive order on refugees and travel suspension: Key points," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38781302>, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

- 3) Though cast as measures meant to make the country safe, the Trump administration's moves during its first week in office are more likely to weaken the counterterrorism defenses the United States has erected over the past 16 years, several current and former U.S. officials said. Through inflammatory rhetoric and hastily drawn executive orders, the administration has alienated allies, including Iraq, provided propaganda fodder to terrorist networks that frequently portray U.S. involvement in the Middle East as a religious crusade, and endangered critical cooperation from often-hidden U.S. partners — whether the leader of a mosque in an American suburb or the head of a Middle East intelligence service. “Ultimately, we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism,” Republican Sens. Lindsey O. Graham (S.C.) and John McCain (Ariz.)²⁹
- 4) The U.S. Senate voted overwhelmingly to confirm South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley as Ambassador to the United Nations, as Republican President Donald Trump rounds out his national security team. Ninety-six senators backed Haley, and four opposed her. The only “no” votes came from three Democratic senators, Tom Udall, Chris Coons and Martin Heinrich, and Bernie Sanders, an independent who caucuses with Democrats. While most lawmakers praised Haley, 45, the governor of South Carolina, a few expressed concerns about her lack of foreign policy experience. She has only ever held office in the U.S. state.³⁰
- 5) During a call with Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, President Trump emphasized that the United States considers India a true friend and partner in addressing challenges around the world. The two discussed opportunities to strengthen the partnership between the United States and India in broad areas such as the economy and defense. They also discussed security in the region of South and Central Asia. President Trump and Prime Minister Modi resolved that the United States and India stand shoulder to shoulder in the global fight against terrorism. President Trump looked forward to hosting Prime Minister Modi in the United States later this year.³¹

²⁹ Greg Miller and Missy Ryan, “Officials worry that U.S. counterterrorism defenses will be weakened by Trump actions,” https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/officials-worry-that-us-counterterrorism-defenses-will-be-weakened-by-trump-actions/2017/01/29/1fo45074-e644-1e6-b82f-687d6e6a3e7c_story.html?utm_term=.c16b6ef40156, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

³⁰ Patricia Zengerle, “Senate Confirms Nikki Haley As Trump’s U.N. Ambassador,” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/nikki-haley-un-ambassador-confirmed_us_5887e907e4bob481c76bbde2?nujb7r7kumrt3xr&, Accessed on 25 January 2017.

³¹ The White House, “Readout of the President’s Call With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India,” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/24/readout-presidents-call-prime-minister-narendra-modi-india>, Accessed on 25 January 2017.

Mexico

- 1) President Trump and Mexico's President, Enrique Peña Nieto, had a "productive and constructive" call, a day after President Peña Nieto cancelled his visit to the US, according to a joint statement released by the White House. The two presidents discussed America's trade deficit with Mexico, "the importance of the friendship between the two nations," and the need to work together to stop drug trafficking and illegal guns and arms sales, the statement said. It also acknowledged the two presidents' "clear and very public differences" on who will pay for the border wall. "Both presidents have instructed their teams to continue the dialogue to strengthen this important strategic and economic relationship in a constructive way," the statement read.³²
- 2) Mexican President Pena Nieto cancelled a planned meeting with President Trump on, signalling a remarkable souring of relations between Washington and one of its most important international partners just days into the new administration. The rift capped days of increasingly confrontational remarks – on Twitter and in duelling public appearances – between the two men, whose countries conduct some \$1.6 billion a day in cross-border trade, and cooperate on everything from migration to anti-drug enforcement to environmental issues. Hours after Trump tweeted that the meeting should be scrapped if Mexico doesn't agree to pay for a wall along the nearly 2,000-mile border, Pena Nieto responded via the same platform. "This morning we have informed the White House I will not attend the working meeting planned for next Tuesday," the Mexican president tweeted. He added that "Mexico reaffirms its willingness to work with the United States to reach agreements that benefit both nations."³³
- 3) President Trump's escalating threats against Mexico have led to calls for a guerrilla struggle of national resistance from across the political spectrum, uniting the Mexican people as almost never before in modern times. A string of elder statesmen warn that the country faces grievous injury and is now in a state of de facto hostilities with Washington, forcing Mexicans to fight back on every front and whatever the cost.³⁴

³² Veronica Stracqualursi, "Trump Speaks to Mexican President by Phone 1 Day After Canceling Meeting," <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-speaks-mexican-president-phone-day-canceling-meeting/story?id=45093019> ,Accessed on 30 January 2017.

³³ Mark Stevenson, "Mexico's President Cancels Meeting With Trump," <https://thewire.in/103310/mexicos-president-cancels-meeting-with-trump/> , Accessed on 30 January 2017.

³⁴ Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, "Mexico unites in anger over President Trump's plan for sanctions," <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/01/29/mexico-unites-anger-trump-plan-sanctions/> , Accessed on 30 January 2017.

Region: South America

Bolivia

- 1) As Mexico-US ties sour over the new US administration's controversial anti-immigration policies, Bolivia urges Mexico to turn to the South American countries rather than Washington, citing capitalism's demise. "The neoliberal model has failed and capitalism has failed too," Bolivian President Evo Morales said. Morales further noted that he had taken to Twitter and called on Mexico to unite with the Latin American and Caribbean states.³⁵

Colombia

- 1) Colombia has announced a plan to eradicate vast crops of coca leaf, the raw material for cocaine. The Farc rebel group relied on cocaine production to fund its insurgency, and controlled much of the industry. But a joint programme between rebels and the government will offer farmers monthly payments if they voluntarily destroy their crops. They will also be offered loans and guidance to plant alternatives such as fruit trees and cacao. The crop substitution programme was agreed as part of Colombia's peace accord, which was finally ratified in December. The Colombian official responsible for the programme, Rafael Pardo, said the government would invest \$340m (£271m), which would benefit 50,000 families.³⁶

Cuba

- 1) Mr. Raúl Castro has said Cuba hopes to continue to normalize relations with the United States but made it clear that the Trump administration should not expect concessions affecting the country's sovereignty. Before taking office, Mr. Trump threatened to torpedo the still fragile detente between the former cold war foes unless a "better deal" could be struck, without providing details. His aides have said current policy is under review. "Cuba and the United States can cooperate and live side by side in a civilized manner, respecting our differences and promoting all that is of

³⁵ Press TV, "Look to South America not US: Bolivia to Mexico," <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/01/28/508081/Bolivia-Mexico-US>, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

³⁶ BBC, "Colombian government and rebels announce cocaine crop plan," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-38779685>, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

benefit for both countries and people,” Castro said in his government’s first remarks since Mr. Trump became president.³⁷

Guyana

- 1) With the survival of CARICOM member states on the line in the face of a changing climate fuelled by greenhouse gas emissions, Guyana could have some tough decisions ahead, following the recent discovery of oil off its coast. This is according to Dr Al Binger, interim executive director of the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE), who suggested that the 1.4 billion-barrel discovery could perhaps not have come at a worse time. This, as CARICOM and other Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) members press for keeping global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels as provided for in the historic Paris Agreement.³⁸

Venezuela

- 1) Venezuela's president created an executive vice president post and named new vice presidents to lead PDVSA in what he described as a shake-up of the state oil company and an effort to root out corruption in the OPEC nation's principal industry. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro kept Eulogio Del Pino as PDVSA president but created a new post of executive vice president while naming vice presidents in areas including finance and exploration. PDVSA has been dogged for years by corruption ranging from lucrative smuggling of heavily subsidized fuel to kickbacks and bribery that led to prosecution of U.S.-based contractors who did business with the company.³⁹

Russia

³⁷ Reuters, “Raúl Castro: Cuba won't compromise sovereignty to normalize US relations,” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/25/raul-castro-cuba-sovereignty-us-relations-donald-trump>, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

³⁸ Caribbean News Service, “Guyana Oil Discovery: Blessing Or Curse?,” <http://caribbeannewsservice.com/now/guyana-oil-discovery-blessing-or-curse/> Accessed on 30 January 2017.

³⁹ Reuters, “Venezuela names new leaders at oil firm PDVSA to 'defeat corruption',” <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/01/29/reuters-america-venezuela-names-new-leaders-at-oil-firm-pdvsa-to-defeat-corruption.html>, Accessed on 30 January 2017.

- Francois Fillon, the French Republicans' presidential hopeful in an interview on 22 January said that Europe must be less dependent on the US in economic and defense areas, and needs stronger ties with Russia, a "vast" country essential for the future of the continent. *"Relations with Russia are a strategic issue for the future of Europe. We made mistakes in the past pushing Russia into faulty actions,"* he said, adding that Russia is a country without a democratic tradition, but with a nuclear arsenal. *"The US would not accept aggressive states at their borders. What made them [US] deploy the anti-missile system at the Russian border then? We've made a lot of mistakes,"* he said. Russia is *"a vast country that cannot be treated light-heartedly,"* Fillon argued. *"There are two options: you either try to find an agreement with Russia, or you confront it. Who in their senses wants a conflict with Russia?"*⁴⁰
- The head of Russia's Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, has sent a message of goodwill to newly sworn-in U.S. President Donald Trump. Kadyrov said it is Trump's responsibility to make Russia and the U.S. "reliable friends."⁴¹
- Images of advanced Dongfeng-41 ICBMs in Heilongjiang Province, which borders Russia, were reported. In a statement to RIA Novosti, the Chinese Foreign Ministry called media reports on China's deployment of ballistic missiles to the Russian border *"speculations and crude guesses."* However, Russian military analyst Konstantin Sivkov said that the alleged deployment of the DF-41 near Russia's border should not be read as a threat to Russia. *"DF-41 missiles placed near Russia's border are a smaller threat than if they were placed deeper in the Chinese territory. Such missiles usually have a very large 'dead zone' [area within minimal range that cannot be attacked by a weapon],"* he said, adding that the ICBMs would not be able to target Russia's Far East and most of Eastern Siberia from the Heilongjiang Province. The Kremlin agreed with the assessment, saying that China is Russia's *"strategic partner in political and economic senses."* *"Certainly, the actions of the Chinese military, if the reports prove correct, the military build-up in China is not perceived as a threat to our country,"* said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.⁴²

⁴⁰"Sanctions won't break Russia, we need partnership – French presidential hopeful Fillon", *RT*, January 23, 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/374777-fillon-russia-sanctions-europe/> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁴¹Damien Sharkov, "Vladimir Putin's Chechen Ally Urges Donald Trump to Make Russia America's 'Friends'", *Newsweek*, January 23, 2017. <http://europe.newsweek.com/putins-chechen-ally-urges-trump-make-russia-us-friends-547005?rm=eu> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁴²"China reportedly deploys ICBMs near Russia's border", *RT*, January 24, 2017.

<https://www.rt.com/news/374874-china-icbm-russia-border/> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

- According to a source close to the East StratCom task force told Germany's Spiegel magazine that Russia is seeking to influence the outcome of several key elections in European countries this year with fake news. It said that "There is an enormous, far-reaching, at least partly organized, disinformation campaign against the EU, its politicians and its principles." It is "highly likely" Russia will try to influence European elections "as it did in the US", the source said. The number one target is Angela Merkel, who has been subjected to a "bombardment" of fake news over her refugee policy and support for economic sanctions against Russia. Disinformation is "part of state policy" and a "military tool" for the Kremlin". East StratCom, set up by the EU in 2015 to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation, says it has already found evidence of a massive fake news campaign targeting European countries. The unit's experts found more than 2,500 examples of "stories directly contradicting public facts" in 18 different languages over just 15 months. The stories were repeated on a daily basis and reproduced in multiple languages. "There is no doubt that the pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign is an orchestrated strategy," the task force, which is part of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's diplomatic service, says on its website. "The aim of this disinformation campaign is to weaken and destabilise the West, by exploiting existing divisions or creating artificial new ones. "Another strategy is to spread as many conflicting messages as possible, in order to persuade the audience that there are so many versions of events that it is impossible to find the truth." The goal of Kremlin disinformation is to "weaken society's will for resistance or confrontation". Most Russian disinformation in the EU is spread by "domestic actors" who independently repeat talking points that first appear on Russian state news outlets because it suits them ideologically. As an example, Milos Zeman, the Eurosceptic president of the Czech republic's example was cited. Zeman, a high-ranking European politician, is said to who "copy pastes Russian messaging and helps Russian foreign policy by repeating its talking points on Syria and Ukraine".⁴³
- Russia has agreed to allow its defence companies to forge direct ties with Indian defense companies — both public and private sector — to supply, service and jointly manufacture spares for use by Indian defense forces. So far, Rosoboronexport of Russia is the sole contractor for spares for a variety of Russian defense platforms and weapons in use by the Indian defense forces, which as been the case for the last five decades. India buys Russian spares at a

⁴³Justin Huggler and Roland Oliphant, "Russia is targeting French, Dutch and German elections with fake news, EU task force warns", *The Telegraph*, January 24, 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/24/russia-targeting-european-elections-fake-news-eu-task-force/> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

cost of more than \$2 billion annually for multiple weapons and platforms. Indian defense companies are not permitted to tie up directly with Russian manufacturing companies for the supply of additional spares, and subsystems and all contracts are routed through Rosoboronexport. "Supply of spares on time and on 'right price' has been the main problem with Russian systems, and overall problems of spares is critical," a top Indian Ministry of Defence (MoD) official said. The Indian Navy still continues to face problems in the procurement of critical spares parts for its Russian Kilo-class submarines, warships and aircraft carriers, missiles, electronic warfare control systems, radar communication tools, and navigation systems. Bharat Karnad, a professor of national security studies at the Centre for Policy Research, said that "the Indian armed services/MoD/Department of Defence Production have failed to bring their spares requirements in sync with the Soviet/Russian stores' indenting and production processes."⁴⁴

- François Fillon on January 23 after his meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel has urged Merkel to soften her position towards Russia and harden her policies on migration, as France's presidential frontrunner flew to Berlin for the first time since his victory in French centre-right primaries. Mr Fillon insisted on the need to restore better relations with Russian president Vladimir Putin, saying it would help to eradicate the Islamist terror threat to France and Germany rooted in war-torn Syria.⁴⁵
- A manager, Ruslan Stoyanov, at Russia's biggest cybersecurity firm, Kaspersky, in charge of investigating hacking has been arrested in December last year, a report which was confirmed by the company on January 25. Stoyanov was arrested along with a senior Russian FSB intelligence officer and that they both face charges of treason.⁴⁶
- A bill that would decriminalize some forms of domestic violence in Russia passed a key stage in the Duma on January 25. The bill, dubbed the "slapping law," decriminalizes a first offense of domestic violence that does not seriously injure the person, making it a less serious administrative offense. The bill also includes violence against children. More than 85% of legislators in Russia's Duma approved the bill -- seen as part of President Vladimir Putin's drive to

⁴⁴Vivek Raghuvanshi, "Russia Allows Companies to work with India to Supply Weapon Spares", *Defense News*, January 23, 2017. <http://www.defensenews.com/articles/russia-allows-companies-to-work-with-india-to-supply-weapon-spares> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁴⁵Anne-Sylvaine Chassany and Stefan Wagstyl, "François Fillon urges Angela Merkel to soften stance on Russia", *Financial Times*, January 24, 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/3b383d5a-e17b-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁴⁶"Russia arrests top manager at Kaspersky cybersecurity firm on treason charge, Russian newspaper says", *CNBC*, January 25, 2017. <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/01/25/top-kaspersky-cybersecurity-manager-arrested-in-russia-on-treason-charge.html> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

appease conservative pushing "traditional family values" -- on Wednesday in its second reading. It will need a third reading and vote before going to the upper house and then to the president to sign into law.⁴⁷

- Gazprom's deputy head Alexander Medvedev said that with Donald Trump's election as U.S. president, Brexit and upcoming elections in France and Germany to improve Western attitudes toward Moscow.⁴⁸
- CEO and General Designer of the Machine-Building R&D Consortium Alexander Leonov said on January 27 that the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile will be mounted in submarines' torpedo launchers and on Russia's fifth-generation T-50 PAK FA fighter jet. They working on the missile's light version.⁴⁹
- Food has become a major point in Russia and China's bilateral relations. Beijing imports food items such as Russian meat: pork, chicken, and beef. According to the news report, China imports food from Russia due to food shortage and growing population in China.⁵⁰
- While greeting India on its Republic Day on January 26, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that the special and privileged strategic partnership with India is an invariable priority in Moscow's foreign policy.⁵¹

Afghanistan

- **Iranians met Taliban in Helmand province**

Some Iranian representatives have reportedly met with the Taliban group in southern Helmand province of Afghanistan. Provincial governor Hayatullah Hayat informed

⁴⁷Emma Burrows and Angela Dewan, "Russian lawmakers back bill decriminalizing some domestic violence", *CNN*, January 25, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/25/europe/russia-domestic-violence-bill/> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁴⁸Vladimir Soldatkin and Shadia Nasralla, "Trump victory, Brexit impact is shifting West's Russia bias: Gazprom", *Reuters*, January 25, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-gazprom-us-trump-idUSKBN1591KY?il=0> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁴⁹"India & Russia to Develop BrahMos Missile for PAK FA 5th Generation Jet", *Economic Times*, January 28, 2017. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-russia-to-develop-brahmos-missile-for-pak-fa-5th-generation-fighter-jet/articleshow/56833757.cms> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁵⁰"China Finds New Food Source in Former Rival Russia", *Real Clear Life*, January 29, 2017. <http://www.realclearlife.com/foodanddrink/china-buying-russian-meat/> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

⁵¹"Privileged Strategic Partnership with India Important to Russia: Putin", *Economic Times*, January 26, 2017. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/privileged-strategic-partnership-with-india-important-to-russia-putin/articleshow/56790490.cms?prtpage=1> (Accessed on January 30, 2017).

regarding the possible meeting, saying the issue has been shared with the intelligence directorate for further confirmation.

Hayat cited preliminary intelligence report regarding the meeting and said the Iranians have met with the Taliban representatives in the restive Garamser district.

He also added that several Iranian rockets were also found after the Taliban used them to attack the provincial government compound. According to Hayat, several rockets were fired on the compound when the group launched a coordinated attack and some of the rockets did not explode after impacting the buildings. Hayat said the Iranian signs could be clearly read from the captured rockets. This comes as the former Afghan intelligence chief Rahmatullah Nabil earlier said Iran is supporting the Taliban group to counter the growing influence of ISIS in the country.⁵²

- **Afghanistan orders arrest of Vice President Dostum's guards**

The attorney general of Afghanistan has ordered to arrest at least 9 security guards of Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum in connection to alleged abduction and sexual abuse of the political rival Ahmad Ischi, it has been reported. The arrest warrants were issued on 23 January 2017 after the men refused to appear before the Attorney General to respond regarding the alleged accusations.

The Vice President and his security guards have been summoned for at least three times by the Attorney General but neither of them has responded to the summonses. According to Afghan law he could be suspended from his position and put under house arrest for his refusal to cooperate with the investigation, Attorney General Farid Hamidi told The Wall Street Journal. However, the Office of the Vice President has said it would cooperate with a government investigation, saying the accusations by the rivals are baseless efforts to defame Gen. Dostum.

Ishchi claimed that the vice president detained him and forced him to strip naked besides he was beaten by the bodyguards of Gen. Dostum and was sodomized with a rifle. This comes as a detailed report was presented to a meeting of the National Security Council chaired by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani late in December last year. The Office of the President, ARG Palace, said the report presented by Attorney General focused on circumstances to launch an investigation regarding the claims made by Mr. Ischi.⁵³

- **Growing foreign insurgents' activities in Afghanistan**

New reports have emerged regarding the growing activities of the foreign insurgents in Afghanistan amid concerns that the loyalists of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group are attempting to expand foothold in the country along with the other terrorist networks. Local officials in eastern Nangarhar province first reported regarding the growing activities of the foreign insurgents who are mainly operating

⁵² *Khaama Press*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/iranians-met-taliban-in-helmand-province-02730>.

⁵³ *Khaama Press*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-orders-arrest-of-vice-president-dostums-guards-02736>

under the flag of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group, with the officials saying the majority of the fighters are hailing from Orakzai Agency.

The officials also added that foreign insurgents from the Central Asian countries as well as Arab fighters are also fighting the Afghan government and security forces. In the latest development, the Afghan security forces arrested two foreign insurgents in northern Sar-e-Pul province who are hailing from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The two men were arrested during a night operation conducted in Qaflatoon area of Sayad district late on Friday. Mohammad Zahir Wahdat appeared in a press conference along with the detained militants, saying four Afghan Taliban insurgents were also killed during the operation.⁵⁴

- **Global Powers Must Not Engage in Rivalry in Afghanistan: CEO**

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah on 24 January 2017 said that the Afghan government will not allow global powers to engage in rivalries on Afghan soil and exploit the country's sovereignty. Referring on the Taliban insurgency, Abdullah said that continued financing by foreign countries of Taliban's war machine was still a matter of great concern, but warned that the Taliban would fail to reach its objectives by waging war against the country.

"We will not allow any country to misuse (Afghan soil); continued support by donor countries has a major importance for us in the fight against terrorism," said Abdullah. Political commentators say Afghanistan needs to define an effective policy which can deter interference by global powers in Afghanistan's affairs.

"I don't think that global powers are able to engage in rivalry here, because past experience has proved that such an approach will not yield an outcome," said legal expert Nasrullah Stanekzai.

It is believed that Afghanistan needs to improve its intelligence capabilities in the view of the current war in the country. "The war is not an option for them, Taliban, to reach their objectives, they think they can claim victory through the war, but it is a failed attempt," Abdullah said.⁵⁵

- **US would consider more troops for Afghanistan, Trump told Ghani**

The United States would consider sending more troops to Afghanistan in a bid to prevent further deterioration of the security of the country. The commitment was reportedly made during a telephone conversation between President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Donald Trump in December last year when he was the president-elect of the United States.

Afghan officials privy of the development told The Wall Street Journal that the two leaders talked about the security situation and relations with Pakistan and Mr. Trump asked if the Afghan leader needed more U.S. troops. "President-elect Donald J. Trump

⁵⁴ *Khaama Press*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/afghan-police-arrest-terrorists-hailing-from-turkmenistan-kazakhstan-02738>

⁵⁵ *Tolo News*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/global-powers-must-not-engage-rivalry-afghanistan-ceo>

said he would certainly continue to support Afghanistan security forces and will consider a proposal for more troops after an assessment,” according to one Afghan official briefed on the call.

This comes as the Trump has not announced its Afghanistan policy so far. However, the Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah welcomed Trump’s commitment to the US forces in Afghanistan.⁵⁶

- **Afghan Forces Have Frustrated Daesh Designs: CEO**

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah has said the Islamic State or Daesh has become an international threat but the Afghan forces have frustrated the group’s designs in Afghanistan. Abdullah, who attended the burial ceremony of former High Peace Council chief Pir Sayyed Ahmad Gilani on Monday, was talking to security forces on the way back to Kabul from Nangarhar. The way back, the CEO visited security posts on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway and listened to security personnel’s problems and praised their sacrifices. Abdullah directed the authorities concerned to ensure that injured personnel were provided timely treatment.

About security forces’ preparations for the fighting season, the CEO said: “Our forces are well prepared and efforts at further equipping them have been intensified and their war plans are successfully underway.” Referring to the peace agreement between the unity government and the Gulbadin Hekmatyar-led Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan, Abdullah said the Taliban should also follow the suit. He said though Daesh had become an international threat, the Afghan forces had defeated its programmes in Afghanistan. The outfit has been unable to reach its goals in the war-torn country, the CEO added.⁵⁷

- **Taliban earn \$4.8 million annually from Kajaki Dam**

The Taliban militants group earn around \$4.8 million annually from Kajaki dam located in the restive southern Helmand province of Afghanistan. The provincial council officials have said the group earns almost 90 per cent of the income of the dam on yearly basis. Majid Akhunda, deputy provincial council chief, told RFE/RL that the group has formed a special unit to collect the income generated from the dam.

He said the 90 per cent income of the dam is almost equal to 500 million Pakistani Rupees which is equivalent to \$4.77 million. The Taliban militants group has not commented regarding the report so far. This comes as reports emerged in mid-2016 suggesting that the group has formed a special military unit, Red Group, in southern Helmand province of Afghanistan to face the increasingly professional Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). Reports regarding the establishment of the Red Group came amid concerns that the group is attempting to control of the

⁵⁶ *Khaama Press*, January 25, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/us-would-consider-more-troops-for-afghanistan-trump-told-ghani-02747>

⁵⁷ *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, January 25, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=17288

key districts and cities of the province in a bid to shift part of its leadership council to Afghanistan.⁵⁸

- **Uzbekistan, Afghanistan Keen to Boost Trade Turnover**

Uzbekistan and Afghanistan signed a bilateral trade and economic road map on the results of an official visit of the Uzbek delegation to Afghanistan, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry's press service said in a message. The road map's implementation will allow increasing the two countries' trade turnover up to \$1.5 billion in a short period of time. Moreover, several intergovernmental documents aimed at boosting the bilateral cooperation have been signed during the visit, according to the message. During the visit, the delegation was led by Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov, said the press service.

During the meeting with Afghanistan's President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, the Uzbek foreign minister presented personal message of Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in which the Uzbek head invited his Afghan counterpart to pay an official visit to Uzbekistan. Abdulaziz Kamilov and Mohammad Ashraf Ghani discussed issues of development of relations between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan in various spheres.⁵⁹

- **Afghan nation will never forget Indian nation's cooperation: Atmar**

The Afghan nation will never forget the aid and cooperation delivered by the Indian people and government, Afghan National Security Adviser (NSA) Mohammad Hanif Atmar said on 26 January 2017. In his statement released on the occasion of the Republic Day in India, Atmar said "On this auspicious occasion and important day, let me convey my best wishes and happiest moments for the government and people of India."

Atmar further added "This day reminds us our strong commitment for an evergreen friendship, cooperation, countering terrorism and getting rid of extremism." "It makes us remember the hardships and sorrows the Great Mahatma Gandhi has tolerated for the sovereignty of this great nation," he said, adding that "We all have to follow him, for peace, for prosperity, for the welfare of our people and for the harmony of whole mankind."⁶⁰

- **Political Tension Takes Heavy Toll on Af-Pak Trade**

The Pakistan-Afghanistan trade has sharply fallen over the last six months as a result of political tensions and strict border controls, an official says. Afghanistan's exports to the neighbour slumped by 21.9 percent while imports declined by 14.9 percent during the period, Model Directorate of Customs chief said.

⁵⁸ *Khaama Press*, January 25, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-earn-4-8-million-annually-from-kajaki-dam-02735>

⁵⁹ *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, January 26, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=17297

⁶⁰ *Khaama Press*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/afghan-nation-will-never-forget-indian-nations-cooperation-atmar-02739>

The News International quoted Qurban Ali Khan as saying the export of 30 main items to Afghanistan accounted for \$103 million, but the overall trade volume dropped. Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan stood at Rs53billion in the two quarters (July-December) of the current fiscal, compared to Rs62.49 billion in the corresponding period of last year. Wheat flour, amounting to Rs13.51 billion in the first two quarters of the 2015-16, dropped to Rs9.28 billion during the corresponding period of the current year.

Similarly, Afghanistan's imports of rice, cement and other traditional items also went down during the current financial year. But medicine imports steadily rose to Rs2.21 billion from Rs1.94 billion.⁶¹

- **A Paradigm Shift in Afghan Economic Policy – From East to West**

After taking charge of Presidency, Ashraf Ghani was very enthusiastic to have more cordial and wide ranging strategic relations with Pakistan, his three frequent visits including the highly criticized visit one to Army GHQ is indicative of the fact. However, President Ashraf Ghani was not happy with the outcomes which resulted in nose dive slide in the already not-so-good relations between the two states. The relations also witnessed a paradigm shift in Afghan economic policy from Eastern to Western Border since the end of 2014.

Being a landlocked country, Afghanistan is dependent upon two neighboring countries, Pakistan and Iran, to reach maritime sea. On western side, Pakistan has been a strong trading partner of Afghanistan while on Western border Iran has good bi-lateral trade relations with Afghanistan. Statistics show that Pakistan and Iran are the top trading partners of Afghanistan. Till 2013, Afghan trading with Pakistan (western border) was more than Western and northern Border (Iran, Tajakistan, Turkemanistan and Uzbekistan).⁶²

- **UN, Russian Officials Talk Afghanistan Situation**

Top UN envoy in Kabul Tadamichi Yamamoto and Russian deputy foreign minister Igor Morgulov have discussed the security situation in Afghanistan, a media report said on Saturday. President Putin's special representative for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov was also present at the meeting that conferred on the Afghan peace process and regional situation. Tadamichi sought Russian support in solution to regional issues and assisting the Afghan authorities in bringing peace and stability to the war-torn country.

Earlier, President Ashraf Ghani had suggested the United Nations should hold a conference at the regional level on key issues. UN Assistant Secretary-General for

⁶¹ *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, January 26, 2017,

http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=17295

⁶² *The Pashtun Times*, January 28, 2017, <http://thepashtuntimes.com/a-paradigm-shift-in-afghan-economic-policy-from-east-to-west/>

Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča said the UN was ready for cooperation in dealing with regional matters.⁶³

- **Greater Efforts Needed To Fight Drug Scourge**

Minister of Counter Narcotics (MoCN) Salamat Azimi said on 29 January 2017 at a conference in Kabul that more effort is needed to fight drug addiction in the country. According to Azimi, this year, the ministry plans to help rehabilitate between 40,000 and 50,000 addicts but in order to do this, more money is needed. “It is a big problem and more effort needs to be made. Everyone should feel responsible and help fight the phenomenon so we can solve the problem,” she said.

The counter narcotics department at the Ministry of Interior said they have detained more than 300 drug dealers in Kabul city in the past two weeks. “In the last 10 months, more than 630 tons of drugs have been seized by police in the country and more than 160 smugglers arrested,” Mirza Mohammad Yusufi, head of the intelligence department of counter narcotics at MoI said.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) meanwhile said treatment of addicts is a complicated matter especially as the number increases daily. “Every week addicts are in danger because of the cold weather, and are often taken to hospital,” said Abdul Manan Azad Manish, head of the drug reduction department at the MoPH.⁶⁴

Bangladesh

- **Communal Text:** Thirteen editors and compilers of Bangla textbooks for classes I to X declared that they were kept in the dark about the changes and additions made in the books published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB).⁶⁵ A joint statement from them comes at a time when the government faces widespread criticism for some embarrassing blunders and dropping of some contents from textbooks. “Wrong public perception may develop about the editors and compilers”, they said in the statement, from the Bangla textbooks published by NCTB for class I to X for this academic year.⁶⁶ “Against such backdrop, we are stating for all, including students, teachers and guardians that we were kept in the dark about the changes made in the textbooks.” The signatories of the statement include Prof Hayat Mahmud, Prof Niranjana Adhikari, Prof Mahbubul Haque, Prof Masuduzzaman, Prof Bishwajit Ghosh, Prof Syed Azizul Haque, Prof Shoaib Jibran, Prof Shafiul Alam, Prof Daniul Haque, Prof Shyamali Akbar, Prof Nurjahan Begum, Prof Rafiqullah Khan and Prof Soumitra Shekhar. They were in different panels responsible for

⁶³ *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, January 29, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=17315

⁶⁴ *Tolo News*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/greater-efforts-needed-fight-drug-scourge>

⁶⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/we-were-the-dark-1347436>. Cited Verbatim.

⁶⁶ Ibid

editing and compiling the textbooks. Hefajat and Bangladesh Awami Olema League have been demanding exclusion of some of the poems written by “Hindus and atheists”.⁶⁷ Many alleged that some poems, including “Boi (book)” written by Humayun Azad, and prose have been dropped from Bangla textbooks for different classes to fulfill the demand of the two organisations. NCTB member (primary curriculum) Dr Mohammad Abdul Mannan earlier told The Daily Star the textbook editors and writers are not usually informed when small corrections are made in those. “But whenever we make major changes, we inform them.” Eminent citizens and different organisations strongly condemned the anomalies in textbooks and demanded immediate withdrawal of the “error-ridden textbooks”.⁶⁸ Following criticism, the education ministry made NCTB Chief Editor Prithish Kumar Sarkar and its senior expert Lana Humayra Khan officer on special duty (OSD), a post regarded as a punishment.⁶⁹

- **Anti-Dumping Duty on Jute:** Commerce minister of Bangladesh Tofail Ahmed deplored the imposition of 'anti-dumping duty' by India on Bangladesh jute products. However, he hoped that the neighbouring country would soon remove all trade barriers to further existing ties.⁷⁰ “It's a matter of great regret that India has imposed anti-dumping duty on Bangladesh jute goods which are supposed to enjoy duty and quota free access to it instead,” the minister was quoted as saying at a meeting with the newly elected body of Dhaka Chambers of Commerce and Industries (DCCI) at his ministry in Dhaka.⁷¹ Tofail said India had provided duty and quota free access of all Bangladesh products, except wine and tobacco, to its market earlier while it has now been imposing anti-dumping duties and realising 12.5 per cent counter-veiling duties from many other products. The minister said India has always been a good and friendly neighbour and the people of Bangladesh still recall their contribution during the war of independence in 1971.⁷² The issue has been raised before New Delhi for discussions and Dhaka would again put it forward for amicable solutions, he added. He also assured the business delegation that the present government would take all out measures to facilitate better business environment at home and abroad and would not take any measures that prevent the sectors persistent growth. The government of India has imposed anti-dumping duty on jute products imported from Bangladesh and Nepal, ranging from \$8 to \$350 per tonne on 5 January. India's finance ministry alleged that imported jute goods

⁶⁷ ibid

⁶⁸ ibid

⁶⁹ ibid

⁷⁰ Retrieved from <http://en.prothom-alo.com/economy/news/136257/Tofail-deplores-India-s-anti-dumping-duty-on>. Cited Verbatim.

⁷¹ ibid

⁷² ibid

were suppressing domestic prices. The targeted jute products include jute yarn, sacking bags, twine and hessian fabric. Bangladesh jute goods marked 133.8 per cent export rise in India in 2015-16 financial year.⁷³

- **Rampal Power Plant:** The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) extended its support to a half-day hartal to be enforced by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports on 26 January demanding cancellation of Rampal power plant project near the Sundarbans. BNP senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi came up with the announcement at a press conference at the party's Naya Paltan central office.⁷⁴ “The National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports has long been on a movement to save the Sundarbans and called a half-day hartal in Dhaka for 26 January. BNP extends its all-out support to the programme in the interest of people,” he said.⁷⁵ Earlier on 26 November, he national committee announced that it will enforce a half-day hartal in the city on 26 January if the government does not cancel the Rampal coal-fired power plant project by two months. Rizvi alleged that the government is going to set up the power plant to protect the interests of local and foreign plunderers, putting the Sundarbans and its biodiversity at stake. “It's the duty of all of us to save the world heritage and the country's natural shield Sundarbans.”⁷⁶ He criticised the government for what he said its rigid stance on implementing the power plant project near the Sundarbans despite the strong opposition by people from all walks of life and internal community. “They (govt) are doing it only to appease their foreign master. The country's patriotic people will wage another liberation war braving all the obstacles if the undemocratic and subservient force tries to implement the project only to pacify its master,” the BNP leader warned.⁷⁷

Maldives

United Nations panel has ruled the Maldives' continued detention of a former defence minister illegal and declared that he should be freed immediately. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention said Mohamed Nazim was not afforded a fair trial following his 2015 arrest on weapons smuggling charges and backed the retired colonel's assertion that the police had framed him. “[T]he Working Group considers that an adequate remedy would be to release Col. Nazim immediately and accord him an enforceable right to reparations”, the ruling adopted on November 25 and publicised on 26th January. It also suggested that Nazim's treatment in prison had violated international

⁷³ ibid

⁷⁴ Retrieved from <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/136789/BNP-backs-Nat%E2%80%99l-committee%E2%80%98s-26-Jan-half-day-hartal>. Cited Verbatim

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid

prohibitions against torture: He was held in solitary confinement and not given “full access to medical care for the treatment of his deteriorating eyesight, heart conditions, varicose veins and back pain”.

The WGAD’s judgment is not legally binding, but his family previously said they hoped it could increase pressure to release him. Ibrahim Muaz Ali, the president’s spokesman, said the government has not taken a decision on the panel’s ruling yet. Nazim is currently serving his 11-year jail sentence under house imprisonment. He has long claimed that rogue policemen framed him on the orders of then-Tourism Minister Ahmed Adeeb. They raided his home and left a bag containing a pistol and bullets in his bedroom, he said. Nazim’s arrest coincided with the breakup of the ruling coalition and became a rallying cry in an opposition campaign launched over President Abdulla Yameen’s constitutional breaches. It was followed closely by the arrest and jailing of several of Yameen’s political opponents, including former President Mohamed Nasheed, throwing the country into a period of prolonged crisis.

The WGAD in 2015 ruled former Nasheed’s trial and sentencing on a terror charge illegal, but the government said it did not accept the findings. Nasheed, who lives in exile in the United Kingdom, and former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom have called for Nazim’s immediate release.⁷⁸

President’s announcement revives rumours about the sale of Maldives atoll to Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has drawn up plans for a “massive project” in the Maldives, President Abdulla Yameen has said. The announcement made last week on the island of Magoodhoo in Faafu Atoll has added fuel to the long-standing speculation that the Maldives plans to sell the entire atoll to the Islamic kingdom.

The president described the project as a township or an integrated development project involving various industries and open to travellers from all over the world. The Saudi rulers have a special interest in Faafu Atoll, he said. The government had hopes that the project would begin last year, but the Saudis had stalled it because of political instability in the Maldives, he said. The president’s office declined to reveal additional details.

Faafu, located to the south west of the capital, Malé, is among the least populous in the country. It has 19 islands, of which five are inhabited and one is a tourist resort. Some 4,365 people are spread across the inhabited islands. The Maldives United Opposition has called on Yameen to be more transparent.

⁷⁸ <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/un-panel-finds-maldives-ex-defence-ministers-jailing-illegal-128550>

Elected representatives for the atoll were meanwhile divided on the rumoured plans for the atoll, which included speculation that the entire population of the atoll may be relocated to Hulhumalé, a planned city near Malé. Rumours of the project first began swirling soon when a constitutional amendment authorising foreign freeholds in the Maldives was approved in 2015. Saudi-Maldives relations have seen a boost since Yameen assumed power in 2013. The president said: “Faafu Atoll may be the smallest atoll in terms of population, but by the grace of Allah, if things go well, Faafu atoll is a happy and lucky atoll. The “massive project” will transform Faafu into the most prosperous atoll and create hundreds of jobs, he promised, and added: “This is not a project that our government has the capacity to implement. The project was put on hold because of political instability, he said, referring to a prolonged period of chaos in the country following the jailing of his political opponents and an explosion on the presidential speedboat.

The government, in the state budget for the past three years, had included US\$150million as estimated revenue from SEZs in the hopes of the Faafu deal. The public needs to be made aware of what the deal is. Are we selling Faafu, are we leasing it, is it for resort development? The people have a right to know.” The government is yet to realise revenue from the proposed SEZs.⁷⁹

Ex-pres Nasheed to meet main opposition officials in Sri Lanka

Self-exiled Former President Mohamed Nasheed visited Sri Lanka on 29th January to meet with top officials of main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) to discuss the political situation of the Maldives as well as to increase the party’s activities. An official of MDP told Mihaaru that the meetings with Nasheed will take place from Monday to Thursday in Lankan capital Colombo.

“All leadership members of the party and the national committee will take part in the meeting,” said the official. Mihaaru understands that topics of discussion include campaigns for future elections and choosing a presidential candidate for the presidential elections next year. MDP added that the former president will meet MDP supporters on 2nd February. Former President Nasheed, who is sentenced to thirteen years in jail for the arbitrary detention of a judge during his administration, is currently living in the United Kingdom under political asylum. He had also visited Sri Lanka last year August and remained for the duration of a week.⁸⁰

Nepal

⁷⁹ <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/presidents-announcement-revives-rumours-of-plan-to-sell-maldives-atoll-to-saudi-arabia-128557>

⁸⁰ <http://en.mihaaru.com/ex-pres-nasheed-to-meet-main-opposition-officials-in-sri-lanka/>

Second meeting of Nepal-India Oversight Mechanism

India and Nepal will evaluate the progress of ongoing India funded projects in Nepal during the second meeting of India- Nepal Oversight Mechanism on 30 January 2016 in Kathmandu.⁸¹ Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Ranjit Rae will lead Indian team while Foreign Secretary of Nepal, Shankar Das Bairagi, will be head of the Nepali team.⁸² During the meeting, the progress of Arun III and Upper Karnali projects will also be assessed and evaluated. During the visit of Nepali Prime Minister Pushp Kamal Dahal to India in September 2016, India and Nepal had agreed to set up such mechanism for timely execution of India funded projects in Nepal.⁸³

During the first meeting in September 2017, some projects such as "construction of the integrated check posts in Nepali side, rail projects, transmission lines, Pancheshwar Development Authority, Upper Karnali project, Arun III project, Tarai Roads projects and Mahakali bridges" had identified for further discussion.⁸⁴ As Kathmandu Post reported, according to a concerned Nepali official, there is little progress since the first meeting of oversight mechanism held in November 2016.⁸⁵

Indian Support to Nepal should not be perceived as Interference: Ambassador Ranjit Rae

Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae said that continued India's support for development of Nepal is not interference in Nepal's internal affairs.⁸⁶ Speaking at the Reporter Club in Kathmandu, he said, "India does not have any interest in Nepal's new constitution. We (India and Indian people) only wish that all groups of Nepal should move ahead together. It is Nepal's internal matter as to how it gets ahead together by sorting out internal problems," Ambassador Rae said (as quoted in Himalayan Times).⁸⁷ "India always wants Nepal to have stability, peace and prosperity as chaos, instability and conflict in the country will have a direct impact on India due to the open border between the two countries," further he said.⁸⁸

Nepali Congress Law Makers demands Review of LLRC Report

⁸¹2nd meeting will assess projects funded by India, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-01-30/2nd-meeting-will-assess-projects-funded-by-india.html>, January 30, 2017.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ India's support to Nepal not an interference: Ambassador Rae, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/india-support-nepal-not-interference-ambassador-rajit-rae/>, January 25, 2017

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Nepali Congress is demanding a review of the Local Level Restructuring Commission (LLRC) report as the report was "impractical and unscientific".⁸⁹ The agitating Madhesi parties have already rejected the report. Nepali Congress law maker Jagdish Narsingh KC said that the report deny the recommendations made by the technical committee of particular districts.⁹⁰ Presenting the case of Nuwakot district, he said, "What was agreed in the district was altered while compiling the report".⁹¹ He also said the police used force against locals who were peacefully protesting the report.

No alternative to Constitution rewriting: Upendra Yadav

Upendra Yadav, the chairman of Federal Socialist Forum (FSF) Nepal, reiterated the need of rewriting of Nepal's Constitution as it was full with "faults and shortcomings".⁹² "Constitution rewriting is the only alternative," he said during a book release function on 29 January in Kathmandu.⁹³ Earlier, on 21 January, 2017, press release issued by FSF mentioned that the amendment bill ignored the 26 point demand raised by the Federal Alliance.⁹⁴ Upendra Yadav said that the bill is useless as it was failed to address some core issue of the agitating force.⁹⁵

Pakistan

- **FATA Reforms:** As stated by the chief of the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) Mehmood Khan Achakzai on January 23rd, the people of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas have not been taken into confidence regarding the government's proposed reforms for the area.⁹⁶ However, the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (Safron) has defended the report finalised by the Fata Reforms Committee on the proposed Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) reforms and said it has been prepared after detailed consultations with representatives of the region. The statement, issued by the Ministry of States

⁸⁹NC lawmakers want revision to LLRC report, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-01-24/nc-lawmakers-want-revision-to-llrc-report.html>, January 24, 2017

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² No alternative to Nepal Constitution rewriting, Upendra Yadav reiterates, <http://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/no-alternative-nepal-constitution-rewriting-upendra-yadav-reiterates/>, January 30, 2017.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ FSF-N decides not to accept amendment bill, <http://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/federal-socialist-forum-nepal-upendra-yadav-decides-not-accept-constitution-amendment-bill/>, January 22, 2017.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Everyone but the locals were taken on board for Fata reforms", *Dawn*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310369/everyone-but-the-locals-were-taken-on-board-for-fata-reforms>

and Frontier Agencies on January 25th rejected the allegation that the report had degraded the status of Fata by an improper description.⁹⁷

- **Human Rights in Pakistan:** Representatives of the Ministry of Human Rights on January 23rd informed a parliamentary committee that the Ministry of Interior and other departments were not cooperating with them on the collection of information to prepare a report related to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The representatives of the Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairman National Commission on Human Rights briefed the committee on the current status of Pakistan's initial report on the implementation of the ICCPR. Director General Ministry of Human Rights Mohammad Hassan Mangi told the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights during a meeting with Babar Nawaz in the chair that the ministry had been facing problems in getting information from the Ministry of Interior and the KP government in preparing the report on the review of Pakistan's initial report on the implementation of the ICCPR.⁹⁸
- **Post of Pakistan Foreign Secretary:** Intense jockeying for the foreign secretary's position has begun as the time for a final decision is drawing closer and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has initiated deliberations over prospective candidates. The post will fall vacant after incumbent foreign secretary Aizaz Chaudhry, who has been designated as ambassador to the US, moves to Washington to take up his new assignment replacing outgoing ambassador Jalil Abbas Jilani. Four possible choices before the prime minister for picking the head of the foreign policy bureaucracy are High Commissioner to India Abdul Basit, former ambassador to France Ghalib Iqbal, High Commissioner to the UK Syed Ibn-i-Abbas and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva Tehmina Janjua. The government is expected to be extremely cautious in picking the next foreign secretary. Prime Minister Sharif has not appointed a full-time foreign minister even though more than two thirds of his tenure has passed and he runs the Foreign Office through an adviser (Sartaj Aziz) and a special assistant (Tariq Fatemi).⁹⁹
- **Multiple Warhead Missile:** Pakistan on January 24th claimed to have successfully tested a nuclear capable, medium range missile equipped with 'multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles' (MIRVs), which has a maximum range of 2,200 kilometres. The missile has been named Ababeel.

⁹⁷ "Ministry defends report on Fata reforms", *Dawn*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310829>

⁹⁸ Kashif Abbasi, "Govt depts accused of non-cooperation in preparing human rights report", *Dawn*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310378>

⁹⁹ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Lobbying under way for top job at FO", *Dawn*, January 25, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310614>

MIRVing implies that Pakistan is going to invest more in production of warheads and fissile materials, which will increase the size of nuclear arsenal.¹⁰⁰

- **Pakistan Defense Expense:** In a dialogue arranged by the think tank Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) in Dubai on January 24th, focused on the theme of sharing of lessons on developments in poverty alleviation in Pakistan and India, Parliamentarians from Pakistan and India stated that defence expenses by the two nuclear neighbours will tell on the well-being of the people. The participants included members of parliament and provincial assemblies of Punjab and Sindh from Pakistan and members of parliament and state legislatures of Delhi and Rajasthan from India. Experts and media representatives from both countries also attended the dialogue.¹⁰¹
- **Gwadar Special Economic Zone:** Balochistan Chief Minister Nawab Sanaullah Khan Zehri said on January 25th that planning for the Gwadar port city should be made keeping in view the future expansion of the city. Presiding over the first meeting of the Special Economic Zones Authority (SEZA), the chief minister approved Gwadar Industrial Estate Special Economic Zone stretching over 3,000 acres and requested the federal government to approve it. He approved Rs50 million endowment fund for setting up SEZA and requested the federal government to give a matching amount for the purpose. He said that Bostan and Khuzdar Special Economic Zones had been included in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and termed it a significant development in a recent meeting in Beijing in connection with CPEC projects. The chief minister approved acquisition of land for Special Economic Zones in Khuzdar, Turbat, Qila Saifullah and Chaman. The meeting also decided to start work on similar zones in Dera Murad Jamali, Dasht, Lasbela and Quetta.¹⁰²
- **Pakistan and Turkey:** Pakistan and Turkey agreed on January 26th to negotiate a comprehensive bilateral strategic framework agreement for promoting bilateral cooperation, which was announced at the end of a two-day meeting of the High Level Military Dialogue Group. At the talks, the Pakistani side was led by Defence Secretary retired Lt Gen Zamirul Hasan Shah, whereas Gen Umit Dundar, Deputy Chief of Turkish General Staff, led the visiting delegation. The two countries already have High Level Strategic Cooperation Council, which the two sides say is meant to reflect the strategic nature of their relations. At the talks, the two sides reviewed mutual defence and security cooperation and exchanged views on prevailing regional environment, particularly with reference to Afghanistan and the Middle East. Gen Dundar also met Chairman

¹⁰⁰ "Pakistan successfully tests multiple warhead missile", *Dawn*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1310630/pakistan-successfully-tests-multiple-warhead-missile>

¹⁰¹ "Defence expenses will tell on well-being of people", *Dawn*, January 25, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310625/defence-expenses-will-tell-on-well-being-of-people>

¹⁰² "CM approves Gwadar special economic zone", *Dawn*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310828/cm-approves-gwadar-special-economic-zone>

Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Zubair Hayat, Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Bajwa and Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Sohail Aman.¹⁰³

- **Iran and CPEC:** Iran on January 26th reiterated its desire to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and offered to commit its ‘full potential’ for the mega regional connectivity project. “Iran is eager to join CPEC with its full capabilities, possibilities and abilities,” Iran’s Ambassador Mehdi Honardoost said while speaking at the Oxbridge Lecture in Islamabad. Honardoost, while responding to a question, acknowledged that Pak-Iran ties were not at the “best point”, attributing the problems of not fully comprehending each other’s point of view due to lack of information. He said Iran’s rich energy resources, well-developed transport infrastructure, and progress in other fields, including nanotechnology, would add to CPEC once it joins it.¹⁰⁴
- **Iran and Case of the Alleged Spy:** As per Pakistani media, senior Iranian officials have stated that Iran’s investigations into alleged spy Kulbhushan Jadhav’s presence in Iran, prior to his capture in Pakistan, have remained inconclusive. “Had there been any result, it would have been shared with Pakistan,” Allaudin Boroujerdi, Chairman of Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran.¹⁰⁵
- **Pakistan Census:** The army on January 27th approved the deployment of 200,000 troops for duties during the sixth population and housing census scheduled to commence on March 15 and continue for two months. The decision to deploy the troops for the census has paved the way for the holding of the long-delayed exercise. Unavailability of troops because of their pre-occupation with security tasks had been cited as the biggest obstacle in the conduct of the census. Beside their engagement with security operations, the army had been concerned about presence of Afghan refugees in Balochistan, which it feared would adversely impact the ethnic profile of the province. The court had been informed that the troop requirement had been cut from the original 288,000 to 48,000 personnel to provide security to the civilian enumerators. However, the army has now agreed to a number close to what had been initially sought.¹⁰⁶ It can be noted here that on January 29th National Party (NP) president Mir Hasil Bizenjo said that census in Balochistan is unacceptable in the presence of refugees, announcing his party’s decision to approach the Supreme Court on the issue of the national population census.

¹⁰³ “Pakistan, Turkey to negotiate comprehensive defence accord”, *Dawn*, January 27, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1311019>

¹⁰⁴ “Iran keen to join CPEC, says envoy”, *Dawn*, January 27, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1311031>

¹⁰⁵ “Iranian official says probe into Jadhav’s stay inconclusive”, *Dawn*, January 28, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1311234/iranian-official-says-probe-into-jadhavs-stay-inconclusive>

¹⁰⁶ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “COAS approves 200,000 troops for census”, *Dawn*, January 28, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1311233/coas-approves-200000-troops-for-census>

Besides refugees, he said, another issue in Balochistan was internally displaced persons as a large number of people had shifted from Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Makran division and Naseerabad in the wake of what he called the 'resistance movement'. Under such conditions, complications would arise if the government went for the census, the NP chief warned.¹⁰⁷

- **Indian Fishermen Arrested:** The Maritime Security Agency (MSA) on January 27th took into the custody 60 Indian fishermen for fishing in Pakistani waters. The agency also seized their 10 boats. An official at the Docks police station said that a case against under Sections 3/4 of the Foreigners Act and 3/9 of the Fishery Act was registered against the Indian fishermen. Most of the arrested fishermen, as alleged, belonged to the Indian state of Gujarat.¹⁰⁸
- **Case of Atrocities against Religious Minorities:** An antiterrorism court on January 28th acquitted for lack of evidence 115 suspects involved in torching of more than 100 houses of Christians at Joseph Colony in the Badami Bagh area following an alleged blasphemy incident in 2013. During January 28th hearing, Advocate Ghulam Murtaza Chaudhry argued that the prosecution had failed to bring even a single piece of evidence to establish the charges against the suspects. He asked the court to acquit them. The presiding judge, Chaudhry Mohammad Azam, accepted the arguments of defence and acquitted the suspects for lack of evidence.¹⁰⁹
- **Pakistan and Palestine:** Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, is due in the capital on January 30th on a three-day visit. He will be accompanied by a 17-member delegation, which includes five ministers. It will be President Abbas's third visit to Pakistan. His earlier trips were in 2005 and 2013. President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharif will jointly inaugurate the Palestine Embassy Complex in the Diplomatic Enclave. Mahmoud Abbas and his delegation will also meet President Mamnoon Hussain. The Palestinian leader will have one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, to be followed by delegation-level talks.¹¹⁰

Israel

¹⁰⁷ Saleem Shahid, "Census unacceptable in refugees' presence, says NP", *Dawn*, January 30, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1311634/census-unacceptable-in-refugees-presence-says-np>

¹⁰⁸ "60 Indian fishermen arrested", *Dawn*, January 28, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1311239/60-indian-fishermen-arrested>

¹⁰⁹ "115 charged with burning Christians' homes acquitted", *Dawn*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1311401/115-charged-with-burning-christians-homes-acquitted>

¹¹⁰ "

Palestinian president due in Islamabad today", *Dawn*, January 30, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1311607/palestinian-president-due-in-islamabad-today>

- The Wall, Trump and Netanyahu:** On January 28th Prime Minister Netanyahu had tweeted in support of US President Trump's decision of building a wall on the borders with Mexico, stating that he also built a wall on Israel's southern borders that stopped all illegal immigration.¹¹¹ As reported, he was stating about the steel fence that Israel has built along its border with Egypt, mainly to keep out migrants fleeing conflicts in Africa, including Somalis, Sudanese and Eritreans.¹¹² However, the tweet was re-tweeted more than 50,000 times, receiving a severe backlash. The Mexican Foreign office admonished Prime Minister Netanyahu's tweet stating "The Foreign Ministry expressed to the government of Israel, via its ambassador in Mexico, its profound astonishment, rejection and disappointment over Prime Minister Netanyahu's message on Twitter about the construction of a border wall...Mexico is a friend of Israel and should be treated as such by its Prime Minister". The Mexican Jewish community said in a formal statement that it "strongly rejected his [Netanyahu's] position." Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon later issued a tweet in which he tried to amend Netanyahu's statement. He stated that "[Netanyahu] referred to our specific security experience which we are willing to share. We do not express a position on US-Mexico relations".¹¹³
- Palestinian Authority:** Dr. Husam Zomlot, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's adviser for Strategic Affairs stated on January 27th that all political agreements between Israel and the Palestinian leadership would collapse, if the hope of establishing a Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital was lost. He further stated that the peace process and its accomplishments, including mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and the establishment of the PA, would become obsolete, if hope to realize a two-state solution was destroyed by unilateral measures such as settlement expansion and the relocation of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.¹¹⁴
- Israel and Kenya:** Shlomo Grofman, who was recently appointed honorary consul of Kenya in Israel, hopes for annual trade volume between the countries to jump from \$100 million today to \$500m. in three years. In addition, he hopes to launch a direct flight route between the two countries as part of the effort to

¹¹¹ Official Tweet of Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, January 28, 2017, https://twitter.com/netanyahu/status/825371795972825089?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

¹¹² Luke Baker, "Benjamin Netanyahu tweet praising Trump's plan for Mexico wall prompts international backlash", *Independent*, January 30, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/donald-trump-mexico-wall-benjamin-netanyahu-israel-tweet-praising-backlash-a7552216.html>

¹¹³ Tovah Lazaroff, "Mexico admonishes Israel over Netanyahu wall tweet", *The Jerusalem Post*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Mexico-rebuked-Israel-over-Netanyahu-wall-tweet-479873>

¹¹⁴ Adam Rasgon, "Abbas adviser: Without hope for a Palestinian state, 'PA would collapse", *The Jerusalem Post*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Abbas-adviser-Without-hope-for-a-Palestinian-state-PA-would-collapse-479871>

expand partnerships among companies in both places. On January 28-29, Grofman received the title “honorary consul of Kenya in Jerusalem,” at a diplomatic ceremony held in the Foreign Ministry, attended by a variety of ministry officials and Israeli diplomats, as well as representatives from the Kenyan Embassy.¹¹⁵

Sri Lanka

Plot to assassinate Sumanthiran: 4 ex-LTTE cadres remanded

A plot to assassinate Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran by exploding a claymore mine while he was travelling along the Soranpatru-Thaalayadi Road in the Jaffna peninsula was uncovered by the Police Terrorism Investigation Department (TID). The four former LTTE cadres arrested in this connection and produced before the Kilinochchi District Judge A.A. Anandarajan on January 20 were remanded at the Anuradhapura prisons. It is suspected that the assassination plot was backed by the overseas LTTE faction headed by the Norway-based Perinbanayagam Sivaparan alias Nediyan. It is reported that two plots hatched to kill Sumanthiran on the Soranpatru-Thaalayady road on December 12, 2016 and January 13, 2017 did not succeed due to "accidental" reasons. An enhanced security arrangement has been provided to Mr. Sumanthiran following a meeting by the National Security Council. Both President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe have expressed grave concern at the perceived threat to the TNA MP's life.¹¹⁶

Rajiv's SL intervention helped him win election: CIA

The CIA, top American intelligence agency, had observed in 1987 that Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had intervened in Sri Lankan crisis to win Haryana State assembly election. The CIA intelligence memo dated June 8, 1987, which has been declassified by the CIA observed that India's decision to airlift humanitarian aid to Sri Lankan Tamils was to gain 'Hindu' sympathy.

“He (Rajiv Gandhi) probably believes such dramatic actions on behalf of Hindus in Sri Lanka will help win over Indian Hindus before critical election next week in Haryana state,” the CIA memo said. Over a month later, another CIA memo (July 29, 1987) criticised Rajiv Gandhi for having short-term view of things. And, that was the day

¹¹⁵ Sharon Udasin, “New honorary consul plans to boost trade relations with Kenya”, *The Jerusalem Post*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Business-and-Innovation/New-honorary-consul-plans-to-boost-trade-relations-with-Kenya-479944>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Plot-to-assassinate-Sumanthiran-ex-LTTE-cadres-remanded-122889.html>

when India and Sri Lanka signed a peace accord that included provision for Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The CIA memo reads; “Sri Lanka, moreover, could become a military entanglement for India.” “Gandhi tends to have a short-term view of things and may not see the pitfalls in trying to achieve a cheap victory using the tougher line on Sri Lanka.” A CIA intelligence officer memo suggested that Rajiv’s move in Sri Lanka was keeping in the view India’s determination to be the dominant regional power in South Asia. “We do not, however, believe Gandhi or his advisers have a ‘greater India’ in mind. New Delhi may instead aspire to a relationship with Colombo that resembles its ties to Nepal, over which India exercises strong influence.”

The CIA also believed certain political advantage to Rajiv Gandhi with the signing of accord and input suggested that his efforts to bring peace for Sri Lankan Tamils will help him “build support among Tamils in Southern India, where the ruling Congress party has been weakest.” Before Rajiv’s decision, an assessment prepared in June 1984 by the CIA said that New Delhi then ruled by Indira Gandhi was “preparing for the possibility of direct military intervention.” The CIA intelligence memo said Gandhi believes that ethnic violence in Sri Lanka can have serious repercussions for India as well as her own political future.

“We believe New Delhi’s support for Sri Lanka’s Tamil separatists probably is an effort to control a movement it cannot eradicate. Gandhi cannot move against Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu without risking the loss of India Tamil votes in this election year,” the CIA memo said. The intelligence agency said Mrs. Gandhi wants to forestall intervention in Sri Lanka by the superpowers and Indian officials reacted with dismay last summer after hearing of Sri Lanka’s thinly veiled pleas for security help from several countries including Pakistan, UK and USA. CIA said the Indian Navy can launch a small amphibious assault force against Sri Lanka on short notice.

“In our opinion, the likelihood of a peaceful resolution of the tensions that divide Sri Lankan society is rapidly diminishing,” the CIA intel note said. In the war, the ability to see the dust storm even before the engine roars has always been critically important. The CIA memo of December 22, 1987, appears to have had ace up on its sleeve when amid the fog of war it said that Indian forces in Sri Lanka could stay for longer and that could be at least next 3 years. The CIA said, “It is not yet clear how far Gandhi intends to go in establishing dominance over Sri Lanka, but active guerrilla warfare by Tamil fighters against the Indians and over 300 combat fatalities will complicate plans to withdraw and make a long stay more likely; the Indians themselves already are talking of a three year presence. This could presage an extended period of warfare and turmoil.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Rajiv-s-SL-intervention-helped-him-win-election-CIA-122864.html>

UN Report On Sri Lanka's Culture Of Torture Is A Wake Up Call To Sirisena Government: ITJP

A UN report describing a “culture of torture” in Sri Lanka reinforced by decades of impunity is a wakeup call to President Sirisena’s Government to comply with its obligations under international law and to the international community to put torture prevention at the core of its engagement with the new Government. The report by Juan Mendez was published day before yesterday following his mission to Sri Lanka last year as UN Special Rapporteur on torture. “This devastating report rightly calls for an office which is independent of the Attorney General’s office to investigate and prosecute allegations of torture in Sri Lanka,” said ITJP’s International Truth & Justice Project – Sri Lanka, executive director, Yasmin Sooka, “we have already offered to assist both the Foreign Minister and the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission in identifying international experts to help set up such an investigative team. If they are serious about justice this should have been done two years ago.”

The Special Rapporteur said he received credible reports to show “white van abductions” have taken place under the Sirisena government in 2015 and 2016. “There has been a deep seated reluctance to accept the evidence on the on-going violations,” said Ms. Sooka, “but without security sector reform these sorts of violations will inevitably continue. Denying the evidence of ongoing abductions because they are politically inconvenient is an unforgivable affront to the scores of victims whose cases have been painstakingly documented by ITJP, our medical colleagues and other human rights groups.” The report says Sri Lanka’s progress in implementing UN Resolution 30/1 has been slow and transitional justice paralyzed. It stresses the need for a participatory process that earns the trust of victims, including those living outside the country. “The prevention of ongoing abduction, torture and sexual violence – including the rape of young men – must be the focus of the transitional justice process in Sri Lanka,” said Ms. Sooka, “two years on there’s been no structural reform to tackle systemic failures of the justice machinery.”¹¹⁸

Indian companies keen to rebuild Sri Lanka’s former war zone

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) will explore the “virgin market” in Jaffna, located in Sri Lanka’s Tamil-majority Northern Province, for possible business collaborations and to help commercially rebuild the former war-zone, a representative of the trade body said. Representatives of about 65 Indian companies, ranging from textiles to engineering, are participating in the Jaffna International Trade Fair 2017 that commenced on January 27.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/un-report-on-sri-lankas-culture-of-torture-is-a-wakeup-call-to-sirisena-government-itjp/>

Vinay Sharma, leading the visiting business delegation, said that while many Indian businesses had associates and agents in Colombo in the island's south, the market in the north was yet to be explored. "We have now sought information from the Jaffna Chamber of Commerce on labour policies, land, taxation, and the availability of water and electricity here," Mr. Sharma said. Some Indian companies may even consider acquiring sick industries for revival, he said.

Sri Lanka's Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen said the initiative hoped to revitalise the northern economy by reviving old industries. "We want to restart the cement factory in Kankesanthurai, the chemical factory in Paranthan and the tile factory in Oddusuddan," he told *The Hindu*, referring to manufacturing plants that once thrived in different parts of the Northern Province. "The aim is to create jobs and bring in investments," he said, adding that his Ministry, in association with the Northern Provincial Council, will discuss the prospect of holding an investors' forum in the north. "We will invite Sri Lankans living abroad, across Europe, the United States and Canada, to come and explore investment opportunities here," he said. According to A. Natarajan, Consul General of India in Jaffna, India had been an active partner and supporter of the Jaffna Trade Fair since 2010. "Last year, over 50 companies that are part of the Tamil Nadu Chamber of Commerce participated in the event," he said.¹¹⁹

West Asia and North Africa

Donald and Putin agree to cooperate on Syria

According to high level sources in Kremlin, both President Putin and new president of the US, Mr. Trump have agreed to rebuild their ties and cooperate on Syrian crisis. Mr. Trump in a first ever telephonic conversation with his Russian counterpart Mr. Putin said that US is keen to develop closer ties with Russia. Both sides also agreed to enhance the bilateral cooperation to strengthen the ties in the future. It is worth mentioning here that Trump after his election was subjected to sever criticism and it was alleged that Russian intelligence agency was very instrumental in installing Mr. Trump in the White House. From the Russian perspective, it is also assumed that any move on the part of the US to ease the sanction imposed against Russia in the backdrop of its role in Ukraine and Crimea would be very catalyst for Mr. Putin who is scheduled to run for the presidential election next year.

Al-Manar (a Lebanese Arabic daily) <http://www.manar.com/page-34060-ar.html>

¹¹⁹ <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Indian-companies-keen-to-rebuild-Sri-Lanka%E2%80%99s-former-war-zone/article17109327.ece>

Donald Trump and putting MBH on the list of terrorist organization

Religious terrorism and extremism have become a hazardous symptom in today's world politics and so far no policy or plan to combat it has come up with a comprehensive vision about its origin, context and the evolution. The root of the terrorism is hidden in the religious discourse which calls for extremism, hatred and incitement against each another. The spread of terrorism can be attributed to the discourse which justifies all sort of extremist action to achieve the political objectives. What is needed at the moment is to strike a major blow to any sort of extremist discourse emanating from religion and advocates and what is more important is to stand collectively in the fight against terrorism and put a comprehensive plan to bring an alternative image of Islam. Nothing has harmed the religion of Islam more than the extremist ideas and discourse being perpetuated in the name of protecting the Islam itself.

The menace of terrorism needs to be first confronted through series of legislations before one goes for pursuing other mean to defeat it. It was Saudi Arabia, UAE and UAE which took the lead and introduced stern laws to combat the terrorism and began by declaring the MBH a terrorist organization . The same is being discussed in the White House today after Mr. Donald took the charge last week as president of the US, and there is all likelihood that the MBH would be very soon declared a terror outfit by new US administration . Mr. Michal, new National Security Advisor for Trump is already preparing a draft legislation to put the MBH on the global terror list under the law stipulated in the US state and finance department. If the new US administration succeeds in putting the MBH on the global terror list, it would be a new beginning in the global fight against the terrorism.

It was under Obama administration that the MBH enjoyed all supports from the US and it was the regime of Saudi Arabia and the UAE which stood by the people and the army to get rid of the MBH rule in Egypt . Now the same strategy is being adopted by the US to fight the menace of terrorism as part of its new strategy under new administration. Endorsing the stance of UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia by the US and joining the anti-MBH war would, no doubt, strengthen anti-MBH front and would bring other nations too in the fold of US which would help in achieving an early success in the war against terrorism.

It is not only the MBH which is perpetuating the religious terrorism but there are other streams as well and in particular, Jihadist Salafist which is equally culprit in spreading the and promoting the extremist religious thought across the globe. There are other branches and associations like Qutbist and Hizb-al-Tahrir whose cadres work in complete coordination and close association with al-Qaeda and the ISIS. It is

worth mentioning here that both Osama and Abdullah Azzam were initially sympathizers of the MBH and there were many others who got their initial training in the camps of the MBH alone including the leaders of today Nusra front fighting in Syria.

There are several European nations which have been a haven and place of asylums for the MBH but now the time has come for them to revive their stance vis-à-vis the MBH in the light of new emerging realities. It is for sure that changing stance of the US against the MBH would force many nations in Europe to revisit their policy towards the extremist organization like the MBH.

Translated from an article in Asharq al-Awsat (An Arabic daily)

<http://aawsat.com/home/article/841436/>

Iraq and Syria

(I) Pakistan

LeJ struck 10 times in Karachi in 2016

Despite the law-enforcement agencies' crackdown on the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in Sindh and Punjab and the killing of its key leaders, the banned sectarian outfit still managed to carry out 17 attacks in the country last year, 10 of them in Karachi alone, reports *The News* on January 30 (today) quoting an Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) '*Pakistan Security Report, 2016*'. The LeJ also carried out four attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and one each in Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh excluding Karachi in 2016. A total of 20 people were killed and 35 injured in all these 17 attacks. The LeJ had carried out 33 terrorist attacks in 2015.¹²⁰

Sindh: Local PPP leader found dead

A local leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), identified as Sabir Hussain Bhutto (30), was found dead with his throat slit in Tando Muhammad Khan District on January 29, reports *The Express Tribune*.¹²¹

Balochistan: Two Policemen killed in Naseerabad District

¹²⁰ Zia ur Rehman, 'LeJ struck 10 times in Karachi last year', *The News*, January 30, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/182608-LeJ-struck-10-times-in-Karachi-last-year>, accessed on January 30, 2017

¹²¹ Local leader of PPP found dead, *The Express Tribune*, January 30, 2017, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1310767/slain-local-leader-ppp-found-dead/>, accessed on January 30, 2017

Two Policemen, including Inspector Hidayatullah Kolachi, were shot dead while another official received injuries when unidentified militants opened fire a police mobile on Wapda Road in Dera Murad Jamali area of Naseerabad District on January 28, reports *Dawn*.¹²²

Sindh: Two TTP terrorists killed in shootout with Rangers in Karachi

Two Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists, identified as Farooq Jamal *alias* Wajid *alias* Toor and Safaid Khan *alias* Nasir, were killed in a shootout with Rangers in Gadap Town of provincial capital Karachi on January 26, reports *The News*. An unspecified number of accomplices fled. Nasir belonged to the Swat Chapter of TTP and Jamal was associated with the TTP-Jameel Group. Jamal had joined the outfit in 2012 while Safaid had joined in 2006. A huge cache of weapons, ammunition and hand grenades were seized during the raid.¹²³

Sindh: Two kidnappers killed in Police encounter in Karachi

Karachi Police shot dead two kidnappers in an encounter and busted a gang of abductors at Northern Bypass near Hub area on January 24, reports *Daily Times*. Police recovered the abducted youth, identified as Muhammad Faisal (17), from their custody. Faisal was kidnapped-for-ransom from his shop on January 5, 2017, and kidnappers had demanded PKR 30 million in ransom.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Crime Investigation Agency (CIA) Police Dr Jamil Ahmed said that it was a first kidnapping case of 2017. Police along with Citizens Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) and Anti Violent Crime Cell (AVCC-CIA) started joint efforts and solved the case within a few days. The DIG claimed that 16 cases of kidnapping-for-ransom were reported in 2016, and all of them have been solved.¹²⁴

Sindh: Man shot dead in sectarian attack in Karachi

A Shia, identified as Mohammed Kazim Raza (39), was shot dead in sectarian attack near Mir Munawar Chowrangi in Gulistan-e-Jauhar area of Gulshan Town in Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh on January 24, reports *Dawn*. "It appeared to be a

¹²² Syed Ali Shah, Two Policemen killed in Balochistan, *Dawn*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1311324/two-policemen-killed-in-balochistan>, accessed on January 30, 2017

¹²³ Two 'TTP terrorists' killed in shootout with Rangers, *Dawn*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/181946-Two-TTP-terrorists-killed-in-shootout-with-Rangers>, accessed on January 27, 2017

¹²⁴ 2 kidnappers killed in encounter, *Daily Times*, January 25, 2017, <http://dailytimes.com.pk/sindh/25-Jan-17/2-kidnappers-killed-in-encounter>, accessed on January 25, 2017

targeted killing incident linked with sectarianism,” said Superintendent Police Dr. Fahad Ahmed.¹²⁵

69 Pakistanis in Saudi detention on terror charges

The number of Pakistanis under detention in Saudi jails on terror charges reached 69 with the arrest of a woman, identified as Fatima Ramadan Balochi Murad and her Saudi husband, from an apartment in Al-Naseem District of Jeddah during a security operation on January 21, reports *The News*. In July 2016, a Pakistani terrorist named Abdullah Qalzar Khan blew himself up near Solaiman Fakeih Hospital in Jeddah. The security authorities arrested 49 Pakistani residents and put them under interrogation since the bombing.¹²⁶

Balochistan: Eight security personnel injured in Panjgur District

At least eight security personnel were injured when their military convoy was attacked in Gichak area of Panjgur District on January 23, reports *Dawn*. "The security personnel were moving through the District's mountainous to conduct a raid against miscreants when they were fired upon," said a security official.¹²⁷

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Six security men injured in blast near FC vehicle in Tank

At least six security personnel were injured in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast during a routine patrol in Molazai Mor area of Tank District on January 23, reports *Dawn*.¹²⁸

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Two suicide jackets recovered from mosque in Peshawar

The Police recovered two suicide jackets containing about five kilogramme explosives from the room of the prayer leader of Abu Bakar mosque near Benazir Hospital on the

¹²⁵ Imtiaz Ali, Man shot dead in Karachi 'sectarian attack', *Dawn*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310496/man-shot-dead-in-karachi-sectarian-attack>, accessed on January 25, 2017

¹²⁶ 69 Pakistanis in Saudi detention on terror charges, *Dawn*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/181205-69-Pakistanis-in-Saudi-detention-on-terror-charges>, accessed on January 25, 2017

¹²⁷ Syed Ali Shah, Eight security personnel injured in Balochistan's Panjgur, *Dawn*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310258/eight-security-personnel-injured-in-balochistans-panjgur>, accessed on January 24, 2017

¹²⁸ Six security men injured in blast near FC vehicle in Tank, *Dawn*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310235/six-security-men-injured-in-blast-near-fc-vehicle-in-tank>, accessed on January 24, 2017

outskirts of provincial capital Peshawar on January 23, reports *Dawn*. However, no arrests were made.¹²⁹

(II) Afghanistan

49 militants killed in Counter-Terrorism Operations in seven Provinces, claims MoI

At least 49 militants were killed during the Counter-Terrorism Operations in at least seven provinces, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) claimed on January 29, reports *Khama Press*. “The operations were conducted in Helmand, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Farah, Jowzjan, Herat and Faryab provinces, as a result 49 armed militants were killed, six wounded and five others were arrested by Afghan National Defense and Security Forces,” according to a statement by MoI. The statement further added “Also, during these operations, joint forces discovered and confiscated light and heavy rounds of ammunition, three rocket launchers, two PK machine guns and six AK-47 rifles.”¹³⁰

Helmand: 14 militants killed in airstrike

At least 14 militants were killed in an airstrike conducted by the Afghan Air Force in Nad-e-Ali District of Helmand Province on January 28, reports *Khama Press*. A rocket launcher, 1 PKM machine gun, 2 AK-47 rifles, and 6 Improvised Explosive Device were also destroyed in the airstrike.¹³¹

Taliban earn USD4.8 million annually from Kajaki Dam in Helmand Province

Deputy Provincial Council Chief Majid Akhunda on January 25 said that Taliban earns around USD 4.8 million annually from Kajaki dam located in the Helmand Province, reports *Khama Press*. The Provincial Council officials have said the group earns almost 90 per cent of the income of the dam on yearly basis and the group has formed a Special Unit to collect the income generated from the dam. This comes as reports emerged in mid-2016 suggesting that the group has formed a special military unit, Red

¹²⁹ Two suicide jackets recovered from mosque, *Dawn*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1310396/two-suicide-jackets-recovered-from-mosque>, accessed on January 24, 2017

¹³⁰ 49 militants killed in counter-terrorism operations in 7 provinces: MoI, *Khama Press*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/49-militants-killed-in-counter-terrorism-operations-in-7-provinces-moi-02758>, accessed on January 30, 2017

¹³¹ 14 militants killed in Helmand airstrike, *Khama Press*, January 28, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/14-militants-killed-in-helmand-airstrike-02753>, accessed on January 30, 2017

Group, in Helmand Province to face the increasingly professional Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).¹³²

Baghlan: Kidnapped Afghan Policemen kill five Taliban militants and escape from captivity

Two Afghan Policemen killed five militants after escaping from Taliban captivity in Barak District of Baghlan Province on January 24, reports *Khama Press*. Provincial Police spokesman Zabiullah Shuja said the two policemen managed to break the Taliban jail after snatching their weapon and opening fire on the others.¹³³

21 ISIS militants killed in afghan air attack in Zabul Province

At least 21 militants affiliated with Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) were killed in an airstrike conducted by the Afghan Air Force in Dai Chupan Khak-e-Afghan District of Zabul Province on January 22, reports *Khama Press*. The elders of Zabul said the local residents in Khak-e-Afghan and Nawbahar districts have noted movements of the two groups to establish and strengthen their presence.¹³⁴

14 militants killed in CT Operations

At least 14 militants, including a local Taliban ‘commander’, identified as Mullah Ghafar, were killed in counter-terrorism operations conducted in the past 24 hours, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) said on January 23, reports *Khama Press*. Ghafar was killed in Pul-e-Manan area of Dehrawood District in Uruzgan Province. The other area of operations included Kapisa, Nangarhar, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Kunduz and Helmand Provinces.¹³⁵

Iranians met Taliban in Helmand Province

Some Iranian representatives have reportedly met with the Taliban in Garamser District of Helmand Province, reports *Khama Press* on January 23. Provincial Governor

¹³² Taliban earn \$4.8 million annually from Kajaki Dam, *Khama Press*, January 25, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-earn-4-8-million-annually-from-kajaki-dam-02735>, accessed on January 27, 2017

¹³³ Kidnapped Afghan policemen kill 5 Taliban militants in Baghlan, *Khama Press*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/kidnapped-afghan-policemen-kill-5-taliban-militants-in-baghlan-02741>, accessed on January 25, 2017

¹³⁴ Afghan air force bomb ISIS hideout in Zabul, 21 killed, *Khama Press*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/afghan-air-force-bomb-isis-hideout-in-zabul-21-killed-02729>, accessed on January 24, 2017

¹³⁵ Taliban commander among 14 killed in latest operations: MoD, *Khama Press*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-commander-among-14-killed-in-latest-operations-mod-02734>, accessed on January 24, 2017

Hayatullah Hayat informed regarding the possible meeting, saying the issue has been shared with the intelligence directorate for further confirmation. Hayat said that several Iranian rockets were also found after the Taliban used them to attack the provincial government compound.

This comes as the former Afghan intelligence chief Rahmatullah Nabil earlier said Iran is supporting the Taliban to counter the growing influence of IS in the country. Nabil said the group is receiving financial and equipment support from Iran, particularly in the western parts of the country.¹³⁶

(III) Iraq

Mosul: Mass grave containing remains of 27 Iraqi Turkmens found

An official source in the Joint Operations Command revealed that Iraqi army forces on January 29 found a mass grave containing the remains of 27 Iraqi Turkmens in Rashidiyah area of northern Mosul, reports *Iraqi News*. Colonel Thanon al-Sabawei said in a press statement, “Iraqi army forces discovered a mass grave, near the Turkmen-majority area of al-Kabba, containing remains of 27 men, youths and children.” “The bodies have traces of torture, and the majority of them have ID cards,” Sabawei said, adding, “The Iraqi forces exhumed all bodies and transferred them to a health centre near al-Rashidiyah area.”¹³⁷

Kirkuk Governorate: Islamic State executes three youths

According to official sources, Islamic State executed three youths near Hawija District west of Kirkuk on charges of spying and collaboration with security forces on January 29, reports *Iraqi News*. The source said, “Today, members of the Islamic State group executed three youths, by firing squad, near Hawija District, west of Kirkuk, for collaborating with Iraqi security forces and facilitating the exit of civilians from the District.”

Requesting anonymity, the source further added, “The Islamic State executed nearly 25 youths in Hawija District this month.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Iranians met Taliban in Helmand province, *Khama Press*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/iranians-met-taliban-in-helmand-province-02730>, accessed on January 24, 2017

¹³⁷ Loaa Adel, Army forces find mass grave containing remains of 27 Turkmens near Mosul, *Iraqi News*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/army-find-grave-containing-remains-27-turkmens/>, accessed on January 30, 2017

¹³⁸ Loaa Adel, Islamic State executes 3 youths near Kirkuk, *Iraqi News*, January 29, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/islamic-state-executes-3-youths-near-kirkuk/>, accessed on January 30, 2017

Bomb classes and gun counts: trauma of Mosul children under Islamic State

Schools in the East of Mosul are seeking to return to a semblance of normality after two years under Islamic State rule when they were either shuttered or forced to teach a martial curriculum that included lessons in bomb-making, reports *Iraqi News* on January 24. Around 40,000 students, most of who have been kept at home by their parents since the militants captured Mosul in 2014, will attend around 70 schools in the coming weeks after the buildings have been checked for unexploded bombs. US-backed Iraqi forces have retaken most eastern districts of the city and are preparing to push into the western part of Mosul, the largest city held by ISIS across its self-proclaimed caliphate.

Eastern Mosul 'fully liberated' from Daesh, says Iraq's PM Haider al-Abadi

Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on January 24 declared eastern Mosul "fully liberated" from Daesh after a day of fierce fighting and more than three months after a massive US-backed operation to retake the city began, reports *The Star*. Iraqi forces drove Daesh from one of their last bastions in the eastern half of the city, while aid groups expressed concern for the estimated 750,000 people still in the militant-held west. "Daesh has quickly collapsed and no one expected such collapse," al-Abadi said, adding, "The heroism of our security forces was behind Daesh's defeat."¹³⁹

Iraq's oil is for Iraqis, says PM Haider al-Abadi in reaction to US President Donald Trump

Iraq's oil is the property of Iraqis, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on January 24, in reaction to United States (US) President Donald Trump who argued that the US should have taken possession of the nation's crude reserves, reports *Reuters*. In a speech to Central Investigation Agency (CIA) officials on January 21, 2017, Trump suggested that US should have taken Iraq's oil in reimbursement for the 2003 invasion that put an end to Saddam Hussein's rule. Trump also suggested that taking Iraq's oil would have prevented Islamic State from rising up, by removing a source of the group's funding.

"It wasn't clear what he meant," Abadi said, adding, "Iraq's oil is constitutionally the property of the Iraqis".¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Eastern Mosul 'fully liberated' from Daesh, Iraq's PM says , *The Star*, January 24, 2017, <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2017/01/24/eastern-mosul-fully-liberated-from-daesh-iraqs-pm-says.html>, accessed on January 25, 2017

¹⁴⁰ PM Abadi says Iraq's oil is for Iraqis, in reaction to Trump, *Reuters*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-mosul-idUSKBN158223>, accessed on January 25, 2017

Dozens of IS leaders flee towards Syria

Member of Nineveh Provincial Council, Hossam al-Din al-Abbar, declared on January 23 that dozens of the Islamic State's leaders fled from the city of Mosul toward Syria, while pointed out to finishing the liberation battles of eastern Mosul, reports *Iraqi News*. Abbar said in a press statement, "Dozens of vehicles belonging to the Islamic State, carrying leaders and their families, were seen while withdrawing from eastern Mosul toward the Syrian territories," pointing out that, "The liberation battles of eastern Mosul finished." "The western side of Mosul includes 30 neighborhoods and 600 thousand civilians," Abbar explained. "The liberation battles of western Mosul are expected to be much easier and faster than eastern side," Abbar further added.¹⁴¹

Iraq Army denies taking east Mosul from ISIS

The Iraqi Defence Ministry on January 23 issued a statement retracting an earlier claim in which it announced the "liberation of the eastern part of Mosul" from ISIL, calling it a "mistake", reports *Al Jazeera*. On its website, the army said that the armed forces succeeded in liberating the left bank of the city completely, "after inflicting heavy losses in lives and equipment to the enemy". However, in a later statement the Defence Ministry said that the 9th and 16th army brigades were still locked in fierce battles against ISIL in the Rashidiya District, while Iraqi troops were still clearing other neighbourhoods and clashing with pockets of ISIL fighters. Iraqi military sources told *Al Jazeera* that ISIL still has a presence in the forest area on the banks of the Tigris River.¹⁴²

(IV) Syria

Damascus: Syrian army recaptures Wadi Barada Valley

Syrian Government forces on January 28 recaptured all towns and villages in the Wadi Barada valley near the capital Damascus, according to a statement by the Syrian military, reports *Al Jazeera*. "Units of our armed forces, together with...allied forces have achieved their mission in returning security and stability" to the area, said the

¹⁴¹ Loaa Adel, Nineveh Council's member: Dozens of IS leaders flee toward Syria, *Iraqi News*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/nineveh-councils-member-dozens-leaders-flee-toward-syria/>, accessed on January 24, 2017

¹⁴² Iraq army denies taking east Mosul from ISIL, *Al Jazeera*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/iraq-army-takes-east-mosul-isil-170123153644672.html>, accessed on January 24, 2017

statement. The Syrian army and its allies took over a Wadi Barada village containing a major spring and pumping station that supplies most of Damascus' water.¹⁴³

Trump says he will order 'safe zones' for Syria

United States (US) President Donald Trump said on January 25 that he “will absolutely do safe zones in Syria” for refugees fleeing violence in the war-torn country, reports *Iraqi News*. Saying Europe had made a tremendous mistake by admitting millions of refugees from Syria and other Middle Eastern trouble spots, Trump told *ABC News* in an interview: “I don’t want that to happen here.” “I’ll absolutely do safe zones in Syria for the people,” he added, without giving details.

According to a document, Trump is expected to order the Pentagon and the State Department in coming days to craft a plan for setting up the “safe zones,” a move that could risk escalation of US military involvement in Syria’s civil war. “The Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Secretary of Defense, is directed within 90 days of the date of this order to produce a plan to provide safe areas in Syria and in the surrounding region in which Syrian nationals displaced from their homeland can await firm settlement, such as repatriation or potential third-country resettlement,” the draft order said.¹⁴⁴

Russia advises Donald Trump to show caution with his plan for Syrian safe zones

Speaking to reporters on January 26, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov urged caution on the part of the United States (US), adding that Russia had not yet been consulted on any safe zone plans, reports *The Independent*. “Our American partners did not consult with us. It’s a sovereign decision,” Peskov said. “It is important that this [plan] does not exacerbate the situation with refugees, but probably all the consequences ought to be weighed up.” The White House has not yet made direct contact with the Kremlin, Mr Peskov added. The safe zone plan is part of a larger new directive aimed at protecting the US from terrorism. The legislation – which Trump is expected to sign in the next few days – also includes a temporary ban on refugees fleeing war and conflict in Syria and six other Middle Eastern and African countries.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Syrian army captures Wadi Barada near Damascus, Al Jazeera, January 29, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/syrian-army-captures-wadi-barada-170129131830656.html> , accessed on January 30, 2017

¹⁴⁴ Loaa Adel, Trump says he will order 'safe zones' for Syria, *Iraqi News*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/trump-says-will-order-safe-zones-syria/>, accessed on January 27, 2017

¹⁴⁵ Russia advises Donald Trump to show caution with his plan for Syrian safe zones, *The Independent*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/russia-is-not-happy-with-trump-s-plan-to-create-safe-zones-in-syria-a7547586.html>, accessed on January 27, 2017

Foreign powers back Syria truce deal, war erupts among rebels

Russia and regional powers Turkey and Iran backed a shaky truce between Syria's warring parties on January 24 and agreed to monitor its compliance, but on the ground rebels faced continued fighting on two fronts which could undermine the deal, reports *The Indian Express*. After two days of deliberations in Astana, Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov said the powers had agreed in a final communique to establish a system "to observe and ensure full compliance with the ceasefire, prevent any provocations and determine all modalities of the ceasefire."

While welcoming the text, the Syrian Government's chief negotiator Bashar Ja'afari said that an offensive against rebels west of Damascus would carry on. Rebels say it is a major violation of the ceasefire agreed on December 30, 2016. Opposition negotiator Mohammad Alloush said he had reservations about the text which he said legitimised Iran's "bloodletting" in Syria and did not address the role of Shi'ite militias fighting rebels.¹⁴⁶

Russian Sappers Demine 70 Hectares in Syria's Aleppo in Past 24 Hours

Sappers from Russia's International Mine Action Center have demined an area of 70 hectares in eastern part of Aleppo in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry's Center for Syrian reconciliation said in a statement on January 25, reports *Sputnik*. "Within the last 24 hours, the Russian sappers have cleared of explosive devices 57 buildings and 11 kilometers [about seven miles] of roads, demining a total area of 70 hectares," the statement said.¹⁴⁷

White House opens door to cooperation with Russian in Syria

The Trump administration on January 23 opened the door to cooperating with Russia "or anyone else" to combat the Islamic State in Syria, suggesting it could reverse a previous refusal to coordinate military action with Moscow as long as it backs the Syrian Government, reports *US News*. "I think if there's a way that we can combat ISIS

¹⁴⁶ Foreign powers back Syria truce deal, war erupts among rebels, *The Indian Express*, January 25, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/foreign-powers-back-syria-truce-deal-war-erupts-among-rebels-4490074/>, accessed on January 25, 2017

¹⁴⁷ Russian Sappers Demine 70 Hectares in Syria's Aleppo in Past 24 Hours, *Sputnik*, January 25, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201701251049978551-russia-demines-more-aleppo/>, accessed on January 25, 2017

with any country, whether it's Russia or anyone else, and we have a shared national interest in that, sure, we'll take it," White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said.¹⁴⁸

The key to success in latest Syrian peace talks: low expectations

The ongoing negotiations — the first time the Syrian Government has met with an opposition delegation composed exclusively of rebel fighters — got off to a difficult start on January 23 as the two sides angrily traded insults, reports *Los Angeles Times*. Calling the Syrian Government a “bloody, oppressive regime,” Mohammed Alloush, the lead negotiator for the opposition and commander of the Islam Army rebel faction, said in a closed-session speech that any political solution would start with the departure of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Bashar Jaafari, Syria’s Ambassador to the U.N. and the Government’s lead negotiator, struck back at a news conference, calling Alloush the head of the “armed terrorist groups’ delegation” and deriding his comments as “undiplomatic, irrelevant to the meeting and inappropriate,” according to a transcript provided by Syrian state. “What happened today is somewhat surreal and ill-fitting of the monumental efforts that were exerted and doesn’t befit the level of the important delegations that attended the opening session,” he said.

“We are not here for political negotiations,” Issam Rayess, a spokesman for the Western-backed Free Syrian Army, said in a news conference. “We are all defected officers, and we are not here for a political transition. That is done by the High Negotiations Committee”. “We are just working on the military issues,” he said. “There are political figures and politicians who will focus on Geneva and the political solution.”

Russia, Turkey and Iran would agree to set up a “trilateral mechanism” to monitor the cease-fire in Syria, the Russian state news agency *Tass* reported, citing a draft of the agreement they hope will emerge from the talks in Astana. Those three countries would also join forces to fight two groups that are excluded from the cease-fire — Islamic State and a former Al Qaeda affiliate now known as the Front for the Conquest of Syria — without targeting so-called mainstream opposition forces, the draft reportedly said.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Robert Burns, White House opens door to cooperation with Russian in Syria, *US News*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-01-23/white-house-opens-door-to-cooperation-with-russian-in-syria>, accessed on January 24, 2017

¹⁴⁹ Nabih Bulos, The key to success in latest Syrian peace talks: low expectations, *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-syria-talks-20170123-story.html>, accessed on January 24, 2017

International Economic Issues

Trump Abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama's Signature Trade Deal

President Trump upended America's traditional, bipartisan trade policy on January 23, 2017 as he formally abandoned the ambitious, 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership brokered by his predecessor and declared an end to the era of multinational trade agreements that defined global economics for decades. In doing so, Mr. Trump signaled that he plans to follow through on promises to take a more aggressive stance against foreign competitors as part of his "America First" approach. Mr. Trump's decision to scrap the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or T.P.P., reversed a free-trade strategy adopted by presidents of both parties dating back to the Cold War. President trump said, "We're going to stop the ridiculous trade deals that have taken everybody out of our country and taken companies out of our country, and it's going to be reversed," stating that from now on, the United States would sign trade deals only with individual allies. "I think you're going to have a lot of companies come back to our country."¹⁵⁰

Australia open to China and Indonesia joining TPP after US pulls out

On January 23, 2017, the Australian government announced that it will push ahead for a Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal without the United States and is open to Indonesia, China and others seeking to join the agreement. In this regard, the Australian trade minister, Steven Ciobo, made the call for countries to push ahead with a so-called TPP 12-minus-one agreement since the US president, Donald Trump, has signed an order that the US will not join the deal. He said that Australia had had talks with Canada, Mexico, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Chile and Peru to salvage the deal without US involvement. On the question of China joining the pact, Mr. Ciobo said the original architecture enabled other countries to join. "Certainly I know Indonesia has expressed a possible interest and there would be scope for China, if we're able to reformulate it, to be a TPP 12 minus one [country] ... [and] for countries like Indonesia or China, or indeed other countries, to consider joining." Ciobo said there were a number of "competing factors" that would complicate a TPP 12-minus-one agreement, including that Mexico and Canada may first have to deal with Trump attempting to renegotiate the North American free trade agreement. He said the agreement was good for Australia because it improved access to markets including Canada and Mexico and lowered compliance costs. Noteworthy, according to the final chapter of the TPP, the trade agreement can go ahead only if at

¹⁵⁰ Peter Baker, Trump Abandons Trans-Pacific Partnership, Obama's Signature Trade Deal, *The New York Times*, 23 January 2017.

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/us/politics/tpp-trump-trade-nafta.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=a-lede-package-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=0

least six of its 12 original members have ratified the agreement, and if those six countries represent 85% of the combined GDP of all 12 countries. It means the deal cannot come into force if the US or Japan fails to ratify the agreement because, between them, they represent 79% of the GDP of all 12 original signatories. Without the US or Japan involved there is no way for the remaining signatories to fulfil the 85% requirement.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile Japan had signalled a reorientation towards the Chinese deals in the lead-up to APEC meeting in Peru.¹⁵²

India opposes EU, Canada bid on investment pact at WTO

According to media reports dated January 23, 2017, India opposed an informal proposal made by the EU and Canada about a global investment pact with an investor-to-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provision at WTO. The issue was discussed at an “informal meeting” of key WTO members, including India, China, Brazil, Japan and Australia, in Davos last week. In this regard, Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, “We rejected it (the attempt made by the EU and Canada) completely. “We want anything to do with investments to be a bilateral thing... We do not believe in making investments a subject of multilateral disputes.” “... There is no way; we will have investment treaty in which companies can take the sovereign or even the regional governments to court. Anything with regard to investments, we wanted to be settled by the domestic laws and courts and only after that... Appeal outside.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Paul Karp, “Australia open to China and Indonesia joining TPP after US pulls out”, The Guardian, 23 January 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jan/24/australia-open-to-china-and-indonesia-joining-tpp-after-us-pulls-out>

¹⁵² Katherine Murphy, “Australia signals support for Chinese-led trade deals to replace TPP”, The Guardian, 17 January 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/17/australia-signals-support-for-chinese-led-trade-deals-to-replace-tpp>

¹⁵³ “India opposes EU, Canada bid on investment pact at WTO”, Business Standard, 23 January 2017. http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-opposes-eu-canada-bid-on-investment-pact-at-wto-117012300895_1.html