

Weekly Media Updates **(24-30 July, 2017)**

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Africa

- **Boko Haram Attack on Nigeria Oil Team Killed Over 50**

More than 50 people were killed in a Boko Haram ambush on an oil exploration team from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in the Magumeri area of Borno state, northeast of Nigeria on 25th July, Tuesday. Hospital and army officials told the corpses of 18 soldiers and 30 others had been brought to a facility in Maiduguri following the incident.

This deadly attack underscored the persistent threat posed by Boko Haram fighters, despite government claims they were a spent force, and also the risks associated with the hunt for crude in the volatile Lake Chad basin.

- **Rwandan President Heads toward Re-election in August Vote¹**

According to Moody Awori, head of the East African Community team tasked with observing the August 4 presidential vote in Rwanda the election campaign have been peaceful and free of threatening rhetoric, in part because Kagame is expected to win in a landslide. He won the 2003 and 2010 polls with more than 90 percent of the vote, and there is no indication this year's result will be much different.

Incumbent President Paul Kagame has attracted huge rallies in the capital, Kigali, and everywhere else he went. His opponents, opposition party leader Frank Habineza and independent Philippe Mpayimana, have drawn crowds too, although not nearly as large. Several rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, have said Kagame's re-election bid comes in a climate of fear that resulted from two decades of crackdowns on the political opposition, media and activists.

Kagame commented on the accusations at one of his campaign stops in western Rwanda, saying that those who say there is a climate of fear and that people are being forced to attend rallies have yet to "get used to the new Rwanda."

Kagame has ruled the country with a firm hand since his forces ended Rwanda's 1994 genocide, which killed an estimated 800,000 people. He is widely credited with helping to bring peace to the country and spurring on economic growth that has led to a falling poverty rate.

While the EU declined to send a mission to monitor the election, the East African Community picked Awori, a former Kenyan vice president, to head its team of 30 election observers in Rwanda. The team will observe the concluding stages of the campaigns, as well as observe the voting and counting process on and after August 4.

Kenyan elections

¹ VoA, 28 July 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/rwanda-president-heads-toward-re-election-august-vote/3963094.html>

Separately, with regard to Kenyan elections, the head of the East African Community Moody Awori, dismissed fears of election problems in his home country. He said "There won't be problems. What I see now is simply healthy and things will work out quite well." Kenyans go to the polls on August 8.

- **Local Workers Complain of Harassment by Chinese Supervisors²**

Casual workers for a Chinese company renovating Kipchoge Keino Stadium in Eldoret have complained about physical and verbal harassment by their Chinese supervisors.

One labourer, Moses Makitare, said some of the Chinese employees of Weihai International Construction Engineering Company were physically assaulting Kenyan workers. Another worker had said "physical and verbal abuse has been going on. There is a language barrier in the place, so when we fail to understand what they are saying, or they don't understand what we are saying, they end up kicking and slapping us."

A local engineer at the construction site, has acknowledged that he had received complaints and that investigations had started. The stadium will host the 2018 Africa Nations Championships.

North Africa

- **Egyptian Criminal Court Confirms Death Sentence for 28 in the Murder of General Prosecutor in 2015³**

On Saturday, the Cairo Criminal Court issued death sentences for 28 out of the 56 defendants accused of involvement in the 2015 assassination of former General Prosecutor of Egypt Hesham Barakat. Earlier in a preliminary judgment, 30 defendants were handed over the death sentence on June 17, at the time pending review by Egypt's grand mufti.

The court excluded Mohamed Kamal from the death sentence, as he died last year in a shootout with the police as they attempted to detain him. Jail terms ranging from 10 to 25 years were handed to the remaining 38 defendants in the case. Of the defendants receiving jail time, 15 were sentenced to 25 years, eight were sentenced to 15 years and 15 were sentenced to 10 years.

The lead judge in the case later said that we are Egypt's judiciary, we have nothing to do with politics; we rule in the case in accordance to evidence and observations. The decision, issued by the Cairo Criminal Court, follows 36 court sessions beginning in June 2016.

² Daily nation, 29 June 2017, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201706300676.html>

³ Mada Masr /<https://www.madamasr.com/en/2017/07/22/news/u/court-confirms-death-sentence-for-28-defendants-in-general-prosecutor-assassination-case/>

Different charges have been brought before the defendants, according to the order which referred the trial to the Cairo Criminal Court. Accusations include complicity in the assassination of former General Prosecutor Hesham Barakat, responsibility for the other deaths and injuries resulting from the attack and affiliation to an outlawed organization, in this case alleged to be the Muslim Brotherhood and its militant wings.

Those who have been convicted are also charged with obstructing the provisions of the constitution, obstructing state institutions from performing their functions, and contacting Palestinian political movement Hamas and coordinating with them to conduct terrorist operations within Egypt.

- **Egypt to Start Oil and Gas Exploration in Red Sea Soon⁴**

Egypt's oil minister Tarek El-Mullah recently announced that the recently implemented Egyptian-Saudi maritime border demarcation deal will now allow Egypt to start oil and gas exploration in the area for the first time, Al-Ahram Arabic news website reported.

The minister after signing of two contracts between Egypt's South Valley Egyptian Petroleum Holding Company informed that the region in the Red Sea has not witnessed any petroleum activity, with the exception of the Suez Gulf and it has remained an untouched area.

The minister also stressed that the project should be completed within one year, so the ministry will be receiving bids for oil and gas exploration in Egyptian territorial waters in the Red Sea and southern Egypt.

Egypt signed the two contracts with the British TGC and the US Schlumberger with investments of more than \$750 million in the Red Sea and southern Egypt regions. It is worth mentioning here that in mid-June this year the Egyptian House of Representatives passed by a majority vote the Egyptian-Saudi deal, allowing the handing over two Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia.

Central Asia

- **C5+1 Security Meeting in Tajikistan**

Tajikistan hosted the C5+1 Security Working Group meeting on 26 July 2017 in Dushanbe. Besides Tajikistan, the meeting was attended by participants from other four republics Kazakhstan Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and

⁴ Ahram online <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/273973/Business/Economy/Egypt-to-start-oil-and-gas-exploration-in-Red-Sea-.aspx>

the US. According the US Embassy, the meeting discussed the threat posed by terrorism in the region and the way to increase the cooperation.⁵

The C5+1 (Central Asian countries + the US) is a platform for dialogue to discuss and address common challenges faced by the region and the US. The first C5+1 foreign ministerial meeting was held in Uzbekistan in 2015. It decided to focus on three common areas of interest: security, economy and environmental issues. The second C5+1 ministerial meeting held in Washington in 2016, the six ministers agreed to launch five projects in the three areas, funded by the US.⁶

- **Uzbekistan Government to Build School in Neighbouring Kyrgyzstan**

In a sign of improving ties between the neighbours, the Uzbekistan Government is to construct a school in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. The two governments signed an agreement on 28 July 2017 in Bishkek for the construction of a 'general' school in Osh in the southern Kyrgyzstan.

The expense will be made by Uzbekistan and it will cater to 630 students of Kyrgyzstan. The school will be handed over to the Kyrgyz authorities.⁷ Southern Kyrgyzstan is part of Feghana region, which is also extended to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Osh region has a sizeable percentage of Uzbek population. In 2010, the region had witnessed inter-ethnic violence between Uzbek and Kyrgyz people leading to many deaths, injury and displacement of population.

The new Government of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan has been making efforts to improve ties with its neighbours. The construction of school in Kyrgyzstan can be seen as a step in this direction. The project aims to help 'strengthen friendly and good-neighborly relations between the peoples of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.'

- **China Launches Cargo Train to Kazakhstan**

China has started a cargo train service to Kazakhstan from Ganzhou in the country's east on 27 July 2017. A train with 100 containers of furniture, clothes and electronic goods started its journey from the Jiangxi province to Kazakhstan to be covered in 12 days.⁸ From Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are already

⁵ U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, "C5+1 Meeting Held in Dushanbe," 27 July 2017, <https://tj.usembassy.gov/pr-07272017/>

⁶ The Times of Central Asia, "Tajikistan hosts C5+1 meeting between Central Asia states and the US," <https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/18401-tajikistan-hosts-c5-1-meeting-between-central-asia-states-and-the-us>

⁷ UzDaily, "Uzbekistan to build school in Kyrgyzstan," 28 July 2017, <https://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-40265.htm>

⁸ Xinhua, "Cargo train services launched between China's Ganzhou, Kazakhstan," 27 July 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/27/c_136477927_2.htm

connected to this Chinese province through rail links and Kazakhstan is its third destination in the region.⁹

China

- **A tone-setting meeting for upcoming CPC national congress**

The keynote speech made by Xi Jinping at a high-profile workshop on July 26, 2017, offers a fine opportunity to take a glimpse of the themes of the CPC's upcoming congress. The speech has laid an important political, ideological and theoretical foundation for the success of the 19th CPC National Congress slated for later this year.

It has been a routine practice of the CPC Central Committee for its general secretary to make a speech in front of high-level officials ahead of the once-for-every-five-years CPC national congress to unify Party members' thoughts and chart out future development.

The tone-setting speech, which summarized achievements in theories and practices since the 18th CPC National Congress held in November 2012, was a concrete mobilization call.

Xi hailed "the historic changes" in the development of the CPC and the nation "over the past five extraordinary years," saying China's development is standing at a new historical starting point, and socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new development stage.

The major achievements made in socialism with Chinese characteristics mean that the Chinese nation, which had experienced tribulations and hardships since modern times, has made a historic leap from standing-up to becoming better-off to getting stronger, Xi said.

Stressing the goals of the nation, Xi said China must accomplish building a moderately prosperous society by 2020, and strive for the great victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics as well as the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation. To achieve that end, Xi called for continuous efforts to adopt an overall approach to promote economic, political, cultural, social and ecological progress, as well as advance coordinated development of the "Four Comprehensives."¹⁰

(Note: Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, spoke at a symposium for provincial and ministerial level officials held on 27 and 28 July in preparation for the 19th National Congress of the CPC)

⁹ China Daily, "Cargo train rolls out between East China, Kazakhstan," 28 July 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-07/28/content_30284288.htm

¹⁰ "A tone-setting meeting for upcoming CPC national congress", *Qiushi*, July 28, 2017, http://english.qstheory.cn/2017-07/28/c_1121395438.htm (accessed on July 31, 2017)

- **Statistics on China's Import & Export in 2017**

In the first half of 2017, the total import and export value of China reached US\$ 1.90948 trillion, with an increase of 13% year on year (the same as below). The export was US\$ 1.04727 trillion, with an increase of 8.5% and the import was US\$ 862.21 billion, with an increase of 18.9%, the trade surplus was US\$ 185.06 billion, with a decrease of 22.9%.

In June, the total value of the Chinese import and export was US\$ 350.42 billion, with an increase of 13.8%. The export was US\$ 196.59 billion, with an increase of 11.3% and the import was US\$ 153.83 billion, with an increase of 17.2%. The trade surplus was US \$42.76 billion, with a decrease of 5.8%.¹¹

	June 2017		January-June 2017	
	Absolute Value	Increase%	Absolute Value	Increase%
Total import and export value	3504.2	13.8	19094.8	13.0
Export value	1965.9	11.3	10472.7	8.5
Import value	1538.3	17.2	8622.1	18.9
Export and import balance	427.6	-5.8	1850.6	-22.9

- **Military parade demonstrates CPC's determination of building a strong army**

The grand parade on July 30, 2017, demonstrated the military's resolute loyalty to the Communist Party of China who is determined to build a strong army. President Xi Jinping reviewed the armed forces on 30 July morning as part of the commemorations to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army, which falls on August 1.

More than 12,000 service personnel from the army, navy, air force, armed police as well as the newly formed rocket force and strategic support troops, took part in the

¹¹ Ministry Of Commerce People's Republic of China, "Brief Statistics on China's Import & Export in June", July 21, 2017, <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/article/statistic/BriefStatistics/201707/20170702617043.shtml> 1 (accessed on July 31, 2017)

parade at Zhurihe military training base in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.¹²

- **China Detains 12-Year-Old Uyghur Boy on Return to Xinjiang From Egypt¹³**

Authorities in China's northwest Xinjiang region forced a 12-year-old ethnic Uyghur boy to undergo political re-education and have detained him since arresting his parents, who returned home from Egypt to "register" themselves with the government nearly five months ago, according to official sources.

Thousands of Uyghurs, many of whom are students studying at Cairo's prestigious Al-Azhar Islamic University, have voluntarily travelled to Xinjiang from Egypt since the beginning of the year when Chinese authorities detained many of their relatives and threatened them with "severe punishment" if they did not return.

In February, Memet Abla, 39, and his wife Buzorigul Rishit, 36, took their 12-year-old son Hezritieli Memet home from Egypt to Yopurgha county, in Xinjiang's Kashgar (in Chinese, Kashi) prefecture, where they were promptly arrested by local authorities, two officials from the county's Yekshenbe Bazaar recently told RFA's Uyghur Service. With his parents in detention, Memet was placed in the custody of the local government for surveillance, according to Abduqadir Abdureyim, a police officer at the Yekshenbe Bazaar station.

- **Xinjiang Users Arrested over State Spyware Usage¹⁴**

Chinese police have reportedly set up checkpoints to ensure that ethnic minorities in the western Xinjiang province have downloaded state-mandated spyware to their mobile devices. The surveillance app, known as *Jingwang*, is said to search the device for files that match those blacklisted by the authorities for terror-related content.

It can also prevent the spread of certain content via social media and online chat platforms and block access to illegal and malicious sites, according to reports. The new rules are only in place in Xinjiang, which has a large population of Uyghur Muslims and a history of social unrest.

- **Xi's show of force declares China's battle readiness to the world¹⁵**

¹² "Military parade demonstrates CPC's determination of building a strong army", *Xinhuanet*, July 31, 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/31/c_136486297.htm (accessed on July 31, 2017)

¹³ "China Detains 12-Year-Old Uyghur Boy on Return to Xinjiang From Egypt", *Radio Free Asia*, July 24, 2017, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/boy-07242017153914.html> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

¹⁴ Phil Muncaster, "Xinjiang Users Arrested over State Spyware Usage", July 24, 2017, <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/xinjiang-arrested-state-spyware/> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

¹⁵ "Xi's show of force declares China's battle readiness to the world", *South China Morning Post*, July 31, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2104684/xis-show-force-declares-chinas-battle-readiness-world> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

The event in Zhurihe in Inner Mongolia, the to mark 90th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army on July 30, had none of the ceremony usually associated with a military parade in China. It was done with the troops in battle dress to remind them that the world's largest army must embrace changes and be ready for battle, analysts said.

Xi, in a camouflage uniform, told the troops to "be ready to assemble at the first call and be capable of fighting and winning any battle". The parade showcased what Xi has done to improve China's military since he took power five years ago, and it underlined his vision of the army's role in the country's future as China aggressively tries to boost its regional and even global clout.

- **China's environment watchdog reads riot act to megacity over litany of pollution failures¹⁶**

The dressing-down from the Ministry of Environmental Protection to a group of Tianjin officials, including its Communist Party chief Li Hongzhong and mayor Wang Dongfeng, on the weekend was based on a month-long assessment that started in April 28. The ministry sent a team to the city to take stock of its environmental protection efforts, only to find Tianjin authorities had done a poor job in protecting its air and water, and were falling well short of "what the central government has required it to do, what a municipality should do, and what the public expects".

In a statement released on July 29, 2017, the ministry accused some municipal leaders of shirking responsibility entirely. "When there's water pollution, they immediately complain about dirty water from upstream areas; when there's air pollution, they immediately blame climate factors," it said.

- **China work safety chief demoted after corruption probe¹⁷**

China's government work safety chief – who previously served under the jailed ex-national security czar Zhou Yongkang – has been sacked and formally demoted. Yang Huanning was fired from his role at the State Administration of Work Safety after the Communist Party's anti-corruption commission completed an investigation into his affairs, the agency said in a statement on July 31, 2017. He has also been placed on probation for two years within the party while serving at a lower rank.

Yuan's previous roles include posts as the second most senior official in China's police force and overseeing anti-terrorism operations at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

¹⁶ "China's environment watchdog reads riot act to megacity over litany of pollution failures", *South China Morning Post*, July 31,, 2017,

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2104793/chinas-environment-watchdog-reads-riot-act-megacity-over-litany> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

¹⁷ "China work safety chief demoted after corruption probe", *South China Morning Post*, July 31,2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2104763/china-work-safety-chief-demoted-after-corruption-probe> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

European Union

- **Italy Considers to Send Its Navy to Libyan Shores**

Italy is considering to deploy its navy to Libyan shores in order to stop traffickers sending migrants. Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Serraj has requested Italian government for help. Italy is facing heavy migrant influx from African countries through Libya.¹⁸ Reportedly, Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni has announced that Italian navy would patrol with Libyan ships.

- **Brexit Negotiations**

The Brexit negotiations are going on. It was reported that freedom of movement of EU citizens would cease to exist after the UK departure from the EU. However, it was also reported that the UK may come with a mechanism to grant permission to businessmen to hire workers. Interior Minister Amber Rudd asked the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to examine the impact of migration on the labor market and economy. It will also examine how the post-Brexit rules support needed and work industrial revival in the country.¹⁹

- **Britain Future Role in Asia-Pacific**

On his visit to Australia, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said that Britain would enhance its role in Asia-Pacific after the Brexit. In an interview to the Australian, he said, “We are now going to be more committed to the Asia-Pacific region and more committed to Australia.” He sounded optimistic about the free-trade agreement with Australia after the Brexit.²⁰ Boris Johnson arrived in Australia on 25 July, 2017 to attend the annual meeting of UK and Australian Foreign and Defence Ministers.²¹

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **North Korea Successfully Tests ICBM**

¹⁸ Italy mulls sending navy into Libyan waters to stop migrants, DW, 27 July, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/italy-mulls-sending-navy-into-libyan-waters-to-stop-migrants/a-39866973>

¹⁹ William James, With 20 months until Brexit, UK orders year-long EU migration study, Reuters, July 27, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-workers-idUSKBN1AC0W6>

²⁰ Gerg Sheridan Boris Johnson hails new dawn for Brits in Asia-Pacific, The Australian, July 27, 2017, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/boris-johnson-hails-new-dawn-for-brits-in-asiapacific/news-story/907e49555a626071b5b66bb808e1312f>

²¹ Foreign Secretary arrives in Sydney for AUKMIN 2017, Gov.UK, Press Release, 25 July 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-arrives-in-sydney-for-aukmin-2017>

On July 28, North Korea launched a ballistic missile from a test site in Jagang Province and landed in the East Sea. According to South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the missile travelled a distance of 1000 km reaching a maximum altitude of 3,700 km before falling in to the sea. The missile was fired at an elevated angle. If fired at a standard trajectory the missile could reach a target about 10,000 km away. This is North Korea's second ICBM in this month. On July 4, North Korea successfully conducted its first ICBM Hwasong-14²² to which the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said represented "a new escalation of the threat to the United States, our allies and partners, the region and the world." That ICBM flew at a trajectory of 1,730 miles above Earth for 37 minutes before crashing into the Sea of Japan.²³

North Korea's missile further led to fears that the country is ramping up efforts to develop a nuclear weapon that would be capable of reaching the United States mainland, a mission that the reclusive nation has obsessively worked towards achieving in the last couple of years. Following reports of the launch, South Korean President Moon Jae-in convened an emergency national security meeting. Meanwhile, Japanese authorities too reported detecting the launch, and the country's public broadcaster NHK said that the missile appeared to land within Japan's exclusive economic zone.²⁴

- **South Korean President Moon Orders More THAAD Deployment**

On July 29, South Korean President Moon Jae-in ordered to deploy four additional THAAD launchers. The order was taken during an emergency National Security Council meeting presided over by the President following North Korea's ICBM test. This suggests Moon apparently shifting his dovish approach to North Korea.²⁵ The order comes a day after the government said it would conduct a full-scale environmental assessment of the deployment site in Seongju, North Gyeongsang Province, before installing the four launchers.²⁶

As a show of force to protest North Korea's missile launch, Seoul and Washington conducted a joint missile drill. In the drill, two South Korean Hyunmoo-2A

²² "N. Korea fires another intercontinental ballistic missile", *The Korea Times*, July 29, 2017, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/07/103_233829.html (accessed on July 31, 2017)

²³ "U.S. confirms another ballistic missile launch from North Korea", *North Korea Times*, 29 July 2017. <http://www.northkoreatimes.com/news/254150861/us-confirms-another-ballistic-missile-launch-from-north-korea> (accessed on July 31, 2017).

²⁴ "U.S. confirms another ballistic missile launch from North Korea", *North Korea Times*, 29 July 2017. <http://www.northkoreatimes.com/news/254150861/us-confirms-another-ballistic-missile-launch-from-north-korea> (accessed on July 31, 2017).

²⁵ "Moon orders more THAAD launchers to be deployed", *The Yonhap News*, July 29, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/07/29/0401000000AEN20170729001251315.html> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

²⁶ Kim Hyo-jin, "Additional THAAD installment fuels political controversy", *The Korea Times*, 30 July 2017. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/07/356_233857.html (accessed on July 31, 2017).

ballistic missiles and two Korea Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) of the US forces in South Korea were fired.²⁷ Washington also sent two B-1B bombers to the Korean Peninsula from its Pacific air force base in Guam.²⁸

- **Japanese Defence Minister Inada Resigns**

On July 28, Japanese Defence Minister Tomomi Inada announced her resignation. She was forced to resign over an alleged involvement in covering up the logs of the Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) unit that was deployed in South Sudan for peacekeeping duty. The Japanese law restrict the deployment of Japanese peacekeeping forces only in non-combat situations. Any proof that the SDF was facing combat would imply contravention of conditions for deploying troops overseas.

The resignation of Inada will be strong blow to the scandal-tainted administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Inada is known to be very close to Prime Minister Abe and was widely regarded as Abe's choice for LDP leadership after him. The defence portfolio is given to Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida.²⁹

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **China Funding 70 percent of Cambodian Roads**

The Cambodian Daily on July 27, 2017, reported that about 70% of roads and bridges in Cambodia have been funded by China, with loans for their financing adding up to about \$ 2 billion. According to Cambodian Transport Minister Sun Chanthol, more than 2000 Km of roads across the country and seven major bridges have been constructed with Chinese funds. The minister's spokesman Var Simsorya confirmed the proportion of roads and bridges funded by Beijing, but declined to discuss the overall budget for the loans. The remaining 30 percent of roads were also largely internationally funded; with loans coming from South Korea and Vietnam. According to analysts this heavy reliance on Chinese funding is a cause of concern, since increased Beijing's investments also increases pressure on the Cambodian government to accept China's political line. For instance

²⁷ "S. Korea, U.S. stage ballistic missile exercise", The Yonhap, July 29, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/07/29/0401000000AEN20170729001652315.html> (Accessed on July 31, 2017)

²⁸ "Two B-1B bombers fly over Korea against N. Korea's ICBM launch", The Yonhap, July 30, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/07/30/0401000000AEN20170730002700315.html> (Accessed on July 31, 2017)

²⁹ "Inada makes resignation official; Kishida to pick up defense portfolio", The Japan Times, July 28, 2017, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/07/28/national/inada-makes-resignation-official-kishida-take-defense-role-now/#.WX7VIYh96M8>, (Accessed on July 31, 2017)

Cambodian government consistently deporting Taiwanese nationals accused of crimes to mainland China.³⁰

- **Southeast Asian nations seek to continue drilling of resources in the South China Sea**

The Star Online on July 25, 2017, reported that China's foreign Minister Wang Yi said that he supported the idea of joint energy ventures with the Philippines in the disputed South China Sea. Wang's also stated that since there lies overlapping maritime rights and interests, if one party goes for unilateral development, and the other party takes the same action, that might complicate the situation at the sea leading to tension, and as a result nobody would be able to develop resources. His remarks comes after President Duterte who on June 24, 2017, while not naming any entity, said that a partner has been found to develop oil fields and exploration and exploitation would restart this year. Philippines energy minister on July 12, 2017, said that the drilling at the Reed bank, which was suspended in 2014, while awaiting the judgement by the Permanent Court of Arbitration. This would now be resumed before the year-end since the judgement clarifies Philippines sovereign rights to access offshore oil and gas within its 200 mile EEZ – within which the Reed bank is located – the government is preparing to offer bidding of new blocks to investors by December.³¹

Vietnam has also begun drilling in mid-June in Vietnam's Block 136/3, which is licensed to Vietnam's state oil firm, Spain's Repsol, and Mubadala Development Co. of the UAE. This is being done despite China urging to halt the drilling as the block lies inside the U-shaped "nine-dash line" that marks the vast area that China claims in the sea and overlaps what it says are its own oil concessions. Vietnam on July 28, 2017, stated that other countries should respect its legitimate right to drill on its waters. According to Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Le Thi Thu Hang, Vietnam's petroleum-related activities take place in the sea entirely under the sovereignty and jurisdiction of Vietnam established in accordance with international law.³²

- **Thailand, Indonesia high-speed railway project with China**

³⁰ Janelle Retka, "China Funded 70% of Cambodian Roads, Bridges: minister", *The Cambodian Daily*, July 27, 2017, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/china-funded-70-of-cambodian-roads-bridges-minister-132826/>,(accessed on July 25, 2017).

³¹Manual Mogato, "China backs joint energy development with Philippines in disputed sea", *The Star Online*, July 25, 2017, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2017/07/25/china-backs-joint-energy-development-with-philippines-in-disputed-sea/> (accessed on July 25, 2017).

³² "Vietnam says others should respect its right to drill for South China Sea oil", *The Straits Times*, July 28, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/vietnam-says-others-should-respect-its-right-to-drill-for-south-china-sea-oil> (accessed on July 29, 2017).

On July 24, 2017, while on a two day visit to Thailand, China's foreign minister Wang stated that both nations have pledged that there will be no u-turn on a long-delayed train project and promised cooperation on the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) scheme. The train and economic schemes are in line with China's ambitious OBOR policy. Thailand's PM stressed that China is a key partner that remains confident in the Kingdom and understanding of its political situation.³³ Meanwhile, it has been reported that the ongoing Jakarta-Bandung high speed rail project which started work in late 2015, as a joint venture between China and Indonesia, has hit a road block owing to an increase in the cost. Indonesia which owes 60% of the enterprise and China the remaining 40%, in order to speed up the project Indonesia may offer China a majority stake; possibly up to 90 percent. According to Indonesia's Public Work Minister, Basuki Hadimuljono, giving Chinese investors the majority stake would be a breakthrough to move the project along as the Indonesian state controlled firms have been finding it hard to inject more cash into the rail venture. Besides, as stated by the government of Indonesia, the project is on a Build-operate-transfer arrangement; meaning that after 50 years, the full ownership of the project will be transferred to the Indonesian government.³⁴

Myanmar

- **Tatmadaw must be referred as "Tatmadaw"**

A senior general on July 27, 2017, urged the media to refer to the country's armed forces as Tatmadaw and not by any other name in their news reports. Major-General Aung Ye Win, vice chair of Tatmadaw's True News Information Team, said Tatmadaw wants to be called as "Tatmadaw". Some media has used "military" "government army" in news reports related with Tatmadaw," he said at the Media Development Conference held at the Ministry of Information.³⁵

- **Myanmar's parliament debates controversial telecom law**

On July 26, 2017, lawmakers in Myanmar's Upper House debated proposed amendments to a controversial section of the 2013 Telecommunications Act. A total of 14 MPs weighed in on changes to the section, known as Article 66(d), which provides prison terms of up to three years for anyone convicted of online

³³"Thailand, China to move forward on train, EEC projects", *Bangkok Post*, July 24, 2017, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1293110/thailand-china-to-move-forward-on-train-eeec-projects> (accessed on July 25, 2017).

³⁴ Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja, "Jakarta may Offer China larger stake in high-speed rail project", *The Straits Times*, July, 27, 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/jakarta-may-offer-china-larger-stake-in-high-speed-rail-project> (accessed on July 27, 2017).

³⁵ "Tatmadaw must be referred as "Tatmadaw", *Myanmar Times*, July 28, 2017, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/26995-tatmadaw-must-be-referred-as-tatmadaw.html> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

defamation, among other offenses carried out through a telecommunications network. Most of the lawmakers who supported a complete annulment were from the NLD, which came to power last year after Aung San Suu Kyi led the party to election victory in 2015.³⁶

- **United Nations' Human Rights Council replaces chairwoman in Myanmar inquiry**

The United Nations' Human Rights Council on July, 27, 2017, replaced the chairwoman of a team investigating allegations of killings and rape by Myanmar's security forces, amid concerns over her perceived bias. After her appointment, Jaising was quoted by broadcaster Al Jazeera as saying the Rohingyas' situation in Myanmar "is especially deplorable because they face the risk of genocide". Indian Supreme Court advocate Indira Jaising was initially named to chair the fact-finding mission, which has a focus on the western state of Rakhine that is home to the stateless Rohingya Muslim minority. Council president Joaquín Alexander Maza Martelli had decided to replace Jaising with Marzuki Darusman, a former attorney-general of Indonesia who has previously conducted rights investigations on North Korea, the council said in a statement from its headquarters in Geneva.³⁷

- **Independent UN rights expert says situation 'worsening' in Myanmar**

In a statement from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee accused national authorities of "presiding over a worsening security and human rights situation" in the country. While no one expects an overnight transition to democracy in Myanmar, there has to be real progress on human rights she said, highlighting reported killings, tortures, and an "ongoing humanitarian crisis" for the Rohingya people and other minorities. Ms. Lee said she catalogued a list of concerns during her 12 day visit to the country, which was held at the invitation of the Government, which also included the use of human shields by security forces and deaths in custody.³⁸

- **People Have Right to Criticize Govt: State Counsellor**

People have the right to criticize a democratically elected government, Myanmar's State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said amid criticism of her government's lack of progress and failure to protect press freedom. "The elected government

³⁶ "Myanmar's parliament debates controversial telecom law", *Mizzima News*, July 29, 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-features/myanmar%E2%80%99s-parliament-debates-controversial-telecom-law> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

³⁷ "United Nations' Human Rights Council replaces chairwoman in Myanmar inquiry", *Mizzima News*, July 28, 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/united-nations%E2%80%99-human-rights-council-replaces-chairwoman-myanmar-inquiry> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

³⁸ "Independent UN rights expert says situation 'worsening' in Myanmar", *Mizzima News*, July 25, 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/independent-un-rights-expert-says-situation-%E2%80%98worsening%E2%80%99-myanmar> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

must face criticism bravely and righteously. People have the right to criticize the government which they have elected,” Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said at an event to mark the first anniversary of her State Counselor’s Office in Naypyitaw on July 27, 2017. “Not all of the people will offer constructive criticism, this is not unusual in a democracy,” she said.³⁹

North America

Canada

- **Saudi Arabia's Use Of Canadian-Made Military Vehicles Sparks Concerns From Feds**

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland has asked Canadian officials to investigate reports “immediately” that Canadian-made military vehicles are being used against civilians in an escalating conflict in Saudi Arabia. If confirmed, the use of armoured vehicles against civilians would be in violation of Canada’s arms deal with the Saudis. Reports are stemming from videos posted across social media, which appear to show Canadian-made Terradyne Gurkhas. Middle East editor of Jane’s Defence Weekly, Jeremy Binnie, confirmed the identification of the vehicle via Twitter. Former foreign affairs minister Stéphane Dion noted two months before that there was no reason to think Canadian-made vehicles have been misused in Saudi Arabia in the violation of human rights, but that he’d monitor the circumstances.⁴⁰

- **Finance Minister Bill Morneau proposes tax changes to close loopholes for wealthy**

Finance Minister Bill Morneau is proposing to close loopholes that allow wealthy Canadians to avoid higher tax rates, largely by targeting people who incorporate themselves and then draw income from their businesses while paying lower corporate taxes. There has been an eight-fold increase in the number of corporations in Canada since the 1970s, while the gap between personal tax and business tax rates has grown significantly. As of 2017, there is a 37.2 per cent gap, meaning income derived from a business faces a much lower tax burden. Morneau wants to curtail so-called “income sprinkling,” a tax move that allows business

³⁹ “People Have Right to Criticize Govt: State Counsellor”, *Irrawaddy*, July 28, 2017, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/people-right-criticize-govt-state-counselor.html> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

⁴⁰ Victoria Gibson, “Government to investigate report Canadian military vehicles used against civilians by Saudis,” <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/07/28/government-to-investigate-report-canadian-military-vehicles-used-against-civilians-by-saudis.html>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

owners — often professionals like doctors and lawyers — to distribute money to family members who earn less, allowing income to be taxed at a lower rate.⁴¹

- **Canada's economy records blockbuster growth, raising chance of another rate hike**

Economic growth in the country blew past expectations in May, powered by the energy sector, raising expectations that the Bank of Canada will raise interest rates again this fall. Statistics Canada said that real gross domestic product grew by 0.6 per cent for the month. Economists had expected an increase of 0.2 per cent, according to Thomson Reuters. The Bank of Canada raised its key interest rate earlier this month for the first time since 2010. The central bank's target for the overnight rate sits at 0.75 per cent. The oil and gas extraction subsector grew 7.6 per cent, with non-conventional oil extraction rising 13 per cent due to a rebound in activity after a fire at the Syncrude Mildred Lake upgrader in mid-March that curtailed production. Conventional oil and gas extraction gained 3.2 per cent.

Service-producing industries increased 0.2 per cent, led by finance and insurance services.⁴²

- **'The demand is growing': High Arctic Research Station nears completion**

A decade after it was first promised, Canada's new High Arctic Research Station is nearly complete and already giving scientists access to a vast new section of ice and tundra. The station has already joined the Canadian Network of Northern Research Operators, a group of Arctic research stations operated by foundations, governments and universities that stretches from Inuvik and Kluane in the west to Churchill in the south to Eureka on Ellesmere Island in the east. Now that the Cambridge Bay station is operating, Scott said Polar Knowledge Canada is helping market that network to international researchers. South Korea has already signed an preliminary agreement to partner with Canadian researchers.⁴³

The United States

- **Reince Priebus Is Ousted Amid Stormy Days for White House**

Mr. Reince Priebus, the White House chief of staff who failed to impose order on a chaos-racked West Wing, was pushed out after a stormy six-month tenure, and President Trump replaced him with John F. Kelly, the secretary of homeland security and retired four-star Marine general. Mr. Trump announced the change via Twitter while sitting aboard Air Force One on a tarmac outside Washington

⁴¹ John Paul Tasker, "Finance Minister Bill Morneau proposes tax changes to close loopholes for wealthy," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/morneau-tax-changes-wealthy-consultations-tuesday-1.4210201>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

⁴² Craig Wong, "Canada's economy records blockbuster growth, raising chance of another rate hike," <http://globalnews.ca/news/3631883/canada-gdp-may-2017-interest-rate-hike/>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

⁴³ The Canada Press, "'The demand is growing': High Arctic Research Station nears completion," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/the-demand-is-growing-high-arctic-research-station-nears-completion-1.4228576>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

minutes after returning from Long Island. Mr. Priebus's ouster was the latest convulsion in a White House that has been whipsawed by feuds and political setbacks in recent days. The president became convinced that Mr. Priebus was not strong enough to run the White House operation and told him two weeks ago that he wanted to make a change, according to White House officials. Mr. Priebus said he had tendered his resignation to the president on Thursday (27 July 2017), the same day the newly appointed White House communications director, Anthony Scaramucci, was quoted vowing to force the chief of staff out.⁴⁴

- **Senate slaps new sanctions on Russia, putting Trump in corner**

The U.S. Senate voted almost unanimously to slap new sanctions on Russia, putting President Donald Trump in a tough position by forcing him to take a hard line on Moscow or veto the legislation and infuriate his own Republican Party. The legislation all but dashes Trump's hopes for warmer ties with Moscow as his administration is dogged by congressional and special counsel investigations into Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election to sway it in Trump's favor. The Senate backed the bill, which also imposes sanctions on Iran and North Korea, by a margin of 98-2 with strong support from Trump's fellow Republicans as well as Democrats.

The bill, which includes a provision that allows Congress to stop any effort by Trump to ease existing sanctions on Russia, will now be sent to the White House for Trump to sign into law or veto.⁴⁵

- **Senate Soundly Rejects Repeal-Only Health Plan**

The Senate soundly rejected a measure that would repeal major parts of the Affordable Care Act without providing a replacement, leaving Republicans still searching for a path forward to fulfill their promise of dismantling President Barack Obama's signature health law. Seven Republican senators joined Democrats to vote against the measure, which had been embraced by conservatives but could have left millions of people without health coverage. The rejection of "clean repeal" laid bare the deep divisions within the Republican caucus about how best to proceed. Without the votes to replace the health law or to simply repeal major parts of it, Senate Republicans appeared increasingly likely to try to pass a modest measure that would repeal only a few provisions of the law,

⁴⁴ Peter Baker and Maggie Haberman, "Reince Priebus Is Ousted Amid Stormy Days for White House," <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/28/us/politics/reince-priebus-white-house-trump.html>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

⁴⁵ Patricia Zengerle, "Senate slaps new sanctions on Russia, putting Trump in corner," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-russia-sanctions-idUSKBN1AC1U8>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

such as the tax on medical devices and the requirements that most individuals have insurance and that large employers offer coverage to workers.⁴⁶

- **Trump Says Transgender People Will Not Be Allowed in the Military**

President Trump abruptly announced a ban on transgender people serving in the military, blindsiding his defense secretary and Republican congressional leaders with a snap decision that reversed a year-old policy reviled by social conservatives. Mr. Trump made the declaration on Twitter, saying that American forces could not afford the “tremendous medical costs and disruption” of transgender service members. He said he had consulted generals and military experts, but Jim Mattis, the defense secretary, was given only a day’s notice about the decision. Mr. Trump elected to announce the ban in order to resolve a quietly brewing fight on Capitol Hill over whether taxpayer money should pay for gender transition and hormone therapy for transgender service members. The dispute had threatened to kill a \$790 billion defense and security spending package scheduled for a vote.⁴⁷

Mexico

- **Mexico's Lopez Obrador to Tour South America Ahead of Elections**

Mexico's presidential hopeful, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, will begin a South American tour prior to the 2018 election, according to El Universal. Lopez Obrador is due to hold talks with the Chilean President Michelle Bachelet and her recently-elected Ecuadorean counterpart, Lenin Moreno. Moreno and Lopez Obrador will discuss regional integration as well as political, economic and social issues, an official source told ANDES. The veteran Mexican politician will also meet representatives from social and political organizations in El Salvador, Chile and Ecuador. In August, he will travel to the United States to launch his book which rejects the U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal to expand and strengthen the border wall with Mexico. Mr. Lopez Obrador dismissed criticism levelled against him by the Mexican right-wing, connecting his party to the Venezuelan government. Mr. Lopez Obrador seeks to end nine decades of almost uninterrupted rule by the PRI, which is currently led by President Enrique Pena Nieto. Recent polls show he is the favorite candidate, scoring 30 to 33 percent of the voters' first preference.⁴⁸

- **Mexico's Leftist Party Takes Lead over Peña Nieto**

⁴⁶ Thomas Kaplan, “Senate Soundly Rejects Repeal-Only Health Plan,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/26/us/politics/senate-rejects-repealing-obamacare-without-replacement-trump.html>, Accessed on 27 July 2017.

⁴⁷ Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Helene Cooper, “Trump Says Transgender People Will Not Be Allowed in the Military,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/26/us/politics/trump-transgender-military.html>, Accessed on 27 July 2017.

⁴⁸ ----, “Mexico's Lopez Obrador to Tour South America Ahead of Elections,” <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Mexicos-Leftist-Party-Takes-Lead-over-Pena-Nieto-20170723-0021.html>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

Mexico's ruling party is running in third place with less than a year to go before the next presidential election, well behind the new party of leftist hopeful Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, an opinion poll show. Excluding undecided voters, support for President Enrique Peña Nieto's Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI, fell to 17 percent, 11 percentage points behind the top choice, Lopez Obrador's National Regeneration Movement, Morena, with 28 percent, the poll by newspaper Reforma showed. The second most popular option with 23 percent support was the center-right opposition National Action Party, or PAN, which held the presidency between 2000 and 2012. Backing for the centrist PRI has gradually crumbled since Pena Nieto took office in December 2012 because of anger over corruption, resurgent gang violence and tepid economic growth.⁴⁹

- **Mexico launches pioneering scheme to insure its coral reef**

A stretch of coral reef off Mexico is the testing ground for a new idea that could protect fragile environments around the world: insurance. The reef, off the coast of Cancún, is the first to be protected under an insurance scheme by which the premiums will be paid by local hotels and government, and money to pay for the repair of the reef will be released if a storm strikes. Under the Cancún insurance policy, pioneered by the insurance company Swiss Re and the Nature Conservancy, a US environmental charity, local organisations dependent on tourism will pay in to a collective pot likely to amount to between \$1m (£770,000) and \$7.5m for the insurance premiums on the policy, and a 40 mile (60km) stretch of reef and connected beach will be monitored. If any destructive storms damage the reef system, the insurer will pay out sums likely to be \$25m to \$70m in any given year. Any payouts will be used for restoration of the reef, for instance by building artificial structures that can increase the height of the reef in case of storm damage.⁵⁰

Latin American and Caribbean

Brazil

- **Lava Jato Investigation in Brazil Targets Ex-CEO of Petrobras and BB**

⁴⁹ ----, "Mexico's Leftist Party Takes Lead over Peña Nieto," <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Mexicos-Leftist-Party-Takes-Lead-over-Pena-Nieto-20170723-0021.html>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

⁵⁰ Fiona Harvey, "Mexico launches pioneering scheme to insure its coral reef," <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/20/mexico-launches-pioneering-scheme-to-insure-its-coral-reef>, Accessed on 31 July 2017.

On July 27, 2017, the Federal Police in Brazil served court orders which included three temporary arrest and eleven search and seizure in the 42nd phase of Lava Jato (Car Wash). The main target was Aldemir Bendine, former head of Petrobras and Banco do Brasil (BB), according to a government news source. In a statement released by the Federal Public Ministry in Paraná (MPF-PR), Bendine is suspected of receiving R\$3 million (currently about US\$946,000) in bribes paid by Odebrecht, the mega-construction company ensnared in the Lava Jato graft scandal. Bendine was in charge of BB between April 17, 2009 and February 6, 2015, and was president of Petrobras between February 6, 2015 and May 30, 2016. According to the MPF-PR, there is also evidence that he asked Odebrecht Agro-Industrial for a pay-off.

Bendine is the first former head of the oil giant to be arrested. Bendine was appointed to head Petrobras when populist Dilma Rousseff was still president. He used the now-impeached president's name "to promote himself with the construction company," the prosecutor said, adding that the investigation had not turned up any evidence implicating Rousseff. Rousseff, who was impeached in 2016 by Congress, had succeeded Lula da Silva as president in 2011. Lula was himself convicted earlier this month on graft charges and given a nine-and-a-half year jail sentence. Moro also ordered the freezing of his assets, estimated at US\$4.3 million.⁵¹

- **Popularity of Brazil's President Temer Plummet to Five Percent**

The government of Brazilian President Michel Temer was considered bad or very bad by seventy percent of the population, says a study released by CNI/Ibope on July 27, 2017. Only five percent consider it good or very good, the lowest positive rate for a Brazilian President since the country's return to democracy in the 1980's. The CNI (National Industry Confederation)-Ibope survey for the second quarter of 2017 was held between July 13 and 16, and interviewed 2,000 people in 125 municipalities. In the previous survey, released in March 2017, ten percent of respondents rated the government as good or very good, 31 percent as regular, 55 percent as bad or very bad, and 4 percent did not know or did not respond.

According to CNI's Research and Competitiveness executive manager, Renato da Fonseca, the low popularity of the Temer government was influenced by the accusations of corruption disclosed by businessman Joesley Batista in 2017 and the difficulties the government has been facing in the economic front. According to the CNI executive the political turbulence faced by the current administration combined with the slow economic recovery seen in the country contributed to one of the lowest popularity rates for any President in Brazil in recent history. Fonseca concluded that the latest poll is as bad as at the end of the Sarney Government (1989) and of President Rousseff's government right before her impeachment.⁵²

⁵¹ Jay Forte, "Lava Jato Investigation in Brazil Targets Ex-CEO of Petrobras and BB," July 27, 2017, <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-politics/lava-jato-investigation-in-brazil-targets-ex-ceo-of-petrobras-and-bb/>, Accessed on July 31, 2017.

⁵² Lise Alves, "Popularity of Brazil's President Temer Plummet to Five Percent," July 28, 2017, <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/rio-politics/popularity-of-brazils-president-plummet-to-five-percent/>, Accessed on July 31, 2017.

Columbia

- **Colombia's FARC will officially become a political party on September first**

Colombia's FARC rebels will officially transform into a political party on September 1, 2017, a major step in reintegrating the former guerillas into civilian life as part of a historic peace deal. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, is the largest and oldest rebel group in the country's long-running civil war. Although a smaller rebel group, the ELN, has yet to put down its weapons, the transition of the FARC into a political party will put a full stop to a 50-year conflict that left 260,000 people dead. FARC commander Carlos Antonio Lozada, whose real name is Julian Gallo, said the group had been working on the details of the "great political-cultural act." The FARC political party's policies and name will be decided at a congress at the end of August. The meeting will take place just days before Pope Francis makes a special four-day visit to Colombia, from September 6-11, 2017, to add his weight to the process of reconciliation. The disarmament in June 2017 by the roughly 7,000 members of Colombia's biggest rebel group under the 2016 peace accord brought a halt to the half-century-old civil war. Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for reaching the historic deal with the FARC that was signed in November 2016. However the FARC conflict has left a quarter of a million dead, about 60,000 Colombians remain unaccounted for and seven million have been displaced in the conflict.⁵³

Venezuela

- **US Refineries Prepare for Imminent Sanctions against Venezuelan Oil**

The United States is already preparing its refineries ahead of imminent sanctions against Venezuela and the state-owned oil company PDVSA. The Valero Energy Corp and Marathon Petroleum Corp refineries said on July 27, 2017 that they plan to work with lighter crude oil this quarter, and to continue to move away from heavy and bitter crude oil supplied by Venezuela and other OPEC producers. Oil deliveries to PDVSA's US subsidiary CITGO have reportedly been substantially reduced from 200,000 barrels per day to 70,000. In June 2017, US imports of Venezuelan crude oil fell 32 percent — a 13-year low of 491,000 barrels per day.

On July 26, 2017, the United States government imposed sanctions on 13 officials in Nicolás Maduro's regime. The sanctions came in response to the human rights violations committed by those officials. Many of them are responsible for allowing and even ordering the violence carried out by law enforcement during months of ongoing protests, during which countless people were injured, arrested and even murdered. Those protests had been organized against the same issue the United States' sanctions are going respond to: Nicolás Maduro's Constituent Assembly,

⁵³ "Colombia's FARC will Officially Become a Political Party on September First," July 26, 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/07/26/colombia-s-farc-will-officially-become-a-political-party-on-september-first>, Accessed on July 31, 2017.

which will rewrite the constitution and more than likely keep him and the members of his regime in power. President Donald Trump warned Maduro not to go through with the Constituent Assembly, or else suffer the consequences of those sanctions, but it's unclear still whether Maduro will back down. If he doesn't, the sanctions would target the PDVSA oil company as a criminal organization due to its ties to a corrupt government.⁵⁴

- **Maduro Bans Public Demonstrations Ahead of Constituent Election**

Venezuela has banned all public demonstrations, Minister of Interior and Justice Néstor Reverol announced this on July 27, 2017. The announcement comes just two days before Nicolás Maduro's dictatorial regime will convene a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the constitution, which has caused international outcry. The Ministry of Interior Relations and Justice threatened those who "organize, support or instigate the carrying out of activities aimed at disrupting the organization and functioning of the electoral service or the social life of the country will be punished with imprisonment of five to 10 years. The completion of the Constituent Assembly is scheduled for Sunday, July 30, 2017. The process has been called illegal by the Venezuelan opposition because the current constitution stipulates that the concept must first be submitted to a public vote.

Opposition leadership has said it will do everything possible to prevent the assembly from being carried out, as it would most likely establish a system of government that keeps Maduro's regime in power. That will now be much harder to do with all protests banned during the assembly itself. Venezuela's opposition has called on citizens to demonstrate against the dictatorship nonetheless in what is being called "The Taking of Venezuela."⁵⁵

Nicaragua

- **Nicaragua Responds to US Sanctions by Announcing \$17 Billion Lawsuit over Decades-old Civil War**

Vice President of Nicaragua Rosario Murilo announced on July 27, 2017 that her country will claim US \$17 billion in compensation from the United States for damages and interference in the Nicaraguan civil war during the 1980s. The measure comes in response to the sanctions listed in the Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality, known as the Nica Act, which was unanimously approved by the US Foreign Relations Committee. The United States was condemned in the 1980s by the International Court of Justice in The Hague for damages to Nicaragua and

⁵⁴ <http://todayvenezuela.com/2017/07/29/us-refineries-prepare-for-imminent-sanctions-against-venezuelan-oil/>

⁵⁵ "Maduro Bans Public Demonstrations Ahead of Constituent Election," July 29, 2017, <http://todayvenezuela.com/2017/07/29/maduro-bans-public-demonstrations-ahead-of-constituent-election/>, Accessed on July 31, 2017.

therefore the Sandinista regime requested compensation of US \$17 billion. However, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's administration refused to accept the money at the time.

This is not the first time that President Daniel Ortega's regime has threatened to file a multi-billion dollar lawsuit against the United States. Since his return to power in 2007, he has done so on at least three occasions: The first was on April 17, 2009 at the Summit of the Americas, claiming then that the amount had actually increased to more than US \$50 billion due to interest and late fees. The second occasion was came on June 25, 2010 during a speech that Ortega gave during an official march. On that occasion, he no longer mentioned the increased price, but only the original amount of \$17 billion. The third time came on July 19, 2011 during the 32nd anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution when he said he would call a referendum "to let the people decide whether or not to charge the United States the debt that they owe Nicaragua."⁵⁶

Russia

- **Russia's Proposal to BRICS for Anti-Terrorist Database**

Nikolai Patrushev, the chairman of Russia's Security Council, on July 28, said during a meeting of security officials from BRICS countries in Beijing that Russia invites all the BRICS nations to participate in an international database for countering terrorism – a project launched by the Federal Security Service in order to target terrorists and their sponsors. In his statement, Patrushev also called upon foreign security officials to be more active in implementing the provisions of international agreements on fighting terrorism, including UN Security Council resolutions concerning terrorists who return from hot spots to their native countries, and measures aimed at destroying channels of terrorism sponsorship. He noted that the latter means an urgent stop to any oil trade with questionable groups in Syria and Iraq.⁵⁷

- **Russia and the New Sanctions**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 30 has said in an exclusive interview with the Rossiya 1 TV channel that more than 750 American diplomats will have to leave Russia by September as a result of Washington's own policies. He said that "The American side has made a move which, it is important to note, hasn't been provoked by anything, to worsen Russian-US relations. [It includes] unlawful restrictions, attempts to influence other states of the world, including our allies, who are

⁵⁶ Elena Toledo, "Nicaragua Responds to US Sanctions by Announcing \$17 Billion Lawsuit over Decades-old Civil War," July 28, 2017, <https://panampost.com/elena-toledo/2017/07/28/nicaragua-responds-to-us-sanctions/>, Accessed on July 31, 2017.

⁵⁷"Russian security chief proposes unified anti-terrorist database for BRICS nations", *RT*, July 28, 2017. <https://www.rt.com/politics/397823-russian-security-chief-proposes-unified/> Accessed on July 31, 2017.

interested in developing and keeping relations with Russia.” He added that “We’ve been waiting for quite a long time that maybe something would change for the better, we had hopes that the situation would change. But it looks like, it’s not going to change in the near future... I decided that it is time for us to show that we will not leave anything unanswered.”⁵⁸ The Russian Foreign Ministry in its statement on July 28 said that Moscow has told the US to reduce the number of its diplomatic staff in Russia to 455 people, and is also halting the use of embassy storage facilities in the capital.⁵⁹

Max Keiser, host of RT’s ‘Keiser Report’ on July 27 said that additional sanctions on Russia may make the American economy suffer greatly. He added that Germany is not going to go along with the sanctions; they are just pushing Germany into the arms of Russia. On July 25, the EU has voiced alarm over the latest anti-Russia sanctions bill, passed by the US House of Representatives. The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker warned the new measures could harm energy security on the continent. The trade restrictions against Russia were included in a bill, which also counters so-called aggression from Iran and North Korea.⁶⁰

- **Russia on North Korea’s Nuclear Arsenal**

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov on July 30 said to ABC’s show ‘This Week’ that the threat posed by North Korea should not be exaggerated and that a rational solution should be found by Russia and the US. He said that *“What they are testing are quite primitive devices which require months for preparation, and which are essentially pieces of equipment with all sorts of wires and additional elements around, which simply cannot be put on top of any missile.”* Ryabkov said that while Moscow was just as keen as Washington to achieve a nuclear free Korean peninsula, any measures taken by the international community must be proportionate and must not demonize North Korea.⁶¹

- **Russia and Internet Ban**

⁵⁸“Putin: 755 US diplomats to depart Russia, time to show we won’t leave anything unanswered”, *RT*, July 30, 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/398019-putin-us-diplomats-sanctions/> Accessed on July 31, 2017.

⁵⁹“Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, July 28, 2017. http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2824435 Accessed on July 31, 2017.

⁶⁰Mark Keiser, “New anti-Russia sanctions is economic suicide for America’ – Max Keiser”, *RT*, July 27, 2017. <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/397718-sanctions-russia-us-bill/> Accessed on July 31, 2017.

⁶¹“N. Korea ‘years and years away’ from viable nuclear device – Russian Deputy FM”, *RT*, July 30, 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/398024-north-korea-years-nuclear-device/> Accessed on July 31, 2017.

Russia has approved a bill on July 21 that would outlaw the use of virtual private networks (VPNs), the Tor anonymity network, anonymous mobile messaging services and internet proxy services, citing concerns about the spread of extremist materials. The bill to ban VPNs and proxy services has been passed by the lower house of Russian parliament, the State Duma only needs to be approved by the upper house and signed by President Vladimir Putin to become law. Once become law, the bill will force the country's internet service providers (ISPs) to block access to any providers of proxy or VPN services. Many Russian citizens use VPNs and other Internet proxy services to access blocked content by routing their traffic through servers outside the country.⁶²

- **Russia and Syria**

President Vladimir Putin on July 26 [signed](#) an agreement with Syria which will give the Russian military access to an airbase on the Mediterranean for another 49 years. Russia will continue to lease the Khmeimim Air Base, in the Latakia province, until at least 2066. The Syrian government conceded to lend the base in Latakia province free of charge.⁶³

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **IEC to Review 7,000 Polling Stations Nationwide**

The Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC) said on 30 July that it will soon start the assessment process of nearly 7,000 polling stations across the country. Up to one thousand more employees have been hired to conduct the review and to identify polling stations, IEC secretary Imam Mohammad Warimach said. This however comes as security still remains a challenge ahead of next year's parliamentary and district council elections, which are scheduled for next July. Meanwhile, the IEC's technical and public awareness officials have said that security threats and the lack of accessibility to remote regions of the country were among key challenges for the election commission.

- **Afghan Parliamentary Delegation to Visit Pakistan**

⁶²"Russia Bans Proxy Services and VPNs to Purge Extremist Content", *The Hacker News*, July 26, 2017. <http://thehackernews.com/2017/07/russian-ban-proxy-vpn-tor.html> Accessed on July 31, 2017.

⁶³"Russia Extends Syrian Airbase Lease by 49 Years", *The Moscow Times*, July 27, 2017. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russia-extends-syrian-airbase-lease-by-49-year-58512> Accessed on July 31, 2017.

An Afghan parliamentary delegation, headed by Wolesi Jirga Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahim, will travel to Pakistan in the near future. The Pakistan visit was discussed during a meeting between Ibarahim, Ambassador Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Farooq Wardak, the speaker's office said. The meeting also discussed the agenda of the parliamentary delegation's talks with political figures from the neighboring country on issues, including the fight against terrorism, the peace process and good neighbourliness. The visit is taking place in response to a request from National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq. A joint parliamentary committee may be formed to work for improving ties between the two parliaments. A Pakistani parliamentary team visited Kabul some months ago.

- **New EU Strategy on Afghanistan to Support Peace, Prosperity**

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission have set a proposal for a new EU strategy on Afghanistan that is "in support of peace and prosperity" in the country, according to an EU statement. "Today, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission have set out their vision for how the European Union can support Afghanistan both to address its challenges and to bring about positive change for the Afghan people," the statement said.⁶⁴

- **Iran, Afghanistan to Link Railway Networks**

Iran and Afghanistan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on July 23, 2017, for implementing a project linking rail networks of the two neighboring countries. The MoU, between Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (IRIR), also known as RAI, and Afghanistan Railway Authority (ARA), was signed by IRIR's Managing Director Saeed Mohammadzadeh and Afghanistan Railway Authority's Director General Mohammad Yamma Shams during a meeting at IRIR's building in Tehran. Alongside the construction of railway between Iran's city of Khaf and Afghanistan's city of Herat, the MOU calls for further railway cooperation between the two sides.⁶⁵

- **Germany Pledges to Expand Economic and Security Support to Afghanistan**

A top German envoy in Afghanistan has said the government of Germany is committed to expand economic and security support to Afghanistan. The Office of the National Security Adviser in a statement said the German envoy Thomas Peter made the remarks during a meeting with the national security adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar on July 27, 2017.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ "New EU Strategy on Afghanistan To Support Peace, Prosperity", *Tolo News*, July 25, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/new-eu-strategy-afghanistan-support-peace-prosperity> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

⁶⁵ "Iran, Afghanistan to Link Railway Networks", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, July 25, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=18699 (accessed on July 31, 2017)

⁶⁶ "Germany pledges to expand economic and security support to Afghanistan", *Khaama Press*, July 28, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/germany-pledges-to-expand-economic-and-security-support-to-afghanistan-03241> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

- **Hizb-e-Islami Commander Ready To Support ANDSF Against Taliban**

A local commander of Hizb-e-Islami in Baghlan has said that he is ready to support the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANDSF) against the Taliban in the central province. Mirwais Jihadyar, who has at least 1,000 fighters, said from now on, he will fight against those groups which threaten the national interests of Afghans. He claimed that he controls the areas that are out of government's control in Baghlan, especially in Baghlan-e-Markazai district. The Hizb-e-Islami commander said they have local courts where they address peoples' judicial problems. According to him, he has control over 150 villages in the province.⁶⁷

Bangladesh

- **Conspiracy claim against Khaleda ill-motivated⁶⁸**

BNP yesterday criticised the ruling party leaders for repeatedly accusing Khaleda Zia of hatching anti-state conspiracies in London. "We sense a conspiracy in such allegation. It is motivated and an outcome of a deep-rooted plot against Khaleda Zia," Rizvi said at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan office in the capital. Several Awami League leaders including its General Secretary Obaidul Quader are creating a smokescreen by claiming that Khaleda Zia is engaged in hatching a conspiracy in London against Bangladesh, Rizvi said. "It is a blatant lie..."

- **Govt behind EC roadmap: BNP⁶⁹**

BNP senior leader Hafizuddin Ahmed on Saturday (July 29) alleged that the Election Commission has prepared its roadmap for the next polls at the behest of the government to present a 'new model of vote rigging', reports UNB. "The Election Commission has given a government-dictated roadmap to take Awami League to power again. It wants to present the nation a new model of vote rigging," he said.

- **WB approves fresh \$570m⁷⁰**

⁶⁷ "Hizb-e-Islami Commander Ready To Support ANDSF Against Taliban", *Tolo News*, July 29, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/hizb-e-islami-commander-ready-support-andsf-against-taliban> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

⁶⁸ "Conspiracy claim against Khaleda ill-motivated," July 29, 2017, *Daily Star*, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/conspiracy-claim-against-khaleda-ill-motivated-1440430> (accessed July 29, 2017)

⁶⁹ "Govt behind EC roadmap: BNP, July 29, *Prothom Alo*, <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/154917/Govt-behind-EC-roadmap-BNP> (accessed July 29, 2017)

The World Bank has now joined the largest-ever programme in Bangladesh's health sector as part of the Washington-based multilateral lender's efforts to bring about qualitative social development in the country. Of the \$14.7 billion total cost for the project, the WB will provide \$515 million. The \$515 million will go towards strengthening the country's health system and improving the quality and coverage of essential service delivery, according to a statement from the WB.

- **Govt loses control over state affairs: BNP⁷¹**

Denouncing the brutal torture on a girl student and her mother in Bogra by ruling party men, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Sunday (July 30) said it has manifested that the government has lost control over state affairs. The party also demanded the government ensure exemplary punishment to those involved in the incident.

- **BNP out to foil next nat'l polls⁷²**

Ministers and ruling Awami League leaders yesterday alleged that BNP is hatching a conspiracy both at home and abroad to foil the next general election, reports BSS. Health and Family Welfare Minister Mohammed Nasim yesterday said BNP is plotting to stop the polls as the party has no trust in countrymen. "BNP is out to misguide people. But they will not be successful," he told the inaugural ceremony of three 10-seated "Ma o Shishu Kollyan Kendro", constructed by Health Engineering Department (HED), at Nischintapur High School under Kazipur upazila in Sirajganj district.

नेपाल

नेपाल

नेपाली कांग्रेस संशोधन बिल को आगे बढ़ाएगी:

नेपाली कांग्रेस की केन्द्रीय कार्यकारी समिति के नेताओं ने पार्टी के नेतृत्व से आग्रह किया है कि संशोधन बिल को चुनाव के तीसरे चरण से पहले मतदान के लिए संसद में पेश किया जाये समिति ने कहा कि यदि इस संशोधन बिल आगे तक ले . के मतदान 2 जाया गया तो प्रान्त संख्याके दौरान राजपा इसे एक मुद्दा बना सकती है और चुनावों में नेपाली कांग्रेस को नुकसान हो सकता है. अब ये बिल चाहे संसद में पास हो या न हो इसे पेश करना जरूरी है .⁷³

⁷⁰ "WB approves fresh \$570m," *Daily Star*, July 30, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/wb-approves-fresh-570m-1440895> (accessed on July 30, 2017)

⁷¹ "Govt loses control over state affairs: BNP," July 30, Prothom Alo, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/155009/Govt-loses-control-over-state-affairs-BNP>

⁷² "BNP out to foil next nat'l polls," *Daily Star*, July 30, 2017, <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/bnp-out-foil-next-natl-polls-1440844>

⁷³ "NC leaders for putting amendment bill to vote:," *The Kathmandu Post*, 24 July 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-07-24/1>

राष्ट्रीय प्रजातंत्र पार्टी सरकार में शामिल नहीं:

प्रधानमंत्री देउबा द्वारा मंत्रालयों के आवंटन 19 के बाद राष्ट्रीय प्रजातंत्र पार्टी ने सरकार में शामिल होने से मना कर दिया है . पार्टी समिति ने कहा कि देउबा ने मंत्रिमंडल का विस्तार एकपक्षीय किया है और अब बातचीत का कोई लाभ नहीं है . सांसद है औ 37 पार्टी ने कहा कि संसद में वे चौथी बड़ी पार्टी है और उनके पासर जून को प्रधानमंत्री के चुनाव में 7 .पार्टी ने देउबा से पांच मंत्रालय मांगे लेकिन बात बनी नहीं .उन्होंने देउबा के पक्ष में वोट डाला था⁷⁴

देउबा ने मंत्रिमंडल का विस्तार किया:

प्रधानमंत्री देउबा ने दिनों बाद अपने मंत्रिमंडल का विस्तार किया जिसमे चार राज 50नीतिक दलों से लोग शामिल है . , बीर बहादुर बल्यार को भौतिक आधारभूत और परिवहन , भीमसेन दास प्रधान को रक्षा , इसके तहत नेपाली कांग्रेस से मोहन बसनेत को सूचना और , मीन विश्वकर्मा को वाणिज्य , न्याय और संसदीय मामले , यज्ञ बहादुर थापा को कानून संजय गौतम को सिं , प्रसारणचाई अम्बिका बसनेत को , राजन के सी को युवा और खेल , राम कृष्ण यादव को कृषि , माओवादी केंद्र के गिरिजामणि . महेंद्र यादव को पेयजल और स्वच्छता मंत्रालय मिले , सहकारिता और गरीबी उन्मूलन टेक बहादुर बसनेत को सामान्य , महेंद्र बहादुर साही को उर्जा , पोखरेल को स्वास्थ्यप्रशासन शिव कुमार मंडल को , आशा खनाल कोइराला को महिला बच्चे और सामाजिक , शांता कुमार थारू चोधरी को लाइव स्टोक विकास , आपूर्ति पर्यटन और नागरिक उड्डयन , नेपाल लोकतान्त्रिक फोरम दल के जीतेंद्र नारायण देव को संस्कृति . कल्याण मंत्रालय मिले तथा गोपाल दहित को भूमि सुधार मंत्रालय मिले सी पी एन संयुक्त की मिथिला चोधरी को जनसँख्या और पर्यावरण . मंत्रालय⁷⁵

Pakistan

- **Nawaz Sharif Steps Down From Prime Ministership**

The Supreme Court on July 28th disqualifies Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for not declaring income from UAE-based Capital FZE to ECP. The judgement declared the prime minister “not honest” under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution, and disqualified him for furnishing a false declaration under solemn oath and having failed to disclose his receivables, constituting assets from Capital FZE, in his nomination papers in terms of Section 12(2)(f) of the Representation of People Act (Ropa) 1976. The unanimous verdict centred round the discovery that the erstwhile prime minister was chairman of the board of Capital FZE, a UAE-based company, and had receivables in the form of a salary from that company, which constituted assets — a fact he failed to disclose in his nomination papers for the 2013 general elections. In addition to disqualifying the prime minister, the Supreme Court gave the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) six weeks to move a number of corruption references against members of the Sharif family before the

⁷⁴ "won't join Deuba government, announce RPP", Onlinekhabar, 28 July 2017, <http://english.onlinekhabar.com/2017/07/28/404167.html>

⁷⁵ "PM deuba inducts 19 ministries", The Kathmandu Post, 27 July 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-07-27/1>

Rawalpindi accountability court. Those who will have cases filed against them include Mr Sharif's three children — Maryam, Hussain and Hassan Nawaz — his son-in-law retired Capt Mohammad Safdar and ex-finance minister Ishaq Dar.

- **Shahbaz Sharif Next PM**

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on July 28th endorsed the nomination of Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif as the next prime minister. Erstwhile Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif proposed the name of his younger brother to see out the remaining 10 months of his party's term in office during a meeting of senior party members at the PM House, which he vacated later. The party nominated Petroleum Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as interim prime minister to enable Shahbaz Sharif to contest for a National Assembly seat. Hamza Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif's son might take over as the Chief Minister of Punjab. Shahbaz will contest the by-election from NA-120 in order to get to the National Assembly. Awami Muslim League (AML) president Sheikh Rashid Ahmed received the forms as a nominee of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) as a Prime Ministerial nominee. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leadership finalised the name of Opposition Leader Syed Khursheed Shah as its candidate.

- **US and Pakistan**

Army Chief General Qamar Bajwa and US commander in Afghanistan Gen John Nicholson agreed on July 24th on the need for remaining engaged. A statement issued by the military's public affairs division after a meeting of the two commanders at the General Headquarters, which was also attended by US Ambassador to Pakistan David Hale, said: "Both agreed on need for continuous engagement and coordination for peace and stability in the region."

Indian Ocean Region

- **IONS Group meeting on Information Sharing & Interoperability concluded in Islamabad**

The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Working Group meeting on Information Sharing & Interoperability concluded in Islamabad on 26 July, 2017.⁷⁶ According to a press release issued by Directorate of Public Relations, Naval Headquarters, Pakistan, during the two day (25- 26 July, 2017), "the working group discussed modalities of sharing information and improving interoperability amongst IONS nations towards the overall objective of increasing maritime

⁷⁶ IONS nations discuss maritime cooperation, 26 July, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/219106-IONS-nations-discuss-maritime-cooperation-at-islamabad>, accessed on 31 July, 2017.

cooperation among navies in the Indian Ocean Region.”⁷⁷ The 13 delegates from nine member countries participated in the meeting.⁷⁸ This IONS Working Group consists of ten member countries namely Australia, Bangladesh, France, India, Iran, Oman, Pakistan, Singapore Thailand and UAE. Pakistan is current chair of IONS working group on Information Sharing & Interoperability.⁷⁹

- **Trials of New Aircraft for INS Vikramaditya**

The Indian Navy is planning to buy 57 fighter aircraft to boost its fleet. For the same, the Indian Navy recently invited 'foreign fighter aircraft vendors' to carry out trials to operate from Russian origin aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya.⁸⁰ According to a media report, French Rafale, Russian MiG 29K, Swedish Sea Gripen, and America's F-18 are key contenders of this Rs. 75000 crore deal.⁸¹ The need for buy new aircrafts for the aircraft carrier came up after the rejection of the naval version of the 'indigenous light combat aircraft'.⁸² India Navy is seeking "twin-engine fighter with a stronger airframe and landing gear to operate from a flight deck with high-tempo flying cycles."⁸³ The trial of aircrafts was needed as "there is a vast difference in take off systems on board the aircraft carriers of Russian and Western origin."⁸⁴

- **Launch of Submarine Acquisition Programme**

The Ministry of Defence, Government of India has initiated the process to acquire conventional six diesel- electric submarines for Indian Navy.⁸⁵ For the same, the Ministry of Defence has issued a Request for Information (RFI) to global manufactures for "six air independent propulsion- enabled submarine" under

⁷⁷ IONS Working Group Meeting on Information Sharing & Interoperability Hosted by Pakistan Navy concluded, Naval Headquarters Islamabad Directorate of Public Relations, 26 July, 2017, [file:///C:/Users/AY/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/D8FBBSKL/IS&I%20IWG%20Meeting%20%20-%20Closing%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/AY/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/D8FBBSKL/IS&I%20IWG%20Meeting%20%20-%20Closing%20(1).pdf), accessed on 31 July, 2017.

⁷⁸ IONS nations discuss maritime cooperation, 26 July 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/219106-IONS-nations-discuss-maritime-cooperation-at-Islamabad>, accessed on 31 July, 2017.

⁷⁹ IONS Working Group Meeting on Information Sharing & Interoperability Hosted by Pakistan Navy concluded, Naval Headquarters Islamabad Directorate of Public Relations, 26 July, 2017, [file:///C:/Users/AY/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/D8FBBSKL/IS&I%20IWG%20Meeting%20%20-%20Closing%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/AY/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/D8FBBSKL/IS&I%20IWG%20Meeting%20%20-%20Closing%20(1).pdf), accessed on 31 July, 2017.

⁸⁰ Rs 75,000 cr deal: Navy carries out simulation trials of new aircraft for INS Vikramaditya, Indigenous Aircraft Carrier, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/ins-vikramaditya-indigenous-aircraft-carrier-new-aircraft-navy/1/1013849.html>, accessed on 31 July, 2017.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Government initiates process to acquire six new submarines for Indian Navy, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/jul/20/government-initiates-process-to-acquire-six-new-submarines-for-indian-navy-1631331.html>, accessed on 31 July, 2017, See also, MoD sought responses from global giants to construct diesel-electric submarine, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/623784/mod-sought-responses-global-giants.html>, accessed on 31 July, 2017.

Project 75I.⁸⁶ According to a media report, the Ministry of Defence issued RFI to six foreign companies which include Rubin Design Bureau of Russia, Naval Group of France, Navantia of Spain, Saab of Sweden, Mitsubishi Heavy Industry of Japan and Thyssen Krupp of Germany.⁸⁷ This initiative is an effort from Government of India to ensure maximum indigenous content in the submarine production.⁸⁸

Maldives

- **Maldivian Constitutional and legal system is designed for a deadlock” enabling the President to be presented to the public with one hand tied behind his back”- President Yameen**

President Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayyoom in his address to the nation on the occasion of Maldives’ 52nd Independence Day on 26th July has stated that the Maldives Constitutional and legal system has been designed for a deadlock. President made reference to the constitutional experts researching the Maldivian constitutional and legal system, stressing that the constitutional framework of the Maldivian system has loopholes allowing enemies of the state to meddle in governmental and state affairs. He further noted that constitutional framework introduced in 2008, is too burdensome and complicated for a country with such limited resources and man power and this complexity is most evident in the Maldivian electoral framework.⁸⁹

- **Official talks held between the Government of Maldives and Pakistan**

Official talks were held as part of the official visit by the Prime Minister of Pakistan H.E. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif to the Maldives. Discussions mainly focused on strengthening cooperation between the two countries in the areas of economics, education, health, tourism, youth and sports. The Pakistani Prime Minister noted that the signing of six important MoUs symbolises the trust, cordiality, and mutual respect between the two countries, on which bilateral bond was based on. He also conveyed Pakistan’s interest in providing training programmes to the Maldives,

⁸⁶ Indian Navy issues RFI for six P-75I AIP submarines, 20 July, 2017, <http://navaltoday.com/2017/07/20/indian-navy-issues-rfi-for-six-p75i-aip-submarines/>, accessed on 31 July, 2017.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Indian inputs to go into making of new, advanced submarines, 25 July, 2017, http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/59745860.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst, accessed on 31 July, 2017.

⁸⁹ “Maldivian Constitutional and legal system is designed for a deadlock” enabling the President to be presented to the public with one hand tied behind his back”- President Yameen, 26th July 2017, <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=18076>

especially in the areas of human resource capacity building, and professional trainings for civil service.⁹⁰

- **India wishes to see Maldivians' aspirations fulfilled**

India wishes to see a Maldives with peace and stability established in which the aspiration of the people are fulfilled, declared India's External Affairs Ministry. The Ministry's spokesperson Gopal Baglay made the remark upon being asked regarding the current political situation in the Maldives. Baglay said, "Maldives is very important neighbour of ours. It is part of SAARC... We attach the highest importance to our relations with Maldives... India wishes to see a stable, prosperous and peaceful Maldives in which aspirations of people of Maldives are fulfilled."⁹¹

During a press conference with President Abdulla Yameen during his visit, Nawaz Sharif had accused India of undermining the spirit of the SAARC as he held them responsible for the cancellation of the 19th SAARC Summit that was to be hosted in Pakistani capital Islamabad last November.

- **Western powers call on Maldives to restore independence of parliament**

Western democracies had called on the Maldivian government to immediately restore the independence of the legislature after the unprecedented expulsion of opposition lawmakers from the Parliament building by the police and military. "The Embassies of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the EU Delegation to Sri Lanka and the Maldives are alarmed by the recent actions of the Government of Maldives which seriously damage and undermine democracy, and run counter to the Maldives' Constitution and the country's international human rights obligations," reads a joint statement released 25th July night.⁹²

- **Seven journalists arrested from opposition protest**

Seven journalists and cameramen from two private TV stations were arrested on 26th July night while covering a protest outside the Maldivian Democratic Party meeting hall in Malé. Adam Janah, Ahmed Riffath, Mohamed Shanoon, and Abdullah Yameen from Sangu TV along with Mohamed Wisam, Murshid Abdul Hakeem and Ahmed Mamdhoo from the opposition-aligned Raajje TV were

⁹⁰ "Official talks held between the Government of Maldives and Pakistan", 25th July 2017, <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=18065>

⁹¹ "India wishes to see Maldivians' aspirations fulfilled", 29th July 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/india-wishes-to-see-maldivians-aspirations-fulfilled/>

⁹² "Western powers call on Maldives to restore independence of parliament", 26th July 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/western-powers-call-on-maldives-to-restore-independence-of-parliament-131691>

arrested around 11 pm from inside the meeting hall, disrupting live coverage of the event. The journalists were accused of obstructing police duty while Specialist Operations officers attempted to disperse the “unlawful gathering”.⁹³

Sri Lanka

- **Sri Lanka condemns hostile acts by North Korea**

The Government of Sri Lanka condemns the firing of a ballistic missile of intercontinental range by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) on 28th July, and the series of recent similar hostile acts by DPRK in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions. DPRK’s continued pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missile programs and proliferation related activity pose a significant threat to international peace and security, the government said.⁹⁴

- **LTTE remains a terrorist organization- EU**

European Union said that it had taken note of the European Court of Justice's judgment annulling measures against the LTTE, namely the designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization and the freezing of LTTE funds. “The judgment is a legal ruling of the European Court of Justice on the procedure used for listing the LTTE. It does not involve any assessment by the Court of the substantive reasons for the designation of the LTTE as a terrorist organization”, a statement from EU said. The annulled measures cover the period 2011-2015. Designations of the LTTE adopted by the Council later in 2015-2017 are not covered by the present ruling. This means that the LTTE remains listed as a terrorist organization by the EU.⁹⁵

- **Amended Hambantota port agreement signed**

The signing of the amended Hambantota port agreement took place on 29th July. Ports Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said that the agreement will be open for further amendments if required. “Any provisions of this agreement can be amended,” the Minister said. Samarasinghe said that the signed agreement will be presented to cabinet and Parliament and will be open for debate.

Under the agreement the Sri Lanka Ports Authority and China Merchant Port Holdings Company Ltd will establish the Hambantota International Port Services Co. (Pvt) Ltd – with a capital of USD 606 million and 50.7% shares to SLPA and

⁹³ “Seven journalists arrested from opposition protest”, 27th July 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/seven-journalists-arrested-from-opposition-protest-131726>

⁹⁴ “Sri Lanka condemns hostile acts by North Korea”, 31st July 2017, <https://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/17565-sri-lanka-condemns-hostile-acts-by-north-korea>

⁹⁵ “LTTE remains a terrorist organization- EU”, 27th July 2017, <https://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/17533-ltte-remains-a-terrorist-organization-eu>

49.3% to CMPort. The Hambantota International Port Group (Pvt) Ltd – with a capital of USD 794 million and 15% shares to SLPA and 85% to CMPort as in SAGT terminal and CICT terminal will also be established.⁹⁶

- **Chinese military looks to improve relations with Sri Lanka**

The Chinese military says it hopes to improve relations with the Sri Lankan military. Senior colonel Xu Jianwei at the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka said that “Chinese military attaches great importance to improving relations with Sri Lanka military and is willing to strengthen exchange and cooperation in areas of college education, troops’ training and maritime safety, so as to develop the military-to-military relations compatible with the comprehensive cooperative partnership between the two countries,” he said.⁹⁷

West Asia

Israel

- **Israel Palestine and Temple Mount** - Security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will gradually increase as long as Muslim access to the Temple Mount remains unrestricted. Last week, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas suspended security coordination with Israel to protest the installation of metal detectors at entrances to the site, a move that sparked widespread protests and condemnation from the Muslim world. However, Israel removed such security restrictions imposed at the Temple Mount in the wake of a deadly terror attack at the site earlier this month. Senior Palestinian officials praised the Shin Bet Security service and the IDF for their handling of the mounting tensions surrounding the Jerusalem holy site, and expressed hope the two sides were on the way to resuming working ties. On July 27th, Israel rolled back all the security steps, including metal detectors, railings and scaffolding for cameras, at entrances to the Temple Mount.⁹⁸
- **Israel and Turkey** – On the issue of installation of metal detectors and security cameras by Israeli security forces at entrances to Temple Mount tensions raised between the Israeli and Turkish leaderships. Tensions started on July 14 when three Palestinian gunmen attacked and killed two Israeli policemen at the gate of the Harem al-Sharif (Temple Mount) compound and escaped inside, where in the al-Aksa Mosque compound they were later killed by security forces. This triggered Israeli lawmakers to install metal detectors and security cameras which triggered

⁹⁶ “Amended Hambantota port agreement signed”, 29th July 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/07/29/new-hambantota-port-agreement-signed/>

⁹⁷ “Chinese military looks to improve relations with Sri Lanka”, 29 July 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/07/29/chinese-military-looks-to-improve-relations-with-sri-lanka/>

⁹⁸ Avi Issacharoff, “Security cooperation with Israel to resume ‘gradually,’ PA official says”, *The Times of Israel*, July 29, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/security-cooperation-with-israel-to-resume-gradually-pa-official-says/> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

large scale protests all throughout West Bank, Gaza and other territories. The executive committee of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has called an emergency meeting in Istanbul on August 1 at the foreign ministers level. They are due to discuss the recent al-Aksa Mosque tension with Israel, following a call by Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan slammed the Israeli government and said the measures aimed not only at the worshipping rights of Muslims but also at the presence of the Palestinians in Jerusalem. An ultra-nationalist/Islamist group called the Alperen Ocakları turned a protest in front of the Neve Shalom Synagogue in Istanbul into a physical attack, threatening to block the worshipping of Turkish Jews in retaliation. On July 25, Erdoğan said he considered the lifting of the metal detectors a “positive step” but stressed that it was “not enough.” He accused the Israeli government of trying to “erase the Muslim presence in Jerusalem.” Adding that the believers of all three monotheistic religions “lived together in peace during Ottoman times for 400 years,” Erdoğan said Jerusalem would never be recognized as the capital of Israel and Turkey was in favor of the 1967 arrangement in which East Jerusalem is accepted as the capital of Palestine and Tel Aviv is the capital of Israel. The same day, Erdoğan had a telephone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron aimed at helping to contain the crisis. But when an Israeli statement on July 26 said “the Ottoman days were over”⁹⁹ and Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, the Turkish Foreign Ministry strongly criticized it and accused the Israeli government of “exceeding its limits.” With the ongoing crisis between the two nations, however, Turkey and Israel are both trying to maintain a reconciliation process that has emphasized giant energy projects, such as the carrying of Israeli gas to European Union markets with or without Cypriot gas. As part of reconciliation moves, a visit of Turkish Energy Minister Berat Albayrak –the son-in-law of President Erdoğan - to Israel has already been announced as the first official contact in years, though no date has been fixed yet.¹⁰⁰

Saudi Arabia and GCC

- **Iraqi Shiite Leader visits Saudi Arabia**

On 30th July 2017, Muqtada al Sadr, an influential Shiite cleric, visited Saudi Arabia for the first time in eleven year.¹⁰¹ He was greeted by the Saudi Minister of State for Gulf Affairs, Thamer Al-Subhan. Thereafter, he met with crown prince Muhammad Bin Salman and other higher Saudi officials.¹⁰² Both the leaders discussed bilateral

⁹⁹ Barak Ravid, “Israel, Turkey continue war of words: 'The days of the Ottoman Empire have passed', *Haaretz*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/turkey/.premium-1.803563> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

¹⁰⁰ “The delicate dynamics of Turkish Israeli tension”, *Hurriyat Daily News*, July 31, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/the-delicate-dynamics-of-turkish-israeli-tension.aspx?PageID=238&NID=116132&NewsCatID=409> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

¹⁰¹ “Muqtada al-Sadr visits Saudi Arabia for the first time in 11 years”, *Al Arabiya*, 30 July 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2017/07/30/Muqtada-al-Sadr-in-Saudi-Arabia-for-the-first-time-in-11-years-.html>

¹⁰² “Iraqi Shi'ite leader Sadr makes rare visit to Saudi Arabia”, *Reuter*, 31 July 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-iraq-cleric-idUSKBN1AF0UN>

and regional issues of common interest. The Saudi News Agency informed that the two leaders “reviewed Saudi-Iraqi relations and a number of issues of mutual interest”.¹⁰³

After meeting, Sadr’s office said, “We have been very pleased with what we found to be a positive breakthrough in the [Saudi-Iraqi relations](#), and we hope it is the beginning of the retreat of sectarian strife in the Arab-Islamic region.”

Saudi Arabia and Iraq had acrimonious past. Riyadh its diplomatic ties with Iraq after a gap of 25 years and sent its diplomats only in 2015. In February 2017, Saudi Foreign Minister *Adil Al Jubair* made a rare visit to Iraq. Iraq’s importance in maintaining regional balance between Shiite Iran and Sunni Arab neighbouring countries holds merit, especially in healing the troubled relations between the two sects. Baghdad is regarded as crucial in establishing a channel of communication between Iran and Arab countries and the two sects, Shia and Sunni.

Last month, Iraq and Saudi Arabia established a Strategic Coordination Council (SCC) to ‘upgrade strategic ties as part of an attempt to heal troubled relations between the Arab neighbors’.¹⁰⁴

Muqtada Al Sadr, known for his anti-American stand, holds large followers in urban poor of Baghdad and southern cities, including Sayara al-Islam, or Peace Brigade militia. Al-Sadr is among those who have called for the disbandment of militias organized in Iraq to help the government fight Daesh extremists. Saudi Arabia and its allies have expressed concern about the influence of Iran over Shiite militias, warning that they could be used against Sunnis in Iraq.¹⁰⁵

On June 19, 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister had visited Iraq and discussed several important issues related to mutual and regional importance and “agreed to fight all types of terrorism”.¹⁰⁶

In recent years, the relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia have improved. However, this gained momentum after President Trump came to power in US. So, it can be concluded that the White House has a common policy to bring all the Arab countries together to fight against the common enemies, especially the Daesh. However, it is not clear whether Baghdad would cross the Rubicon line and join the anti-Iran coalition, which aims to roll back Iran.

Turkey

- **Opposition HDP lawmaker Besime Konca released from prison**¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ “Saudi crown prince meets with Iraq's Moqtada Al-Sadr”, *Arab News*, 31 July 2017

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1137151/saudi-arabia>

¹⁰⁴ Op.cit 2.

¹⁰⁵ Op.cit. 4.

¹⁰⁶ <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2017/06/19/Iraq-s-Abadi-to-visit-Saudi-Arabia-on-Monday-for-the-1st-time-as-premier.html>

Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Siirt deputy Besime Konca was released from prison on July 29 after the approval of her appeal against a 2.5-year prison sentence for disseminating terror propaganda. The 2nd High Criminal Court in the southeastern province of Batman ordered Konca's release considering the five years she remained in custody. She was previously jailed in 2009 on terror charges, and released in 2014.

Konca was jailed for two-and-a-half years on May 29 by the Batman court on a series of charges which included membership of a terror organization and making terror propaganda. Her lawyers had appealed the jail term, but the ruling was upheld on July 13 by a court in the southern province of Gaziantep. Several HDP deputies, including party leaders Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş, were arrested in November.

- **Former president Gül : it will be more right to try Cumhuriyet journalists without arrest**¹⁰⁸

Former Turkish President Abdullah Gül said on July 28 that it would be more appropriate to try daily Cumhuriyet journalists without arrest. "I am saying that it is right to always try journalists without arrest, and now I think that it is more right to try [Cumhuriyet] journalists without arrest. No doubt, the court will give a verdict according to its own conviction. However, I think that it will be an element that would relieve the government in Turkey at home and abroad," Gül told reporters following Friday prayers in the Sarıyer district of Istanbul. The last day of the first hearings in the case of daily Cumhuriyet journalists and executives began on July 28, as a verdict is expected to be announced in the evening hours.

- **Turkish, Chinese militaries to have high-level meeting**¹⁰⁹

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) are going to have a high level dialogue meeting in Ankara before the end of this year, Zheng Qinli, China's military attaché to Ankara announced on July 28. Speaking at the reception to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the PLA Military Attaché, Zheng Qinli said military affairs have a very important place in Chinese-Turkish bilateral relations and he underlined that relations between the two countries' armies are "gaining momentum." "The high level military dialogue meeting between the TSK and the PLA will take place in Ankara before the end of this year.

¹⁰⁷ Hurriyet Daily News 29 July 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opposition-hdp-lawmaker-besime-konca-released-from-prison.aspx?pageID=238&nID=116098&NewsCatID=338>

¹⁰⁸ Hurriyet Daily News 28 July 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/former-president-gul-says-it-will-be-more-right-to-try-cumhuriyet-journalists-without-arrest-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=116072&NewsCatID=338>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2017/07/31/turkish-chinese-militaries-to-have-high-level-meeting>

- **Turkish government steps up attempt to ease economic row with Germany¹¹⁰**

Turkish economy officials have accelerated efforts to tone down a recent row with Germany, vowing that German investments in Turkey were safe and citing a “communication mistake” for reports about an anti-terror probe against hundreds German companies in the country. Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Şimşek has sought to assure German companies that their investments in Turkey are safe and their businesses will not be affected by recent political disagreements between Ankara and Berlin.

In an interview with weekly magazine Der Spiegel published on July 29, Şimşek said Turkey had “left behind a difficult period” after the defeated coup attempt last year, while noting that the Turkish economy was performing well at the moment. “I can assure the business community that Turkey remains an open, liberal and investment-friendly country,” he added. Şimşek stressed that no German firms were being probed by Turkish investigators, amid ongoing investigations into the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), believed to have organized last year’s attempted military takeover.

- **Erdogan: Under guise of fighting terror, Israel trying to take Al-Aqsa Mosque from Muslims¹¹¹**

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in an Ankara speech at an AKP party meeting in parliament that Israel is trying to take the Al-Aqsa Mosque from Muslims under the guise of efforts to fight terrorism.

"Everyone who knows Israel is aware that restrictions on Al-Aqsa mosque are not due to safety concerns," Erdogan said in his strongest statement since the crisis began on the Temple Mount.

The Turkish president was one of the prominent leaders of the Muslim world that attacked Israel in recent days following the placement of metal detectors at entrances to the Temple Mount. Erdogan, who serves as the rotating president of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held a series of phone calls with Arab and Muslim leaders and even raised the issue in a meeting with Saudi King Salman bin Abd al-Aziz earlier this week.

Erdogan called on the world's Muslims to take an active part of the defense of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. "When Israeli soldiers carelessly pollute the grounds of Al-Aqsa

¹¹⁰ Hurriyet Daily News 29 July 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-government-steps-up-attempt-to-ease-economic-row-with-germany-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=116101&NewsCatID=345>

¹¹¹ Haaretz, 25 July 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/turkey/1.803348>

with their combat boots by using simple issues as a pretext and then easily spill blood there, the reason [they are able to do that] is we [Muslims] have not done enough to stake our claim over Jerusalem."

Yemen

- **Houthis claim attack on UAE ship off Yemen's west coast**¹¹²

Yemen's Houthi rebels have said they targeted a military ship belonging to the United Arab Emirates, part of the Saudi-led coalition fighting them in the country. The ship, carrying military equipment, was arriving at Yemen's Mocha port from Eritrea's Assab port when it was attacked, Houthi officials said on Saturday. The Saudi Press Agency, citing a statement by the coalition, said that Houthis used an explosives-laden boat, which struck the pier close to a group of ships at Mocha. It added that there were no casualties or any substantial damage.

UAE vessel is the third ship belonging to the coalition to be attacked off Yemen's western coast since the beginning of 2017, according to AP news agency. Also on Saturday, Yemeni officials said that forces loyal to President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi took full control of a key military base, known as Khalid Ibn al-Walid, near Yemen's west coast. Clashes that raged over the base between forces loyal to Hadi and Houthis, who controlled it for more than two years, have killed dozens on both sides.

Later on Saturday, other Yemeni officials said that 13 of Hadi's forces were killed after Houthis attacked a military site south of the city of Taiz, on the southwest coast. They said that five Houthis were killed in the clashes and expected the death toll among Hadi's forces to rise.

Cyber Security

- **CIA on Chinese cyberspying**¹¹³

A senior CIA analyst said China is continuing to conduct aggressive cyberespionage operations against the U.S., contrary to claims by security experts who say Beijing curbed cyberattacks in the past few years.

"We know the Chinese are very active in targeting our government, U.S. industry and those of our partners through cyberespionage," said Michael Collins, deputy

¹¹² Al Jazeera, 30 July 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/houthis-claim-attack-uae-ship-yemen-west-coast-170729184615831.html>

¹¹³ Washington Times, 26 July 2017, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jul/26/cias-china-cyberattack-analysis-contradicts-securi/>

assistant CIA director and head of the agency's East Asia Mission Center. "It's a very real, big problem, and we need to do more about it," Mr. Collins told a recent security conference in Aspen, Colorado.

Mr. Collins said solving the problem of Chinese cyberattacks will require an "all-of-government, all-of-country approach to pushing back against it." The comments contradict a number of cybersecurity experts who have said Beijing's digital spying and information theft decreased sharply as a result of the 2015 agreement between President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The two leaders announced the cyber deal with great fanfare and said both countries had agreed to curtail cyberespionage against businesses.

- **Middle East cybersecurity: Is region's big spend aimed at the right targets?¹¹⁴**

Data published by Research and Markets earlier this year predicts that the Middle East's cybersecurity market will almost double in the next five years, up from \$11.38bn in 2017 to \$22.14bn by 2022. Much of this growth is driven by government expenditure, with protection of the oil, gas, and defense industries leading the charge. Healthcare, and recognition by smaller businesses of their own cybersecurity needs, will also play a role in this growth.

Research and Markets notes that across these sectors, the key drivers for this increased outlay are factors such as the "need to mitigate IT security risks and threats, including malware, ransomware, and advanced persistent threats, along with a rising enterprise mobility trend across organizations".

Across the region, investment in cybersecurity is projected to grow at an average 14.2 percent compound annual growth rate over the next five years, with Saudi Arabia expected to be the largest national market. Qatar, which is currently embroiled in the diplomatic and economic fallout from an alleged Russian-led cyberattack, is predicted to be the fastest-growing market for cybersecurity in the region, as it gears up for hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

Despite these impressive numbers, Research and Markets nonetheless cautions that "the high cost of innovation and budget constraints of organizations limit the growth of the market". The impact of 'oil shock', which has dramatically reduced petrochemical revenues, is one contributor here. But other long-standing cultural and structural issues may also play a role.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.zdnet.com/article/middle-east-cybersecurity-is-regions-big-spend-aimed-at-the-right-targets/>

Successive reports, such as those from PwC in 2016 and Strategy& in 2015, have previously identified the region's cybersecurity frailties, noting challenges in areas such as cybersecurity governance, strategy, and skills.

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	July 30	Quetta / Balochistan	A search operation was launched by the Frontier Corps in the Kili Deeba and adjoining areas of provincial capital Quetta to consolidate peace in the locality. FC Commander Quetta Brigadier Khalid Baig said that more than 3,000 personnel, among them 208 women, were participating in the operation. ¹¹⁵	Search operation	
2	July 30	Karachi / Sindh	According to security officials, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is attempting to re-establish its financial network in Karachi in a bid to increase its capability to launch terrorist attacks. The officials also claimed that although the capability of banned Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) had almost been wiped out, its activities were increasing particularly in upper Sindh. ¹¹⁶	Report	
3	July 29	Panjgur / Balochistan	At least four people were killed and five others were injured in a bomb blast in Chedgi area of Panjgur District near the Iranian border. Deputy Commissioner Panjgur	4	5

¹¹⁵ Saleem Shahid, Search operation launched in Quetta, *Dawn*, July 31, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1348670/search-operation-launched-in-quetta>, accessed on July 31, 2017.

¹¹⁶ Imtiaz Ali, TTP trying to re-establish financial network in Karachi for renewed strikes, *Dawn*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1348415/ttp-trying-to-re-establish-financial-network-in-karachi-for-renewed-strikes>, accessed on July 31, 2017

			Abdul Jabbar Baloch confirmed the incident. ¹¹⁷		
4	July 26	Charsadda / Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	A religious scholar and leader of the Jama'at Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), identified as Maulana Haq Nawaz Haqqani, was shot dead while he was going for <i>Fajr</i> (morning) prayer at about 4.20 a.m. in Shabqadar <i>tehsil</i> (revenue unit) of Charsadda District. Haqqani was the administrator of Jamia Muhammadia in the Matta Mughalkhel area. ¹¹⁸	1	0
5	July 25	Lahore Punjab	The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in Lahore arrested two terrorists belonging to the TTP and its splinter group Jama'at-ul-Ahrar (JuA). The two have been identified as Ali Noor and Sartaj Khan. According to CTD statement, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and grenades were recovered from their possession. ¹¹⁹	Arrest	

Afghanistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	July 30	Baghlan	Ministry of Defense (MoD) said that the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANDSF) launched an operation against the Taliban in Baghlan-e-Markazi District of Baghlan	ANDSF recapture from Taliban	

¹¹⁷ Syed Shah Ali, 4 killed in Balochistan blast near Pak-Iran border, *Dawn*, July 29, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1348388/4-killed-in-balochistan-blast-near-pak-iran-border>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹¹⁸ Faiz Muhamamd, JUI-F leader shot dead in Charsadda, *Dawn*, July 27, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1347959/jui-f-leader-shot-dead-in-charsadda>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹¹⁹ Terrorist bids in Lahore, Bajaur foiled by security forces, *Dawn*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1347583/terrorist-bids-in-lahore-bajaur-foiled-by-security-forces>, accessed on July 31, 2017

			Province and have seized control of the Taliban's deployment and administration centre. ¹²⁰		
2	July 28-29	13 Provinces	A statement from the National Directorate of Security (NDS) said that intelligence operatives conducted 26 independent and joint operations round-the-lock, killing 167 Taliban militants and injuring 135 others. The raids were carried out in 14 Provinces, including Kabul, Zabul, Badghis, Kapisa, Nangarhar, Paktia, Herat, Ghor, Badakhshan, Faryab, Baghlan, Helmand and Nimroz. ¹²¹	167	135
3	July 27-28	Faryab	The Security Forces recaptured the Kohistan District Centre from Taliban's control, following drone strikes and a major ground operation for two consecutive days. This led to 200 Taliban casualties. The Taliban had captured the Kohistan District Centre on July 20, 2017, besieging more than 60 personnel from the commandos unit, the army and police. ¹²²	Recapture from Taliban control	
4	July 26	Kabul	At least 10 journalists were killed in Afghanistan in the first half of 2017, showing a 35 per cent surge over laast year, according to Afghan Journalists' Safety	Report	

¹²⁰ Taliban Pushed Back from Baghlan-e-Markazi, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, July 31, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/July%2031,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, p. 2, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹²¹ Round-the-Clock Raids leave 167 Taliban Dead, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, July 30, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/July%2030,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, p. 2, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹²² 200 Taliban suffer casualties in battle for Kohistan, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, July 29, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/archive.php>, p. 2, accessed on July 31, 2017

			Committee (AJSC), an independent media watchdog. ¹²³		
5	July 24	Kabul	At least 36 civilians were killed and 40 others were injured in suicide bombing, targeting a bus carrying employees of the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum in Kabul. ¹²⁴	36	40

Iraq

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	July 30	Iraq-Syria border	The Defense Ministry's War Media Cell said that Iraqi warplanes killed 20 Islamic State militants and destroyed six vehicles at Tal Sufouq, a region at Nineveh's borders with Syria. ¹²⁵	20	0
2	July 30	Mosul	Three civilians were killed and seven others injured when a landmine planted by ISIS exploded in Ras al-Jadda District, northwest of Mosul. ¹²⁶	3	7
3	July 27	Saladin	Security forces killed two IS suicide attackers trapped inside an abandoned house at Silo al-	2	0

¹²³ 10 Afghan Journalists killed in first half of 2017, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/July%2026,%202017/Front%20page.pdf>, accessed on July 26, 2017

¹²⁴ Death Toll Rises to 36 in Kabul Suicide Bombing, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, July 25, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/July%2025,%202017/Front%20page.pdf>, p. 1, accessed on July 27, 2017

¹²⁵ Mohamed Mostafa, Iraqi forces kill 20 IS militants near Syrian borders: military media, *Iraqi News*, July 31, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraqi-forces-kill-20-militants-near-syrian-borders-military-media/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹²⁶ Nehal Mostafa, IED blast kills three civilians, wounds seven others in western Mosul, *Iraqi News*, July 30, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/ied-blast-kills-three-civilians-wounds-seven-others-western-mosul/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

			Haggag area north of Tikrit, Saladin. ¹²⁷		
4	July 26	Saladin	A prominent Islamic State guide, identified as Barhoum, was killed in an explosion while accompanying militants in Mutaibija, east of Saladin Province. ¹²⁸	1	0
5	July 26	Mosul	A civilian was killed, while three others were wounded as a mortar missile fell in Hamid Shaaban region, west of Baghdad. ¹²⁹	1	3

Syria

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	July 30	Deir Ezzor	The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) reached the northern border of the Deir Ezzor Governorate for the first time in several years after liberating three villages near the Islamic State-held town of Ma'adan. ¹³⁰	SAA reached Deir Ezzor	
2	July 30	Aleppo	An unnamed source revealed that Syrian rebels shelled, using heavy artillery, military headquarters and locations of the Syrian Democratic Forces in the area of	NS	NS

¹²⁷ Mohamed Mostafa, Ministry: 2 Islamic State suicide attackers killed north of Tikrit, *Iraqi News*, July 27, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/ministry-2-islamic-state-suicide-attackers-killed-north-tikrit/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹²⁸ Nehal Mostafa, Baghdadi's guide to Mosul killed in bomb blast east of Salahuddin, *Iraqi News*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/baghdadis-guide-mosul-killed-bomb-blast-east-salahuddin/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹²⁹ Nehal Mostafa, Mortar missile, IED blast leave civilian killed, six others wounded in Baghdad, *Iraqi News*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/mortar-missile-ied-blast-leave-civilian-killed-six-others-wounded-baghdad/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹³⁰ Leith Fadel, Syrian Army reaches northern Deir Ezzor for the first time in years: map, *Al Masdar News*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-reaches-northern-deir-ezzor-first-time-years-map/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

			Afrin, north of Aleppo.		
3	July 30	Damascus	At least 10 civilians, including seven children and two women, were killed and 50 others were injured in an air strike, carried out by the Government forces on the town of Arbin, in eastern Ghouta of Damascus. ¹³¹	10	50
4	July 27	Raqqa	The SDF managed to recapture several neighbourhoods and security points, belonging to the IS, since the beginning of the “Wrath of the Euphrates” military operation in the city in June 2016. The spokesperson of the “Wrath of the Euphrates” Operation Command, Jihan sheikh Ahmad, said in a press statement, “The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is now controlling 50% of the city [Raqqa].” ¹³²	SDF recapture territory from IS	
5	July 27	Raqqa	IS’s media arm announced electing the group’s “Princess of the Women” in Tal Afar, identified as Um Hajar, a Russian national. She is famous for using sniping gun. ¹³³	IS Princess of Women elected	

International Economic Issues

- **IMF to launch new form of aid, with no money**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced on July 26, 2017 that it will launch a new tool, new non-financing Policy Coordination Instrument (PCI), to

¹³¹ Loaa Adel, Syrian regime airstrike kills 10 civilians, wounds 50 others in eastern Ghouta, *Iraqi News*, July 25, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/syrian-regime-airstrike-kills-10-civilians-wounds-50-others-eastern-ghouta/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹³² Loaa Adel, Jihan Sheikh Ahmad: SDF captures 50% of Raqqa, *Iraqi News*, July 27, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/jihan-sheikh-ahmad-sdf-captures-50-raqqa/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

¹³³ Nehal Mostafa, Islamic State ‘Princess of the women’ elected in Tal Afar, *Iraqi News*, July 27, 2017, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/islamic-state-princess-women-elected-tal-afar/>, accessed on July 31, 2017

support governments in financial trouble: one that involves no money. According to that IMF statement, “The new instrument is designed to help countries unlock financing from official and private donors and creditors,” “It enables them to signal commitment to reforms and catalyze financing from other sources.” The new non-financing PCI, which unlike traditional fund programmes will not have any eligibility criteria, as long as the country is not delinquent in payments to the IMF. Rather than providing loans in exchange for strict adherence to an agreed programme of economic and financial reforms—with performance targets reviewed quarterly—the IMF will focus only on the government’s policy package. But the IMF stressed that “policies supported under the instrument would be required to meet the same standard as those required under a standard IMF loan.”¹³⁴

- **India tells WTO to follow credible negotiating process**

On July 25, 2017, India’s new trade envoy, J.S. Deepak, asked the World Trade Organization (WTO) Director General, Robert Azevedo, to follow credible negotiating processes, as established under the Doha work programme of 2001, and avoid questionable practices, ahead of the 11th ministerial conference in Buenos Aires in December later this year. In his first intervention at the informal trade negotiations committee (TNC) meeting, Shri Deepak drew several markers for bringing credible developmental outcomes at the WTO. India “cannot imagine a substantive outcome at MCXI (11th ministerial conference) without a permanent solution on food security.” India along with China, called for elimination of most trade-distorting farm subsidies, called the aggregate measurement of support (AMS). The US, the European Union (EU), Japan, Norway, and Switzerland, among others, provide annually \$160 billion for AMS to their rich farmers.

India sought to know from the DG “the need for having informal HODs (heads of delegation) (meeting) to be chaired by him.” India’s concern was shared by Uganda and several other countries. In his response to the issues raised by India, Mr. Azevedo said he will follow the informal TNC meeting for negotiating the outcomes while insisting that the HOD meeting will be used for providing transparency to members on various issues.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ “IMF to launch new form of aid, with no money”, *Livemint*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.livemint.com/Money/sOs08FLSpK1OITx15tmaKP/IMF-to-launch-new-form-of-aid-with-no-money.html> (accessed on July 31, 2017)

¹³⁵ D. Ravi Kanth, “India tells WTO to follow credible negotiating process”, *Livemint*, July 25, 2017, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/Wrkmc3nCjxRkegCaAm7KAJ/India-tells-WTO-to-follow-credible-negotiating-process.html> (accessed on July 31, 2017)