

Weekly Media Updates **(16-22 October, 2017)**

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Africa

- **South Sudan to Revive Crude Oil Operations¹**

South Sudan is determined to restore security in the country in order to resume normal crude oil production and attract investments. The oil sector has been battered since South Sudan's civil war started in December 2013. With 95 per cent of the economy relying on oil revenues, the country hopes to restart normal crude production. The government has cut down on social welfare programmes like health and education, put on hold investments in infrastructure, companies are laying off workers and foreign firms are fleeing.

James Wani Igga, South Sudan's Vice president said that the past 18 months have been challenging for the oil industry because the conflict and declining oil prices have led them to make painful decisions and adjustments. The country estimates that the current 3.5 billion barrels of recoverable crude reserves represents only 30 per cent of its oil potential, with 70 per cent remaining unexplored. South Sudan also has three trillion cubic metres of recoverable natural gas. With production currently standing at 130,000 barrels per day being produced by Dar Petroleum Operating Company, and crude prices at the international market at a depressed low of \$48 per barrel, South Sudan's economy is struggling.

Restored security will not only enable the country to increase production to pre-crisis levels of 300,000 barrels per day, but also encourage investors to return. Before becoming an independent state in 2006, South Sudan was producing about 500,000 barrels per day.

- **Chinese Exhibit Compares Black People to Animals²**

A Chinese Exhibit showcased photography in a section dubbed "This Is Africa", which juxtaposed images of wild African animals with black African people, that caused an uproar for its racist connotations.

The Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan included side-by-side photographs from photographer Yu Huiping of animals and people displaying similar expressions. One pair included a young boy and a howling chimpanzee, each photographed with their mouths agape. The section's pictures, which were apparently meant to celebrate the harmony between man and nature were taken down after massive complaints the exhibit's curator said in a statement. African students studying in China complained to their university deans while others petitioned their embassies, according to students and professionals in these circles.

A Ghanaian master's student at Tsinghua University studying global affairs said "It's not shocking. Africans are not strangers to racism here in China or elsewhere. But it is sad

¹ The East Africa , 17 October 2017

http://allafrica.com/stories/201710170543.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Ainternal&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabafbt

² <https://thisisafrika.me/chinese-exhibit-black-people-animals/>, 18 October 2017

that despite deepening economic connections and interactions between Chinese and Africans, there's still clearly so much racism and lack of cultural understanding.

- **Keep off Kenyan Affairs, Uhuru Tells Foreign Powers³**

President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto have fired a warning shot to foreign countries, accusing them of trying to interfere with Kenya's affairs. Speaking during political rallies in Nyahururu and Karatina, the two said the country was not in a crisis to deserve interference by the foreign countries. The Head of State said the country will not allow dialogue between him and Mr Odinga spearheaded by the foreign countries.

While maintaining that Kenya was a sovereign state, he said: "We will not allow wazungu (whites) to come and tell us what to do. If they come to Kenya, let them come as tourists." He also blamed Mr Odinga for demonstrations and destruction of property in various parts of the country, saying any person involved in protests must be dealt with accordingly. The President appealed to voters in the county to turn up in large numbers for the October 26 repeat election and cast their votes.

Mr Ruto accused Mr Odinga of begging the international community to force mediation talks to form a coalition government.

- **Panama Papers: Africa's Elite are Plundering their Countries⁴**

A new report based on the Panama Papers reveals how Africa's politicians, generals and business leaders are systematically siphoning off billions of dollars and parking the money offshore.

The investigative report, "The Plunder Route to Panama", highlights how Africa's leaders are doing more than accepting bribes from foreign companies or evading tax. Rather, they are systematically setting up power structures run by favored friends or family members to steal billions of dollars and store the loot outside of their countries, the report finds. This cuts budgets, hinders development and keeps people impoverished.

The investigation by a consortium of African journalists was inspired by the Panama Papers, a massive leak of documents of offshore accounts and companies that included the names of numerous African politicians

Togo, for example, is home to vast reserves of phosphate directly managed from the offices of President Faure Gnassingbe, whose family have ruled the West African country for 50 years. Togo earns 40 percent of its export earnings from the mineral, which is crucial for making fertilizers. The investigation found that phosphate would generate

³ Daily nation, 16 October 2017,

http://allafrica.com/stories/201710160005.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aacblp

⁴ DW, 18 October 2017

http://allafrica.com/stories/201710180191.html?utm_campaign=allafrica%3Aeditor&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_content=promote%3Aaans%3Aabkopt

more wealth if it weren't being sold for two thirds of the going rate to a "shady" shipping family called Gupta.

The report found a similar situation in Mozambique, where half of the world's rubies are mined. Dozens of generals, ministers and high-ranking party members hold ruby licenses. Villagers in the mining areas have been forcibly removed from their traditional lands, and even beaten and killed. Despite a UK company paying Mozambique's government millions in ruby royalties, a percentage of which is supposed to flow back to these impoverished communities, there is no record of this money ever arriving.

In Botswana, tourism is the preferred method of plundering the country's coffers. The report says President Ian Khama, along with his relatives and friends, virtually control Botswana's tourism industry through interests in major agencies, channeling profits offshore.

"The Plunder Route to Panama" report sounds a small note of optimism, noting that protests against kleptocratic governments have flared up in a number of African countries from Togo to Kenya and DR Congo.

In South Africa, the demonstrations have even shown some signs of success, with banks closing the accounts of the Gupta family, close friends of President Jacob Zuma linked to money laundering and fraud.

North Africa

- **Dozens killed in a terror ambush in Egypt** ⁵

According to high level security source in Cairo, at least 58 security personnel were killed in a confrontation with terrorist in the western desert Wahat towards Libyan border and around 135 kilometers south west of town of Cairo. The terrorist used rocket guided bombs (R B G) against the armed policemen to kill them while the police forces raided a hideout of terror outfits in the region which caused large scale casualty among the police forces and terrorists as well. The police forces had moved to the hideouts on the basis of inputs from the intelligence agency about their movement in the region but their convoy was bombed before they could reach the post. In addition, during the encounter at least 20 twenty terrorists were also killed. According to sources in the Interior Ministry, Police cordoned off the area while search operation was underway.

In recent months, the police force in northern Sinai have been facing major security challenges after the different terror groups backed by the ISIS have intensified the war against the Egyptian state and in last three years after the removal of Morsi hundreds of policeperson have been killed in similar attacks.

⁵ Asharqal Awsat, <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1058546/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-14-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%AF%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86>

Meanwhile, the Parliament approved the presidential decree for further imposing emergency in the country. The Prime Minister asserted that the move would not undermine the freedom of the citizens and claimed that it was necessary to intensify the war against terror in the country.

- **Former President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh to attend conference in Moscow⁶**

The former President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh in an interview told that he has been invited to participate in the international conference on Yemen in Moscow. He said that he has been invited by an institute in Moscow to attend the deliberation on two major issues: terrorism and how to fight it and how to bring Yemen out of the present quagmire.

- **Parliamentary defense committee in Egypt to recommend El-Sisi to contest the next election⁷**

According to Ahram online sources, the parliament's defense and national security committee in Egypt has prepared a message of support to send to Egypt's president Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi. The message calls upon President El-Sisi to contest Egypt's 2018 presidential election. Members of the committee want to see President El-Sisi running in this election because this is very important to the country's security and stability. The released message that President El-Sisi has shown a good example of loyalty to national interests, firm resolve, and high creativity in leading Egypt, not to mention his prominent role in restoring Egypt's role in international circles, members recommend that he runs for a second four-year in office. It is important to mention that El-Sisi has so far refrained from officially announcing that he will run in next year's election. However he has said many times that he was ready to run again for president only if wished by the people of Egypt.

Central Asia

- **SCO Justice Ministers' Meeting in Uzbekistan**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) organized the fifth conference of Justice Ministers of SCO member countries in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on 20 October 2017. Other participants to the meeting included SCO observers Afghanistan, Belarus and Iran, SCO Secretariat and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS).⁸

The participants discussed range of issues on increasing cooperation in the legal field among member states and to further ensure the rule of law, protection of rights and

⁶ *Railyoum*, <http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=762694>

⁷ Ahramonline,

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/278519/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-parliaments-defence-committee-recommends-Pre.aspx>

⁸ SCO, "SCO Justice Ministers gather in Tashkent," 20 October 2017, <http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20171020/339333.html>

legitimate interests of citizens. They also deliberated on the introduction of modern mechanisms of legal support for investments in the SCO area.⁹

Since becoming the full member of the organization in June 2017, India has been participating in different SCO meetings. Minister of State for Law and Justice and Corporate Affairs Shri P.P. Chaudhary represented India in the meeting. He also held a bilateral meeting with Minister of Justice of Uzbekistan Mr. Ruslanbek Davletov. The two Ministers discussed the improvements being made in the legal fields in the two countries. They also explored the potential areas of cooperation between the two countries.¹⁰

- **CSTO Exercise in Kazakhstan**

The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) held ‘The Unbreakable Brotherhood 2017’ military exercises with the peacekeeping forces on the post-conflict resolution. The exercises were held from 16 to 20 October in the Almaty region.¹¹

The main objective of the exercise was to enhance mutual cooperation and increase interoperability of peacekeeping forces of the CSTO countries. The tasks during the exercise included escorting humanitarian supplies, patrolling and performing service at checkpoints and observation posts and blocking and eliminating militant training camps.

China

- **Opening-up will remain the basic policy of China¹²**

China will stick to the policy of opening-up and further expand market access to foreign investors, the spokesman of the Communist Party of China's 19th National Congress said on Tuesday. Spokesman Tuo Zhen said at a news conference for the congress that opening-up is a basic national policy and China's attitude of "opening to the world" is clear.

Citing the pledge of CPC Central Committee General Secretary and Chinese President Xi Jinping to be consistent in the country's policy of protecting the legal interests of foreign investors in China, Tuo said that there will be renewed efforts to attract foreign investors in the future as opening-up and reform continues. "The goal is to see a win-win result and common development," he said.

⁹ Diana Aliyeva, "Justice ministers of SCO member states convene in Tashkent," 21 October 2017, <https://en.trend.az/casia/uzbekistan/2811031.html>

¹⁰ Embassy of India, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, "Visit of Hon'ble MoS (Law and Justice) to Uzbekistan for 5th SCO Justice Ministers' Meeting," 19 October 2017, <http://eoi.gov.in/tashkent/?6460?000>

¹¹ Astana Times, "Kazakhstan hosts CSTO Unbreakable Brotherhood 2017 exercises," 22 October 2017, <https://astanatimes.com/2017/10/kazakhstan-hosts-csto-unbreakable-brotherhood-2017-exercises/>

¹² http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/18/content_33396286.htm

- **CPC's governance wisdom leading China to bigger role in global development¹³**

China, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), has in recent years served as a stabilizing factor and source of wisdom in a world troubled with uncertainties and challenges. Reading the signals from the ongoing 19th CPC National Congress, analysts worldwide said they are confident that the CPC will lead China to make more contributions to world peace and development.

David Shambaugh, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a leading U.S. think tank, said that China "has a particularly important leadership role to play in global governance." He mentioned various areas in which the world has seen China significantly increase its contributions, including climate change, global health, international peacekeeping, global economic governance, energy security and reshaping multilateral institutions. China was one of the first to sign the Paris Agreement, and has reaffirmed its commitment to fighting global warming after the United States announced its decision in June to withdraw from the accord.

- **China's home prices continue to stabilize¹⁴**

China's property market continued to show signs of cooling as home prices were falling or posting slower growth in major cities amid tough control policies, official data showed Monday, 23 October. On a yearly basis, of the 70 cities surveyed in September, the pace of new home price growth slowed in 15 major cities compared with the same month of last year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said. On a month-on-month basis, new home prices fell or remained flat in the 15 cities in September, according to the NBS data.

- **Xi instructs Party to put people first¹⁵**

Rural official Pan Kegang said what General Secretary Xi Jinping said at his village two years ago has been a motto to remind him to work for the people. Whether the Party's policy is good or not depends on whether it makes the people smile or cry, Xi said during an inspection tour of the impoverished village of Huamao in Guizhou province in June 2015.

Pan, a delegate to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, recalled the words when Xi attended a panel discussion with Guizhou delegates on Thursday as part of the congress. Pan, presenting Xi with a photo showing the enormous changes taking place in the once-poor village, said, "We will work harder to give people more smiles." This people-centered philosophy is an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era unveiled at the congress. In the report delivered at the opening session on Wednesday, Xi urged all Party members to "always breathe the same breath as the people, share the same future and stay truly connected to them".

¹³ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/1023/c90000-9283530.html>

¹⁴ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-10/23/content_33600348.htm

¹⁵ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-10/23/content_33591764.htm

European Union

- **India-EU Negotiation on BTIA**

India and the EU will, reportedly, resume negotiations on Broad based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) in mid November 2017. There are multiple issues, for instance, intellectual property rights and duty cut on automobile and spirits need to be addressed. Ambassador of the EU to India, Tomasz Kozlowski said, “We want concluding of a broad and comprehensive FTA.” He added, “It has to be a win-win situation.”¹⁶ Recently, 14th India-EU Summit was held in New Delhi.

- **Brexit Negotiations**

It seems that the EU and the UK may move to discuss their relationships after the Brexit. Earlier it was reported that sufficient progress has not been made in the negotiations. German Chancellor Angela Merkel indicated that some progress had been made. She said, “We have made progress, and it is perhaps the nature of the thing that we look at it step by step.” She hoped that a good Brexit deal would be reached by March 2019. Donald Tusk also talked about internal preparations for the second phase of Brexit.¹⁷ British Prime Minister Theresa May wants to make progress in the negotiations, so, an orderly exit from the EU may be possible. Her speech in Florence was seen as an effort in this direction.

- **EU Leaders Support Iran Nuclear Deal**

EU leaders have supported the Iran Nuclear Deal signed in 2015. The EU leaders consider the deal is “a pillar of efforts to reduce the global nuclear threat.”¹⁸ However, US President Donald Trump has criticized the deal.

- **France to Enhance Internal Security**

French President Emmanuel Macron has planned to enhance the internal security in the country. In a speech to police forces at the presidential Elysée Palace, he unveiled his plan for enhancing the internal security. His plan includes creation of a “daily security force” within the police, combat radicalisation and reforms to asylum procedures. He announced to employ 10,000 extra police and gendarmes as well as promised to provide more technology to police force to use in operations.¹⁹

¹⁶ India-EU FTA: chief negotiators to meet mid-November, the Economic Times, October 18, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-eu-fta-chief-negotiators-to-meet-mid-november/articleshow/61127902.cms>

¹⁷ Bianca Nobilo, Angela Merkel eases Theresa May's Brexit nightmare, CNN, October 20, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/20/europe/brexit-talks-european-council-merkel-may/index.html>

¹⁸ Defying Donald Trump, European Union leaders commit to Iran nuclear accord, the Indian Express, October 20, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/defying-donald-trump-european-union-leaders-commit-to-iran-nuclear-accord-4898433/>

¹⁹ Macron sets out counter-terror programme for next five years, France 24, October 18, 2017, <http://www.france24.com/en/20171018-macron-france-counter-terror-security-agenda-5-years>

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

- **Shizo Abe's ruling coalition retains two-thirds majority in Japanese election**

In the October 22, 2017 Lower House election, incumbent Prime Minister Shizo Abe secured a thumbing two-third majority in his bid to stay in power. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-Komeito bloc won 312 seats in the 465-member Lower House. Endorsing three independents after the election LDP secured 283 seats alone nearly unchanged from the 284 it held before the election. Kibo no To (Party of Hope), the upstart headed by Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike, struggled at 49 seats. The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, another new party consisting of members who chose not to join Kibo no To, made big headway by bagging 54 seats. This made the CDP the biggest opposition party. LDP's coalition partner Komeito secured 29, Japan Community Party won 12 and Hope Party's coalition partner Nippon Inshin won 10 seats.²⁰

- **Pyongyang won't return to six-party talks until change in Washington's attitude: N.K. diplomat**

On October 21, 2017 Choe Son-hui, director-general of the North American department of North Korea's foreign ministry said that Pyongyang will not return to multilateral talks until it resolves issues with the United States. Choe made the remark during a session at an international forum on nonproliferation in Moscow. Choe said the North will continue developing its nuclear program if the U.S. does not give up on its hostile policies toward Pyongyang. South Korea sent its deputy nuclear envoy, Lee Sang-hwa, to the forum, but there was no bilateral meeting between Lee and Choe.²¹

- **S. Korea, U.S., Japan agree to seek all possible diplomatic options on N.K.**

On October 20, 2017, US, Japan and South Korea agreed to seek all possible diplomatic options for peacefully and completely resolving the issue of North Korea's nuclear program. The agreement was arrived during a trilateral meeting in Seoul hosted by South Korea's Vice Foreign Minister with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama. During a joint press conference Minister Lim said that US, Japan and South Korea "shared our assessments of the current situation and reaffirmed our push for a complete dismantlement of the North's nuclear program through peaceful methods" and also "agreed to make all possible diplomatic efforts, including sanctions and dialogue, through close coordination among the three countries."²²

²⁰ "Ruling coalition wins two-thirds of seats in lower house election", The Mainichi, October 23, 2017, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20171023/p2a/oom/ona/006000c> (Accessed on October 23, 2017)

²¹ "Pyongyang won't return to six-party talks until change in Washington's attitude: N.K. diplomat", The Yonhap News, October 22, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2017/10/22/0200000000AEN20171022001451320.html> (Accessed on October 23, 2017)

²² "S. Korea, U.S., Japan agree to seek all possible diplomatic options on N.K.", The Yonhap News, October 18, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/10/18/0401000000AEN20171018009254315.html> (Accessed on October 23, 2017)

- **S. Korea, U.S. conducted maritime drills against North Korea**

South Korean and U.S. navies conducted combined drills off the coast of the peninsula amid heightened tensions during October 16 – 20. The drill included U.S. 7th Fleet's aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76) and two Arleigh Burke-class destroyers -- the USS Stethem (DDG-63) and the USS Mustin (DDG-89). Among other assets mobilized were F-15K, FA-18 and A-10 fighter jets, as well as AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, Lynx and AW-159 Wild Cat naval choppers. The U.S. has also deployed a Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) plane to closely monitor the North's ground and naval forces.²³

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

- **Marawi Crisis set to End**

President Rodrigo Duterte on October 17, 2017, declared the liberation of its southern city of Marawi almost five months of the siege by pro-Islamic State group militants. The military Chief, Gen Eduardo Ano, stated that the President's announcement means that the threat from the militants, who have occupied parts of the lakeside city for five months, is substantially over. Further according to the military spokesman Restituto Padilla, there are still 20 to 30 militants left in Marawi, including 6 to 8 foreign fighters. They have about 20 hostages, including women and children. There is also the need to sweep 80 small buildings and homes for explosives. During this siege two key militant leaders Isnilon Hapilon, who is amongst the FBI's most-wanted terror suspects, and Omarkhayam Maute, have been killed. Thus, according to the military with the death of these two leaders they're leaderless and they have no more organisation. A top Malaysian militant, Mahumud bin Ahmad, who uses the nom de guerre Abu Handzalah and was a close associate of Hapilon, has not been found and is among the remaining militants being hunted by the military.²⁴

- **US President Trump to visit Hanoi in November**

President Trump according to the White House Press Secretary is scheduled to pay an official visit to Hanoi and have talks with his Vietnamese counterpart. This visit of the US president is part of his Asia tour schedule to take place from November 3 to 14, during which he would visit Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam. President Trump is scheduled to first land in the central Vietnamese city of Da Nang on November 10 to participate in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting, where he would deliver a speech at the APEC CEO Summit. On November 11, Trump will travel to Hanoi for an official visit and bilateral engagements with Vietnam's State President Tran Dai Quang and other Senior Vietnamese leaders. This visit by President Trump would make him the fourth sitting US president to pay an official visit to Vietnam

²³ "S. Korea, U.S. start maritime drills against N. Korea", The Yonhap News, October 16, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2017/10/16/0401000000AEN20171016001100315.html> (Accessed on October 23, 2017)

²⁴ Jim Gomez, "Military pushes to defeat last Marawi fighters", *Phil Star Global*, October 18, 2017, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/10/18/1750060/military-pushes-defeat-last-marawi-fighters>, accessed on October 18, 2017.

since 1975, following his predecessors Bill Clinton (2000), George Bush (2006), and Barack Obama (2016).²⁵

- **Cambodia Partnering with China to Launch First Satellite in 2021**

Cambodia hopes to launch its first communication satellite into orbit as early as 2021, at an estimated cost of US \$ 150 million, according to a senior official at the Telecom Regulator of Cambodia (TRC). According to TRC spokesman Im Vutha, this would be a milestone for the local communication industry. Cambodia's Royal Group's subsidiary Royal Blue Skies and Beijing based China Great Wall Industry Corporation, are the companies tasked with conducting the feasibility studies for the satellite project. The feasibility study will be ready within a year, with Cambodia developing the capability to launch the device within the following three years. Last December, PM Hun Sen asked the Royal Group to partner up with foreign companies to make the Kingdom's satellite dream a reality. The PM said that Cambodia should have its own satellite to make high-speed broadband available to all.²⁶

- **Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia to use local currencies for Trade**

Indonesia's central bank said that it will allow transaction settlement for bilateral trade between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to be conducted in local currencies. The new regulation is aimed at reducing dependency on the US dollar and limiting exposure to the volatile foreign exchange rates. The rule, which goes into effect on January 2, next year allows Indonesian exporters or importers to settle payments with their Malaysian or Thai counterparts using rupiah, ringgit, or baht, which are the three most volatile currencies in the region.²⁷

Myanmar

- **Repatriation talks begin with Bangladesh in Nay Pyi Taw**

High-ranking officials from Myanmar and Bangladesh will meet this month to finalise plans to restart a long-delayed voluntary repatriation programme for Bengalis (referred to by the international community as Rohingya) from Rakhine State. As part of the agreement reached between Myanmar and Bangladesh earlier this month, Bangladesh's foreign minister will come to Nay Pyi Taw to meet with Myanmar officials led by the minister for Home Affairs. Then a minister-level meeting will be held on October 24, the director general of the State Counsellor's office confirmed in Nay Pyi Taw on October 20.

²⁵ "US President Trump to visit Hanoi after Da Nang in November: White House", *Tuoi Tre News*, October 17, 2017, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20171017/us-president-trump-to-visit-hanoi-after-da-nang-in-november-white-house/42074.html>, accessed on October 18, 2017.

²⁶ "Cambodia hopes to launch first satellite in 2021", *Bangkok Post*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1344084/cambodia-hopes-to-launch-first-satellite-in-2021>, accessed on October 18, 2017.

²⁷ "Indonesia Encourages ASEAN Currencies in Trade", *Bangkok Post*, October 16, 2017, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1343519/indonesia-encourages-asean-currencies-in-trade>, accessed on October 17, 2017.

The two countries agreed to set up a group to work out the details of repatriating Bengalis to Myanmar. According to the Myanmar government, a final draft was achieved.²⁸

- **Sittwe protesters urge Myanmar not to repatriate Rohingya**

Hundreds of hard-line Buddhists protested Sunday to urge Myanmar's government not to repatriate the nearly 600,000 minority Rohingya Muslims who have fled to Bangladesh since late August to escape violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The protest took place in Sittwe, the state capital, where many Rohingya lived before an outbreak of inter-communal violence in 2012 forced them to flee their homes.²⁹

- **US holds Tatmadaw leaders responsible for Rakhine crisis, says Tillerson**

The United States holds Myanmar's military leadership responsible for the Rakhine crisis, US Secretary of State Mr Rex Tillerson said in Washington on October 18. "We really hold the military leadership accountable for what's happening," Tillerson said in a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. However, he did not say if the US would reimpose sanctions on Myanmar over the Tatmadaw operation in northern Rakhine State that has resulted in more than 580,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh since late August. The US was "extraordinarily concerned" by the situation, Tillerson said.³⁰

- **KNU urges nonviolent solution to Rakhine crisis on ceasefire anniversary**

One of Myanmar's leading non-state armed groups has urged the government to find a "politically dignified and nonviolent" resolution to the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State, warning that failure to do so could jeopardise the government's peace process. On 15th October, the second anniversary of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the Karen National Union released a statement reaffirming its commitment to ending Myanmar's decades-long history of civil conflict through political dialogue.

However, it went on to criticise the northern Rakhine security crackdown that began in August, noting the parallels between events there and counterinsurgency campaigns conducted by the military elsewhere in Myanmar. "The handling of the crisis in northern Rakhine by the government and the Tatmadaw brings the memory of what the KNU and the Karen people have experienced ... through various forms of military operations," the statement read. "The KNU regrets witnessing the repeat of this history while efforts to achieve peace are being made, and is gravely concerned the peace process will be derailed."³¹

²⁸ Repatriation talks begin with Bangladesh in Nay Pyi Taw, 23rd October 2017, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/repatriation-talks-begin-bangladesh-nay-pyi-taw.html>

²⁹ Sittwe protesters urge Myanmar not to repatriate Rohingya, 23rd October 2017, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/sittwe-protesters-urge-myanmar-not-repatriate-rohingya.html>

³⁰ <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-10-18/tillerson-us-holds-myanmar-military-leaders-accountable-for-rohingya-crisis>

³¹ KNU urges nonviolent solution to Rakhine crisis on ceasefire anniversary, 16th October 2017, <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/knu-urges-nonviolent-solution-to-rakhine-crisis-on-ceasefire-anniversary>

North America

Canada

- **Trudeau says federal government will 'look carefully' at implications of Bill 62**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says the federal government is looking into the implications of Quebec's Bill 62, which would require Muslim women wearing a niqab or burka and anyone else using public services to uncover their faces. When asked if that would include taking the bill to court, Trudeau would only repeat that Ottawa is "looking carefully at the implications." The Conservative Party took a similar stance, saying it's up to Quebecers to pass judgment on this legislation. NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh was quick to condemn the bill after it passed into law. Bill 62, which passed Wednesday and has sparked protests in Montreal, prohibits public-sector workers — including doctors, teachers and daycare employees — from covering their faces. It also obliges anyone seeking public services, including taking public transit, to not shield their faces. While the niqab and burka are not specifically mentioned in the legislation, Quebec Justice Minister Stéphanie Vallée said the bill aims to clearly establish the "neutrality of the state."³²

- **Trudeau appoints Bob Rae as special envoy to Myanmar**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is appointing Bob Rae a special envoy to Myanmar, two months into a growing crisis that has left 600,000 Rohingya Muslim people displaced. The move comes in response to growing public pressure to act in the face of what Canada and the United Nations have labeled ethnic cleansing of a long persecuted minority in Myanmar. The former Ontario premier is expected to seek permission to visit Rakhine state, where Rohingya have long lived under what Trudeau called "brutal oppression." Rae will advise the prime minister directly on the matter. According to a source familiar with the new role, Rae can play a sharper, more political role within Myanmar without jeopardizing diplomatic relationships on the ground with a government that is prickly about foreign interference in its affairs. Thousands of Canadians have signed a petition calling on the government to strip Myanmar's state counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, of honorary Canadian citizenship she was given back in 2007.³³

- **Canada 'extremely worried' about NAFTA: Ambrose**

Behind the scenes Canadian officials are "extremely worried" about where the North American Free Trade Agreement negotiations are headed, and it's time to be worried, says Rona Ambrose, a member of Canada's NAFTA Advisory Council. In the last round of talks the American trade negotiators put demands on the table, including on auto and dairy, that Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland called "unconventional" and "troubling" in the round four closing news conference. The federal government is dispatching cabinet ministers and premiers to the United States to try to once again sell staying in the deal. Ambrose said that though the deal won't unravel overnight if Trump tweets he's pulling out, it would create economic uncertainty. The one "shred of

³² Catharine Tunney, "Trudeau says federal government will 'look carefully' at implications of Bill 62," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-bill-62-implications-1.4363989>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

³³ Nahlah Ayed, "Trudeau appoints Bob Rae as special envoy to Myanmar," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/bob-rae-special-envoy-myanmar-trudeau-rohingya-1.4366689>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

optimism"-- as Ambrose put it -- for the Canadian government is that there is about a month before round five of renegotiations get underway in Mexico Nov. 17.³⁴

The United States

- **Tillerson seeks Arab help in US effort to isolate Iran**

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took the Trump administration's case for isolating and containing Iran in the Middle East and beyond to Saudi Arabia and Iraq on Sunday, pushing for them to unite against growing Iranian assertiveness. He also called for a quick resolution to the ongoing crisis between Qatar and its Arab neighbors, which he said was unintentionally bolstering Iran. In Riyadh for the inaugural meeting of the Saudi Arabia-Iraq Coordination Council - a vehicle that US officials believe can wean Iraq from Iran - Tillerson told Saudi King Salman and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi that the nascent partnership between their countries held great promise for Iraq's reconstruction after devastating battles to wrest territory from the Islamic State group and its independence from foreign influence.³⁵

- **Rex Tillerson to stress on India's role in Afghanistan plan**

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's three-day (Oct 24-26) visit to New Delhi will underline the Trump administration's strategy to make India the centrepiece of Washington's South Asia policy, with an eye on stabilising Afghanistan and establishing a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific to counter-balance an expansionist China. It is, therefore, no coincidence that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani will visit India on Oct 24 on the very day Tillerson lands in India. The Trump administration has put India as the key player in its Afghan strategy - a point that was also underlined by US Defence Secretary James Mattis during his visit last month, according to officials. While Tillerson will visit Islamabad ahead of New Delhi during his five-nation trip, the US Secretary of State is expected to deliver a blunt message to his Pakistani hosts about cracking down on safe heavens of terror - a point highlighted by him during his recent remarks on the Indo-US partnership.³⁶

- **US to release EMALS technology to India for aircraft carriers**

The US has decided to release the crucial Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System for the Indian Navy's future aircraft carrier, according to the Trump administration. Due to its flexible architecture, EMALS can launch a wide variety of aircraft weights and can be used on a variety of platforms with differing catapult configurations. Aerospace expert Dr Vivek Lall, chief executive, US and International Strategic Development, of General Atomics had told earlier that General Atomics is planning to open an office in Delhi to

³⁴ Rachel Aiello, "Canada 'extremely worried' about NAFTA: Ambrose," <http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/canada-extremely-worried-about-nafta-ambrose-1.3642290>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

³⁵ ----, "Tillerson seeks Arab help in US effort to isolate Iran," <http://www.france24.com/en/20171022-tillerson-seeks-arab-help-usa-effort-isolate-iran-iraq-saudi-arabia-trump>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

³⁶ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Rex Tillerson to stress on India's role in Afghanistan plan," <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/rex-tillerson-to-stress-on-indias-role-in-afghanistan-plan/articleshow/61177563.cms>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

support the Indian government's military requirements. The Indian Navy plans to integrate the US-made EMALS catapults into its future supercarriers.³⁷

- **US preparing for North Korea's 'final step'**

CIA Director Mike Pompeo said the United States has to act as if North Korea is on the verge of being able to strike it with a missile and act accordingly -- and that President Donald Trump is ready to do so. Pompeo is among a number of former officials who have been signaling the increased possibility of a slide into military confrontation with North Korea over its refusal to back down from its nuclear program. The CIA chief spoke at the forum shortly before national security adviser H.R. McMaster, who also said the President wasn't prepared to accept a nuclear Pyongyang. The Trump administration comments came a day after former CIA Director John Brennan put the chances of military conflict with North Korea as high as 20% to 25%. The isolated Asian nation conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test in September, claiming it had detonated a miniaturized hydrogen bomb that could be mounted on a missile. It's also been steadily working on its missile capabilities, firing 22 missiles during 15 tests from February to mid-September. Even as other countries have urged caution, dialogue and reciprocal confidence-building measures, Trump has belittled the North Korean leader as "rocket man," dismissed Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's efforts to broker a diplomatic solution, and hinted that he is ready to take military action.³⁸

Mexico

- **Mexico joins legal fight against Texas' sanctuary city crackdown**

The government of Mexico has aligned itself with municipalities suing the state of Texas over a new law that, if implemented, would crack down on sanctuary cities, arguing that the state's action hurts Mexico's relationship with Washington. Lawyers for the Mexican government argue that Texas Senate Bill 4 creates unnecessary tension in relations between Mexico and the United States. It forces Mexico to treat Texas differently from other states and interferes with diplomatic interests and ongoing negotiations on a range of bilateral matters, from trade to security. In August, a federal judge in San Antonio temporarily halted the implementation of the state law that punishes officials who don't honor requests by immigration authorities to detain people suspected of being in the country illegally. But the state appealed and, last month, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans allowed Texas officials to implement part of the law while awaiting a full hearing on the appeal in November. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott signed the law in May. It would prevent municipalities from adopting their own policies to limit enforcement of immigration laws and empowers police officers to question people about their immigration status when they are detained. The Mexican government says the Texas

³⁷ PTI, "US to release EMALS technology to India for aircraft carriers," <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/us-to-release-emals-technology-to-india-for-aircraft-carriers/articleshow/61129874.cms>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

³⁸ Nicole Gaouette, "US preparing for North Korea's 'final step'," <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/19/politics/north-korea-officials-mash-up/index.html>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

law will only make it harder to reach an agreement on NAFTA and other diplomatic matters between the two countries.³⁹

- **NAFTA talks must benefit agricultural trade in region, says Mexico**

The renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), currently taking place between Mexico, Canada and the U.S., must strengthen trade and investment in the agricultural sector, said the Mexican government. While NAFTA talks continue, Mexico is seeking to diversify its export markets and is expanding agricultural exports to China, Japan, South Korea and countries of the Arabian Peninsula, said Agriculture Minister Jose Calzada. According to Calzada, Mexico will show firmness, strong will and patience in the renegotiation, to obtain a position which will increase trade and investment in Mexican agriculture.⁴⁰

- **Mexico considers new laws on investor security if NAFTA dies: minister**

Mexico is examining ways to create new laws that would give investors security over their investments if the NAFTA collapses, Mexico's economy minister said. Addressing reporters near Washington on the same day that the United States, Mexico and Canada agreed to extend freight talks to update the North American Free Trade Agreement into 2018, the minister, Ildefonso Guajardo, said it was important for Mexico's negotiating position to have a fallback plan.⁴¹

- **Mexico: Graft Probe Into President's Ally Poses Tricky Challenge Ahead of Elections**

With a tight general election looming next year, Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto faces a tough choice on whether to pursue a graft probe involving a prominent ally and Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht. Mexico's top prosecutor, acting Attorney General, Alberto Elias Beltran, fired the federal attorney general responsible for electoral crimes, adding fuel to a case that may complicate the president's efforts to shake off allegations of corruption in the run-up to the July 2018 presidential vote. The dismissal of top electoral prosecutor, Santiago Nieto, came two days after he accused Emilio Lozoya, the former boss of state oil firm Pemex, and a longtime ally of President Pena Nieto, in a newspaper interview of writing to him to ask to be declared innocent of funnelling Odebrecht cash to political campaigns. In Brazil, Odebrecht has admitted to paying bribes in several countries in Latin America, including Mexico. The dismissal was attacked by the conservative National Action Party (PAN) and the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), opposition parties which questioned the impartiality of Pena Nieto's government.⁴²

³⁹ ----, "Mexico joins legal fight against Texas' sanctuary city crackdown,"

<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/immigration/2017/10/21/mexico-joins-legal-fight-texas-sanctuary-city-crackdown>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

⁴⁰ ----, "NAFTA talks must benefit agricultural trade in region, says Mexico,"

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/23/c_136698692.htm, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

⁴¹ Reuters, "Mexico considers new laws on investor security if NAFTA dies: minister,"

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-nafta-mexico/mexico-considers-new-laws-on-investor-security-if-nafta-dies-minister-idUSKBN1CM2XP>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

⁴² Gabriel Stargardt And Lizbeth Diaz, "Mexico: Graft Probe Into President's Ally Poses Tricky Challenge Ahead of Elections," <https://thewire.in/189208/graft-probe-mexico-presidents-ally-poses-tricky-challenge-ahead-elections/>, Accessed on 23 October 2017.

Brazil

- **Brazil's Lower House Commission Rejects 2nd Accusation Against President Temer**

On October 18, 2017, the Commission of Constitution and Justice of Brazil's Lower House approved the report in favour of rejecting the second accusation made by the Prosecutor General's Office against President Michel Temer. The final figures showed 39 votes in favour of President Temer, 26 against and one abstention—two votes short of the number the government reached in the decision of the first criminal accusation analyzed by the commission, and three votes short of the number it had expected this time. The final decision will be made after a voting in a plenary sitting in the Lower House next week. In the second indictment, President Temer is accused by the Prosecutor General's Office of obstructing justice and, along with Ministers Eliseu Padilha (Presidential Chief of Staff) and Moreira Franco (General Secretariat), integrating a criminal organization that received at least R\$ 587 million (US\$ 184 million) in bribes. The report approved had been drawn up by Bonifácio de Andrada (PSDB), an ally of the government. The choice of Andrada made the internal crisis in his party grow as it was divided whether to support Temer or not. In the first accusation against President Michel Temer for passive corruption filed in July 2017, the Commission of Constitution and Justice approved a report against the continuation of proceedings with 41 votes in favour and 24 against. In both cases political parties supporting the government changed members in the commission in order to ensure a favourable result for the government.⁴³

Chile

- **Chile opens first investment office in Asia**

The Chilean Government announced on October 18, 2017 that it will be opening an investment office in Tokyo, the first of its kind in Asia for the South American country. The hope is that it will serve as a “bridge” to attract more investment by Japanese businesses to the country. Japan is Chile’s fourth largest trade partner, after China, the USA and the EU, and in 2011 the value of commerce between the two countries was just over US\$12billion. However, this has since fallen, reaching only US\$7.4billion in 2015. The announcement was made during a visit from a Chilean delegation to the Japanese capital, during which Chilean businesses and potential Japanese partners will take part in a range of seminars and visits to encourage investment. The delegation was led by ex-President Eduardo Frei, currently the Special Ambassador for Asia-Pacific, the head of the Department for International Economic Relations, Paulina Nazal, and Carlos Álvarez, the director of InvestChile. Álvarez underlined that “the principal reason for our visit is to stimulate our efforts in promoting investment in Chile”. He added that the government is “convinced that there is potential to attract even more Japanese investment”, highlighting the sectors of information technology, mining tools and solar energy as ones with “large growth margins” which are “very interesting for Japanese businesses”. Ex-President Frei commented that Japanese businesses “have been great investors” and that he valued the

⁴³ Ranier Bragon and Daniel Carvalho, “Brazil’s Lower House Commission Rejects 2nd Accusation Against President Temer,” October 19, 2017, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2017/10/1928351-brazils-lower-house-commission-rejects-2nd-accusation-against-president-temer.shtml>, Accessed on October 23, 2017.

“very fluid relationship” between the two countries, which has reached 120 years of mutual trade.⁴⁴

Venezuela

- **Venezuelan Parliament Declares Elections A Fraud, Moves to Replace Electoral Council Officials**

On October 19, 2017, the Venezuelan National Assembly unanimously declared that the regional elections that took place on Sunday, October 15, 2017 were fraudulent, and said it will begin arranging a process for the appointment of new directors to the National Electoral Council. “The motion to reject the fraudulent regional elections that took place on October 15 is officially, unanimously approved by the National Assembly,” the official Venezuelan Legislative body’s Twitter account said. The Venezuelan National Assembly demands that a comprehensive “qualitative and quantitative” audit be carried out by international organizations and requested that a special commission be set up to document the violations of the electoral process by President Nicolás Maduro and his regime. The *Vente Venezuela* party—led by Maria Corina Machado and Omar González—officially proposed appointing new directors to the National Electoral Council. The opposition coalition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) said the elections from October 15 were fraudulent. The figures announced by the illegitimate National Electoral Council did not coincide with the MUD’s results. However, some within MUD have tried to disprove the fraud. The *Acción Democrática* party claimed their figures do in fact coincide with the regime’s numbers. But with results now officially being declared fraudulent by the National Assembly, the opposition has managed to unite the majority of opposition movements.⁴⁵

- **Canada Imposes Sanctions on Venezuelan Authorities**

The government of Canada announced on October 20, 2017 the imposition of sanctions against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and key government figures in “a clear message that their anti-democratic behavior has consequences.” Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said the targeted sanctions are aimed at 40 officials and individuals who “are helping to undermine the security, stability and integrity of democratic institutions in Venezuela,” *Efe* cited. The list includes the president of the National Electoral Council (CNE), Tibisay Lucena; Minister of Education Elías Jaua; Executive Vice-President Tareck el Aissami; the brand-new Attorney General handpicked by the National Constituent Assembly (ANC), Tarek William Saab; ANC member and strongman Diosdado Cabello, and ANC president Delcy Rodríguez. The sanctions freeze any assets they may have in Canada and bans Canadians from engaging them in business dealings. “Canada will not stand by silently as the Government of Venezuela robs its people of their fundamental democratic rights,” Freeland said in a statement. “Canada stands in

⁴⁴ Isabel Cocker, “Chile Opens First Investment Office in Asia,” October 18, 2017,

<http://santiagotimes.cl/2017/10/18/chile-opens-first-investment-office-in-asia/>, Accessed on October 23, 2017.

⁴⁵ “Venezuelan Parliament Declares Elections a Fraud Moves to Replace Electoral Council Officials,” October 21, 2017, <http://todayvenezuela.com/2017/10/21/venezuelan-parliament-declares-elections-a-fraud-moves-to-replace-electoral-council-officials/>, Accessed on October 23, 2017.

solidarity with the people of Venezuela as they struggle to restore democracy in their country.”⁴⁶

Russia

- **Russia and India**

Exercise INDRA-2017, the first ever Tri Services Joint Exercise between Indian and Russian Armed Forces is being conducted in the Eastern Military District of Russia. The Indian Army, Navy and Air Force have been holding bilateral exercises separately with their Russian counterparts but it is for the first time that the two countries are carrying out a tri-services exercise. The year 2017 marks a major milestone as this Exercise has been upgraded to involve all the three Services of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force), which further accentuates the importance of Joint Services in the present world environment. Exercise INDRA-2017 is being conducted at the 249th Combined Army Range Sergeevskiy and in the Sea of Japan near Vladivostok.⁴⁷

Scientists from India and Russia have crafted star-shaped gold nanoparticles that can selectively destroy cancer cells. These stable, inexpensive and non-toxic particles will also make it possible to detect cancer at an early stage. The development was reported by scientists from the National University of Science and Technology MISIS (NUST MISIS), Moscow, and the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata, recently in the journal *Chemical Communications*. The focus of the research was to formulate a benign nanostructure suitable for medicinal purpose.⁴⁸

- **Russia and Afghanistan**

Russia is being accused of helping the Taliban. Afghan officials have called on Moscow to stop supporting the Taliban, as the militant group steps up attacks across the country, allegedly with the help of Russian weapons. Brig Gen Mohammad Naser Hedaya said that “Many large countries are involved in the Afghan war. We can name Russia, who is actively meddling in Farah, and we have seized Russian-made weapons, including night vision sniper scopes.” Contacts began in earnest in 2005 when Moscow reached out to the Taliban to enlist its help in curtailing militants, especially those from Uzbekistan, said Waheed Muzhda, a political analyst and former Taliban official. The offices of the Afghan president and his national security adviser declined to comment, but government officials

⁴⁶ “Canada Imposes Sanctions on Venezuelan Authorities,” October 21, 2017, <http://todayvenezuela.com/2017/10/21/canada-imposes-sanctions-on-venezuelan-authorities/>, Accessed on October 23, 2017.

⁴⁷ “First Indo-Russia tri-services exercise INDRA-2017 begins”, *Economic Times*, October 21, 2017.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/first-indo-russia-tri-services-exercise-indra-2017-begins/first-ever-tri-services-joint-exercise/slideshow/61160833.cms> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

⁴⁸ “Indian, Russian scientists craft gold nanostars to destroy cancer cells”, *Economic Times*, October 18, 2017. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/science/indian-russian-scientists-craft-gold-nanostars-to-destroy-cancer-cells/articleshow/61129402.cms> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

have previously accused Russia of arming and financing the Taliban. Javid Faisal, spokesman for the government's chief executive, Abdullah Abdullah, said the government had reports of insurgents using Russian weapons in the north and west of the country, and in the southern Uruzgan province, but added that information was scarce. Afghan officials allege that Russian intelligence helped the Taliban capture Kunduz in 2015 and 2016, shortly after Mullah Abdul Salam – one of the insurgents' "shadow governors" – travelled to Tajikistan. According to Afghan and western officials, Russia has met several times with Taliban representatives without the knowledge of the Afghan government. Most noteworthy was a meeting last year in Iran with Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour. Russian interference in Afghanistan is not limited to armed Islamists. Russia is also allegedly supplying weapons and cash to local strongmen in northern Afghanistan, destabilising an already fragile region. Commanders with unpredictable allegiances and vast criminal networks from Baghlan, Kunduz, Sar-e Pol and Badakhshan have received weapons from Russia, according to a researcher with a western organisation in Kabul who is not authorised to speak to media. The claim was confirmed by a gun smuggler who travels across the Afghan-Tajik border with caches of weapons.⁴⁹

- **Russia's Presidential Candidate**

Journalist Ksenia Sobchak, daughter of the late Anatoly Sobchak, the former St. Petersburg mayor and one-time mentor to Russian President Vladimir Putin, launched a promotional video on 18 October in which she announced her decision to run as a candidate "against all" on behalf of all angry Russian voters. In the video, Sobchak says she will drop out of the race if mainstream opposition leader Aleksei Navalny, who is legally barred from seeking public office until 2028, is allowed to return to the ballot. But some analysts see her bid as a Kremlin ploy to split the liberal opposition by planting a Kremlin-approved spoiler candidate to give the election the appearance of credibility. Both Sobchak and presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov have vigorously denied the allegation that any Kremlin officials are involved in Sobchak's candidacy. Meeting with reporters on 19 October, however, Peskov did not clarify how Putin, who recently met privately with Sobchak, reacted to her plans to challenge his presumptive candidacy for reelection. Sobchak's candidacy hasn't thrilled some of Russia's seasoned politicians, including Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, head of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. "This is a fake, phony candidate," he said, adding that her arrival on the campaign trail could have "dangerous" consequences. He did not elaborate upon what that meant. Andrei Kolesnikov, director of the Russian Domestic Politics and Political Institutions program at the Moscow Carnegie Center, thinks Sobchak's candidacy lacks any practical significance. He said that "It cannot have any influence on the outcome of the election. The president will receive the required amount of votes, just like the runner-up, and it's not worth even mentioning the other [candidates]. Navalny will not be allowed to run for president however you look at it." Russia's Central Election Commission recently barred Navalny from seeking office due to his 2013 conviction on money-laundering charges.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Russia accused of supplying Taliban as power shifts create strange bedfellows", *The Guardian*, October 22, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/22/russia-supplying-taliban-afghanistan> Accessed on October 22, 2017.

⁵⁰Victor Vladimirov, "Some Analysts See Election Bid By 'Russian Paris Hilton' as Ploy to Split Opposition Vote", *VOA*, October 21, 2017. <https://www.voanews.com/a/analysts-sobchak-election-bid-split-opposition/4080672.html> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

- **Russia and Its Defence System**

During his remarks at the Valdai forum of international policy experts in Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin on 19 October said that Russia is ready to develop new weapons systems in response to other countries doing the same – and warned that if the US pulls out of a treaty on intermediate-range nuclear weapons, Moscow will do likewise. He said that Russia will adhere to a landmark Cold War-era arms control treaty for as long as America sticks to it. He said he believes that global nuclear disarmament is a real possibility and that Russia “want[s] it and will be striving to achieve that”. However, he noted Moscow is ready to develop new weapons systems, both nuclear and non-nuclear, in response to other countries doing the same but did not specifically mention the US in that part of his comments. He noted that the US has been slow to dismantle its chemical weapons arsenals in line with an international treaty, while Russia wrapped up the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpiles last month.⁵¹ Putin also said that his country's gravest error in the past 15 years -- placing Moscow's trust in the West. He said that the West took Russia's trust as a “weakness”.⁵² He also took the opportunity to talk about North Korea. He warned against “cornering North Korea”. He said that said “threatening to use force or going down to outright boorishness and swearing” would be the wrong approach.⁵³

- **Russia and Iraq**

Russian energy major Rosneft has agreed to take control of the main oil pipeline in Iraq's Kurdistan, further boosting its role as the main international investor in the semi-autonomous region. It came amid the crisis in Kurdistan's relations with the central government in Baghdad, which erupted after the region held an independence referendum last month. Rosneft said its share in the project may total as much as 60 percent, while the current pipeline operator KAR Group will retain 40 percent. Rosneft's investment in the project was seen totaling about \$1.8 billion. Rosneft's influential Chief Executive Officer Igor Sechin said on 19 October that Kurshish authorities and Baghdad have to resolve their differences by themselves. Iraq, along with neighboring Iran and Turkey, has pledged to isolate Kurdistan in the wake of last month's referendum.⁵⁴

- **Russia and North Korea**

⁵¹Mythili Sampathkumar, “Vladimir Putin says Russia will develop new weapons systems if US does the same”, *The Independent*, October 20, 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-russia-new-weapons-us-mid-range-nuclear-missiles-treaty-withdraw-response-kremlin-a8009466.html> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

⁵²Tom O' Connor, “Russia's Putin Reveals his Biggest Mistake: Trusting the West”, *Newsweek*, October 19, 2017. <http://www.newsweek.com/russia-putin-reveal-biggest-mistake-trusting-west-688998> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

⁵³Mythili Sampathkumar, “Vladimir Putin says Russia will develop new weapons systems if US does the same”, *The Independent*, October 20, 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-russia-new-weapons-us-mid-range-nuclear-missiles-treaty-withdraw-response-kremlin-a8009466.html> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

⁵⁴“Russia's Rosneft to take control of major Kurdish oil pipeline”, *CNBC*, October 19, 2017. <https://www.cnb.com/2017/10/19/russias-rosneft-to-take-control-of-major-kurdish-oil-pipeline.html> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

Sea trips between Vladivostok, Russia and isolated North Korea have resumed after a two-month break, with the transport of cargo. The North Korean-flagged Mangyonbong left the Russian port for North Korea's Rajin on 15 October. The ferry line, the only one between the two countries, was opened in May to carry cargo and passengers, predominantly Chinese tourists. It stopped operating in August, however, because the port in Vladivostok refused to provide services to the vessel after the company failed to pay for them.⁵⁵

- **Russia and EU Trade**

A drastic decline in both import and export in sectors affected by sanctions as well as other economic sectors that were suffering from the uncertainties created by the crises in Crimea and Ukraine since 2014 till 2016. However, the trend has changed in 2017. From the first seven months of the year shows that this decline has stopped and, in fact, the trend was reversed with an expected increase of 20 percent by the end of the year compared to 2016. EU-Russia trade was up to €285 billion in 2014. In 2016, this number dropped to €181 billion. In only three years, EU members imported €64 billion less from Russia and exported to it €31 billion less. This decline affected Germany, Italy, Austria and Lithuania above all, which constitute €14.5 billion less in export towards Russia. In the first six months of 2017, the volume of EU-Russia trade increased by €27 billion. The lion's share is for Germany with an expansion by €6 billion and the Netherlands with €4 billion. The only country that reduced its trade is Malta with a decrease of €400,000. The leading countries are Germany (plus €2.6 billion), Italy (plus €739 million) and the Netherlands (plus €707 million). The only countries decreasing their exports are Malta, Cyprus and the United Kingdom.⁵⁶

South Asia

Afghanistan

- **Pakistan Unveils First Section Of Durand Line Fence**

A senior Pakistan Army officer, last week on 18 October 2017 unveiled the first phase of a fence that will run along the Durand Line, in a move that Pakistan hopes will prevent "incursions by Islamist militants from Afghanistan". The fence, topped with barbed wire, will eventually run to about 2,500km in length, despite Kabul's protests that this would divide families and friends along the de facto border. It was reported that the Pakistan military estimates it will need about \$532 million USD for the project, which will include 750 border forts and high-tech surveillance systems. In March, Pakistan announced its

⁵⁵"Russia reopens ferry route to North Korea", *Reuters*, October 16, 2017.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-russia-china-ferr/russia-reopens-ferry-route-to-north-korea-idUSKBN1CL1ZT> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

⁵⁶Francesco Giumelli, "EU-Russia trade bouncing back despite sanctions", *EU Observer*, October 17, 2017.

<https://euobserver.com/opinion/139485> Accessed on October 23, 2017.

intention to fence the border – claiming it had been a decision taken by government “at a high level”.⁵⁷

- **Russia Massively Funding Taliban to Fight NATO Forces: Report**

The Russian intelligence agencies have stepped up aid to the Taliban insurgents to fight the NATO-led coalition forces in Afghanistan, it has been reported. Certain Taliban sources have told a British newspaper, *The Times*, that the group mainly receives the funding in a covert way, involving large quantities of fuel deals. The sources have further added that the monthly funding of the Taliban by the Russian intelligence amounts to nearly 2.5 million US Dollars.⁵⁸

- **Afghanistan Gains UNHRC Membership**

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) executive director said on October 17, 2017, that Afghanistan has been granted United Nations Human Rights Council membership. According to AIHRC, Afghanistan by getting 130 votes earned UNHRC membership for the first time. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission executive director Musa Mahmoudi said by gaining UNHRC membership, Afghanistan’s responsibilities in terms of respecting and improving human rights has been increased.⁵⁹

- **Taliban Representatives, Afghan Politicians to Meet in Dubai**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) will be hosting a two-day meeting between Afghan politicians and Taliban representatives next month, an official said on Friday (October 20). Organized by the Canadian organization Pugwash, the event will take place on November 1 and 2, one of the expected participants of the gathering told *Pajhwok Afghan News*, but declined to be named. He said some politicians and former Taliban officials were expected to attend the conference. He said it was expected that 10 representatives of the Taliban’s office in Qatar would attend the meeting.⁶⁰

- **President Ghani Sacks IEC Secretary-General**

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani on Saturday (October 21) dismissed Imam Mohammad Warimach, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) secretary. Warimach's dismissal came during a meeting of IEC members and international partners supporting the Afghan election process at the Presidential Place in Kabul. “With a crucial responsibility on your shoulders, you are expected to conduct the election process in a fair and transparent manner,” the president was quoted as saying.⁶¹

⁵⁷ "Pakistan Unveils First Section Of Durand Line Fence", *Tolonews*, 19 October 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/pakistan-unveils-first-section-durand-line-fence> accessed on 20 October 2017.

⁵⁸ “Russia Massively Funding Taliban to Fight NATO Forces: Report”, *Khaama Press*, October 16, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/russia-massively-funding-taliban-to-fight-nato-forces-report-03656> (accessed on October 23, 2017).

⁵⁹ Nabila Ashrafi, “Afghanistan Gains UNHRC Membership”, *Tolo News*, October 17, 2017, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-gains-unhrc-membership> (accessed on October 23, 2017).

⁶⁰ “Taliban Reps, Afghan Politicians to Meet in Dubai”, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, October 21, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19222

⁶¹ “President Ghani Sacks IEC Secretary-General”, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, October 22, 2017, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19232 (accessed on October 23, 2017).

- **First Batch of Afghan Pilots Complete Black Hawk Helicopters Training in USA**

The first batch of the Afghan Air Force pilots completed their trainings for the newly-deployed modern UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. The Afghan government says the first batch of four pilots have completed their training in the United States of America. The officials are saying that the newly-trained pilots are expected to start services with the Afghan Air Force in the near future.⁶²

Bangladesh

- **Bangladesh gets priority among all its neighbours: Sushma**

Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on Monday (October 23) said Bangladesh gets priority among all its neighbours as per its neighbourhood policy. She said the relationship between Bangladesh and India is moving ahead in a faster pace. The Minister also laid emphasis on investing in youth saying they are the future leaders of the two nations. Sushma was addressing a programme after inauguration of the Chancery Complex of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka and 15 others uplift projects in Bangladesh funded by the government of India with the cost of Tk 71.64 crore.⁶³

- **Suspected New JMB member held in Sherpur**

Police have arrested a member of the banned militant outfit Jama'at ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (New JMB) from Kalihati Upazila in Tangail district. The arrestee was identified as Abul Kashem, 22, son of late Safil Uddin, a resident of Hujurikanda area of Nakla Upazila. Sherpur District's Superintendent of Police (SP) Rafiqul Islam confirming the matter said a team of Sherpur Police arrested Abul from Alenga area around 12:45pm on Sunday (October 22). The SP said on October 5, around 540 liters of liquid explosives material was recovered from Abul's rented shop. Following the incident Abul went into hiding and planned moving to Dhaka with his cohort. During the interrogation Abul confessed about being a New JMB member, Rafiqul said.⁶⁴

- **Exert sustained pressure on Myanmar: Dhaka**

Bangladesh has called upon India to exert sustained pressure on Myanmar to take back the Rohingyas, who had to flee their homes in Rakhine in the face of atrocities orchestrated by the Myanmar security forces and local Buddhist mobs. In reply, India said that normal situation in Rakhine state will only possible with the return of displaced people due to violence and voiced the country's support for the implementation of the recommendations of the Annan commission. "We were happy to be re-assured that India would continue to support the humanitarian cause related to Rohingyas in Bangladesh. We thank them for humanitarian assistance provided for Rohingyas," Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali said in a joint statement with his Indian counterpart External

⁶² "First Batch of Afghan Pilots Complete Black Hawk Helicopters Training in USA", *Khaama Press*, October 22, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/first-batch-of-afghan-pilots-complete-black-hawk-helicopters-training-in-usa-03694> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁶³ "Bangladesh gets priority among all its neighbours: Sushma," *The Independent*, October 23, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/120274> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁶⁴ "Suspected New JMB member held in Sherpur," *Dhaka Tribune*, October 23, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2017/10/23/suspected-new-jmb-member-held-sherpur/> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj after the fourth meeting of Bangladesh-India Joint Consultative Commission at a local hotel yesterday (October 22).⁶⁵

- **Bangladesh urges Turkey to build 100,000 more shelters for the Rohingya**

The government on Sunday urged Turkey to build an additional 100,000 shelters for the Rohingya refugees along with the previous 100,000 they had already ensured to build in Kutupalong of Cox's Bazar. After concluding a meeting with Turkish Ambassador to Bangladesh Devrim Ozturk at the secretariat, Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya said "We have proposed they (Turkey) build 100,000 more shelters for the Rohingya people as the number of refugees has already surpassed six 600,000 recently." Talking to reporters at the secretariat, the minister said Turkey will later deliver their decision regarding the matter.⁶⁶

Pakistan

- **Irregularities in Road Projects**

The audit paras for 2013-14, which pointed out Rs 43 billion loss to the national kitty, forced the chairman Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to refer the matter to departmental accounts committee (DAC) for reconsideration after officials from both Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) who failed to provide clarification. The Chairman asked the report to be back by December 7, 2017.⁶⁷

- **Bajwa's Middle East Tour**

While representatives from Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the US met in Muscat to revive the stalled Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited United Arab Emirates from October 14th to October 17th. On October 14th, Gen Bajwa met Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai and prime minister of the UAE, as well as other key Emirati leaders. He then travelled to Saudi Arabia to attend the inaugural session of the second International Conference on C4I Solutions at the King Saud University, Riyadh, which was organised by the Saudi defence ministry. The theme of this year's conference was "Alliance Against Terrorism: Strategies and Capabilities". Gen Bajwa met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on the sidelines of the conference. The army chief reviewed the scope of bilateral relationship with the Commander of Saudi Ground Forces, Lt Gen Prince Fahd bin Turki bin Abdulaziz.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ "Exert sustained pressure on Myanmar: Dhaka," *The Independent*, October 23, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/120239> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁶⁶ "Bangladesh urges Turkey to build 100,000 more shelters for the Rohingya," *Dhaka Tribune*, October 23, 2017, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2017/10/23/bangladesh-urges-turkey-build-100000-shelters-rohingya/> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁶⁷ Syed Irfan Raza, "Over Rs400bn irregularities found in road projects", *The Dawn*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364306> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁶⁸ "Bajwa back home after 'quiet' visit to Saudi Arabia, UAE", *The Dawn*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364522> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

- **Pakistan and Iran Trade**

A delegation of the Gwadar Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), led by Mir Naveed Jan, met the Deputy Governor of Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran, Ali Asghar Mir Shikari, and other members of his team and discussed border trade between the two countries. Shikari said that his country wanted to increase the current bilateral trade volume from \$1 billion to \$5bn with Pakistan. He also assured Pakistani businessmen that they would be given visas and special cards soon.⁶⁹

- **US and Pakistan**

In a telephonic conversation in between US Vice President Mike Pence and PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on October 18th agreed to keep up the momentum of improvement in bilateral relations through high-level engagements and stronger counterterrorism cooperation. Talking to VP Pence, PM Abbasi said Pakistan would continue to act on “actionable intelligence” provided by the US. A statement released by the White House press office said Mr Pence emphasised the need for a “continued and sustained cooperation” against militants.⁷⁰ However, it can be noted that US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley has said that India can help the United States in keeping an eye on Pakistan, as Washington cannot tolerate any government that shelters terrorists.⁷¹ Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Zubair Mahmood Hayat arrives at Washington on October 23rd to attend an international conference on counterterrorism. US policymakers believe that direct talks with Pakistani defence officials are necessary to address their main concern: seeking Pakistan’s assistance in the fight against militants along the Pak-Afghan border.⁷²

नेपाल

दलों ने उम्मीदवारों के नाम चुनाव आयोग को दिए:

दिसंबर 7 नवम्बर और 26को समानुपातिक प्रतिनिधित्व के आधार पर होने वाले प्रांतीय और संघीय चुनावों के लिए देश के सभी प्रमुख दलों ने अपने अपने उम्मीदवारों के नाम चुनाव आयोग को दे दिए हैं.⁷³

सिंह दरबार में नाटकीय घटना:

⁶⁹ Behram Baloch, “Steps to boost Pak-Iran trade discussed”, *The Dawn*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364516> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁷⁰ Anwar Iqbal & Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan, US agree to build on improvement in ties”, *The Dawn*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364757> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁷¹ “US seeks India’s help to ‘keep an eye’ on Pakistan”, *The Dawn*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364768/us-seeks-indias-help-to-keep-an-eye-on-pakistan> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁷² Anwar Iqbal, “US, Pakistan re-engage in diplomatic, defence talks”, *The Dawn*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1365609/us-pakistan-re-engage-in-diplomatic-defence-talks> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁷³ “Parties submit lists for PR candidates”, *The Kathmandu Post*, 16 October 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-10-16/1>

मंगलवार को सिंह दरबार में नाटकीय मोड़ आया माओवादी केंद्र ने जब सरकार छोड़ने की मंशा जाहिर की उसके एक घंटे बाद ही प्रधानमंत्री शेर बहादुर ने मंत्रिमंडल में फेर बदल किया उन्होंने माओवादी केंद्र के मंत्रियों से जिम्मेदारी लेते हुए उन्हें बगैर पोर्टफोलियो के रख दिया⁷⁴

माओवादी केंद्र रविवार को सरकार छोड़ेगा:

माओवादी केंद्र के एक नेता ने कहा कि हम फर्स्ट पास्ट द पोस्ट के प्रथम चरण के नामांकन के बाद शेर बहादुर देउबा की सरकार छोड़ देंगे मंगलवार को माओवादी केंद्र ने सरकार अक्टूबर है 22 नामांकन की अंतिम तिथि लेकिन जिन म. छोड़ने की बात कही लेकिन बाद में इसमें बने रहने की भी बात कही मंत्रियों के पोर्टफोलियो ले लिए गये हैं उनके अनुसार रविवार को माओवादी सरकार छोड़ देंगे.⁷⁵

Indian Ocean Region

- **Nirmala Sitharaman celebrated Diwali with security personnel in Andaman and Nicobar Islands**

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman celebrated Diwali on 19 October 2017, with military personnel and their families at Andaman and Nicobar's Brichgunj Military Station.⁷⁶ Defence Minister, was on two day visit to the tri service command at the Andaman and Nicobar islands.⁷⁷ This was her first visit to any strategically important command after assuming the charge as the Union Defence Minister.⁷⁸ On the arrival on 18 October 2017, she was accorded a joint services guard of honour.⁷⁹ During the visit, she was given a comprehensive brief on the security environment and thrust areas of the command at its headquarters.⁸⁰ The Defence Minister also paid homage to the Air force personnel and their families killed during Tsunami of 2004 in the Car Nicobar islands.⁸¹

- **Bi- Annual Commanders' Conference**

The top commanders of Indian Navy will hold extensive discussion on security challenges facing India on the sea front during the four day bi-annual naval commanders' conference commencing from October 24, 2017.⁸² The issues linked with maritime cooperation with

⁷⁴ "A day of High drama in Singh Durbar", The Kathmandu Post, 18 October 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-10-18/1>

⁷⁵ "Maoist center to quit Govt on Sunday", The Kathmandu Post, 19 October 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2017-10-19/1>

⁷⁶ From Narendra Modi to Nirmala Sitharaman: Top leaders honour armed forces, celebrate Diwali with soldiers, October 19, 2017, <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/from-narendra-modi-to-nirmala-sitharaman-top-leaders-honour-armed-forces-celebrate-diwali-with-soldiers/899447/> (accessed on 20 October, 2017)

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Nirmala Sitharaman celebrates Diwali with troops at Andaman & Nicobar, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/nirmala-sitharaman-celebrates-diwali-with-troops-at-andaman-nicobar/story-zlCaUSpjlZSFazeo3YKNmK.html> (accessed on 20 October, 2017)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Eye on China, top Navy commanders to deliberate on security challenges, October 22, 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/eye-on-china-top-navy-commanders-to-deliberate-on-security-challenges/articleshow/61170995.cms> (accessed on 23 October, 2017)

friendly countries, naval modernisation, combat preparedness, and critical strategic issues will be among key areas of discussion.⁸³ "The Navy's combat readiness would be reviewed with focus on operational effectiveness of combat platforms, logistics and development of shore support infrastructure for sustaining distant operations," Navy Spokesperson Capt. D K Sharma said (as reported by media).⁸⁴ The four day conference will be addressed by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. "Chiefs of Indian Army and Indian Air Force are also likely to address the conference."⁸⁵

- **17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), 18 October 2017**

The 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) Ministers and Heads of Delegation of the Member States of the Indian Ocean Rim Association was organised in Durban, South Africa on 18 October 2017.⁸⁶ The IORA ministerial meeting, represented by the 21 member states and 7 dialogue partners of the IORA, was held under the theme "Uniting the Peoples of Africa, Australasia and the Middle East through Enhanced Cooperation for Peace, Stability and Sustainable Development".⁸⁷ The key outcomes of the meeting are outlined in the *Durban Communiqué* which was issued after conclusion of the meeting.⁸⁸

Sri Lanka

- **Some people misleading society regarding a new constitution –President**

President Maithripala Sirisena says the citizens of the country must be aware of the attempts by some section of the society to mislead the society regarding a new constitution which is still not drafted. He said that we had to face a nearly three decade long, brutal war as a result of not providing solutions for the issues in the country in a timely and appropriate manner. President Sirisena requested all the Sri Lankans, as true human beings who loves the country, to join with him to build peace and reconciliation among all the communities.⁸⁹

- **India-Sri Lanka ministerial meeting on fishermen issues held**

The ministerial level talks on fishermen issue was held between Indian Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Radha Mohan Singh and Sri Lankan Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development Mahinda Amaraweera on 14th October in New Delhi. The talks followed the 3rd Meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries held in New Delhi on 13th October. The JWG was co-chaired by Secretary (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries), Government of India and

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Durban Communiqué: The 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), 18 October 2017, <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2017/iora1020.htm> (accessed on 23 October, 2017)

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ East Africa: Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane - Concluding Remarks At Indian Ocean Rim Association Meeting of Council of Ministers, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201710190709.html> (accessed on 23 October, 2017)

⁸⁹ Some people misleading society regarding a new constitution –President, 21st October 2017, <https://news.lk/news/politics/item/18427-some-people-misleading-society-regarding-a-new-constitution-president>

Secretary (Ministry of Fisheries & Aquatic Resources Development), Government of Sri Lanka. The co-Chairs of the JWG briefed the outcome of the issues discussed during the 3rd JWG meeting for consideration of the Ministers and for further directions. The Ministers agreed that a permanent solution to the fishermen issues should be found at the earliest. The Indian side was satisfied with the progress on release of apprehended fishermen and detained fishing vessels in the recent past, while reiterating the release of all the remaining Indian fishermen and fishing vessels in Sri Lankan custody.⁹⁰

- **Dismay in Tamil Nadu over failed Indo-Lankan talks**

Fishermen leaders in Tamil Nadu have expressed dismay over the failure of the third meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) and the ministerial meeting that followed to work out a time frame for the release of fishermen and more than 130 trawlers detained in Sri Lanka and to end bottom trawling in the Palk Bay, The Hindu newspaper reported. “It is very unfortunate that the Lankan side ended the meetings after making a vague statement that it would take up the issues relating to the release of fishermen and trawlers at an appropriate forum,” fishermen leader P Sesu Raja said.⁹¹

- **Iran and Sri Lanka sign extradition treaty in Tehran**

An agreement on extraditing convicts was signed on 22nd October between Iran and Sri Lanka in Tehran, the IRNA news agency reported. The deal was signed by Sri Lankan Ambassador to Tehran Anis Zaidi and Iran’s Justice Minister Alireza Avaei, and the document is expected to be delivered for signing to the Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Affairs by Iranian envoy to the country.⁹²

- **Philippines VP warns of China debt trap, cites Sri Lanka**

Philippines Vice President Leni Robredo has warned that the Philippines could face the same fate as Sri Lanka if it depend too much on China. Vice President Leni Robredo said the Duterte administration’s new source of financing for its ambitious infrastructure projects, China, could lead the Philippines into a “debt trap” as it did other countries that had borrowed heavily from the Asian giant, the inquirer reported.⁹³

- **OMP Needed In Jaffna Too: Sampanthan Tells UN**

A meeting was held on 22nd October 2017 between the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence Pablo De Greiff and the Leader of the Opposition and the Tamil National Alliance R. Sampanthan in Colombo. Sampanthan highlighted the important issues faced by the Tamil people with regard to the release of Lands belonging to civilians, Missing persons and the political prisoners. Speaking of the Missing persons Sampanthan said “if a mother handed over her son to armed forces or a police officer she wants to know what happened to him

⁹⁰ India-Sri Lanka ministerial meeting on fishermen issues held, 23rd October 2017, <https://news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/18387-india-sri-lanka-ministerial-meeting-on-fishermen-issues-held>

⁹¹ Dismay in Tamil Nadu over failed Indo-Lankan talks, 23rd October 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/10/21/dismay-in-tamil-nadu-over-failed-indo-lankan-talks/>

⁹² Iran and Sri Lanka sign extradition treaty in Tehran, 22nd October 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/10/22/iran-and-sri-lanka-sign-extradition-treaty-in-tehran/>

⁹³ Philippines VP warns of China debt trap, cites Sri Lanka, 22nd October 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2017/10/22/philippines-vp-warns-of-china-debt-trap-cites-sri-lanka/>

it is a legitimate demand, these demands cannot be ignored”. Highlighting the delay in operationalizing the Office of the Missing Persons, Sampanthan pointed out the importance of having this office established in the Northern and the Eastern provinces as well.⁹⁴

Maldives

- **Alleged Maldivian jihadis cleared of intent to join terror group**

The first Maldivians to be charged with travelling abroad with the intent of joining a terror group have been acquitted and set free. In a closed hearing on 19th October, the criminal court decided that the prosecution was unable to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Ahmed Latheef, Ahmed Suhail Moosa, and Munawwar Abdulla went to Turkey to cross the border into Syria. In the not guilty verdict made public on 22nd October, Judge Adam Arif said there were “big differences” between the testimony of nine prosecution witnesses at court and their statements taken during the police investigation.⁹⁵

- **PPM leaders’ snide response to Nasheed’s call for interim president**

Responding to former president Mohamed Nasheed’s call to establish an interim presidency in 2018, ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM)’s deputy leader and Fonadhoo MP Abdul Raheem Abdullah claimed that Maldivian citizens do not want an interim president. Speaking to the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)’s national congress, Nasheed had said that it was unlikely to hold free and fair elections, given the current political situation in the Maldives.⁹⁶

- **Maldives sign agreement with Abu Dhabi Fund to develop airport terminal**

Maldives president Abdulla Yameen has signed a loan agreement with the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD) to develop the Velana International Airport (VIA) during his official visit to the UAE. Mihaaru reported that, ADFD will be aiding the development of VIA’s terminals; however, the exact amount of the loan has not been officially disclosed yet.

Sources have told Mihaaru that it was roughly a USD 50 million loan, whilst the estimated cost of revamping the entire terminal is USD 350 million. The construction of the terminal will be overseen by the Saudi-based multinational construction conglomerate, the Saudi Binladin Group, the source revealed.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ OMP Needed In Jaffna Too: Sampanthan Tells UN, 21st October 2017, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/omp-needed-in-jaffna-too-sampanthan-tells-un/>

⁹⁵ Alleged Maldivian jihadis cleared of intent to join terror group, 23rd October 2017, <http://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/alleged-maldivian-jihadis-cleared-of-intent-to-join-terror-group-133542>

⁹⁶ PPM leaders’ snide response to Nasheed’s call for interim president, 22nd October 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/ppm-leaders-snide-response-to-nasheeds-call-for-interim-president/>

⁹⁷ Maldives sign agreement with Abu Dhabi Fund to develop airport terminal, 18th October 2017, <http://en.mihaaru.com/maldives-sign-agreement-with-abu-dhabi-fund-to-develop-airport-terminal/>

West Asia

Israel

- **Netanyahu, Hamas and Peace Talks**

Prime Minister Netanyahu stated that he will refuse any diplomatic talks with an emerging Palestinian unity government if the Hamas militant group plays any role within it. In a statement released on October 17th, Netanyahu's security cabinet set out a series of conditions which appeared to complicate Egypt-sponsored efforts to end a decade-long split between Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah movement, which rules in the West Bank, and the Islamist group Hamas, which has been in control of Gaza.⁹⁸ It can be noted that Hamas's chief in Gaza Yahya Sinwar unequivocally rejected recognizing Israel on October 19th, saying the issue for Hamas is "when to erase" the Jewish state. It was stated in reaction to President Donald Trump's peace envoy Jason Greenblatt, who said if Hamas wants to join a future Palestinian government, it must lay down its arms and recognize Israel.⁹⁹

- **Iran, Syria and Israel**

On October 18th, Iran's military chief, Maj.-Gen. Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, met in Damascus with his Syrian counterpart, Lt.-Gen. Ali Ayoub, and warned Israel against violating Syrian airspace. SANA news agency quoted Bagheri as saying, "We are here in Damascus to coordinate and cooperate in facing our common enemies of Zionists and terrorists."¹⁰⁰

Cyber Security

- **India working on robust data protection regime: Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad¹⁰¹**

An Indian delegation led by Union Law and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, attended the Commonwealth Law Ministers' Conference held in Nassau, the Bahamas between October 16 and 19, 2017. The Conference revolved around the theme, 'the role of technology in strengthening the rule of law'. In the conference, Mr. Prasad said that heinous terror acts could be investigated through data analytics and cyber forensics. The

⁹⁸ Peter Beaumont, "Israel will not negotiate with Palestinian unity government if Hamas is involved", *The Guardian*, October 17, 2017,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/17/israel-will-not-negotiate-with-palestinian-unity-government-if-hamas-is-involved> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

⁹⁹ Adam Rasgon, Herb Keinon & Michael Wilner, "Hamas rejects recognizing Israel, an absolute US demand", *The Jerusalem Post*, October 19, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Hamas-accuses-America-of-blackmail-after-US-backs-Israel-on-Palestinian-unity-deal-507868> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

¹⁰⁰ "Syrian, Iranian chiefs of staff: Turkey's presence in Syria is "act of aggression", *SANA News Agency*, October 18, 2017, <http://sana.sy/en/?p=116019> (accessed on October 23, 2017); Anna Ahronheim & Herb Keinon, "Iran's military chief vows to cooperate with Syria against 'Zionist enemy' Israel", *The Jerusalem Post*, October 18, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iran-News/Irans-military-chief-vows-to-cooperate-with-Syria-against-Zionist-enemy-Israel-507731> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

¹⁰¹ (Business line, 20 October 2017, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/india-working-on-robust-data-protection-regime-law-minister-ravi-shankar-prasad/article9916905.ece>)

conference agreed to the outcome that ‘terrorism could have no justification and that acts of terror were the most egregious violation of the Human Rights of the victims’. The law minister participated in the discussion on counter-terrorism and the use of ICT and condemned all forms of terrorism, citing India’s own experience with cross border terrorism. Prasad highlighted the need to address challenges in cyber security collectively, emphasizing on determined effort to secure data privacy, control money laundering and crime as well as to thwart cyber terrorism. He also underlined a few digital accomplishments on part of India such as eCourts, judicial data grid and NyayMitra which through video conferencing provide pre-litigation guidance to the disadvantaged community across the country.

- **Japan and US must work together to tackle China’s cyber security law**¹⁰²

China implemented a new cyber security law in last November 2016 to safeguard national sovereignty in cyber space. According to this law, all the foreign organizations need go through a security assessment by Chinese authorities if they desire to transmit customer information out of the country. Japanese, US and European business became wary of China’s newly implemented cyber security law. Almost 54 Organizations around the world asked China to postpone the enactment of this law, highlighting the negative effects on global economy by this digital security regulation. The Chinese authority rejected their appeal outlining no serious damage on the part of Japanese or Western companies. On 16 October 2017, both Japan and USA held second round of economic talks and agreed to cooperate on “ more effective enforcement activities against unfair trade practices by third countries”. In reality, the law would hamper all the foreign companies to continue their operations in China since all the companies need to collect and use data. It would also disregard WTO rules considering the fact that China is forcing the foreign companies to accept proprietary standards without any notification to countries concerned.

Indian, Russian firms sign agreement for IT solutions¹⁰³

Russian Rus IT Export (RITE), a key integrator of top Russian IT solutions in the global market and Indian firm Aark Infosoft Pvt Ltd. signed an agreement to cooperate in information technology, Smart City Projects, cyber security and e-governance in the GITEX Information Technology Forum held in Dubai in early October 2017 in the presence of the Indian Ambassador to UAE. The two sides in its first stage of implementation will cooperate in the development of a road map and later in the development of Smart City projects, cyber security systems and electronically conducted election process, proving security safeguards.

¹⁰² Nikkei Asian Review, 19 October 2017,

<https://asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20171019/Viewpoints/Editorial-Japan-and-the-US-must-work-together-to-tackle-China-s-cybersecurity-law>)

¹⁰³ The Economics Times, 21 October 2017

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/science/indian-russian-firms-sign-agreement-for-it-solutions/articleshow/61163545.cms>

- **US warns energy and industrial firms of attacks by ‘Russia-linked’ hackers¹⁰⁴**

The US Department of Homeland Security and FBI have released a report on 20 October 2017 highlighting the attacks by sophisticated Russian hackers against nuclear, energy, aviation, water and critical manufacturing industries as well as government institutions dating back to May. According to the report, “the US Homeland Security has confidence that this campaign is still ongoing and threat actors are actively pursuing their objectives over a long-term campaign”. However, the report did not mention any incidence of attack and described that a hacking group called ‘Berserk Bear’, closely associated with Russia and aimed at the energy, financial and transportation industries and hacked their computer networks with malicious emails and infected websites. Mr. McConnell spokesman of the Department of Homeland Security mentioned, “The technical alert provides recommendations to prevent and mitigate malicious cyber activity targeting multiple sectors and reiterated our commitment to remain vigilant for new threats.” But he refused to give detailed information provided by the report.

- **Some children's GPS watches have security flaws: EU consumer group¹⁰⁵**

On 18 October 2017, the EU’s main consumer lobby i.e. the Norwegian Consumer Council said that some smart watches such as Gator 2, Tinitell, Viksfjord and Xplora watches for children which use the Global Position System (GPS) to allow parents to track their child’s location and communicate with them through their mobile phones lack safety measures that in turn assist hackers to control and use data. Monique Goyens, the director general of the European Consumer Organisation BEUC - of which the Norwegian council is a member said, “These watches should not find their way into our shops. Parents buy them to protect their children. However, they are probably unaware that instead of protecting them they are making their children more vulnerable.” Earlier in July 2017, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation cautioned consumers on use of internet-connected children’s devices.

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

Pakistan

S. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	October 18	Balochistan	At least eight persons, including seven Policemen, were killed and 24		

¹⁰⁴ Express, 22 October 2017, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/869519/us-russia-hackers-homeland-security-fbi-report>)

¹⁰⁵ Reuters, 18 October 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-cyber-watches/some-childrens-gps-watches-have-security-flaws-eu-consumer-group-idUSKBN1CN2PY?il=0>)

			others were injured in an explosion in Sariab Mill area of Quetta. ¹⁰⁶		
2	October 18	FATA	Two security personnel were killed in an IED attack in Miranshah town of North Waziristan Agency. ¹⁰⁷	2	0
3	October 19	Punjab	A provincial review board comprising judges of the Lahore High Court approved one-month extension in detention of Jama'at-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Muhammad Saeed but turned down a government request for extending detention of four other leaders of the organisation. They were to stand freed on October 26, the expiry of their detention period. ¹⁰⁸	Hafiz Saeed detention extended	
4	October 19	Balochistan	At least 15 people were injured when unidentified armed assailants hurled grenade near a mobile market at Safar Khan Chowk in Mastung District. Separately, 20 Sindhi labourers were injured when unidentified militants lobbed a grenade at Al-Zubair hotel on airport road in Gwadar District. ¹⁰⁹	0	35
5	October 21	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police recovered beheaded dead bodies of two police constables, identified as Faisal Wahid and Tariq, from Elum Mountain in Buner District. ¹¹⁰	2	0

Afghanistan

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	October 17	Paktia	At least 40 people, including the police chief for southeastern	40	235

¹⁰⁶ Syed Ali Shah, 8 killed, 24 others wounded in blast targeting police vehicle in Quetta, *Dawn*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364600/7-killed-24-others-wounded-in-blast-targeting-police-vehicle-in-quetta>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹⁰⁷ Ali Akbar, 2 security personnel killed in North Waziristan IED blast, *Dawn*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364627/2-security-personnel-killed-in-north-waziristan-ied-blast>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹⁰⁸ Hafiz Saeed's detention extended, *Dawn*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364980/hafiz-saeeds-detention-extended>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹⁰⁹ Syed Ali Shah, Balochistan rocked by grenade attacks; 35 injured in Mastung, Gwadar, *Dawn*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364847/balochistan-rocked-by-grenade-attacks-35-injured-in-mastung-gwadar>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹⁰ Umar Bacha, Mutilated bodies of two police constables found in Buner district, say police, *Dawn*, October 22, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1365359/mutilated-bodies-of-two-police-constables-found-in-buner-district-say-police>, accessed on October 23, 2017

			Paktia province, were killed and 235 others were wounded in an explosion carried out by Taliban militants in Gardez. Taliban militants launched coordinated attacks on the provincial police headquarters and a police training centre, following by car bombings. ¹¹¹		
2	October 20	Kabul / Ghor	<p>Suicide bombers attacked two mosques in Afghanistan, killing at least 72 people. In the first incident, a suicide bomber blew himself up in Imam Zaman mosque of Shias located in Dasht-e-Barchi District of Kabul, killing 39 people. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.</p> <p>Separately, at least 33 people were killed in a suicide bombing at a mosque, targeting a local leader from the Jama'at political party. No outfit claimed responsibility for the attack.¹¹²</p>	72	NS
3	October 20	Paktika	25 Haqqani Network militants were killed and 30 others wounded in Afghan National Defense and Security Forces joint clearance operation carried out in Tandi Hotel and Wali Was regions of Giyan District. ¹¹³	25	30
4	October 21	Nangarhar	US airstrike targeted a training camp for the suicide bombers in Pekha area area of Achin District, killing at least 40 people, including two trainers of	40	NS

¹¹¹ 40 killed and 235 wounded in Paktia attacks, *Pajhwok News*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2017/10/17/40-killed-and-235-wounded-paktia-attacks>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹² Hamid Shalizi, Suicide bombers attack two Afghan mosques, at least 72 dead, *Reuters*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-attack/suicide-bombers-attack-two-afghan-mosques-at-least-72-dead-idUSKBN1CP1UF>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹³ 25 members of Haqqani Network killed in Paktika, *Afghanistan Times*, October 21, 2017, <http://afghanistantimes.af/25-members-of-haqqani-network-killed-in-paktika/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

			the terror group and several suicide bombers. ¹¹⁴		
5	October 22	Faryab	Unidentified militants shot dead three religious scholars in the Qaisar District. ¹¹⁵	3	0
6	October 22	Herat	A sudden infighting among the Taliban insurgents in Khaifan area of Shindand District left nearly 50 people dead. According to the local officials in Herat, the latest clashes took place between the supporters of Taliban supreme Mullah Hebatullah Akhundzada and dissident Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Rasool. ¹¹⁶	50	NS

Iraq

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	October 18	Anbar	Iraqi government and paramilitary forces killed three Islamic State militants near Thirthar lake, north of the province. ¹¹⁷	3	0
2	October 19	Baghdad	Four civilians were wounded in a bomb blast in the industrial district in al-Taji region, north of Baghdad. ¹¹⁸	0	4
3	October 19	Salahuddin	An Islamic State suicide attacker was killed by security troops in Salahuddin province. ¹¹⁹	1	0
4	October 20	Mosul	Eight Islamic State militants were killed in an airstrike	8	0

¹¹⁴ US airstrike hit ISIS suicide training camp in Afghanistan leaving 40 dead, *Khaama Press*, October 22, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/us-airstrike-hit-isis-suicide-training-camp-in-afghanistan-leaving-40-dead-03691>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹⁵ 3 Religious Scholars Gunned Down in Faryab, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, October 23, 2017, <http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/assets/epaper/October%2023,%202017/Main%20Page.pdf>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹⁶ Deadly infighting among Taliban leaves 50 dead, wounded in Herat, *Khaama Press*, October 22, 2017, <http://www.khaama.com/deadly-infighting-among-taliban-leaves-50-dead-wounded-in-herat-03692>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹⁷ Mohamed Mostafa, Troops kill 3 Islamic State members near Anbar lake, *Iraqi News*, October 18, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/troops-kill-3-islamic-state-members-near-anbar-lake/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹⁸ Nehal Mostafa, Four civilians wounded in bomb blast, northern Baghdad, *Iraqi News*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/four-civilians-wounded-bomb-blast-northern-baghdad/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹¹⁹ Nehal Mostafa, Security kills Islamic State suicide attacker in Salahuddin, *Iraqi News*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/security-kills-islamic-state-suicide-attacker-salahuddin/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

			launched in Tal Faris region of Mosul. ¹²⁰		
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Syria

S.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1	October 17	Raqqa	Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) managed to fully recapture the city of Raqqa, after clashes with the Islamic State that lasted for more than 130 days. ¹²¹	SDF	recaptures Raqqa
2	October 20	Syria	Russian Ministry of Defense announced that nearly 92.6% of the Syrian territory was liberated from the Islamic State group. Furthermore, Russian troops have cleared more than 200 hectares in Deir Ezzor from land mines. ¹²²	Syrian	territory liberated from ISIS
3	October 22	Hama	Russian Air Force carried out an airstrike over the town of Rahjan, killing at least ten al Qaeda linked Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham fighters that were present at the base in the Hama Governorate. ¹²³	10	0
4	October 22	Turkish-Latakia border	The jihadist rebels of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham launched a surprise attack near the Turkish-Latakia border, targeting the Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) positions near the town of Rabi'yah and killing seven SAA soldiers. ¹²⁴	7	0

¹²⁰ Nehal Mostafa, Eight IS militants killed in army airstrike, south of Mosul, *Iraqi News*, October 21, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/eight-militants-killed-army-airstrike-south-mosul/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹²¹ Loaa Adel, SDF completely recapture the city of Raqqa, *Iraqi News*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/sdf-completely-recapture-city-raqqa/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹²² Loaa Adel, Russian Krasnaya Zvezda: 92.6% of Syrian territory free of IS, *Iraqi News*, October 21, 2017, <https://www.iraqinews.com/arab-world-news/russian-krasnaya-zvezda-92-6-syrian-territory-free/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹²³ Leith Fadel, Breaking: Russian Air Force bombs Al-Qaeda base in east Hama, *Al Masdar News*, October 22, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/breaking-russian-air-force-bombs-al-qaeda-base-east-hama/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

¹²⁴ Leith Fadel, Jihadist rebels launch surprise attack near Turkish-Latakia border, *Al Masdar News*, October 22, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/jihadist-rebels-launch-surprise-attack-near-turkish-latakia-border/>, accessed on October 23, 2017

Economic Issues

- **India rejects WTO push for new global e-commerce rules**

India has rejected fresh efforts by a group of countries led by the European Union (EU), Japan, Canada and Australia to negotiate new global e-commerce rules under the aegis of the World Trade Organization (WTO). During an informal meeting at the WTO on October 16, 2017, the EU, Canada, Australia, Chile, Korea, Norway and Paraguay, among other countries, circulated a restricted draft ministerial decision to establish “a working party” at the upcoming WTO ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires and authorizing it to “conduct preparations for and carry out negotiations on trade-related aspects of electronic commerce on the basis of proposal by Members”.

India fears that new rules could provide unfair market access to foreign companies, hurting the rapidly growing domestic e-commerce platforms. A key demand by the developed countries is to make permanent the current ban on customs duties on global electronic transactions—they were suspended in 1998. A large majority of developing countries supported India’s stand. The African Group of more than 50 countries, while rejecting any new institutional arrangement, said that it was willing to “agree to continue the exploration of issues under the 1998 Work Programme”.¹²⁵

- **NAFTA Talks’ Extension May Make for Slow, Painful Demise**

The United States, Canada and Mexico said on October 17, 2017 that they would extend NAFTA negotiations into next year, with the parties citing “significant conceptual gaps” in how to rewrite the 1994 trade pact. Negotiators, struggling to find agreement on some of the thorniest provisions of the trade deal, will take an extended break to consult with politicians and interest groups before convening again in Mexico City for the fifth round of talks in mid-November. The trade talks, which were supposed to wrap up by year-end, have now been extended into the first quarter of 2018. The three countries, which will meet again on November 17, have been unable to reach agreement on a range of issues, including what percentage of a product should be made in the United States and whether the trade pact should expire every five years.

Noteworthy, the Mexican presidential race will begin in earnest leading up to a July 1 election, raising the risk that President Trump’s proposals for revising NAFTA will become a sensitive topic that Mexican candidates will shy away from supporting. In the United States, legislation will expire in July that gives the Trump administration more extensive authority to negotiate trade deals and then submit them to Congress for a simple up or down vote, without amendments. Campaigning for midterm elections will also begin in the United States, while Canada will hold provincial elections.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ D. Ravi Kanth, “India rejects WTO push for new global e-commerce rules”, *Livemint*, October 17, 2017, <http://www.livemint.com/Industry/tRCUKDsTGvnQUpVyVTLmhJ/India-rejects-WTO-push-for-new-global-ecommerce-rules.html> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

¹²⁶ Ana Swanson “Nafta Talks’ Extension May Make for Slow, Painful Demise”, *The New York Times*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/us/politics/nafta-negotiators-extend-talks-delaying-its-expected-demise.html> (accessed on October 23, 2017)

- **UK minister seeks US trade deal focused on services**

The Financial Times reported on October 23, 2017 that the UK Trade Secretary, Liam Fox, wants a post-Brexit trade deal with the US to focus on the services sector, amid growing cabinet and business concern in Britain to an accord covering goods and agriculture. Mr Fox's allies say that a deal on services with the US is the big prize, acknowledging that an ambitious agreement in other areas could lead to bitter disputes with Washington over food imports, such as chicken dipped in chlorinated water. However, any serious negotiations between the UK and the US on a trade deal are unlikely to start until 2019, when it becomes clearer to Washington what sort of access to the EU market the UK negotiates.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ George Parker, Jim Pickard, Shawn Donnan and Alan Beattie, "UK minister seeks US trade deal focused on services" *The Financial Times*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/2f8c8a8a-b711-11e7-8c12-5661783e5589> (accessed on October 23, 2017)