

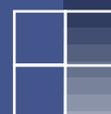
2018



Foreign Policy Review

*Annual Report on the Developments in the Field of
Foreign Affairs*

Indian Council of World Affairs
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New Delhi

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Contents

Chapter	Page No.
1. Executive Summary	5
2. South Asia	11
3. South East/East Asia	27
4. Central Asia	48
5. West Asia	55
6. Africa (North, South, East, West & Sub-Saharan Africa)	62
7. Indian Ocean and Pacific Islands	71
8. Latin America and the Caribbean	78
9. North America	80
10. Major Powers	83
Contributor's List	94

Sources

The information provided in the Foreign Policy Review 2018 has been sourced from the following websites:

1. Ministry of External Affairs
2. Ministry of Commerce
3. Ministry of Finance
4. President's Office
5. Vice President's Office
6. Prime Minister's Office
7. Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP)
8. Press Information Bureau
9. Websites of various News and Media Houses

Executive Summary

The *South Asian region* witnessed significant developments in 2018. India welcomed the formation of new governments in Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives and reiterated the need for continuation of mutual cooperation within the region and beyond. Internal political and constitutional developments in Sri Lanka became a concern for India after the dismissal of Prime Minister by the President. Relations with Pakistan were at a standstill due to an un-ending spat over cross-border terrorism. However, positive initiatives such as the Kartarpur Corridor underlined that events on the India- Pakistan terrain have a more complex logic. India and Nepal tried to consolidate trust in their relations, which was strained after the declaration of the new constitution in 2015. Bhutan held its third parliamentary election. Enhancing regional cooperation under SAARC and balancing Major Powers' interests in the region remained crucial challenges for India.

The ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit held in New Delhi in January 2018 set the tone for India's engagement with the ASEAN States in 2018. Through the 'Delhi Declaration', the summit reaffirmed India's continued partnership while also opening opportunities for new areas of cooperation, such as in the maritime space. The positive momentum in the relations was marked by high-level visits from India to the ASEAN States and vice-versa. These visits contributed to the establishment of enhanced partnership such as the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between India and Indonesia. 2018 witnessed elections in Cambodia and Malaysia, and the beginning of the election process in Indonesia and Thailand. Elections in the Southeast Asian states concluded successfully with the return of the incumbents in all countries, except in Malaysia.

With regard to *northeast Asia*, the situation in the Korean Peninsula throughout 2018 remained stable and peaceful, witnessing unprecedented diplomatic activities, in contrast to the highly tensed situation in the preceding year. North Korea restrained from nuclear and missile testing and also ended its self-imposed isolation from the international community, creating a conducive environment for diplomacy, including three inter-Korean Summits, three China-North Korea Summits and a historic North Korea-US Summit. The summit with the US also initiated North Korea-US nuclear negotiation, which was intermittent but helped to maintain peace and stability in the region. The 'Trump shock', featuring Washington's unilateral decision to impose tariff on countries in the region, including its allies, Japan and South Korea, and the subsequent trade war between Washington and Beijing had a significant influence in the shaping of regional affairs in 2018. The year also witnessed a thaw in China-Japan relations, which was marked by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Beijing for the first time in eight years.

India welcomed the developments in the Korean Peninsula, and also made an effort to improve its relations with North Korea. The visit of the then Minister of State for External Affairs General V.K. Singh to Pyongyang in May, the first Indian ministerial visit to North Korea in the last three decades, is a testimony to India's continued commitment to peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. The year 2018 also featured an expansion in India's relations with Japan and South Korea, evidenced by the announcement of the 2+2 dialogue, involving the Defense and External Affairs Ministers of India and Japan, and the expansion of the "Special Strategic Partnership" between the two countries. Seoul's 'New Southern Policy', aimed at bringing India and Korea closer, provided a new context to the relations between the two countries.

In *Central Asia*, 2018 witnessed an increasing interest in the US. Presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan paid official visits to the US in January and May 2018, respectively. Regional, economic and political cooperation continued to see its upward trajectory in the region. The consultative conference of five republics was held in March 2018, an important development from the regional perspective. Central Asian countries, especially Uzbekistan, showed interest in resolving the situation in Afghanistan. An international conference on Afghanistan was held in Tashkent in which India also participated.

India's engagement with the five republics maintained its course of economic, political and cultural engagements in 2018. The fifth India-Central Asia Track II dialogue was held at Samarqand, Uzbekistan. India attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in 2018 for the first time after becoming its full member in 2017. Investments in Chabahar, joining of the Ashgabat transit agreement, etc. show that India will continue to strengthen its economic relations with the neighbouring region in 2019.

The *West Asian region* witnessed the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement in May 2018. This was followed by a reimposition of all nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions on Iran, leading Iran to devise a policy of pressurising the European signatories of the deal to make 'economic guarantees' and strengthening its economic and political relations with Russia, China and other Asian powers, signalling the return of the earlier 'Look to the East' policy. Following the US withdrawal, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif visited New Delhi, seeking India's support to salvage the nuclear deal and to continue the deepening partnership between the two countries in the areas of connectivity, energy, and trade. Connectivity emerged as a major focus of bilateral relations during Iranian President Rouhani's visit to India in February, with the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the inclusion of Chabahar within its framework figuring prominently. In December, India Ports Global Limited Company took over operations at the Shaheed Beheshti port at Chabahar.

In Iraq, the first parliamentary election after the military defeat of ISIS culminated in the appointment of Adel Abdul Mahdi, a former oil minister and an independent candidate who was not allied with either of the two Shi'ite blocs, as the president. The Qatar crisis continued, despite attempts at its resolution by the US, which sought the Gulf allies to put a united front against Iran. Qatar criticised the US sanctions on Iran, calling on the US for a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue.

The year 2018 failed to make any progress in the diplomatic ties in the Arab world. There was a divide among the GCC nations and political divergence between major powers of the

region like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and many small and big powers. India's engagement with the region was very fruitful and began with Prime Minister Modi's policy of engagement with all the Arab nations. His visit to UAE, Oman, and Palestine further showed India's commitment to the Arab world and the Arab world in turn showed its support to India's efforts in forging a global alliance against terrorism. However, India's foreign policy calculus faced several challenges due to events, such as the US' withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, the US' unilateral actions and the imposition of Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) on countries purchasing crude oil from Iran, the growing rivalry among extra-regional actors especially Russia and the US on Syrian crisis. While India pursued a multi-alignment foreign policy to judiciously balance all the major players in global politics, the challenges for India's interests in West Asia largely came from two of its major bilateral partners- the US and Russia.

In *North Africa*, there was no headway in combating violence in Libya and many non-state actors did not allow the political process to begin despite global efforts for the same. France and Italy were completely divided over the prospects of Libya. Egypt was able to mend its ties further with the US despite the repression of political opponents at home, and also enjoyed good relations with all world powers. Tunisia witnessed some internal political upheaval due to worsening economic situation but the political front remained stable. Various high-level delegations from Egypt and Morocco visited India and both sides signed many agreements and MoUs to strengthen the ties.

The *Sub-Saharan African* region witnessed various eventful moments in the political, economic, security and development arenas. The most transformative events were the conduct of peaceful elections that came as a respite for many African countries. Sierra Leone, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo witnessed a peaceful transition of power. There was an acceptable voter turnout and one key aspect of these elections was the active participation of youth. Africa witnessed the overthrow of long-standing autocratic leaders, for instance, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. There were positive economic developments in the region, such as the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by the African Union in March 2018, setting the stage for a massive free trade area. The trade agreement was signed by 44 African countries during the 10th Ordinary Session of African Union Heads of State summit held in the Rwandan capital, Kigali. The settlement of the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea was a major step towards a peaceful and stable region and a positive sign for Indian interests in the region.

India's relations with Africa witnessed significant intensification in various fields. Various important high-level visits added impetus to the relations and increased India's outreach to Africa. Some of the significant high-level visits were President Kovind's visit to Mauritius and Madagascar from 11- 15 March 2018; his visit to Swaziland, Zambia, and Equatorial Guinea from 7-13 April 2018 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Rwanda, Uganda, and South Africa from 23- 28 July 2018. India announced the opening of 18 new Indian missions in Africa to expand India's diplomatic footprints in Africa. This project is expected to cover countries from west and central Africa such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland and Togo within a period of four years, from 2018-2021. 2018 also saw African countries becoming more receptive to the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor initiative.

India's vision for the *Indo-Pacific* was clearly articulated in Prime Minister Modi's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2018, highlighting that India's vision stands for a "free, open and inclusive region." Dynamic and action-oriented 'Act East Policy' remained the focus of India's engagement with its extended eastern neighborhood. Indian Navy continued to engage with other regional navies in the Indo-Pacific conducting exercises and goodwill visits including Milan 2018, Malabar, JIMEX, SIMBEX, AUSINDEX, RIMPAC and other such bilateral and multilateral engagements. The 'Quad' also progressed gradually with a focus on areas of connectivity and infrastructure development; counterterrorism, HADR maritime cooperation; and cybersecurity issues. Fresh energy was witnessed in India's relations with Australia and New Zealand and in India's outreach to the Pacific Island Countries. The first-ever Head of State's visit to Australia in 2018 reflected the upward trajectory of the India-Australia relationship. With the Modi government and Morrison administration returning to power in 2019, there will be more continuity in India-Australia bilateral cooperation.

In the *Indian Ocean region*, China's growing influence continued to be a challenge for India. India patiently worked to enhance cooperation with littoral states and major powers to maintain peace and stability in the region. India displayed mature diplomacy during the Maldivian crisis; Seychelles agreed to work with India on the joint project at the Assumption Island. Maintaining maritime safety, security and freedom of navigation and overflight in the region remained key priorities for India. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) added Maldives as its 22nd member and Turkey and South Korea as the 8th and 9th dialogue partners of the Association. India and France inked Logistic Support agreement during the State visit of President Emmanuel Macron to India in March 2018. Such an agreement aimed to facilitate the armed forces of both countries to receive logistical support, supplies, and services from each other during authorised port visits, joint exercises, joint training, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief efforts.

For *India-China* relationship, the year 2018 was significant as the first India-China informal summit was held on April 27-28, 2018 in Wuhan, China. Exchanges and cooperation between India and China increased. The two leaders agreed to implement some of the agreements reached during their meetings at the SCO summit in Qingdao and at the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg in July 2018. The two sides agreed to give direction to their militaries in enhancing communications to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas. In November 2018, India's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, met with the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, in Chengdu for the 21st round of Special Representatives' talks on the boundary question. The annual 'Hand-in-Hand' exercise was resumed after its suspension in 2017. The year was significant as the Chinese Defence Minister, Wei Fenghe, visited India in August 2018 regarding the establishment of a hotline between the two sides. Again, Deputy Commander of Western Theatre Command of the Chinese military visited India in June was followed by the Chinese Minister of Public Security, Zhao Kezhi, in October 2018. As a result of the Wuhan summit, India and China convened the first High-Level Mechanism on Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges on December 21, 2018. One of the important achievements of the Wuhan summit was the inauguration of the first Joint India-China Training Programme for Afghan diplomats. The two sides agreed to explore means to bridge the trade deficit and provide greater market access for Indian agricultural products. India won market access for sugar, rice, pharma,

grapes, fish meal, fish oil, rapeseed meal, and tobacco. At the multilateral level, China and India put up a joint front along with other developing and developed nations to break the impasse in the WTO Appellate Body on appointment of judges. The US under Trump has repeatedly blocked the appointment process, referring to the system as unfair and unjust to American interests.

Russia witnessed the continuation of the tensed relationship with the West, especially the US, during the course of 2018. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the Russophobic sentiments in the West have reached an unprecedented level. For India, the tensed and strained relationship between Russia and the West was not a positive development. India was able to avoid the CAATSA on signing the S-400 missile defense system deal with Russia in October 2018. India closely watched Russia's relationship with China and Pakistan as well as the Taliban. President Putin was re-elected in 2018, which was a positive development for India's bilateral relationship. During the 19th Annual Summit in 2018, Prime Minister Modi and President Putin praised the 20 percent increase in the bilateral trade volume. Russia in 2018 introduced the hypersonic weapons, a potential area for India-Russia bilateral cooperation in the future. Other bilateral developments included the activation of the Russia-India-China format when the three heads of the states met for the second time in 12 years.

Relations with the *United States* progressed well with several official meetings. Defence relations between the two witnessed the most progress with the 2+2 meetings being the most prominent. The COMCASA agreement allows sensitive US military equipment to be sold to India. Trade relations took a blow with the tariffs placed by the US and the continuous pressure on India's relations with Iran and Russia. While the US would continue to pressure India on reducing relations with these two nations, India has shown that it will build a strategy based on its interests. On the domestic agenda, the status of H1B Visa holders and their spouses will continue to be monitored in 2019 as well.

India's relations with *Canada* were largely dominated by the Khalistan issue. This became prominent during the visit of Prime Minister Trudeau to India and later in the year when Canada changed the language of the Public Report on the Terrorism Threat (December 2018), that had listed Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) as terrorist organisations due to protests by Sikh groups. As the Indian Sikh community plays an important role in Canada's electoral politics, relations would continue to remain the same until the elections in Canada on October 2019.

Relations with *Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) region* saw a considerable push in 2018 with the visit of President and Vice President to the region. This visit was in continuation of the visit of the Prime Minister to the region before for the BRICS summit. The visit of Argentinian President to India has further shown the way forward. Relations with Mexico, which also went into elections in 2018, have been the same and likely to remain the same in 2019. The two countries continued to share common views on several issues such as the reform of the UN and terrorism. India actively engaged the LAC region and this is going to continue in 2019 too.

In 2018, India worked towards expanding its presence in the *European continent*. The European Union (EU) also acknowledged India to be an economic powerhouse and a key emerging global player. For long, the EU-India partnership was dominated by western member states such as France, Germany, and the UK, but this changed in 2018 with India renewing its focus on countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and Northern Europe (Nordics). India also became the second country after the US, where all the Nordic countries come together on a single platform for a summit with one single country. These visits focused on enhancing cooperation at the multilateral forums, boosting trade and investment ties, innovation, science and technology, culture and people-to-people contacts. Moreover, the EU published its new strategy on India that went beyond its traditional approach to the areas where Europeans can offer their expertise and where the relations can be further enhanced. This was EU's first strategy paper in 14 years since the signing of the strategic partnership between the two sides in 2004. The strategy presented a long-term strategic vision to redefine and revitalise the partnership and to address India's expectations from the EU.

SOUTH ASIA

1. SOUTH ASIA

The year 2018 saw a number of political, strategic, security and economic developments in the countries of South Asia. On the political front, Bhutan, Pakistan and Bangladesh held parliamentary elections in 2018, while the presidential elections in Afghanistan got postponed. The election in Bhutan was peaceful, bringing a new face at the helm of affairs. Elections in Pakistan too brought a regional political party at the national level. The year saw most of the important political leaders getting indicted and imprisoned in Pakistan on charges of corruption. The nation also faced major economic crisis along with charges of abetting terrorist organisations in the country. Elections in Bangladesh saw a change in the governmental setup, as the alliance led by Bangladesh Awami League won all the seats in the *JatiyoSangsad*, decimating the space for the alliance led by Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Afghanistan witnessed a violent and unstable year, witnessing widescale terrorist and militant attacks, leading to the largest number of civilian deaths after 2009. Major global and regional players made various futile attempts of forging a peace plan for Afghanistan. Sri Lanka experienced rift in between the executive and the legislature, which created mistrust among the President and the Prime Minister. Maldives witnessed the dismissal of leaders and extremely volatile domestic politics. Nepal, in comparison, had a peaceful political climate with the coming of the new Prime Minister in February.

On the economic front the South Asian countries witnessed lowering of GDP, with the exception of Bangladesh and Maldives.

GDPs in South Asia (in %)

Country	2017	2018
India	7.2	7.0
Bangladesh	7.3	7.9
Nepal	7.9	6.3
Sri Lanka	3.4	3.2
Afghanistan	2.7	2.2
Bhutan	6.3	5.5
Maldives	6.9	7.6
Pakistan	5.4	5.2

(Source: Asian Development Bank)

AFGHANISTAN

While the entire year was interspersed with sporadic violence and terrorist attacks in Kabul and other provinces, attempts were made to find long term peace. On 9 November 2018, for the first time the Moscow format of talks was held, having the Taliban on the dialogue table. India participated in the talks on a non-official level. In the same month, the US requested Afghanistan to suspend its April 2019 presidential elections and pursue peace talks with the Taliban.¹ Later, former Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar announced his candidacy, indicating his firm belief in the possibility of a peace deal with the Taliban.² On November 28, 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani formed a 12-member team to hold peace talks with the Taliban while attending a two-day international peace conference in Geneva.³

In the first week of December, Zalmay Khalilzad, in charge of US peace efforts in Afghanistan, left for an eight-country tour to discuss negotiating with the Taliban, and has already spoken multiple times with senior Taliban officials by their account.⁴ On December 30, officials announced the presidential elections scheduled for April 2019 would be delayed by three months (until July 2019), to ensure better organised polls but also due to ongoing efforts at peace negotiations with the Taliban.⁵

While attempts of talks were made all throughout 2018, Taliban kept on carrying out deadly attacks against ANSF, and were successful in capturing strategic areas in Afghanistan. The rising influence of the Islamic State inside Afghanistan is also a cause of major concern for the Afghan government. As per a UN report, 2018 has seen the highest number of civilian deaths after 2009. As per UNAMA Report, 3,804 civilians were killed while 7,189 were

¹ Jessica Donati, Craig Nelson and Dion Nissenbaum, "U.S. Considers Asking Afghanistan to Suspend Presidential Election", *The Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-considers-asking-afghanistan-to-suspend-presidential-election-1542054459> as accessed on June 11, 2019

² Ahmad Shah Katawazai, "Afghanistan's Most Powerful Person Announces Bid for April Presidential Elections", *The Diplomat*, November 28, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/afghanistans-most-powerful-person-announces-bid-for-april-presidential-elections/> as accessed on June 11, 2019

³ Eltaf Najafizada, "Afghan President Ghani Forms Team for Peace Talks With Taliban", *Bloomberg*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-11-28/afghan-president-ghani-forms-team-for-peace-talks-with-taliban> as accessed on June 11, 2019

⁴ "US envoy for Afghan peace embarks on multi-nation tour amid concerns in Kabul", *Stars and Stripes*, January 1, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-envoy-for-afghan-peace-embarks-on-multi-nation-tour-amid-concerns-in-kabul-1.559078> as accessed on June 11, 2019

⁵ "Afghanistan's presidential elections delayed until July", *Washington Post*, January 1, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghanistans-presidential-elections-delayed-until-july/2018/12/30/038faea0-0c45-11e9-8f0c-6f878a26288a_story.html?utm_term=.9ac187e04680 as accessed on June 11, 2019

wounded. According to the report, there has been increase in deaths than the previous years, with an increase in suicide bombings by Islamic State and airstrikes by US-led coalition forces.⁶

It should be noted that an Indian national working in a multinational corporation in Baghlan province in Afghanistan was kidnapped and later killed in August 2018.⁷

Bilaterally, there were high level visits between India and Afghanistan. For instance, President Ashraf Ghani visited India on September 19, 2018 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They had discussions with regard to regional and bilateral importance.⁸

The first tripartite meeting of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India was held on September 11, 2018 at the Deputy Foreign Minister level in Kabul, Afghanistan. The meeting focused on consolidating economic cooperation, including Chabahar, as well as enhancing cooperation on counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and continuing support to the peace and reconciliation process that is led and owned by Afghanistan. The three sides agreed to hold the next round of consultation at an appropriate time in India in 2019.⁹ India also participated non-officially in a meeting on Afghanistan hosted by Russia on November 9, 2018, as mentioned above.

The Third Meeting of Joint Working Group on Political and Security Cooperation between India and Afghanistan was held in Kabul on September 10, 2018. Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Hekmat Khalil Karzai, and Foreign Secretary of India, Vijay Gokhale co-chaired the meeting. Both sides agreed to strengthen security cooperation between the two countries. The Indian side reiterated its support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process.¹⁰

⁶ "Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Annual Report 2018", United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations Human Rights, February 2019, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_annual_protection_of_civilians_report_2018_-_23_feb_2019_-_english.pdf as accessed on June 11, 2019

⁷ "Official Spokesperson's response to queries regarding the kidnapping and killing of an Indian national in Afghanistan", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, August 02, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/30209/official+spokespersons+response+to+queries+regarding+the+kidnapping+and+killing+of+an+indian+national+in+afghanistan> as accessed on June 11, 2019

⁸ "Visit of President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to India (September 19, 2018)", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, September 19, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30410/visit+of+president+of+islamic+republic+of+afghanistan+to+india+september+19+2018> as accessed on June 11, 2019

⁹ "Joint Statement of the Trilateral Meeting of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, September 11, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30378/joint+statement+of+the+trilateral+meeting+of+the+islamic+republic+of+afghanistan+the+islamic+republic+of+iran+and+the+republic+of+india> as accessed on June 11, 2019

¹⁰ "Third meeting of Joint Working Group on Political and Security Cooperation between India and Afghanistan", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, September 10, 2018,

The second meeting of India-Afghanistan Joint Working Group on Development Cooperation (JWG-DC) was hosted in Kabul on August 9, 2018. The JWG-DC is one of the four Joint Working Groups formed under the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Council, which is headed by the External Affairs Minister of India and the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan. The Strategic Partnership Council is mandated for the overall management of the strategic relationship between India and Afghanistan. During the meeting of the JWG-DC, both sides had an exhaustive review of the large number of ongoing development projects spread over varied areas of cooperation such as capacity building, infrastructure, education, healthcare, good-governance, human resource development, etc.¹¹

The then Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj met the visiting Minister of National Defence of Afghanistan Lt. General Tariq Shah Bahrami in New Delhi on April 13, 2018. They exchanged views on the situation in Afghanistan. Afghan Defence Minister shared his assessment of the recent initiatives of the Government of Afghanistan for internal reconciliation; efforts to combat terrorism that receives support from safe havens sanctuaries beyond Afghanistan; and efforts to combat the menace of opium cultivation and drugs trafficking which goes into funding terrorism against the people of Afghanistan.¹²

Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale visited Afghanistan on 27-28 February 2018. During his visit, Foreign Secretary called on President Ashraf Ghani and handed over a letter from the Prime Minister. Foreign Secretary also called on NSA Atmar, Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani and met Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Karzai. Foreign Secretary represented India at the second meeting of the Kabul Process on 'Peace and Security Cooperation' that was held on 28 February 2018. In his meetings with the Afghan leadership and statement at the Kabul Process meeting, Foreign Secretary conveyed India's continued commitment to enhance economic and development partnership; and support for efforts of the people and Government of Afghanistan to build a peaceful, stable, secure, prosperous, united, inclusive, democratic and pluralistic nation free from the shadow of terrorism.¹³

<https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30376/third+meeting+of+joint+working+group+on+political+and+security+cooperation+between+india+and+afghanistan> as accessed on June 11, 2019

¹¹ "Second Meeting of India-Afghanistan Joint Working Group on Development Cooperation (JWG-DC) in Kabul", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, August 10, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30310/second+meeting+of+indiaafghanistan+joint+working+group+on+development+cooperation+jwgdc+in+kabul> as accessed on June 11, 2019

¹² "External Affairs Minister meets Minister of National Defence of Afghanistan", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, April 13, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29811/external+affairs+minister+meets+minister+of+national+defence+of+afghanistan> as accessed on June 11, 2019

¹³ "Foreign Secretary's visit to Afghanistan", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, February 28, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29523/foreign+secretarys+visit+to+afghanistan> as accessed on June 11, 2019

During the inauguration of the TAPI pipeline, the then Minister of State M.J. Akbar represented India at Herat on February 23, 2018.¹⁴

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BANGLADESH

Since the beginning of 2018, political parties started preparing for the 11th parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. The main opposition party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) increased pressure on Awami League government to accommodate its demands as a precondition for the inclusive and participatory elections. The BNP had boycotted the last general elections over the election-time neutral caretaker government. As the heated debates and discussions were going on, in February 2018, a Dhaka court found BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia guilty in Zia Orphanage Trust graft case and sentenced her to a five-year prison term. The party, which was pressurizing the ruling coalition on a number of issues, came under pressure itself to get her top leader out of jail. The BNP leaders cried foul and accused the government of resorting to political vendetta to marginalise the opposition before the general elections. Despite all their attempts, Khaleda Zia could neither come out of jail nor contest the election when BNP finally decided to take part in the electoral exercise.

In the run up to the elections, opposition parties gave a call of national unity and came together to form JatiyaOikya Front under the Gono Forum leader Dr Kamal Hossain. The Front too supported BNP demand on an election-time neutral caretaker government and release of Khaleda Zia. The general elections finally took place in December 2018, amid accusations of government muzzling opposition voices and large scale rigging, and Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League won a landslide victory. The opposition parties' performance was quite poor and they could not secure seats in double digits. After months of bickering and delay, most of the opposition members took oath barring one. The political tussle between the government and opposition continues over a range of issues including the release of Khaleda Zia.

The issue of repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar dominated the foreign policy of Bangladesh throughout the year. Bangladesh urged international community to put pressure on Myanmar government to stop violence against the hapless Rohingyas on the one hand and make arrangements for their return. International community responded

¹⁴ "Speech of MOS MJ Akbar at Inauguration Ceremony for Construction of TAPI pipeline in Afghanistan (Herat: February 23, 2018)", *Ministry of External Affairs*, Government of India, February 24, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29515/speech+of+mos+mj+akbar+at+inauguration+ceremony+for+construction+of+tapi+pipeline+in+afghanistan+herat+february+23+2018> as accessed on June 11, 2019

generously in support of Bangladesh dealing with a humanitarian crisis. India was the first country to reach out to Bangladesh with much needed help in tackling the crisis. China proceeded cautiously and in fact sided with Myanmar to some extent to shield it from adverse consequences. Bangladesh, obviously, did not like the way China responded to the crisis. However, it made no impact on the bilateral relations with China. It continued engaging China in a number of areas and strengthened economic cooperation. In March 2018, it signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Padma Bridge Rail Link Project. In May 2018, it again signed a deal to set up coal-based power plant in the country. The Bangladesh Power Development Board and China Huadian Hong Kong Company Limited agreed to form a joint venture company for the purpose.

Bilateral Relations

While engaging China in a multifaceted cooperation, Bangladesh made it clear that the relationship had no negative bearing on its relations with India. The Bangladesh-India relationship has historically been based on shared socio-cultural heritage, mutual respect and meaningful cooperation in every feasible arena. The two countries work together to cope with common challenges and have never shied away from taking measures to address each-others' genuine concerns. India is always ready to take asymmetrical responsibilities and provide necessary assistance to Bangladesh. During the Rohingya refugee crisis, India launched Operation Insaniyat to supply relief materials for 300,000 people. In April, Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Keshav Gokhale visited Dhaka to review bilateral ties and discuss issues of mutual interests. At the end of this visit, six documents were signed to strengthen development cooperation between the two countries.

Dr. Ashish Shukla

NEPAL

K.P. Sharma Oli was officially made Nepal's new prime minister, bringing a prolonged and often-painful political transition to an end. Oli, a veteran communist leader, was sworn in as the 41st prime minister of Nepal on February 15, 2018, two months after the completion of elections. Oli's appointment was expected to set off a journey of peace, stability, and economic development in the Himalayan nation. In this second stint, however, Oli was regarded as the most powerful prime minister in Nepal's recent history as the Left Alliance, dominated by Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center), dominated all the country's power centers. The Maoists, led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (or Prachanda) had supported the formation of the Oli-led government. The Left Alliance also formed provincial governments in all but one of Nepal's provinces. In Province No. 2 (all Nepal's provinces currently have provisional numbers

instead of names), two Madhes-based parties RJP-N and Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum SSF formed a coalition government.¹⁵

On 13 March 2018, the election for President in Nepal was held and under the new constitution 2015 and Bidhya Devi Bhandari was elected as the President of Nepal. Incumbent President Bhandari defeated Nepali Congress leader Kumari Laxmi Rai with an overwhelming majority in the presidential election.¹⁶

India -Nepal Bilateral Relations

The then EAM, Sushma Swaraj visited Kathmandu from 1-2 February 2018. EAM was the first high-level visitor from India after successfully holding Parliamentary and first ever Provincial Assembly elections in Nepal in November-December 2017. She met all political leaders including the President of Nepal. EAM congratulated the Government and people of Nepal for the successful conduct of three-tier elections in Nepal, which was an important milestone in the democratic transition of Nepal.¹⁷

At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of Nepal and his spouse paid a State visit to India from April 6-8, 2018. This was the first foreign visit of PM Oli after assuming the charge. During this visit, both nations signed various agreements like, rail link from Raxoul to Kathmandu, inland waterways connectivity and agricultural cooperation. Apart from these agreements, the two prime ministers jointly inaugurated the Motihari-Amlekhgunj Petroleum Pipeline whose construction is under way. They also opened the Integrated Check Post in Birgunj.¹⁸

Prime Minister Modi paid a State visit to Nepal from 11-12 May 2018, at the invitation of Prime Minister of Nepal. During this visit, PM Modi attended two civic receptions at Janakpur and Kathmandu where he addressed the masses. On this occasion Modi also announced Rs. 1 billion assistance for Province No. 2. He also visited Jaanki temple, Muktinaath temple and Pashupatinath temple. Both Prime Ministers inaugurated Bharat Nepal Maitry Bus Seva from Janakpur to Ayodhya during this visit.¹⁹

¹⁵ "Nepal has a New Prime Minister, Now comes the hard part", *The Diplomat*, 17 February 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/nepal-has-a-new-prime-minister-now-comes-the-hard-part/>,

¹⁶ "Bidya Devi Bhandari reelected as Nepal President", *The Economic Times*, 13 March 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/bidya-devi-bhandari-reelected-as-nepal-president/articleshow/63286382.cms?from=mdr>,

¹⁷ "Visit of External Affairs Minister to Nepal, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2 February 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29408/visit+of+external+affairs+minister+to+nepal+from+february+0102+2018>,

¹⁸ Chandra Sekhar Adhikari, "New Channels for Cooperation open", *The Kathmandu Post*, 8 April 2018, <https://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2018-04-08/new-channels-of-cooperation-open.html>,

¹⁹ Dharbendra Jha, "PM Modi, Oli jointly open Ramayana Circuit", *The Rising Nepal*, 12 May 2018, <http://www.therisingnepal.org.np/news/23577>,

On 30-31 August 2018, the fourth Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit was held in Kathmandu. Seven heads of state or government reiterated the need for enhancing connectivity within the grouping during its inaugural session. From the Indian side PM Modi participated in this summit. On the sidelines of the summit, PM Modi and PM Oli jointly inaugurated the 400-bed Nepal-Bharat Maitri Pashupati Dharmashala at Kathmandu.²⁰

Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', former Prime Minister of Nepal and Co-Chairman, Nepal Communist Party, came to India for a four-day visit on 8 September 2018. Prime Minister Modi and Prachanda discussed the progress in India-Nepal relations, as well as other issues of mutual interest. The Prime Minister fondly recalled their previous interactions, and thanked Shri Dahal for his valuable contributions in strengthening India-Nepal relations.²¹ Former PM of Nepal also attended a programme at the Indian Council of World Affairs, Sapru House and delivered a lecture on India-Nepal Relations.

BHUTAN

The year 2018 will be remembered as an election year for the Himalayan nation. Bhutan's parliament elections were held successfully. On 20 April 2018, elections were held for the National Council (Upper House) for 25 seats. According to the election commission of Bhutan, the final voter turnout was 54.3 percent.²² This time voting percentage was higher than the previous elections (in 2008 and 2013) to the upper house. The result showed anti-incumbency, where for 20 seats, only 5 of the 12 old candidates who contested elections won, and rest were new faces. The upper house is not so powerful as the lower house but it is a significant part of Bhutan's legislative body, with powers to review performance and issues, as well as consider, pass, amend or reject "any legislation" passed by the lower house.

In Bhutan, the third parliamentary elections for the National Assembly (NA) (lower house) were held on 15 September 2018 and 18 October 2018, in two phases. The result of NA election (first phase) were surprising, as the newly formed party DrukNyamrupTshogpa (DNT) won the election and the ruling party People's Democratic Party (PDP) was relegated to third place, while the opposition party DrukPhuensamTshogpa (DPT) secured second position. In the second phase (final round) on 18 October 2019, DNT secured a comfortable majority with 30 out of 47 seats in the elections and DPT secured just 17 seats to play the

²⁰ Sanjeev Giri, "Leaders stress connectivity", *The Kathmandu Post*, 31 August 2018, <https://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2018-08-31/leaders-stress-connectivity.html>,

²¹ "Former PM of Nepal, Shri Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' calls on PM", PMINDIA, 8 September 2018, https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/former-pm-of-nepal-shri-pushpa-kamal-dahal-prachanda-calls-on-pm/,

²² "The Third NC election", Kuensel, 21 April 2018, <http://www.kuenselonline.com/the-third-nc-election/>,

role of opposition. Dr. Lotay Tshering, the president of DNT became the new Prime Minister of Bhutan.²³ The trend of these election results showed anti-incumbency factor and the changing mood of Bhutanese people as they believed giving chance to every party.

India-Bhutan Bilateral Relations

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bhutan Lyonpo Damcho Dorji visited India from 20-23 February 2018 and had discussions on various issues with regard to bilateral relations, including the high-level exchanges between the two countries with the then EAM Sushma Swaraj. At this event, Indian EM addressed the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan.²⁴

In the month of April 2018, Indian Foreign Secretary Shri Vijay Gokhale paid an official visit to Bhutan. The visit was focused on the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries, and provided an opportunity to the two sides to discuss matters concerning bilateral partnership, including the commemorative activities planned in 2018 to mark the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries.²⁵

The Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dasho Tshering Tobgay visited India from 5-7 July, 2018, at the invitation of the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi. In a meeting between the two Prime Ministers, discussions on a range of bilateral and regional issues of mutual interest were held.²⁶

In the month of December 2018, Bhutan's Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering visited India. The state visit took place during the Golden Jubilee year of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan.²⁷

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²³ "DrukNyamrupTshogpa won 54 percent of the total vote", Kuensel, 20 October 2018, <http://www.kuenselonline.com/druk-nyamrup-tshogpa-won-54-percent-of-the-total-votes/>.

²⁴ "Official visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bhutan to India", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 21 February 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29507/official+visit+of+minister+of+foreign+affairs+of+bhutan+to+india+february+2023+2018>.

²⁵ "Visit of Foreign Secretary to Bhutan (01-02 April 2018)", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2 April 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29739/visit+of+foreign+secretary+to+bhutan+0102+april+2018>.

²⁶ "Official visit of Prime Minister of Bhutan to India", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 6 July 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30036/official+visit+of+the+prime+minister+of+bhutan+to+india>.

²⁷ "State visit of Prime Minister of Bhutan to India", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 24 December 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30812/state+visit+of+prime+minister+of+bhutan+to+india>.

PAKISTAN

The year began with deteriorating relations between the United States and Pakistan, where President Trump tweeted on January 1st, how Pakistan had been lying to the world with regard to their attempts of countering terrorism. On January 4, US announced suspension of entire US security assistance for the military to Pakistan.²⁸ Pakistan was once again placed in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) watch list, which was supported by US, France and Germany on a weeklong FATF meeting in mid February.²⁹ General Bajwa, while addressing the Munich Security Conference on February 17, asked the US to stop blaming Pakistan for not being able to bring peace in Afghanistan, and instead asked the US to introspect.³⁰ To improve deteriorating relations, Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua met Ms Lisa Curtis, the Senior Director for South and Central Asia at the NSC of US, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Islamabad on February 26th.³¹ However, later on March 1, Foreign Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif stated that Pakistan's interests could not be sacrificed for the sake of American interests, and would not act as a US proxy.³² The FATF on June 29th formally placed Pakistan on the grey list due to 'strategic deficiencies' in its anti-money laundering and terrorism financing regime.³³

Furthering the deterioration, the US administration added seven Pakistani companies to a list of foreign entities that presumably pose a significant risk to its national security and policy interests by allegedly engaging in nuclear trade and their involvement in the proliferation of unsafeguarded nuclear activities, a move that could undermine Pakistan's ambition of joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).³⁴ US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, visited Islamabad for some hours on September 5, accompanied by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, during which he met Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and Chief of the Army Staff General Qamar Bajwa. They decided to reset

²⁸ Anwar Iqbal, "America suspends entire security aid to Pakistan", *Dawn*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1380876> accessed on January 8, 2018

²⁹ Anwar Iqbal, "FATF begins today review of move to put Pakistan on grey-list", *Dawn*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390160> accessed on February 19, 2018

³⁰ "COAS urges US not to blame Pakistan for its failures", *Dawn*, February 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390159/coas-urges-us-not-to-blame-pakistan-for-its-failures> accessed on February 19, 2018

³¹ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Top US official on quiet Pakistan visit to improve ties", *Dawn*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1391942> accessed on March 5, 2018

³² Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan won't act as US proxy, says Asif", *Dawn*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1392692> accessed on March 5, 2018

³³ Shahbaz Rana, "Pakistan formally placed on FATF grey list", *The Express Tribune*, June 30, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1746079/1-pakistan-formally-placed-fatf-grey-list/> as accessed on July 2, 2018

³⁴ Anwar Iqbal, "US sanctions seven Pakistani firms for 'nuclear trade'", *Dawn*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397628> accessed on April 2, 2018

the ties and build a better understanding between the Trump administration and the new Pakistani government on delivering on each other's expectations.³⁵

Pakistan continued its effort to bring peace in its western neighbourhood and had the second Pakistan-Afghanistan dialogue in February 10 in Islamabad without achieving any fruitful results.³⁶ Pakistan and Russia also announced setting up of a commission for promoting military cooperation while expressing alarm over growing footprint of the militant Islamic State (IS) group in Afghanistan on February 20.³⁷ Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua visited Kabul on April 2nd for continuing negotiations on a bilateral engagement plan - Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity - and held meetings with President Ashraf Ghani and other senior Afghan officials.³⁸ Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi travelled to Kabul on April 6 for a day-long visit. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to finalise their bilateral dialogue framework, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS), as the former reaffirmed support for the Afghan government's offer of peace dialogue to the Taliban and urged the militant group to join the reconciliation process without any delay.³⁹ APAPPS became operational on May 14 with both sides hoping that its implementation would contribute to promoting peace in the region. The seven principles agreed between Pakistan and Afghanistan for the new framework for engagement included: commitments that Pakistan would support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation; the two countries would undertake effective actions against fugitives and the irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries; both countries would deny use of their respective territory by any country, network, group or individuals for anti-state activities against either country; they would put in place a joint supervision, coordination and confirmation mechanism through liaison officers for realisation of the agreed actions; territorial and aerial violations of each other's territory would be avoided; there would be no public blame game and instead APAPPS cooperation mechanisms would be utilised to respond to mutual issues of contention and concerns; and working groups and necessary cooperation mechanism would be set up as per APAPPS. Both sides have operationalised six working groups, including the ones on security and intelligence cooperation.⁴⁰ Heads of intelligence services of Russia,

³⁵ BaqirSajjad Syed, "Pakistan, US agree to make fresh start", *Dawn*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1431263> as accessed on September 11, 2018

³⁶ BaqirSajjad Syed, "Success eludes second round of Pak-Afghan security talks", *Dawn*, February 11, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1388728> accessed on February 12, 2018

³⁷ BaqirSajjad Syed, "Pakistan, Russia form panel to step up military cooperation", *Dawn*, February 21, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390716> accessed on February 26, 2018

³⁸ "Janjua holds talks on bilateral engagement plan in Kabul", *Dawn*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1399247> as accessed on April 9, 2018

³⁹ BaqirSajjad Syed, "Islamabad, Kabul to reframe terms of engagement", *Dawn*, April 7, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1400104> as accessed on April 09, 2018

⁴⁰ New framework for talks with Afghanistan becomes operational, *Dawn*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1407732> as accessed on May 21, 2018

Iran, China, and Pakistan held a meeting in Islamabad on July 10 to discuss the measures against the threat of aggregation of the Islamic State militants in Afghanistan.⁴¹

In April, the apex court of the country ruled that the disqualification under Article 62 (1)(f) of the Pakistani constitution should be treated a disqualification for life. This was the terminal jolt to former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his party Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), as they were preparing for the upcoming general elections with an eye on retaining power. The security establishment, having deep distrust with mainstream political forces, was keen on marginalising PML-N as well as Pakistan People's Party (PPP). It covertly started supporting Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

Prime Minister Abbasi went to Turkmenistan and Afghanistan on February 22nd for the inauguration of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project in the two countries.⁴² Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi also attended the Boao Forum's Annual Conference for Asia which was held in Boao (Hainan) in April 8 and was one of the keynote speakers at the opening session of the forum along with Chinese President Xi Jinping, and other leaders.⁴³ Pakistan, for the first time, launched two indigenously built satellites into the orbit in the second week of July, using a Chinese launch vehicle. The satellites were launched onboard a Chinese Long March (LM-2C) rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre located at the Gobi desert, China.⁴⁴ Pakistan and Russia, on August 7, signed an agreement to allow for training of Pakistani troops at Russian military training institutes. The agreement was signed at the conclusion of the first meeting of Russia-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee (JMCC) at Islamabad, described by the defence ministry as the highest forum of defence collaboration between Pakistan and the Russian Federation.⁴⁵ Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena was the Guest of Honour for the Pakistan Day celebrations held on March 22nd.⁴⁶

⁴¹ BaqirSajjad Syed, "FO says not aware of quadrilateral meeting of spy chiefs", *Dawn*, July 13, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1419720> as accessed on July 16, 2018; "Heads of Russian, Iranian, Chinese, Pakistani intelligence services discuss IS threat", *TASS*, July 10, 2018, <http://tass.com/world/1012616> as accessed on July 16, 2018

⁴² "PM Abbasi to embark on two-country visit today", *Dawn*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390953> accessed on February 26, 2018; "Pakistan values TAPI gas pipeline project: PM Abbasi", *Dawn*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1391125/pakistan-values-tapi-gas-pipeline-project-pm-abbasi> accessed on February 26, 2018; "Bonhomie marks opening of TAPI gas pipeline", *Dawn*, February 24, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1391340/bonhomie-marks-opening-of-tapi-gas-pipeline> accessed on February 26, 2018

⁴³ "PM arrives in China to attend Boao conference", *Dawn*, April 9, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1400491/pm-arrives-in-china-to-attend-boao-conference> as accessed on April 9, 2018,

⁴⁴ SehrishWasif, "Pakistan launches two satellites using Chinese rocket", *The Express Tribune*, July 9, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1753260/1-pakistan-launches-two-satellites-using-chinese-rocket/> as accessed on July 16, 2018

⁴⁵ BaqirSajjad Syed, "Accord with Russia signed for training of Pakistani troops", *Dawn*, August 8, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1425673> as accessed on August 13, 2018

⁴⁶ "Sri Lankan president arrives", *Pakistan Observer*, March 23, 2018, <https://pakobserver.net/sri-lankan-president-arrives/as> accessed on March 26, 2018

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in a landmark decision in June, rejected the application of Milli Muslim League (MML) to be registered as a political party. Through MML, Lashkar-e-Toiba chief Hafiz Saeed wanted his political offshoot registered as a political party to contest the 2018 general election. Another rightwing extremist organisation made its mark in 2018. It was Tahreek-e-LabbaikYaRasool Allah. Its political offshoot Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) contested 2018 general elections and played a major role in the defeat of PML-N in Punjab and PPP in Sindh.

As it was election year, a caretaker government was established under former chief justice Nasirul Mulk as the prime minister on May 28.⁴⁷ General elections were scheduled to be held on July 25.⁴⁸ Federal elections in Pakistan took place on July 25 for the National Assembly and four provinces. Results were declared in phases. Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) emerged as the largest political party in the country, winning 149 of the 270 National Assembly seats on which the elections were held.⁴⁹ Prime Minister Imran Khan was elected as the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan on August 18.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding the allegations of pre-poll rigging, the elections were important. Firstly, after a long time, Pakistan witnessed the rise of a new political force. Secondly, the PML-N and PPP carried the weight of dynastic politics and the emergence of PTI appeared to have brought some fresh air in the system. Thirdly, at least a significant percentage of Pakistani youth who participated in the recent elections did not have a personal memory of military rule in the country. This stands out as a small achievement for a nation that has been under direct military dictatorships for long periods in its history.

India-Pakistan Bilateral Relations

On the bilateral front, there was no high-level visit or talk between India and Pakistan. Pakistan and India on March 30 agreed to address complaints of harassment of diplomats in accordance with the bilaterally agreed 1992 'Code of Conduct' on treatment of diplomatic and consular staff in each other's country.⁵¹

Pakistan remained adamant in not addressing Indian concerns and sensitivities and continued to support terror outfits that created trouble inside Indian territory. This attitude

⁴⁷ "Former CJP NasirulMulk named as caretaker PM", *Dawn*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1410523/former-cjp-nasirul-mulk-named-as-caretaker-pm> as accessed on June 4, 2018

⁴⁸ SardarSikander, "In the saddle, Mulk reshuffles top bureaucracy", *The Express Tribune*, June 01, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1724763/1-justice-mulk-takes-oath-caretaker-pm/> as accessed on June 4, 2018

⁴⁹ Iftikhar A. Khan, "PTI secures lead of four million votes over PML-N", *Dawn* July 29, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1423605> as accessed on July 30, 2018

⁵⁰ Amir Wasim, "Imran takes oath as PM, picks 21-strong cabinet", *Dawn*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1427897> as accessed on August 20, 2018

⁵¹ BaqirSajjad Syed, "Pakistan, India agree to end envoys harassment", *Dawn*, March 31, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398648> as accessed on April 2, 2018

led India to cancel proposed meeting of the two foreign ministers at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2018.

It can be further noted that in the 114th annual meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission which took place in New Delhi on March 29-30, Pakistan sought inspection of the Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai hydroelectric projects, which India is building in the Chenab river basin in Jammu and Kashmir. As per the Pakistani delegation, India has agreed to the demand but has sought time for making arrangements for the purpose in line with the World Bank-brokered pact for sharing waters of six rivers between the two countries.⁵² Pakistan and India had a two-day discussion (29 and 30 August) on the platform of Pakistan-India Permanent Indus Commission. Pakistan urged India to entertain the objections it raised over the construction of the 1,000MW Pakal Dul and 48MW Lower Kalnai hydropower projects on the River Chenab.⁵³ India agreed on August 30 to get sites of its two hydropower projects - 1,000MW Pakal Dul and 48MW Lower Kalnai — to be inspected by Pakistani experts.⁵⁴ A three-member Pakistani expert team inspected the two dams late January 2019.⁵⁵ India also agreed to allow Pakistan to inspect the projects in the Jhelum basin, including Kishanganga hydroelectric project, in the near future and Islamabad will allow New Delhi to carry out inspection of the Kotri barrage over the Indus under Article VIII (4) (c) of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). Decision also reached in recent water talks to let Indian team visit Kotri barrage on Indus, which has not been decided yet.⁵⁶

Amid fears of being isolated regionally and internationally, Pakistan started looking for opportunities to engage India in a dialogue. One such occasion came in November 2018 when India urged Pakistan to open Kartarpur Corridor for Indian Sikh Pilgrims.

Pakistani leadership immediately responded positively and agreed to open up the corridor. Soon, groundbreaking ceremonies were held in India and Pakistan. A three member delegation from India, that included Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Hardeep Singh Puri and Navjot Singh Sidhu, travelled to Pakistan to be part of the groundbreaking ceremony. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, using this opportunity, indicated his government's willingness to resolve outstanding issues with India peacefully through dialogue and negotiation. However, the EAM Sushma Swaraj made it clear that there was no possibility of India engaging Pakistan in a dialogue beyond Kartarpur. She underlined that talks and terror could not go

⁵² Pakistan seeks inspection of two Indian projects on Chenab, *Dawn*, March 31, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398686> as accessed on April 2, 2018

⁵³ Khalid Hasnain, "Pakistan to go for arbitration if India ignores concerns", *Dawn*, August 30, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1429875> as accessed on September 5, 2018

⁵⁴ Khalid Hasnain, "India agrees to allow Pakistan to inspect Kishanganga project", *Dawn*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1430855> as accessed on September 5, 2018

⁵⁵ "Pakistani delegation inspects PakalDul project in J&K's Kishtwar", *Hindustan Times*, January 29, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pakistani-delegation-inspects-pakal-dul-project-in-j-k-s-kishtwar/story-3JujXpkv1xTGwLqpUOG0RO.html> as accessed on June 12, 2019

⁵⁶ Khalid Hasnain, "India agrees to allow Pakistan to inspect Kishanganga project", *Dawn*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1430855> as accessed on September 5, 2018

together. Since then several rounds of discussion over Kartarpur Corridor has been taken up and the two countries are making attempts to finalise modalities.

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SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka participated actively in the Fourth Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit in Nepal on August 30-31. Sri Lanka assumed the next Chairmanship of the BIMSTEC.

Sri Lanka continued to extend its support to Belt and Road Initiative of China and also tried to further improve its foreign relations with countries such as US and Japan. Sri Lanka tried to position itself as an important player in the Indian Ocean to emerge as a hub in the region. This policy was envisaged in various economic policy statements of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. The 'Galle Dialogue' and Platforms initiated by Sri Lanka such as, "the Indian Ocean: Defining Our Future", a track 1.5 Dialogue held in Colombo in October 2018, brought together forty nations. India had participated in the dialogue. Colombo had emphasised on "the need to maintain Freedom of Navigation and Freedom of Digital Connectivity for the region to grow and prosper and the need for a shared understanding in order to maintain peace and security".

Domestically, the year witnessed political turbulence in Sri Lanka owing to differences between the President of Sri Lanka Maithripala Sirisena and the Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. President Sirisena sacked the Prime Minister on 26 October. The move was termed as unconstitutional by the Prime Minister and his party the United National Party (UNP). President appointed the former President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa as the Prime Minister. The constitutional crisis ended after the no-confidence motion against Rajapaksa was defeated in parliament in December 2018.

The constitutional crisis was the result of differences of opinion that was witnessed publicly since the beginning of 2018 between Sirisena and Ranil Wickramasinghe on issues pertaining to implementation of the Geneva resolution in Sri Lanka, economic reforms and investments, handling of corruption cases particularly the Central Bank Bond Scheme and financial mismanagement. Under these circumstances, newly formed Rajapaksa's party the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) won 225 out of the 340 directly-elected Councils in February elections. Lack of consensus, on issue of governance led to no-confidence motion against Wikramasinghe initiated by Rajapaksa backed Joint Opposition in April 2018, but it was defeated with the help of Tamil National Alliance (TNA). The Sri Lankan Parliament

passed the 'Office of Reparations Bill' on 12 October 2018, which was a significant step towards reconciliation.

India - Sri Lanka Bilateral Relations

Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe paid an official visit to India from 18-20 October 2018. During the visit, both the Prime Ministers discussed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and ways to further deepen the historically close and friendly relations between the two countries. The leaders exchanged views on regional and global issues. They also reviewed the progress in implementation of various decisions taken during high level exchanges in 2017 including the visit of Sri Lankan Prime Minister in April and November 2017, Prime Minister's visit to Sri Lanka in May 2017 during the International Vesak Day Celebrations. Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena was in India for the International Solar Alliance Founding Conference in March 2018.

After the President of Sri Lanka accused India's intelligence agency RAW of a plot to assassinate him, Indian Prime Minister called on the Sri Lankan President on 17 October 2018. The President of Sri Lanka stated that he categorically rejected the reports in sections of media about him alluding to the involvement of India in any manner.

MALDIVES

The 2018 Maldivian Presidential elections ended the political crisis by ending the rule of Mohamamed Yameen. The election brought together all the opposition parties in Maldives on a single platform to mobilise voters against government's political and economic policies. The Maldives Democratic Party (MDP) candidate, Ibrahim Mohammed Solih supported by opposition parties won the presidential elections held in September 2018.

India-Maldives Bilateral Relations

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Special Envoy of the President of the Republic of Maldives visited India in January 11, 2018 and reiterated the government of Maldives' "India First Policy". However, India expressed concerns on internal developments in Maldives and declaration of a State of Emergency in February 2018, following the refusal of the government of Maldives to abide by the unanimous ruling of the full bench of the Supreme Court on 1 February to release political prisoners. India asked Maldives to allow judiciary to function independently and in a fair and transparent manner in accordance with the Constitution. The press release by India said that the order issued by the Supreme Court of Maldives on 1 February 2018 should be implemented in letter and spirit.

Indian Prime Minister called upon Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in September and congratulated him on his victory in the Presidential elections. The new Foreign Minister of Republic of Maldives Abdulla Shahid paid an official visit to India from 24-27 November. India announced \$1.4 billion financial assistance to Maldives.

Dr. Samatha Mallempati

South East/ East Asia

2.1 Southeast Asia

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REGION

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Brunei Darussalam, Dato Lim Jock Hoi, assumed office as the 14th Secretary General of ASEAN on January 5, 2018, for a term of four years.⁵⁷

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat was held on February 6, 2018, in Singapore where the leaders welcomed the improving cooperation between ASEAN and China and were encouraged by the conclusion and adoption of the framework of a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea, as well as the official commencement of the substantive negotiations towards the conclusion of an effective COC on a mutually-agreed timeline.⁵⁸ The ASEAN Foreign Ministers welcomed the successful conclusion of a historic summit meeting between the US and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in Singapore on 12 June 2018.⁵⁹

The Ministers from the 16 RCEP Participating Countries (RPCs) attended the 4th RCEP Inter-Sessional Ministerial Meeting held on March 3, 2018 in Singapore. The Ministers reiterated the commitment to expedite negotiations on rules, geared towards facilitating trade and investment in support of the expansion and deepening of regional value chains.⁶⁰ At the 32nd ASEAN Summit held on April 28, 2018 in Singapore, ASEAN continued its support for multilateral trading system and the leaders stated their commitment towards improving ASEAN+1 FTAs, while also urging swift conclusion of the RCEP.⁶¹

On March 8, 2019, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, along with seven other nations namely, Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, and Peru, signed the

⁵⁷ "New ASEAN chief Lim Jock Hoi calls for unity in evolving global landscape", *The Straits Times*, January 5, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/new-asean-chief-lim-jock-hoi-calls-for-unity-in-evolving-global-landscape>, accessed on January 5, 2018.

⁵⁸ "Press Statement by the Chairman of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat Singapore", *ASEAN6* February 6, 2018, <http://asean.org/storage/2018/02/Press-Statement-by-the-Chairman-of-the-ASEAN-Foreign-Ministers-Retreat-clean.pdf>, accessed on February 7, 2018.

⁵⁹ "ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Summit between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", *ASEAN*, June 16, 2018, <http://asean.org/storage/2018/06/ASEAN-Foreign-Ministers-Statement-on-the-Summit-between-the-US-and-the-DPRK.pdf>, accessed on June 18, 2018.

⁶⁰ "The Fourth Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Intersessional Ministerial Meeting 3 March 2018, Singapore", *ASEAN*, March 3, 2018, <http://asean.org/storage/2018/03/JMS-4th-RCEP-ISSL-MM-FINAL-0303181.pdf>, accessed on March 7, 2018.

⁶¹ "Chairman's Statement of the 32nd ASEAN Summit Singapore, 28 April 2018", *ASEAN*, April 28, 2018, <http://asean.org/storage/2018/04/Chairmans-Statement-of-the-32nd-ASEAN-Summit.pdf>, accessed on May 1, 2018.

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in Santiago. The CPTPP will reduce tariffs in countries that together amount to more than 13 percent of the global economy - a total of \$10 trillion.⁶²

BRUNEI

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Brunei on November 19, 2018 on a bilateral visit. While discussing the growing relations between the two nations, Sultan of Brunei, Haji Hassanal Bolkiah invoked his nation's support to the BRI.⁶³

The Sultan visited India with a high-level delegation to participate in the Special Summit to commemorate 25 years of ASEAN-India Partnership Dialogue on January 25, 2018. Apart from the commemorative summit, he also participated in a Leaders Retreat and a bilateral meeting with Indian PM Narendra Modi. He also witnessed the Republic Day Parade on January 26 along with the Heads of State and Governments of all the other ASEAN Member States.

CAMBODIA

The US Senate on March 23, 2018, passed the Omnibus bill that conditioned the funds for assistance to the Cambodian government to be based on the report of the Secretary of State that Cambodia is "taking effective steps" to respect the rights enshrined in Cambodia's constitution.⁶⁴ The US House of Representatives with a bipartisan support on July 25, passed the Cambodia Democracy Act of 2018, which among other measures will allow for the imposition of stiff financial sanctions on Prime Minister Hun Sen, his family members, military elites and senior officials from the ruling Cambodian People's Party.⁶⁵

Official results released by Cambodia's National Election Committee (NEC) on August 15 revealed that the long-ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won all 125 seats in the country's National Assembly after the July 29 general election. According to the NEC the CPP won 4,889,113 of 6,362,241 valid votes, or roughly 77 percent of the popular vote. The US, Japan and Australia, as well as the EU, has called the general election "illegitimate" after the only viable opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), was dissolved by

⁶²"Asia-Pacific Nation sign sweeping trade deal", *The Star tv.com*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.thestartv.com/v/asia-pacific-nations-sign-sweeping-trade-deal>, accessed on March 9, 2018.

⁶³ "Full text of China-Brunei joint statement", *Xinhua*, November 19, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/19/c_137617362.htm, accessed on June 10, 2019

⁶⁴Erin Handley, "US funding conditional on Cambodia's release of political prisoners, reinstatement of CNRP", *The Phnom Penh Post*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/us-funding-conditional-cambodias-release-political-prisoners-reinstatement-cnrp>, accessed on March 23, 2018.

⁶⁵David Hutt, "US sanctions loom over Hun Sen's 'illegitimate' polls", *Asia Times*, July 26, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/us-sanctions-loom-over-hun-sens-illegitimate-polls/>, accessed on July 30, 2018.

court order last November and was barred from participating at the polls.⁶⁶ Opposition leader Kem Sokha was released on bail on September 10, after more than a year in pre-trial detention at Trapiang Thlong prison, also known as Correctional Centre 3 (CC3). He was held on charges of treason of up to 30 years in prison due to his alleged conspiracy with foreign countries.⁶⁷ Europe has even shown indications that it might end the “Everything but Arms” (EBA) Agreement that it shared with Cambodia, which had benefited the Cambodian manufacturing sector immensely.

Bilaterally, the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen was amongst the Chief Guests in the Republic Day of India as well as participated in the 25th India ASEAN commemorative summit in New Delhi. During the bilateral dialogue, an agreement on cultural exchanges, credit line agreements and line of credit for hydel power projects in Cambodia, agreement on mutual assistance on criminal matters, and an MoU for cooperation in the prevention of human trafficking was signed. The then EAM Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Cambodia on August 29-30, 2018 and met Prime Minister Hun Sen, President of Senate Say Chhum and Prak Sokhonn, Senior Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

INDONESIA

Indonesia and Australia signed an action plan on maritime cooperation in Sydney on March 16, 2018, in the sidelines of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit. The cooperation includes strengthening maritime security, combatting transnational organised crimes and illegal fishing as well as addressing maritime pollution.⁶⁸ Indonesian President Joko Widodo at the ASEAN-Australia Summit stated that Indonesia wanted Australia to become a full member of ASEAN, and was keen on Canberra playing a bigger regional role in defence, trade and security matters.⁶⁹

Indonesia for the first time organised a two day Indonesia-Africa Forum in Bali on the theme "Developing Sustainable Economic and Investment Cooperation". In the forum, a series of concrete agreements to further strengthen Indonesia's partnership with African countries

⁶⁶David Hutt, “Cambodia is now officially a one-party state”, *Asia Times*, August 16, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/cambodia-is-now-officially-a-one-party-state/>, accessed on August 16, 2018.

⁶⁷NitemChheng, “Breaking: Sokha released with conditions”, *The Phnom Penh Post*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/breaking-sokha-released-conditions>, accessed on September 10, 2018.

⁶⁸Anton Hermansyah, “Indonesia, Australia sign action plan on maritime cooperation”, *The Jakarta Post*, March 16, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/03/16/ri-oz-sign-action-plan-on-maritime-cooperation.html>, accessed on March 16, 2018.

⁶⁹“Indonesia open to idea of Australia as full ASEAN member”, *The Straits Times*, March 16, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-wants-australia-as-full-asean-member>, accessed on March 16, 2018.

were signed. A meeting was also held to begin the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) discussions with Mozambique, Tunisia, Angola, Kenya and South Africa.⁷⁰

Around 5,500 navy personnel from 37 countries that includes China, the US, Russia, France, UK, among others, participated at the 2018 Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK) on the theme “Cooperation to respond [to] disasters and humanitarian issues” held in Lombok waters, West Nusa Tenggara, from May 5-9.⁷¹

On May 13, a family of suicide bombers linked to JAD attacked three churches across Surabaya, killing at least 12 people and injuring 41 others. Two attempted bombings were reported at two other churches in the East Java capital. Later the same day, another explosion was reported at a low-cost apartment in the neighboring city of Sidoarjo. Further, on May 14, a bomb exploded at the Surabaya Police headquarters. In total, 25 people, including 13 suicide bombers, were killed and dozens injured in the series of bombings in Surabaya.⁷² On May 16, four sword-wielding men were shot dead after ramming a car into a security checkpoint at a provincial police headquarters in Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau Province in central Sumatra.⁷³

Indonesia’s Parliament on May 25 unanimously approved a tougher anti-terrorism law proposed by President Jokowi, which gives its police force powers to take pre-emptive measures in fighting terrorism. Other amendment to the existing law would include the TNI supporting the police in counter-terrorism efforts as well as act on terror threats against foreign embassies, special economic zones, commercial vessels and aircraft, as well as terror cells in jungles or mountainous areas in Indonesia.⁷⁴

Indonesian government in a press statement by its Foreign Minister Marsudi on May 14 strongly condemned the US’ decision to open its Embassy in Jerusalem.⁷⁵ Foreign Minister, Marsudi, during her meeting with the US Secretary of State, Michael Richard Pompeo, in

⁷⁰ “The Concrete Result of IAF 2018: Strengthening Indonesia-Africa Partnership”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/The-Concrete-Result-of-IAF-2018,-Strengthening-Indonesia-Africa.aspx>, accessed on April 16, 2018.

⁷¹ Panca Nugraha, “51 war vessels to participate in Lombok naval exercise”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 1, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/05/01/51-war-vessels-to-participate-in-lombok-naval-exercise.html>, accessed on May 2, 2018.

⁷² Karina M. Tehusijarana and Moses Ompusunggu, “What is JAD? Terror group behind MakoBrimob riot, Surabaya bombings”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 14, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/05/14/what-is-jad-terror-group-behind-mako-brimob-riot-surabaya-bombings.html>, accessed on May 15, 2018.

⁷³ Joe Cochrane and Hannah Beech, “Indonesia Sword Attack on Police Follows String of Deadly Bombings”, *The New York Times*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/world/asia/indonesia-swords-terrorism-sumatra.html>, accessed on May 18, 2018.

⁷⁴ “Jokowi vows to push through tougher anti-terror laws”, *The Straits Times*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/jokowi-vows-to-push-through-tougher-anti-terror-laws>, accessed on May 16, 2018.

⁷⁵ “Indonesia's Response on the Opening of the US Embassy in Jerusalem”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/Indonesias-Response-on-the-Opening-of-the-US-Embassy-in-Jerusalem.aspx>, accessed on May 16, 2018.

Washington DC on June 5, 2018, reiterated Indonesia's position in supporting the Palestinian struggle while seeking the US to give attention to the interests of the Islamic world.⁷⁶

President Jokowi chose Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) chairman Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate for the 2019 presidential election.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, coalition partners Gerindra Party, National Mandate Party (PAN) and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) have decided to pair Gerindra leader Prabowo Subianto and Jakarta deputy governor Sandiaga Uno against the incumbent President for the April 2019 national election.⁷⁸

According to a press release on August 27, the Indonesian government has offered various infrastructure projects to China worth US\$13.2 billion.⁷⁹ The Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has cumulatively approved US\$691.5 million in loans for four infrastructure projects in Indonesia, thereby making the country the second-largest borrower among its 66 members.⁸⁰

LAO PDR

A bilateral meeting between the delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos and that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia was held on May 16 in Vientiane. The meeting was held according to the agreement reached last year between Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and his Cambodian counterpart Hun Sen that had assigned the Foreign Ministries of the two countries to work together to find resolutions to border demarcation issues as 14 percent of the total length of the common border of 535 km remains un-demarcated. Both sides agreed to encourage border committee in their respective countries to hold meetings more frequently to seek solutions to the border issues. They also agreed to establish department-level collaboration mechanisms at the foreign ministries of the two countries to ensure peace and security

⁷⁶ "Economic Cooperation and Counter-Terrorism Strengthen Indonesia-United States Strategic Partnership", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia*, June 6, 2018, <https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/Economic-Cooperation-and-Counter-Terrorism-Strengthen-Indonesia-United-States-Strategic-Partnership.aspx>, accessed on June 7, 2018.

⁷⁷ "Breaking: Mui chief Ma'ruf Amin tapped as Jokowi's running mate", *The Jakarta Post*, August 9, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/08/09/breaking-mui-chief-maruf-amien-tapped-as-jokowis-running-mate.html>, accessed on August 10, 2018.

⁷⁸ "PrabowoSubianto to run for 2019 Indonesian presidential election with Jakarta deputy governor", *The Straits Times*, August 10, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/prabowo-subianto-says-to-run-again-for-indonesian-president-in-2019-election>, accessed on August 10, 2018.

⁷⁹ "Indonesia offers US\$13.2b infrastructure projects to China", *The Straits Times*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-offers-us132b-infrastructure-projects-to-china>, accessed on August 29, 2018.

⁸⁰ "AIIB lends \$692 million to Indonesian infrastructure", *The Jakarta Post*, August 29, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/08/29/aiib-lends-692-million-to-indonesian-infrastructure.html>, accessed on August 29, 2018.

along the Lao-Cambodian common border thus restoring normalcy in the cooperation between the two countries.⁸¹

Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, Thongloun Sisoulith visited New Delhi as one of the Chief Guests to New Delhi to attend Republic Day celebrations of India as well as to participate in the 25th India-ASEAN commemorative summit in New Delhi. Later the then EAM Sushma Swaraj led the Indian delegation to Vientiane to participate in the Ninth Joint Commission Meeting on Bilateral Cooperation between India and Lao PDR on November 22-23, 2018. The Laotian delegation was led by Saleumxay Kommasith, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR.

MALAYSIA

For the first time in 61 years Malaysians voted in a new Federal Government, Pakatan Harapan (PH) led by Dr Mahathir Mohamad in their 14th General Election held on May 9.⁸² Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on May 13, in a special televised address to the nation, announced sweeping measures to clean up corruption in the country and restore people's trust in government.⁸³ Anwar Ibrahim clinched a landslide victory in a by-election for the seaside constituency of Port Dickson on October 13, a poll seen as the first stepping stone on his path to assuming the role of prime minister. The twice-jailed former opposition leader is slated to take the reins when incumbent Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad steps down in two years.⁸⁴

Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir on May 28 confirmed that the 350 km High-Speed Rail (HSR) linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore will be scrapped.⁸⁵ On June 22, PM Mahathir criticised the 1962 water supply deal with Singapore as "too costly" and suggested that he may have to renegotiate a longstanding water supply agreement with Singapore.⁸⁶ According to the spokesman from the Finance Ministry, Malaysia has cancelled three China-backed pipeline projects after halting work on them in May following the election of Mahathir. The plans comprise two oil and gas pipelines that cost more than US\$1 billion

⁸¹ "Lao, Cambodian Foreign Ministers Meet On Border Issues", *Laos News Agency*, May 17, 2018, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=33789>, accessed on May 18, 2018.

⁸² "Dr M poised to be nation's seventh PM", *The Star Online*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/05/10/dr-m-poised-to-be-nations-seventh-pm-kak-wan-expected-to-be-first-woman-dpm/>, accessed on May 10, 2018.

⁸³ Razah Ahmad and Victoria Brown, "PM makes sweeping changes", *The Star Online*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/05/14/pm-makes-sweeping-changes-dr-m-the-aim-is-to-clean-up-our-country-and-reduce-economic-woes/>, accessed on May 14, 2018.

⁸⁴ Nile Bowei, "Malaysia's Anwar one step closer to the top", *Asia Times*, October 14, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/malysias-anwar-one-step-closer-to-the-top/>, accessed on October 15, 2018.

⁸⁵ Rashninjeet S. Bedi and Hemanantnani Sivanabdam, "Dr M confirms high-speed rail project with Singapore to be scrapped", *The Star Online*, May 28, 2018, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/05/28/dr-m-confirms-scrapping-of-high-speed-rail-project-with-singapore/>, accessed on May 29, 2018.

⁸⁶ "Malaysian PM Mahathir revives Singapore water dispute, says supply deal 'too costly'", *The Strait Times*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysian-pm-mahathir-revives-singapore-water-dispute-says-supply-deal-too-costly>, accessed on June 25, 2018.

each, as well as a pipeline that would have linked the state of Melaka to a refinery and petrochemical plant in the state of Johor.⁸⁷

The US and Royal Malaysian Navy commenced the 24th iteration of Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Malaysia in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, on August 10. The CARAT exercise focuses on the full spectrum of naval capabilities and is designed to strengthen the close partnership between both navies while cooperatively ensuring maritime security, stability and prosperity.⁸⁸

MYANMAR

The third Panglong Peace Conference took place in July and fourteen principles were agreed upon as part of the union accord. The ten Ethnic Armed Organisations that signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) participated in the conference. However, agreement on security sector principles is yet to be discussed. Repatriation of Rohingya community persons displaced from Myanmar is yet to begin despite the agreement signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar on repatriation. In frontier areas, violent clashes between the army and EAOs led to their displacement. The Amnesty International withdrew its highest honour given to the State Councillor Aung San Suu Kyi “the ambassador of conscience award”, citing her indifference to Rohingya plight. Myanmar government rejected the UN Fact Finding Mission. At the regional level, Myanmar actively participated in 4th BIMSTEC Summit and 13th East Asia Summit held in November in Singapore as part of the ASEAN Summit. In 2018, Myanmar renegotiated the Kyaukpyu deep-seaport and China’s investments continued under the BRI in developing ports and railway linkages.

India - Myanmar Bilateral Relations

An important visit by Sushma Swaraj to Myanmar on 10-11 May was significant as it resulted in Land Boundary Crossing Agreement of 2018 along with six MOUs pertaining to Restoration and Preservation of Earthquake Damaged Pagodas in Bagan; assistance to the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee; training of Myanmar Foreign Service Officers; setting up Industrial Training Centre (ITC) at Monywa; ITC at Thaton and Exchange of Letters on extending a maintenance contract for ITC Myingyan. Regarding the Rakhine issue, India welcomed Myanmar’s commitment to implementing the Rakhine Advisory Commission’s recommendations.

The 17th round of Foreign Office Consultations between India and Myanmar were held in New Delhi on June 7. The Foreign Secretary of India, Vijay Gokhale, paid an official visit to

⁸⁷“Malaysia finally scraps three China-backed pipelines”, *The Straits Times*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-finally-scraps-three-china-backed-pipelines>, accessed on September 11, 2018.

⁸⁸ Christopher Veloicaza, “US Malaysia Commence 24th CARAT Exercise”, *America’s Navy*, August 13, 2018, <http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/Pages/US-Malaysia-Commence-24th-CARAT-Exercise.aspx#.W3JIMs4zYdU>, accessed on August 14, 2018.

Myanmar on 22 October. India and Myanmar signed an MoU for the appointment of a private Port Operator for the Operation and Maintenance of Sittwe Port, Paletwa Inland Water Terminal and associated facilities that are part of the Kaladan Multi Model Transit Transport Project. The President of India paid a State visit to Myanmar from 10-14 December. During his visit, Indian President addressed the Indian community in Myanmar. Two MoUs on science and technology cooperation and capacity building were signed. Myanmar announced tourist visa on arrival to Indian citizens who intend to visit Myanmar, from 1 December 2018.

THE PHILIPPINES

President Rodrigo Duterte in his speech at the Boao Forum in Hainan, China on April 10, 2018, admitted that bilateral relations with China were “complex” but said that these are not barriers to a positive and mutually-beneficial engagement.⁸⁹ Speaking on the occasion of the 120th anniversary of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in Pasay City on June 18, 2018, President Duterte stated that while he wanted China out of the Philippine-claimed areas in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), he would not declare war against Beijing over the maritime row.⁹⁰

Philippine lawmakers on January 16, began formal proceedings on changing the government into a federal system. The proposed shift from a unitary system would give the next president two five-year terms whereby President Duterte’s single six-year term that ends in mid-2022, would again be eligible to run for two more five-year terms after amendment is made to the current 1987 Constitution.⁹¹ According to the survey released by Pulse Asia on July 16, Majority of Filipinos expressed opposition to the moves to amend the 1987 Constitution and change the current system of government to a federal one. The poll, conducted from June 15 to 21, showed that 67 percent of Filipinos were against charter change.⁹²

President Rodrigo Duterte on March 14, 2018, announced that the Philippines would formally begin the process to withdraw from a United Nations treaty that created the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC in February 2018 began a preliminary investigation into the controversial crackdown on the narcotics trade which, according to

⁸⁹ Gaea KatreenaCabico, “Duterte: Philippines, China partnering in combating drug trade, criminality”, *Phil Star Global*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/04/10/1804601/duterte-philippines-china-partnering-combating-drug-trade-criminality>, accessed on April 10, 2018.

⁹⁰ Alexis Romero, “Duterte wants China out of West Philippine Sea, but no war”, *The Philippines Star*, June 19, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/06/19/1825891/duterte-wants-china-out-west-philippine-sea-no-war>, accessed on June 19, 2018.

⁹¹ “Philippine Congress starts debate that may extend Duterte term”, *The Straits Times*, January 16, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippine-congress-starts-debate-that-may-extend-duterte-term>, accessed on January 16, 2018.

⁹² Gaea KatreenaCabico, “Majority of Filipinos reject charter change, shift to federal government”, *Phil Star Global*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/07/16/1834044/majority-filipinos-reject-charter-change-shift-federal-government>, accessed on July 16, 2018.

police, left nearly 5,000 suspects dead in shoot-outs during drug raids since Duterte assumed office in mid-June 2016.⁹³

The US and Philippine militaries launched major exercises on May 7, aimed at fighting global terrorism. This would be the second “Balikatan” (“shoulder-to-shoulder”) manoeuvres to be held under President Rodrigo Duterte.⁹⁴ The US government has vowed to provide US \$26.5 million to assist the Philippines' counterterrorism efforts.⁹⁵

President Duterte arrived in Israel on September 2 for a four-day visit, making him the first sitting Filipino president to visit the Jewish state. Duterte said he would seek a “robust relationship” with Israel in the areas of defence and security, law enforcement, economic development, trade and investments, and labour.⁹⁶ More than 20 private agreements and letters of intent worth \$82.9 million were signed during President Duterte’s four-day visit to Israel.⁹⁷

During the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to the Philippines from 20-21 November, 2018, both nations established a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation. The joint statement after President Xi’s meeting with President Duterte witnessed the conclusion of 29 agreements, which also included joint oil and gas exploration, and China being asked to get involved in Duterte’s signature US\$ 180 billion “Build, Build, Build”, infrastructure programme.⁹⁸

SINGAPORE

⁹³“Duterte to withdraw Philippines from the ICC”, *The Straits Times*, March 15, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/duterte-to-withdraw-philippines-from-the-icc>, accessed on March 15, 2018.

⁹⁴“US-Philippine war games open under pro-China Duterte”, *The Straits Times*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-philippine-war-games-open-under-pro-china-duterte>, accessed on May 8, 2018.

⁹⁵“US pledges \$26.5M to Philippines for counterterrorism”, *Phil Star Global*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/07/19/1834905/us-pledges-265m-philippines-counterterrorism>, accessed on July 19, 2018.

⁹⁶DharelPlacido, “Duterte arrives in Israel for 4-day visit”, *ABS-CBN News*, September 3, 2018, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/03/18/duterte-arrives-in-israel-for-4-day-visit>, accessed on September 6, 2018.

⁹⁷Alexis Romero, “\$82.9-million deals forged during visit to Israel”, *Phil-Star Global*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/09/06/1849153/829-million-deals-forged-during-visit-israel>, accessed on September 6, 2018.

⁹⁸Harini V, “Xi's visit to the Philippines may be an attempt to 'woo Manila away' from Washington's orbit”, *CNBC*, November 21, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/21/china-xis-visit-to-manila-may-be-to-woo-philippines-from-us-expert.html>, accessed November 28, 2018.

A Singaporean warship docked at Tien Sa Port in Da Nang on April 26 on a four-day visit to Vietnam.⁹⁹ Both nations are celebrating 45 years of diplomatic relations and five years of strategic relations.¹⁰⁰

Singapore and Malaysia have reaffirmed their bilateral defence relationship and exchanged views on bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation between the two countries.¹⁰¹

China and Singapore have signed 118 pragmatic cooperation projects under the Strategic Interconnection Demonstration Program, worth a total amount of US\$21.4 billion. All the projects cover the fields of finance, aviation, logistics and transportation, information and communication technology.¹⁰²

THAILAND

The 4th US-Thailand Defence Strategic Talks were held on December 20, 2017, at the Pentagon, Washington DC. Officials reviewed the broad range of US-Thai defence cooperation and discussed ways to enhance the alliance's contributions to a free and open Indo-Pacific, including through maritime security cooperation and exercises such as COBRA GOLD. They also discussed ways to continue strengthening the defence trade relationship.¹⁰³ According to sources from the Thai military, the US wants to open a military arms maintenance centre in Thailand to supply and fix US armaments purchased by the Thai military.¹⁰⁴

The Thai government will be introducing tax incentives to encourage families to have more children as the country is becoming an ageing society.¹⁰⁵

Two key organic laws on the election of MPs and selection of senators have received royal approval and were published in the Royal Gazette on September 12, paving the way for an election to take place by May 2019.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹Thai Xuan, "Singaporean stealth frigate visits Da Nang", *Tuoi Tre News*, April 26, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180426/singaporean-stealth-frigate-visits-da-nang/45310.html>, accessed on April 27, 2018

¹⁰⁰DuyKhang, "Singapore pledges to boost investment into Vietnam", *Tuoi Tre News*, April 26, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180426/singapore-pledges-to-boost-investment-into-vietnam/45291.html>, accessed on April 27, 2018.

¹⁰¹ October 4, 2018, <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/singapore-malaysia-reaffirm-warm-defence-ties/>

¹⁰² October 8, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/sino-singapore-strike-118-deals-worth-us21-4-bn/>

¹⁰³ See: <https://media.defense.gov/2017/Dec/22/2001860613/-1/-1/1/Readout4thUSThailandDefenseTalks.PDF>, accessed on January 5, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ "US seeks to build military service depot", *Bangkok Post*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1389266/us-seeks-to-build-military-service-depot>, accessed on January 5, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ "Thailand introduces tax incentives to encourage more babies", *Borneo Bulletin*, January 17, 2018, <http://borneobulletin.com.bn/thailand-introduces-tax-incentives-to-encourage-more-babies/>, accessed on January 18, 2018.

VIETNAM

The US Defence Secretary held talks with his Vietnamese counterpart, General Ngo Xuan Lich, to discuss defence ties between the two nations during his visit to Hanoi on January 25, 2018.¹⁰⁷ The USS Carl Vinson arrived at the Vietnamese city of Da Nang on March 5, 2018. The 103,000-tonne aircraft carrier and two other US ships began its five-day visit. The arrival of the aircraft carrier marks the biggest US military presence in Vietnam since 1975.¹⁰⁸

Aimed at reviewing the bilateral relations, the annual Vietnam-China deputy foreign ministers' meeting was held in Guangzhou Province on February 5 and 6. Both sides agreed that the relationship had achieved positive development over the past year. The two sides also looked into partnership in diplomacy, national defense and security, economic matters, trade and investment, tourism, science and technology, transport, agriculture, and environmental protection.¹⁰⁹

Vietnam's National Assembly proposed a new cyber security law that gives more control to government against local users posting anti-government propaganda and defamatory and slanderous content.¹¹⁰

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made his first visit to Vietnam from 8-9 July. This was also his first visit to Southeast Asia, since taking office. During his meeting with Communist Party General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng, he stated that the US backed Vietnam to play a central role in the Indo-Pacific region, while also voicing support for freedom of navigation and the peaceful resolution of disputes in line with international law in the East Sea.¹¹¹

Vietnam's Defence Ministry confirmed its Navy's participation at the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) being held from July 1-31 in Hawaii. This was the first time that Vietnam

¹⁰⁶“Senate, MP organic laws published, paving way for poll”, *Bangkok Post*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/politics/1538726/senate-mp-organic-laws-published-paving-way-for-poll>, accessed on September 13, 2018.

¹⁰⁷“US aircraft carrier to visit Vietnam in March”, *Tuoi Tri News*, January 26, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180126/us-aircraft-carrier-to-visit-vietnam-in-march/43816.html>, accessed on January 29, 2018.

¹⁰⁸“Aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in Vietnam for historic visit”, *The Straits Times*, March 5, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/aircraft-carrier-uss-carl-vinson-in-vietnam-for-historic-visit>, accessed on March 6, 2018.

¹⁰⁹Duy Khang, “China to boost non-refundable aid for Vietnam”, *Tuoi Tre News*, February 7, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180207/china-to-boost-nonrefundable-aid-for-vietnam/44008.html>, accessed on February 8, 2018.

¹¹⁰Soumik Roy, “Concerns as Vietnam ponders new cyber security law”, *Asian Correspondent*, June 6, 2018, <https://asiancorrespondent.com/2018/06/concerns-as-vietnam-ponders-new-cybersecurity-law/>, accessed on June 6, 2018.

¹¹¹“Pompeo meets Trọng on first visit to Vietnam”, *Vietnam News*, July 9, 2018, <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/451384/pompeo-meets-trong-on-first-visit-to-viet-nam.html>, accessed on July 9, 2018.

participated in the RIMPAC, after the country sent observers to the event in 2012 and 2016.¹¹²

Vietnam's President Tran Dai Quang, passed away on September 21, at the age of 61 after a serious illness.¹¹³ Vietnam's Communist Party general secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, was elected as President while maintaining his position as party head. President Trong became the first person to hold both roles since the revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh in the late 1960s.¹¹⁴

ASEAN-INDIA BILATERAL RELATIONS

The ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit (AICS) was held on January 25, 2018, at New Delhi to celebrate 25 years of India-ASEAN partnership. The Delhi Declaration of the AICS reaffirmed India-ASEAN commitment to further strengthen and deepen the ASEAN-India Partnership for mutual benefit, across the whole spectrum of political-security, economic, socio-cultural and development cooperation. The declaration laid out the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and over flight in the region, while resolving disputes based on the international laws including the 1982 UNCLOS.¹¹⁵

At the 20th ASEAN-India Senior Officials' Meeting (AISOM) held from April 5-6, 2018 at Hanoi, Vietnam, senior officials reaffirmed their strong commitment to further strengthen ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. The Officials also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest and concern. India reaffirmed the importance of and its continued support for ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture.¹¹⁶

Three vessels from the Indian Navy which included frigate Sahyadri, fleet tanker Shakti, and anti-submarine stealth corvette Kamorta, along with 900 crew members arrived in the central Vietnamese city of Da Nang to commence their friendly visit from May 21 to 25. The

¹¹²"Vietnam to participate in US-hosted naval exercise for first time", *Vietnam News*, June 26, 2018, <http://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/450610/viet-nam-to-participate-in-us-hosted-naval-exercise-for-first-time.html>, accessed on June 27, 2018.

¹¹³"Vietnam's President dies of serious illness at age 61", *The Straits Times*, September 22, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/vietnams-president-dies-of-serious-illness-at-age-61>, accessed on September 24, 2018.

¹¹⁴<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/new-viet-president-says-he-has-limits>

¹¹⁵ "Delhi Declaration of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit to mark the 25th Anniversary of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations", *ASEAN*, January 25, 2018, http://asean.org/storage/2018/01/Delhi-Declaration_Adopted-25-Jan-2018.pdf, accessed on January 29, 2018.

¹¹⁶"ASEAN, India to strengthen strategic partnership", *ASEAN*, April 6, 2018, <http://asean.org/asean-india-to-strengthen-strategic-partnership/>, accessed on April 9, 2018.

visit was aimed at enhancing cooperation between the two countries' naval forces, thus contributing to the maintenance of security and stability in Southeast Asia and the world.¹¹⁷

After returning from the fifth edition of the India-Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) Business Conclave in Phnom Penh, the then Indian Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu stated that as part of a move to strengthen ties with ASEAN, India would establish a medical college and hospital in Cambodia.¹¹⁸

During the first official visit of the Prime Minister of India to the Republic of Indonesia on 29-30 May 2018, Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) was established between the two nations.¹¹⁹

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 31 met the newly-elected Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohammad. The two leaders had exchanged views on strengthening bilateral strategic partnership, which included boosting economic and cultural relationship.¹²⁰

Indian Prime Minister after his meeting with Singapore's PM on June 1, emphasised the importance of defence and security in the bilateral strategic partnership. He also congratulated the navies of India and Singapore on the 25th anniversary of SIMBEX.¹²¹

The ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Singapore on August 3, within the framework of the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Both sides expressed delight at the progress of the implementation of agreements reached during the summit as well as the outcome of the Plan of Action in the 2016-2020 period with specific activities in various fields from politics-security to economy, culture-society, and people-to-people exchange.¹²²

The then Indian EAM Sushma Swaraj, paid an official visit to Vietnam (August 27-28) for the 16th Meeting of the Vietnam-India Joint Committee on Economic, Commercial, Scientific, and Technological Co-operation. She stated that India wanted to further intensify its multi-

¹¹⁷DuyKhang, "Three Indian naval ships begin friendly visit to Da Nang", *Tuoi Tre News*, May 22, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180522/three-indian-naval-ships-begin-friendly-visit-to-da-nang/45715.html>, accessed on May 23, 2018.

¹¹⁸Horkimsay, "India to build medical college and hospital in the Kingdom", *The Phnom Penh Post*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/india-build-medical-college-and-hospital-kingdom>, accessed on May 29, 2018.

¹¹⁹"Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", *Prime Minister India*, May 30, 2018, http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/shared-vision-of-india-indonesia-maritime-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific/?comment=disable, accessed on May 31, 2018.

¹²⁰"PM Modi meets Malaysian counterpart Mahathir Mohammad", *Business Line*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/pm-modi-meets-malaysian-counterpart-mahathir-mohammad/article24043714.ece>, accessed on June 1, 2018.

¹²¹"English Translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister during visit to Singapore", *Ministry of External Affairs*, June 1, 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29941/English_Translation_of_Press_Statement_by_Prime_Minister_during_visit_to_Singapore, accessed on June 4, 2018.

¹²²"Vietnam co-chairs ASEAN-India foreign ministers' meeting in Singapore", *Vietnam News*, August 4, 2018, <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/463181/viet-nam-co-chairs-asean-india-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-singapore.html>, accessed on August 6, 2018.

faceted partnership with Vietnam with a special focus on economics, trade, investment, science-technology, security-defence, and people-to-people exchange, thereby contributing to peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and across the globe.¹²³

On August 30, she met her Cambodian counterpart Prak Sokhonn during which both leaders discussed bilateral, multilateral and key international issues. They also signed two agreements to step up cooperation, the first MoU was on the restoration and preservation of the world heritage site of a temple of Lord Shiva in Cambodia's Preah Vihear. The second MoU was on cooperation between India's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and Cambodia's National Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations (NIDIR). Swaraj also called upon Prime Minister Hun Sen and President of the Senate Say Chhum.¹²⁴

On October 3, India launched 'Operation Samudra Maitri' to assist victims of earthquake and tsunami in Central Sulawesi Province of the Republic of Indonesia. Two IAF Aircraft, C-130J and C-17, departed carrying onboard medical personnel and relief material. The operation for humanitarian assistance was launched after the telephonic conversation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with President Joko Widodo on 1st October 2018, and following latter's acceptance for international aid.¹²⁵

The First India-Indonesia Interfaith Dialogue (IIID) was held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on 3-5 October 2018. A 7 member delegation from India led by M.J. Akbar, the then Minister of State of External Affairs participated in the dialogue. The Indonesian delegation was led by A.M. Fachir, Vice Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹²⁶

President Ram Nath Kovind, paid a State visit to Vietnam from 18-20 November 2018. He was accompanied by a high-level official delegation, including the then Minister of State Shri Anant kumar Hegde, Member of Parliament, and a large business delegation.¹²⁷

Dr. Temjenmeren Ao, Dr. Samatha Mallempati & Dr. Dhruvajyoti Bhattacharjee

¹²³“Plenty of room for expanding Vietnam – India ties: PM”, *Vietnam News*, August 29, 2018, <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/464749/plenty-of-room-for-expanding-viet-nam-%E2%80%93-india-ties-pm.html>, accessed on August 29, 2018.

¹²⁴“India Signs Two Agreements to Step up Cooperation with Cambodia”, *NDTV*, August 30, 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-signs-agreement-to-preserve-lord-shiva-temple-in-cambodia-1908318>, accessed on August 31, 2018.

¹²⁵ “Operation SamudraMaitri: India's Assistance to Earthquake and Tsunami affected areas in Indonesia”, *MEA*, October 3, 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30461/Operation_Samudra_Maitri_Indias_Assistance_to_Earthquake_and_Tsunami_affected_areas_in_Indonesia

¹²⁶ October 5, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30473/First+India+Indonesia+Interfaith+Dialogue>

¹²⁷“India-Vietnam Joint Statement during State Visit of President to Vietnam”, *Ministry of External Affairs*, November 18, 2019, <https://mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?30615/IndiaVietnam+Joint+Statement+during+State+Visit+of+President+to+Vietnam>,

2.2 East Asia

JAPAN

The political situation in Japan remained stable in 2018. In September, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was re-elected as the President of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party for the third consecutive term, which has allowed him to stay in power until 2021. On the economic front, Japan performed relatively well. Annual growth rate marked 1.3 percent though less than Prime Minister Abe's promised 2 percent.¹²⁸ In an attempt to boost economic growth, the Abe government took additional steps. In July, the government introduced a new energy law called the Basic Energy Plan, with an aim to make renewable sources as the primary source of energy.¹²⁹ In an attempt to promote entertainment industry, Japanese government passed a law to establish casinos to create an integrated entertainment network, with the aim to attract foreign tourists.¹³⁰

In December, Japan announced New Defense Guidelines that called for enhancing the capability of Japanese Self Defense Force's capability to deal with security risk's at sea, cyber and outer space. The Mid-Term Defense Program announced along with the New Defense Guidelines budgeted \$240 billion for expanding Japan's Self Defense Forces' armory, reflecting Tokyo's continuing security concerns emanating from China and North Korea.¹³¹ Key aspect of both documents is the emphasis on the retrofitting of an Izumo-class destroyer to give it aircraft carrier capabilities. However, given the sensitivity of the issue, the upgraded destroyer was described in the documents as "a destroyer with multifunctional capabilities", rather than as an aircraft carrier.¹³²

On the foreign policy front, Tokyo recalibrated its approach on facing "Trump Shock" and has presented a proactive outlook. Despite President Donald Trump's decision to apply tariff on Japanese goods particularly steel and automobile, US-Japan relations remained steady.

¹²⁸Kalish, Ira (2019) "Japan Slowing economy, declining exports", Deloitte, <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/economy/asia-pacific/japan-economic-outlook.html>,

¹²⁹"Cabinet Decision on the New Strategic Energy Plan", Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, July 3, 2018, https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2018/0703_002.html,

¹³⁰"Japan enacts controversial casino gambling bill", *Nikkei Asia Review*, July 20, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-enacts-controversial-casino-gambling-bill>,

¹³¹"Japan's new defense guidelines will outline plans for more cohesive and flexible 'multidimensional' force", *Japan Times*, December 13, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/12/13/national/politics-diplomacy/japans-new-defense-guidelines-will-outline-plans-integrated-flexible-multidimensional-force/#.XQC93MbhWM8>,

¹³² "Japan's new defense policy adds 'effective aircraft carrier'", *Asahi Shimbun*, December 18, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201812180041.html,

To iron out issues in US-Japan economic relations, Prime Minister Abe and President Trump during their Summit in September opened bilateral trade talks.¹³³ Despite Abe's proactive diplomacy to keep the US-Japan relations on a steady track, developments in Okinawa has the potential to become an irritant in the future. Newly elected governor of Okinawa is against the planned relocation of American bases in province and has announced the plan to conduct provincial referendum on the matter.¹³⁴

On the pragmatic side, Tokyo improved its relations with China. Prime Minister Abe's visit to Beijing, first in seven years by a Japanese Prime Minister, set the relations between Tokyo and Beijing in a normal course. Japan also hosted the Trilateral Summit involving China and South Korea. Japan and China also restarted their high-level economic talks that were stalled for eight years. In an attempt to improve its relations with Russia, Tokyo started a mechanism to negotiate its boundary dispute with Russia.¹³⁵ Japan's relations with South Korea saw a low point after the Korean Supreme Court ruled Japanese companies to compensate ten Koreans who were forced into labour during Japan's forty years of rule over Korea.¹³⁶

The year also witnessed Japan's emerging leadership in multilateralism, for instance it led the negotiation process that resulted in the conclusion of Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP, or TPP-11)¹³⁷. CPTPP is the successor of Trans-Pacific Partnership, a mega trade deal among 12 countries including the US. However, Washington withdrew from the pact after President Trump assumed power. Japan also signed a free trade agreement with the EU.

India-Japan Relations

On a strong footing provided by the personal connection between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, India-Japan relations witnessed expansion in 2018.

¹³³"Joint Statement of the United States and Japan", MOFA, Japan, September 26, 2018, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000405449.pdf>,

¹³⁴"Okinawa decides to hold Feb. 24 referendum on U.S. base issue", Asahi Shimbun, November 27, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201811270038.html,

¹³⁵"New Japan-Russia framework set, but obstacles to territorial talks abound", *The Japan Times*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/12/03/national/politics-diplomacy/new-japan-russia-framework-set-obstacles-territorial-talks-abound/#.XQC8d8bhWM8>

¹³⁶"Supreme Court's ruling orders Japanese firm to pay damages to victims of forced labor", *Hankyoreh*, October 31, 2018, english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/868188.html,

¹³⁷"Asia-Pacific nations sign sweeping trade deal without U.S.", Reuters, March 8, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-tpp/asia-pacific-nations-sign-sweeping-trade-deal-without-u-s-idUSKCN1GK0JM>,

Prime Minister Modi visited Japan on October 28-29, 2018 for the India-Japan Annual Summit with Japanese Prime Minister Abe. Following their Summit talk, Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Abe signed a twenty-five-point Joint Vision Statement and a set of 12 Facts Sheets on the relationship. They also launched "2 + 2" Ministerial Meeting and established Japan-India Space Dialogue.¹³⁸ During the summit, New Delhi and Tokyo signed thirty-two agreements including cooperation between Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force and Indian Navy, Japan-India Digital Partnership, cooperation in healthcare, academic and people to people exchange. Japan also joined the India led International Solar Alliance.

In March, the then EAM SushmaSwaraj traveled to Tokyo for the 9th Japan-India Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with her counterpart Taro Kono. During the visit of EAM, India and Japan signed and exchanged notes concerning the provision of four yen loan projects including the Mumbai Metro Line 3 Project (II) (total loan provision of up to 149.218 billion yen).¹³⁹

On June 19, 2018, the 5th India-Japan 2+2 Vice-Ministerial level dialogue was held in New Delhi. The meeting was co-chaired on the Indian side by Foreign Secretary, Vijay Gokhale and Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra and from the Japanese side by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Takeo Mori and Vice-Minister of Defence for International Affairs, Ro Manabe.¹⁴⁰ In July, India and Japan held the 4th Round of the India-Japan Maritime Affairs Dialogue in New Delhi.¹⁴¹ In November, the first joint military exercises between the armies of India and Japan focusing on counter-terrorism was held in India.¹⁴²

SOUTH KOREA

The developments in inter-Korean relations and the situation in the Korean Peninsula occupied the South Korean political landscape in 2018. President Moon Jae-in, who assumed office in May 2017 had spent much of his political capital to improve inter-Korean relations and to create a diplomatic breakthrough in the tensed situation in the Korean Peninsula. President Moon's strategy has paid dividends. Starting with the breakthrough

¹³⁸ "India-Japan Vision Statement", MEA, October 29, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30543/indiajapan+vision+statement>

¹³⁹ MOFA Japan, "Signing and Exchange of Notes Concerning Yen Loans to India" March 29, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001978.html,

¹⁴⁰ "5th India-Japan 2+2 Dialogue", MEA, June 19, 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29988/5th+indiajapan+2432+dialogue>

¹⁴¹ "India-Japan Maritime Affairs Dialogue & India-Japan Bilateral Consultations on Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Export Control", MEA, July 19, 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30133/indiajapan+maritime+affairs+dialogue+and+indiajapan+bilateral+consultations+on+disarmament+nonproliferation+and+export+control>,

¹⁴² http://www.atimes.com/article/rising-sun-flutters-over-indo-pacific-once-more/?utm_source=The+Daily+Report&utm_campaign=db449ba8d4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_10_24_10_42&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1f8bca137f-db449ba8d4-16241003,

from the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and through three Summits between President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un, inter-Korean relations witnessed an unprecedented momentum in multiple areas including political, military, economic and social. To maintain the momentum and to further facilitate inter-Korean relations, Seoul and Pyongyang expanded their channels of communications by establishing a liaison office in the border city of Kaesong and a hotline between the two top leaderships. They also restored military communication mechanism. During the September inter-Korean Summit in Pyongyang, North Korea and South Korea signed a military agreement to reduce military tension in the border by scaling down military activities and initiating confidence building measures. Even though economic projects are yet to start because the existing sanctions regime on North Korea, Seoul and Pyongyang conducted a number of feasibility studies to promote the economic cooperation including road, rail and port connectivity and restarting stalled inter-Korean projects. Seoul has also expressed its intention of relaxing the bilateral sanctions that it had implemented on North Korea. Social and people-to-people exchanges between the two Koreas have also witnessed a dramatic improvement with their joint participation in international sports events, exchanges of sports and art personalities and the restoration of family reunion meetings.

Despite his success in bringing stability in the Korean Peninsula, President Moon's popularity has been sliding through 2018. The main reason for declining popularity was the sluggish performance of Korean economy. Moon's strategy of wage-led economic growth has produced mixed results. The minimum wage was increased over 16 percent in 2018. This move badly affected small and medium business enterprises. The unemployment rate, in particular among the youth, increased. The youth unemployment peaked to 23 percent. In response, the Moon government injected more than KRW 10 trillion (US\$ 9 billion) during his term, aiming to lower the rate to 8 percent by 2021. The government also increased the fiscal year 2019 budget by 9.7 percent to deal with unemployment situation. The employment budget peaked to KRW 23.5 trillion (US\$ 21.4 billion), a record 22 percent increase in the last two decades.¹⁴³

The arrest of former Korean President Lee Myung-bak weakened the political opposition in Korea. President Lee was sentenced for 15 years in prison and a KRW 21.2 billion (US\$ 19.3 million) fine on charges including abuse of power, embezzlement, and bribery. A year before Park Guen-hye, who took over Lee as the President and party leadership was also sent to prison for 24 years for abuse of power and corruption.

India-South Korea Relations

In 2018, bilateral relations between India and Korea accounted a remarkable growth. President Moon Jae-in's 'New Southern Policy', announced a year before, provided a new context for the bilateral relations complementing India's Act East Policy. The state visit of

¹⁴³SeoYoojin. "Youth Unemployment 10 Percent, Highest since 1999, Expanded Unemployment 23 Percent," *JoongAngIlbo*, September 12, 2018, <<https://news.joins.com/article/22965496>>.

President Moon Jae-in to India in July provided an opportunity to impart a new momentum to the relationship. At the Summit, Prime Minister Modi and President Moon issued a joint vision statement to further strengthen the “Special Strategic Partnership” between the two countries.¹⁴⁴ During the Summit, India and Korea signed eleven agreements.¹⁴⁵ Among the agreements, two were on the expansion of trade, three focused on science and technology cooperation, two on cultural and people to people relations, besides an MoU to promote cooperation in future technology and an MoU on railway cooperation. The negotiation for upgrading CEPA was initiated in 2015 after observing sluggishness in bilateral trade and a low utilisation rate of CEPA. Agreeing to continue the process of CEPA upgrade, they also announced an ‘Early Harvest Package’ and set the goal of achieving USD 50 billion bilateral trade by 2030 against the current level of USD 20 billion. Bilateral trade has shown an improvement by reaching 21 billion USD in 2018, compared to 20 billion USD in 2017, 15.7 billion USD in 2016 and 16.2 billion USD in 2015.¹⁴⁶

The visit of South Korean first lady to India in November 2018 was a special occasion for India-Korea relations. Madam Moon was invited as the chief guest of Uttar Pradesh government’s *Deepotsva* celebrations in Ayodhya. Her visit popularised the Korean myth of a nuptial connection dating back two millennia. In Korea, it is believed that an Indian princess named Suriratna from Ayodhya (known in Korea as Heo Hwang-ok) travelled to Korea and married a Korean king. However, the story of the Princess and the cultural connections associated with it was hitherto not well known in India.

In April 2018, joint anti-piracy, search-and-rescue exercise 'SAHYOG-HYEOBLYEOG 2018' was conducted by Indian and Korean Coast Guards. As part of the exercise, ships of both countries conducted tactical manoeuvres and "drills" to counter piracy and carry out maritime law enforcement tasks.¹⁴⁷

In August, the Korean Defense Minister Song Young-moo visited India to improve defense cooperation between the two countries. Song’s visit to India was the first by a South Korean Defence Minister since 2012. In December, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha visited India to co-chair the 9th India-Korea Joint Commission with the then EAM Sushma Swaraj. High-level Indian dignitaries including Nitin J Gadkari, Union Minister of Road Transport, Highways and Shipping visited Korea in April and Thawarchand Gehlot, Minister

¹⁴⁴ "India and Republic of Korea: A Vision for People, Prosperity, Peace and our Future", Ministry of External Affairs, July 10, 2018, www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30041/India_and_Republic_of_Korea_A_Vision_for_People_Prosperty_Peace_and_our_Future,

¹⁴⁵ "List of MoUs/Documents signed between India and the Republic of Korea during the State Visit of President of Korea to India", Ministry of External Affairs, July 10, 2018, www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30040/List_of_MoUsDocuments_signed_between_India_and_the_Republic_of_Korea_during_the_State_Visit_of_President_of_Korea_to_India,

¹⁴⁶ Source: Korea International Trade Association, www.kita.org

¹⁴⁷ "Indian, Korean coast guards hold joint exercise off Chennai coast", Business Standard, April 6, 2018, https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/indian-korean-coast-guards-hold-joint-exercise-off-chennai-coast-118040600013_1.html,

for Social Justice and Empowerment visited in September. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, visited Seoul in September to sign the Sister City MoU with Seoul Metropolitan Government.¹⁴⁸

NORTH KOREA

2018 was an eventful year for North Korea witnessing a change in Pyongyang's behaviour from belligerence to diplomacy. It also witnessed North Korea's attempts to end its international isolation. Chairman Kim Jong-un in his New Year address declared completion of its nuclear mission of acquiring 'state nuclear force' and would focus ahead on economic development. Pyongyang's participation in Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in Seoul in February 2018 not only provided a break in inter-Korean relations but also its relations with the US and China. Before 2018, Kim who assumed power in 2012 had not travelled to any foreign country nor had a meeting with any foreign leader. In 2018, Kim had three Summit meetings with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, travelled three times to China to meet President Xi Jinping and had the first ever North Korea-US Summit when he met with President Donald Trump in Singapore in June. After its sixth nuclear test in September 2017 and a long range missile in November 2017, North Korea refrained from nuclear and missile tests in 2018.

At the June 12 summit with Trump in Singapore, Chairman Kim not only managed to improve his image that he was no longer the leader of a "hermit kingdom" at the international level but also projected an image of himself as a world leader to his subjects at home. At the summit, Kim also managed to persuade the termination of US-South Korea annual military exercise. Though the US and North Korea signed a broad-based agreement to improve US-North Korea relations and denuclearisation, there has not been much progress. The denuclearisation negotiation reached a deadlock on how and in what sequence to proceed. Washington and Pyongyang are expecting each other to be the first one to concede in moving forward. The US demanded North Korea to make a full disclosure of its nuclear programme, while Pyongyang is demanding the US to declare the end of the Korean War and relax sanctions.¹⁴⁹

The new dynamics, while creating a favourable environment for diplomacy have also produced a set of new challenges. The weakening of international cooperation on North Korea is the first challenge. Difference of opinion between countries on the continuation of international sanctions on North Korea is an indication of weakening international solidarity on the issue. In the September UNSC meeting on North Korea, China and Russia argued for

¹⁴⁸ "India - RoK High-Level Visits", Indian embassy Seoul, www.indembassyseoul.gov.in/page/high-level-visits/

¹⁴⁹ Choe Sang-Hun and David E. Sanger, "North Korea's New Nuclear Promises Fall Short of U.S. Demands", *New York Times*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/19/world/asia/north-south-korea-nuclear-weapons.html>,

relaxing sanctions in response to positive actions taken by North Korea.¹⁵⁰ The message was repeated during a trilateral meeting between North Korea, China and Russia on October 10, 2018.¹⁵¹ Seoul has also been mulling on relaxing the bilateral sanctions that it had imposed on Pyongyang and to start inter-Korean economic projects.¹⁵² On the other hand, the US, Japan and Western countries are firmly arguing for the continuation of existing sanctions until North Korea gives up its nuclear programme.

India-North Korea Relations

India-North Korea bilateral relations has been stagnant for two decades mainly because of North Korea's self imposed isolation from the international community. In an effort to improve relations with North Korea in the context of developments in the Korean Peninsula, the then Minister of State for External Affairs V.K. Singh visited Pyongyang in May 2018. His visit was the first Indian ministerial visit to North Korea in the last two decades. During the visit, he held discussions with the Kim Yong Dae, the Vice President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, Ri Yong Ho, Foreign Minister, Pak Chun Nam, Minister of Culture and Choe Hui Chol, Vice Foreign Minister of DPRK on a range of issues covering political, regional, economic, educational and cultural cooperation between the two countries. The MoS highlighted the threat from nuclear proliferation, in particular India's concerns in the context of the proliferation linkages with India's neighbourhood.¹⁵³

Dr. Jojin John

¹⁵⁰ "North Korea Fault Lines Exposed at UN Security Council Meeting", *Bloomberg*, September 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-27/north-korea-fault-lines-exposed-at-un-security-council-meeting>,

¹⁵¹ "China, Russia push to ease North Korea sanctions as Seoul mulls over options", *The Strait Times*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-russia-push-to-ease-north-korea-sanctions-as-seoul-mulls-options>,

¹⁵² "Minister: S. Korea mulls lifting sanctions on N. Korea", *The Yonhap News*, October 10, 2018, english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2018/10/10/0200000000AEN20181010003653315.html,

¹⁵³ "Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs General Dr. V.K. Singh (Retd.) to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", MEA, May 16, 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29899/visit+of+minister+of+state+for+external+affairs+general+dr+vk+singh+retd+to+the+democratic+peoples+republic+of+korea>,

Central Asia

3. Central Asia

The five Republics of Central Asia Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan remained stable and continued their economic development in 2018. Elections for parliament and local bodies were held in Turkmenistan in March. The Central Commission for Holding Elections and Referendums said, 91.69 percent of votes were polled for 125 members of parliament, 91.75 percent voted to elect members of provincial, district and municipal people's councils, while 91.68 percent voted for the election of local councils' members.¹⁵⁴ Kyrgyzstan's parliament (Jogorku Kenesh) approved the new government of Prime Minister Mukhammedkalyi Abylgaziev in April 2018. Earlier, the Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov dismissed the cabinet of Prime Minister Saparlsakov following the passage of no-confidence vote against his government. The opposition was not satisfied with the government's performance in the year 2017.¹⁵⁵ It was first time since its independence in 1991 that the Kyrgyz parliament expressed no-confidence in the government.

Regional Cooperation Strengthened

The efforts to enhance regional cooperation continued apace. The most significant change in the bilateral ties in the region came from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev visited Tajikistan in March 2018 and Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon paid a two-day visit to Uzbekistan in August 2018. The two leaders signed 26 documents, a Joint Statement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The two countries resumed the supply of gas and electricity to each other after a gap of nine years.¹⁵⁶ After a gap of 25 years, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan resumed bus services in May.¹⁵⁷ Air services between the two countries, which were discontinued in 1992, had resumed since April 2017. Rail connection between the two countries' southern regions was re-linked after a gap of seven years.¹⁵⁸ Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also resumed the bus services between the

¹⁵⁴ Turkmenistan Golden Age, "About 91.7 Percent of Turkmen Electorate Vote on Polling Day," 25 March 2018, <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/eng/?id=10246>,

¹⁵⁵ Kabar, "Kyrgyz president dismisses cabinet after no-confidence vote," 19 April 2018, <http://kabar.kg/eng/news/kyrgyz-president-dismisses-cabinet-after-no-confidence-vote/>,

¹⁵⁶ Asia-Plus, "Tajikistan reportedly begins supplying electricity to Uzbekistan," 3 April 2018, <http://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20180403/tajikistan-reportedly-begins-supplying-electricity-to-uzbekistan>,

¹⁵⁷ Azernews, "Uzbekistan, Tajikistan resume bus connection after 26-year break," 15 May 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/131994.html>,

¹⁵⁸ Azernews, "Uzbekistan, Tajikistan resume bus connection after 26-year break," 15 May 2018, <https://www.azernews.az/region/131994.html>,

two countries after a gap of about 15 years.¹⁵⁹ It was resumed with Kyrgyzstan in early May 2018.

A significant development from a regional perspective was the (Consultative) Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States' at Astana on March 15, 2018. The initiative to hold the consultative meeting came from Uzbekistan and it was decided that such meetings will be held annually before the Nauruz Holiday (20-21 March). It was highlighted that the region could solve all its problems together. Leaders said that the region is getting economically integrated by developing transport connectivity linkages. They added interaction would help deal with the regional security and other challenges, including terrorism and environmental issues.

Uzbekistan hosted an international conference on Afghanistan in March 2018. India also participated in the Tashkent conference. The conference acknowledged that peace and security in Afghanistan are essential for ensuring stability and prosperity in the region. It recognised that an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political settlement, close regional counter-terrorism cooperation, connectivity and regional economic cooperation are key to peace and prosperity of Afghanistan and the region. The conference supported the Afghan government's offer of direct talks with the Taliban.¹⁶⁰

Further, the five Republics met in August 2018 in Turkmenistan tourist city Avaza on the Caspian Sea coast for finding solutions for Aral Sea conservation. It was the Summit of the heads of the founding states of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, which was formed in 1993.¹⁶¹ The Summit was held after a gap of about 10 years.¹⁶² The five countries agreed to work together to deal with the consequences of Aral Sea issues, improve socio-economic condition in Aral Sea area and address regional water and environmental matters.¹⁶³

In July 2018, Foreign Ministers of five Republics held meeting in the Kyrgyz resort city of Cholpon-Ata and confirmed their commitment to regional cooperation. They agreed to

¹⁵⁹ Caravanserai, "Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan launch new bus routes," 5 January 2017, http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/newsbriefs/2018/01/05/newsbrief-01 ,

¹⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Declaration of the Tashkent conference on Afghanistan: Peace Process, Security Cooperation & Regional Connectivity," 27 March 2018, <https://mfa.uz/en/press/news/2018/03/14327/> ,

¹⁶¹ The Times of Central Asia, "Five Central Asian leaders hold Aral Sea summit in Turkmenistan," 25 August 2018, <https://timesca.com/index.php/news/20169-five-central-asian-leaders-hold-aral-sea-summit-in-turkmenistan> ,

¹⁶² Official website of the President of Uzbekistan, "Regional cooperation is important for eliminating consequences of the Aral tragedy," 24 August 2018, <http://president.uz/en/lists/view/1967> ,

¹⁶³ Official website of the President of Uzbekistan, "Negotiations are held in an open and constructive spirit," 24 August 2018, <http://president.uz/en/lists/view/1968> ,

enhance cooperation to deal with international terrorism and extremism.¹⁶⁴ The statement also sought promotion of ‘intra-regional investment cooperation’ for business among Central Asian countries. They advocated integrated use of water and energy resources in the region.¹⁶⁵ The participants of the meeting welcomed the regional countries’ cooperation and role to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁶

Five Caspian Sea littoral states Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan signed convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea in Aktau, Kazakhstan on 12 August 2018. The negotiations were going on since 1996. Six other documents related to Caspian Sea cooperation were also signed. The Caspian Sea has been given ‘special legal status’, which creates territorial waters within 15 maritime miles. It has a 10 miles of fishing zones, and beyond the fishing zones, the common water area remains unchanged. There is freedom of maritime navigation to ships of coastal countries. The countries also agreed on freedom of transit to other water bodies. It creates the possibility of undersea pipelines provided environmental requirements are met.¹⁶⁷

In May 2018, Tajikistan hosted High-Level International Conference on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism, at Dushanbe. The conference was organised by the Tajik government in cooperation with the UN, CSTO, SCO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the EU. It was attended by representatives of 46 countries and organizations,¹⁶⁸ including India. The then Minister of State for External Affairs M.J. Akbar highlighted the achievements of Tajikistan in defeating terrorism in the country in 1990s.¹⁶⁹ He added that the fight against terrorism must be at three levels; first, on the field by security forces; second, against the radicalisation of minds, and third, bringing equitable economic prosperity.

¹⁶⁴ The Times of Central Asia, “Central Asia states confirm commitment to regional cooperation,” 23 July 2018, <https://www.timesca.com/index.php/news/20032-central-asia-states-confirm-commitment-to-regional-cooperation>

¹⁶⁵ Uzbekistan National News Agency, “Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central Asian countries,” 22 July 2018, <http://uza.uz/en/society/joint-statement-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-c-22-07-2018>

¹⁶⁶ Kazinform, “Central Asian FMs discuss regional coop issues in Cholpon-Ata,” 22 July 2018, https://www.inform.kz/en/central-asian-fms-discuss-regional-coop-issues-in-cholpon-ata_a3328599

¹⁶⁷ ElyaAltynsarina, “Caspian Sea nations sign historic convention laying solid framework for use of resource-rich sea,” *The Astana Times*, 14 August 2018, <https://astanatimes.com/2018/08/caspian-sea-nations-sign-historic-convention-laying-solid-framework-for-use-of-resource-rich-sea/>

¹⁶⁸ Akbar, “International conference on counter-terrorism opens in Tajik capital today,” 3 May 2018, <http://kabar.kg/eng/news/international-conference-on-counter-terrorism-opens-in-tajik-capital-today/>

¹⁶⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Statement by Shri M.J. Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs at the High-Level International Conference on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism (4 May 2018, Dushanbe),” 7 May 2018, <http://www.indianembassytj.com/index.php?itfpage=newsevent&itemid=70>

India-Central Asia

President of India Ram Nath Kovind paid a State visit to Tajikistan on 7-9 October 2018. He met with President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon and discussed matters of bilateral as well as regional and international cooperation. The Joint Statement condemned the sponsorship, financial support, assistance and provision of safe havens to terrorists anywhere in the world. The two leaders emphasised on close cooperation between the security agencies of the two countries. India announced allocation of a grant of USD 20 million to Tajikistan for implementation of mutually identified development projects.¹⁷⁰

The two countries encouraged exploration of opportunities to increase trade and investment in various fields, including IT and electronic devices, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, weaving and textiles, silk and leather products, mining, hydropower and renewable energy. Tajikistan invited Indian investments in its free economic zones.

India and Tajikistan also expressed their support to Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan controlled peace and reconciliation process with participation of all ethnicities of Afghanistan.

During this visit, various documents for cooperation on space technology, disaster management, renewable energy, youth matters, agricultural research, and unani medicine were signed.

The then EAM of India Sushma Swaraj concluded a four-day visit of three Central Asian countries from 2-5 August 2018. She went to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan. In her meeting with the Kazakh Foreign Minister, she discussed bilateral, regional and global issues of common concern and explored areas of increasing cooperation, including in agriculture, pharmaceuticals and energy. It was mentioned that the 'Digital India' programme of India may be of interest for Kazakhstan's 'Digital Kazakhstan' programme.¹⁷¹ She also visited the Kyrgyz Republic and called on President SooronboiJeenbekov, and had meetings with Foreign Minister Erlan Abdyldaev. During the delegation level talks, the Minister discussed possible collaboration in IT, health, tourism, energy and natural resources between the two countries.¹⁷² In Uzbekistan, the Minister was received by her

170 Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "India-Tajikistan Joint Statement during State Visit of President to Tajikistan (7-9 October, 2018)," 8 October 2018, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30482/IndiaTajikistan_Joint_Statement_during_State_Visit_of_President_to_Tajikistan_7_9_October_2018

¹⁷¹ Embassy of India in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Statement to Media by External Affairs Minister H.E. Mrs. Sushma Swaraj, 3 August 2018, <http://www.indembastana.in/docs/1533294438Swaraj%20following%20bilateral%20meeting%20with%20Foreign%20Minister%20of%20Kazakhstan%20Mr.%20Kairat%20Abdrakhmanov%20in%20Astana%20on%203rd%20August,%202018.PDF>

counterpart at the Tashkent airport.¹⁷³ In a meeting between them, the two Ministers discussed key issues of interest and exchanged perspectives on regional and global developments. Further cooperation was explored including in political, trade, economic, investment, tourism, cultural and humanitarian areas.¹⁷⁴

The then Defence Minister of India Nirmala Sitharaman held talks with her Tajikistan counterpart Lieutenant General Mirzo Sherali on 8 February 2018 in New Delhi. The two Ministers discussed bilateral defence cooperation, regional security scenario and the issues of common interests of the two countries.¹⁷⁵ India is a strategic partner of Tajikistan and the two countries have a joint working group on counter-terrorism.

The then Minister for Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation, Road Transport & Highways and Shipping, Government of India, Nitin Gadkari visited Tajikistan to participate in the global conference on “International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028”, 20-21 June 2018. UN and Tajikistan jointly organised the Conference to discuss key water related issues of Sustainable Development Goals adopted by UN.¹⁷⁶ He held talks with Tajikistan’s Foreign Minister and discussed the need to enhance mutual cooperation in the area of sustainable water development.

Other major developments during the year at the bilateral front were the following:

India Joins Ashgabat Transit Corridor Agreement: India joined the Agreement on the Establishment of International Transport and Transit Corridor between Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, informed the Ministry of External Affairs on February 1, 2018.¹⁷⁷ It is called Ashgabat Agreement. Turkmenistan is the depository state and six other members are: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Oman, Pakistan and India.

¹⁷² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Visit of External Affairs Minister to Kyrgyz Republic,” 4 August 2018, <http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30235/Visit+of+External+Affairs+Minister+to+Kyrgyz+Republic>

¹⁷³ The Hindu Businessline, “Swaraj calls on Uzbek PM; discusses bilateral relations,” *PTI*, 4 August 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/swaraj-calls-on-uzbek-pm-discusses-bilateral-relations/article24604525.ece>

¹⁷⁴ Uzbekistan National News Agency, “Meeting with the External Affairs Minister of India,” 4 August 2018, <http://uza.uz/en/society/meeting-with-the-external-affairs-minister-of-india-04-08-2018>

¹⁷⁵ Business Standard, “Sitharaman holds talks with Tajik defence minister,” 9 February 2018, http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/sitharaman-holds-talks-with-tajik-defence-minister-118020900136_1.html

¹⁷⁶ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, “Shri Nitin Gadkari to attend conference on “International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028” in Tajikistan,” 19 June 2018, <http://pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1535850>

¹⁷⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “India Joins the Ashgabat Agreement,” 1 February 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29406/India_Joins_the_Ashgabat_Agreement

India, Kyrgyzstan Held Joint Military Exercise: Forces from India and Kyrgyzstan concluded their 5th joint training exercise 'Khanjar V' on March 29, 2018 at the Counter Insurgency Jungle Warfare School, Vairengte, Mizoram.¹⁷⁸ The exercise included operation against terror hideouts, understanding tactics of the two forces, developing inter-operability and exchanging best practices.¹⁷⁹

India-Kazakhstan Conclude Joint Military Exercise: Forces of India and Kazakhstan concluded the third edition of joint military drill KAZIND 2018 in Kazakhstan. The 14-day exercise began on 10 September and concluded on 23 September 2018. The main objective of the drill was to enhance cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries and train and equip the contingents to undertake joint counter-terror and counter-insurgency operations in urban and rural environments under the UN mandate.¹⁸⁰

Uzbekistan Introduces e-Visa for Indian Visitors: Uzbekistan introduced the electronic visa (e-visa) regime for visitors from India and fifty other countries from 15 July 2018. The system provides for a single entry of 30-day stay.

India's Medical Assistance Benefits Kyrgyz People: The National Oncology Centre at Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan held a ceremony in February 2018 to launch a new Bhabhatron-II radiotherapy device. The equipment has been donated by India.¹⁸¹ Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Saparlsakov was present at the ceremony.

Indian Company Bags Transmission Line Contract in Tajikistan: The Kalpataru Power Transmission Limited (KPTL), based in Mumbai and working in the fields of engineering, procurement and construction in the power and infrastructure sector, received contracts in Tajikistan totalling Rs. 346 crores'.¹⁸²

TAPI Moves Ahead with Construction Inauguration in Afghanistan: The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline got a boost with the inauguration of construction works in Afghanistan on February 23, 2018 at Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border. The countries also signed the general conditions of the agreement with the governments of receiving states of the pipeline project.

¹⁷⁸ Morung Express, "Joint Indo- Kyrgyzstan training exercise culminates in Mizoram," 29 March 2018, <http://morungexpress.com/joint-indo-kyrgyzstan-training-exercise-culminates-in-mizoram/>

¹⁷⁹ Sangzuala Hmar, "Indo-Kyrgyzstan joint training exercise 'KHANJAR V' concludes," *Northeast Now*, 29 March 2018, <https://nenow.in/indo-kyrgyzstan-joint-training-exercise.html>

¹⁸⁰ Financial Express, "Indo-Kazakhstan Joint Exercise a step forward in military relations," 22 September 2018, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/indo-kazakhstan-joint-exercise-a-step-forward-in-military-relations/1322970/>

¹⁸¹ Maria Orlova, 24.kg, "New Radiotherapy device launched in Kyrgyzstan," 24.kg, 26 February 2018, https://24.kg/english/77076_New_radiotherapy_device_launched_in_Kyrgyzstan/

¹⁸² Kalpatru Power Transmission Limited, Press Release, "KPTL Received New Orders of Rs 1,235 Crores," 28 June 2018, <http://kalpatarupower.com/company-announcement/>

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

China hosted the 18th Council of Heads of State of the SCO meeting at Qingdao on 9-10 June 2018. It was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The members committed themselves to the SCO Charter's objectives and principles and, guided by the Shanghai Spirit, sought to fulfil the tasks of SCO Development Strategy until 2025. The SCO asserted itself as a unique, influential and authoritative regional organisation whose potential had grown remarkably following the accession of India and Pakistan. A Plan of Action for 2018-2022 to implement the Treaty on Long-Term Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation between SCO Member States was approved.

Some of the major developments related to the SCO were the following:

India Participated in SCO Meet on Military Cooperation: After joining the SCO in June 2017, India for the first time participated in the meeting on defence cooperation in the SCO framework. The two-day International Military Cooperation Departments of SCO Member Countries was held in China on 15-16 January 2018. Practical cooperation in this area among the member countries was discussed. The Indian delegation was led by Major General Ajay Seth.¹⁸³

SCO Military Exercise in Russia: SCO conducted the 'Peace Mission' series of joint military exercises as part of the defence cooperation initiative among member countries. The Peace Mission 2018 was held at Chebarkul, Chelyabinsk, Russia, from 22 to 29 August 2018.¹⁸⁴ The exercise gave an opportunity to SCO members' armed forces to train in a multinational and joint environment for counter-terrorism operations in urban scenario.

SCO Group on Afghan Met in Beijing: SCO Contact Group on Afghanistan held a meeting in Beijing on May 28, 2018. Three main issues discussed were on : current situation of Afghanistan and neighbouring regions, the reconciliation process, and SCO cooperation in Afghanistan. India expressed its perspectives on the security situation in Afghanistan, including security challenges posed by terrorism and extremism imposed from beyond its borders. India also assured continued assistance for socio-economic development as per the priorities of the Afghan people and greater connectivity and regional integration for Afghanistan. India reiterated its support to the membership of Afghanistan in the SCO.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Embassy of India, Beijing, "Meeting of SCO International Military Cooperation Departments," 16 January 2018, <http://indianembassybeijing.in/pdf/Embassy%20Press%20release-16-jan-2018.pdf>

¹⁸⁴ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence, "Curtain Raiser: Exercise SCO Peace Mission 2018," 10 August 2018, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=181800>,

¹⁸⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Second SCO- Afghanistan Contact Group Meeting, Beijing (May 28, 2018)," 28 May 2018, http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29926/Second_SCO_Afghanistan_Contact_Group_Meeting_Beijing_May_28_2018

SCO First Meeting of Railways Administration Heads: The first meeting of SCO railway administration heads was held in Tashkent on September 19, 2018. At the meeting, heads of railway administrations from SCO member states, were joined by their counterparts from observer states, including Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia, as well as from the SCO's dialogue partner Azerbaijan. The participants exchanged views on making effective use of and expanding the transit potential of railways run by SCO member states. They also reviewed various relevant international legal instruments, as well as integrated shipping management. The meeting of the SCO railway administration heads is a new mechanism in the SCO established in June 2018 by the decision of SCO heads of state at the Qingdao Summit.¹⁸⁶

SCO's Prosecutors General Meet Held in Dushanbe: The 16th Meeting of the Prosecutors General of SCO was organised in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on September 20, 2018. The Meeting of the Prosecutors General of the SCO countries is an advisory body for coordination, cooperation and interaction among prosecution agencies of the SCO member states against terrorism, separatism and extremism, illegal drug and arms trafficking and other transnational organised crimes. The participants signed a protocol of intent to strengthen efforts against extremism and terrorism as well as transnational crimes that work as a source to fund terrorism, including illegal drug and human trafficking.

Dr. Athar Zafar

West Asia

4. West Asia

TURKEY

The year 2018 was eventful for Turkey both at the domestic level and in its foreign policy.

At the domestic level, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on April 18, 2018 announced an early parliamentary and presidential election in June 2018. The Supreme Election Council, YSK chairman Sadi Güven announced the official results of the elections and declared Erdogan as victorious, who won 52.50 percent of the total votes.

The newly elected president Erdogan gained substantial powers according to the constitutional amendment passed with a narrow margin in April 2017. With the new system in place, the President became the head of the executive branch holding the power to declare presidential decrees, prepare the annual budget, appointment and removal of the

¹⁸⁶ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, "Tashkent hosts first meeting of SCO railway administration heads," 19 September 2018, <http://eng.sectSCO.org/news/20180919/469084.html>

Vice President, high level state officials, including more than half the members of the nation's highest judicial body apart from various other powers without requiring the confidence vote of the parliament. The president also gained the power to dissolve the national assembly and impose states of emergency. Earlier, appointment and the removal of ministers were made only after consultation with the Prime Minister. The post of Prime Minister will be annulled and Vice Presidency will be introduced for the first time. Based on the law passed in March 2017, the political parties for the first time are allowed to form pre-election alliances.

As for the 2018 elections outcome, the turnout was 86.2 percent with a total number of votes cast was 51,178,630 while the valid votes were 50,125,400. Erdogan gained a total of 26,324,482 (52.6%) votes, followed by Muharrem İnce with a total vote of 15,336,594 (30.6%). Selahattin Demirtaş, the pro-Kurdish leader managed to gain 4,205,219 votes (8.4%), while Meral Akşener gained 3,649,233 votes (7.3%), Temal Karamallaoglu gained 443,766 (0.9%) and Dogu Perincek gained 98,926 (0.2%) votes respectively.¹⁸⁷

As for the political parties' performance, the ruling party AKP won 295 seats (42.6%), CHP the second largest party gained 146 seats (22.6%), HDP gained 87 seats (11.7%) passing the threshold of 10% along with MHP 49 seats (11.1%) and İYİ party 43 seats (10.0%). As for the coalition parties' seat sharing, the People's Alliance gained 53.7 percent votes while the National Alliance gained 33.9 percent votes.

While Erdogan may have won the 2018 Presidential and parliamentary elections, compared to the 44.4 percent victory in 2015, the AKP managed to gain only 42.6 percent votes, hence Erdogan had to rely on its allies of the People's Alliance to continue to maintain the parliamentary majority.

Two key support bases that were crucial in the 2018 elections were the Turkish Muslim votes and the pro-Kurdish supporters in the presidential election.

Additionally, Turkey saw a rise in threats to its national security mainly emerging from FETO, PKK and the Islamic State. In fact, counter-terrorism measures had emerged as one of the key election campaign agendas for both the ruling party and the opposition.

At the foreign policy level, the developments in West Asia especially the Syrian crisis, the withdrawal of the Iran nuclear deal and the growing unilateralism of the US have impacted Turkey's foreign policy approach. Turkey pursued a multi-dimensional foreign policy to carry forward its national interests both at the regional and global context. Turkey's foreign policy aspirations focused to move beyond West Asia's regional geopolitics and gain a larger profile. The participation of Turkey (a long-term western ally and NATO member) in a non-

¹⁸⁷ All data for elections results are provided by the Anadolu Agency, *Hurriyat Daily News*, 25 June 2018, <http://www.hurriyetsdailynews.com/turkey-elections-2018/>

Western organisation's event such as the BRICS Summit reinforced the perception of multipolarity as advocated by its members.

US' imposition of sanctions against two top Turkish government officials over the detention of an American pastor held on espionage charges; its strong condemnation of the killings of Palestinian civilians after the inauguration of the US Embassy in Jerusalem amidst protests in the Gaza strip; US' support to Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG), which is an affiliation with PKK and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Manjib and its stand during the Kurdish crisis against Turkey, and; call for imposition of Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAASTA) sanctions after Turkey signed the S-400 missile deal with Russia and imposition of steel tariffs are a few instances that have led to a deterioration in relations. Turkey's growing proximity for Russia and its efforts along with Iran and Syria to resolve the Syrian crisis were also factors at play. Also, Recep Tayip Erdogan's participation in the 10th BRICS Summit was held on 25–27 July 2018 in Johannesburg, South Africa themed 'BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution' was a confidence boost to his African foreign policy interests.

Inevitably, Turkey will seek to balance its relations with the US and Western allies since its engagement with these long-term partners are too important to be ignored. In brief, with reference to the current geopolitical calculus, it stands to reason that the participation of Turkey in the BRICS summit has enhanced the country's role and influence further as a global entity beyond its regional footprint.

SAUDI ARABIA

Some of the major developments that took place in the country were the government granting commercial movie theatre licenses and opening the doors for cinemas. The long standing ban on women to drive was lifted in June 2018 and financial assistance was also granted for women workforce.

Under Prince Salman, the implementation of 'Vision 2030'- a centralised development plan largely remained focused on diversification of economic revenue source such as tourism, housing, investment, etc.

Given the geopolitical contentions in West Asia, there was a visible reassessment of its foreign policy priorities by Saudi Arabia and the need to expand its regional profile. Also, Prince Salman was widely condemned by the international community over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Kingdom's Istanbul consulate in October 2018. This strained the strategic partnership between Saudi Arabia and the West, especially the US. Saudi Arabia's regional arrangement in West Asia remained challenged given the intensity of extra-regional actors such as Turkey and Russia and traditional partners such as US overseeing Saudi Arabia's interests while pursuing its own unilateral policies.

Saudi Arabia-India Bilateral Relations

The year 2018 marked 70 years of bilateral relationship between Saudi Arabia and India. The mutual respect and trust that Saudi Arabia and India have shared was reflected in the developments that took place this year. The Al-Janadriyah festival has been an integral part of Saudi Arabia's cultural landscape since 1985 and the Kingdom's gesture of honouring India was deeply symbolic of the growing importance of the friendship and the crucial ties both sides shared. The festival was inaugurated by the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud in the presence of the then EAM Sushma Swaraj in Riyadh. In 2018, Saudi Arabia increased India's Haj quota by 5,000, the second hike in two years, taking the number of pilgrims who can perform Haj from the country to 175,025. During the signing of bilateral annual Haj 2018 agreement, positive discussions were also held on reviving the option of sending Haj pilgrims through sea route over the next few years.

Saudi Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources Khalid Bin Abdulaziz Al-Falih met Prime Minister Modi during his visit to India in February 2018. Their talks focused on the synergy between the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 and India's economic initiatives. Following the visit, Saudi Aramco signed an MoU with a consortium of three Indian oil companies to jointly build a mega refinery in Ratnagiri, on the west coast of India. The project is estimated to cost around USD 44 billion, and once operational, the refinery would process 1.2 million barrel per day.

The then Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley also visited Saudi Arabia in February 2018 to co-chair the meeting of the 12th India-Saudi Arabia Joint Commission. He met with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and discussed ways to boost bilateral economic and trade cooperation with Saudi officials. The frequency of high-profile bilateral exchanges demonstrated the growing ties.

Dr. Chandra Rekha

IRAQ

The year 2018 witnessed the first parliamentary election in Iraq after ISIS was defeated in the battlefield. The elections were important since it would shape the new phase of state-building and re-construction and also for the geopolitics of the region, given that major powers such as US, Iran, Turkey and Iraq's Arab neighbours have been competing for influence in Iraq. Ahead of the elections, Iraq's top Shi'ite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, making a rare intervention into politics, advised Iraqis to "avoid falling in the trap of those ... who are corrupt and those who failed, whether they have been already tried or not." The influential Shi'ite leader Muqtada al-Sadr dissolved his previous al-Ahrar bloc and formed a new Ishtiqama (integrity) party in which incumbent parliamentarians of al-Aharar bloc were not allowed to contest for elections. His Sairoon (Reform) alliance including the Communist Party, civic groups that organised the popular protests in 2015-2016, won the highest 54 seats in the 329 seats strong house. The Fatah coalition led by Hadi al-Amiri of pro-Iran Badr

Organisation combined two other major Iran-backed Shi'i militias of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Kataib Hezbollah was a close second with 47 seats. The results were followed by widespread complaints of irregularities in the balloting by several political parties, including Kurdish opposition parties in the northern Kurdish autonomous region, suggesting that hackers may have manipulated the results after electronic voting systems were used for the first time. Following a ruling from the Supreme Federal Court, a panel of judges replaced the Independent High Election Commission's nine-member board of commissioners and oversaw the recount of suspected ballots in the presence of UN representatives.¹⁸⁸

Amid the allegations of fraud and recounting of votes, the government formation was further delayed with the onset of anti-government protests in south-eastern Iraq triggered in early July in Basra, when unemployed youngsters gathered outside major oilfields demanding jobs and better services. Venting out anger against the Shi'ite parties, which have benefitted from Iran's assistance in advancing their political fortunes in Iraq's ethno-sectarian power sharing system, protesters have targeted the offices of the National Wisdom Movement, Dawa parties and Badr Organization.¹⁸⁹ In September, Sistani announced that the Shi'ite religious authority would not support any new prime minister chosen from the politicians who have been in power in the past years, whether he was affiliated with a party or independent.¹⁹⁰

In October, Adil Abdul Mahdi, a former oil minister was picked up by President Baharam Salih as an independent candidate who was not allied with either of the two Shi'ite led blocs. Mahdi held his first news conference as the Prime Minister of Iraq outside the secure Green Zone, opposite Baghdad's iconic railway station, saying he wanted to bring his government closer to the people.

Dr. Dhrubajyoti Bhattacharjee

IRAN

The year witnessed the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement in May 2018. This was followed by the return of all nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions on Iran, leading Iran to devise a policy of pressurising the European signatories of the deal to make 'economic guarantees' and strengthening its economic and political relations with Russia, China and other Asian powers, signalling the return of the earlier 'Look to the East' policy.

¹⁸⁸ Iraq plants manual election recount only for suspect ballots, 24 June, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-election/iraq-plans-manual-election-recount-only-for-suspect-ballots-idUSKBN1JKONL>

¹⁸⁹ 16 protesters killed, injured, 33 others arrested in demonstrations at Iraq's Muthanna, 15 July, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/16-protesters-killed-injured-33-others-arrested-in-demonstrations-at-iraqs-muthanna>

¹⁹⁰ Sistani calls for nominating new faces for next prime minister, 13 September, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/09/iraq-government-sistani-fatah-sadr-sairon.html#ixzz5qdVeZU3i>

Following the US withdrawal, Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, visited New Delhi, seeking India's support to salvage the nuclear deal and for continuing the deepening partnership between the two countries in the areas of connectivity, energy, and trade. Connectivity emerged as a major focus of bilateral relations during Iranian President Rouhani's visit to India in February, with International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the inclusion of Chabahar within its framework figuring prominently. In December, India Ports Global Limited Company took over the operations at the Shaheed Beheshti port at Chabahar.

India-Iraq Bilateral Relations

An Indian delegation under the leadership of the then Minister of State for External Affairs M.J. Akbar participated in the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq hosted by Kuwait. The Minister welcomed Iraq's announcement that it is open for investment, and noted that India will play its part with project-specific proposals. Minister also supported the important role assigned to private sector investors in rebuilding terrorist-affected areas in the country.¹⁹¹

In April, General V. K. Singh visited Baghdad in a Special Aircraft to bring back mortal remains of the 39 Indian workers, who went missing in 2014 and were suspected to have been killed by the ISIS. The bodies were exhumed from a mass grave in Badosh, Mosul and identities were established through DNA match conducted by Iraq's Martyr's Foundation.

In April-January period of 2017-18, Iraq overtook Saudi Arabia by a wide margin to become India's leading crude oil supplier, a position it maintained throughout the year.¹⁹²

Dr. Deepika Saraswat

QATAR

The year 2018 began with Qatar having its inaugural Strategic Dialogue with the US. The US reiterated, "its readiness to work jointly with Qatar to deter and confront any external threat to Qatar's territorial integrity that is inconsistent with the UN Charter". The joint

¹⁹¹[https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29485/Statement by Shri MJ Akbar Minister of State for External Affairs at the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq in Kuwait February 14 2018](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29485/Statement%20by%20Shri%20MJ%20Akbar%20Minister%20of%20State%20for%20External%20Affairs%20at%20the%20International%20Conference%20for%20Reconstruction%20of%20Iraq%20in%20Kuwait%20February%2014%202018)

¹⁹² Iraq pips Saudi Arabia to become India's top oil supplier, 5 March, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Industry/dZK5wBF1rY38N5E8yrlXSI/Iraq-pips-Saudi-Arabia-to-become-Indias-top-oil-supplier.html>

statement expressed the need for an immediate resolution that respected Qatar's sovereignty. An early resolution of the Qatar crisis, which started in June 2017, when Saudi Arabia along with UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a land, sea, and air embargo on Qatar, became important for the US as it withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal and called on its Gulf allies to put a united front against Iran. However, the US failure to persuade its allies to reconcile became evident when Saudi Arabia announced that it would dig a 60-kilometer-long maritime channel along its border with Qatar, turning the peninsular country into an island.¹⁹³

With the deepening of Qatar's strategic relations with Turkey since the Qatar crisis, Turkey signed an agreement in March to establish a naval base in northern Qatar, including a training center for maritime patrols and monitoring.¹⁹⁴ Later in the month, Qatar also signed a \$4-billion agreement with Sudan to jointly develop the Suakin port with Turkey, which was given full rights to rehabilitate the Red Sea island-town of Suakin with a naval dock for civilian and military vessels in December, 2017.¹⁹⁵

The ripples of the Gulf dispute reached the fragile state of Somalia. When the UAE was forced to end its military training programme in Somalia, which came after the seizure of \$9.6 million from an Emirati civilian plane in Mogadishu in the month of April, Qatar readily took advantage of the dispute by stepping up the development aid and inviting Somali President Mohammad Abdullahi Farmajao to Doha.¹⁹⁶

Qatar also criticised the US sanctions on Iran. In an interview with CNBC's Hadley Gamble in December, Qatar's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani mentioned that, 'We encourage the US to come back to the renegotiation and have a diplomatic solution, because we cannot afford another escalation in our region.'¹⁹⁷

The resolution of Qatar crisis was in no sight at the end of the year Gulf Arab Summit in Saudi Arabia from which Qatar's Emir remained absent and instead sent its state minister for foreign affairs. The final communiqué of the summit did not address the boycott.

India-Qatar Bilateral Relations

¹⁹³ Saudi Arabia to dig canal along Qatar border: Official, 10 April 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/saudi-arabia-to-dig-canal-along-qatar-border-official/1113874>

¹⁹⁴ Qatar signs Turkey naval military base agreement, 14 March, 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180314-qatar-signs-turkey-naval-military-base-agreement/>

¹⁹⁵ Sudan, Qatar to sign \$4 billion deal to manage Red Sea port – Ministry, 27 March 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-qatar/sudan-qatar-to-sign-4-billion-deal-to-manage-red-sea-port-ministry-idUSKBN1H22WH>

¹⁹⁶ Somalia: Farmajao begins Qatar visit amid dispute with UAE, 14 May 2018, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-farmajo-begins-qatar-visit-amid-dispute-with-uae>

¹⁹⁷ Qatari foreign minister criticizes Iran sanctions, UAE foreign policy as 'destabilizing, 16 December, 2018 <https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/16/qatar-foreign-minister-on-gulf-blockade-saudi-arabia-and-us-s>

In October, the then EAM Sushma Swaraj visited Qatar where she called on the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani and held delegation level talks with her counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Qatari investors were invited for areas such as petrochemicals, infrastructure, agriculture and food processing. The two ministers also signed a declaration to establish Joint Commission at the level of External Affairs and Foreign Minister to periodically review progress in various cooperation initiatives.¹⁹⁸

Dr. F.R. Siddiqui

Africa (North and Sub-Saharan Africa)

5. Africa

North Africa

ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

In the political front, the major highlight of year 2018 was the re-election of President El-Sisi, who won an almost uncontested election in March 2018. He won the election with a massive majority when he received 92 percent of the total votes cast in the election. His sole opponent, the leader of *Al-Ghad* party, Mostaf could garner only 3 percent of the votes. The main opposition parties, MBH was not allowed to contest the election as it was declared a terrorist organisation under the Egyptian law. Other potential candidates for the post of the president were put behind bars on one or the other charges. Many of earlier candidates withdrew their nomination or were forced to leave the contest. El-Sisi had won his first election in the year 2014 after the overthrow of MBH government in 2013.

In Egypt's war against terrorism, in October seventeen people were sentenced to death over the 2016-17 wave of IS group attacks on churches, and other 19 were sentenced to life imprisonment.

In diplomacy, there was no headway in improving the ties with the Qatar after Egypt along with AUE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain announced to cut its diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017. In its relationship with neighboring countries, the president of Egypt held many meetings with self-claimed head of the Libyan National Army, Colonel Haftar and promised

¹⁹⁸Sushma Swaraj leaves for Kuwait, concludes Qatar visit, 30 October, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/sushma-swaraj-leaves-for-kuwait-concludes-her-qatar-visit/article25369111.ece>

all supports in his fight against extremism and radicalism in Libya. Egypt's ties with Sudan and Ethiopia witnessed some improvements after it had run into trouble over the issue of distribution of Nile water and construction of dam. In its relations with Palestine, the year 2018 witnessed no major progress except few informal meetings between Palestinian leadership and its counterpart in Egypt and it is worth mentioning here that Egypt has always been an important actor in the Palestine-Israel crisis

In the economic sphere, the Egyptian economy bounced back after years of decline as there was negative growth for almost 6 years amidst political upheaval in the country. The Egyptian economy witnessed positive developments during the year 2017, thus sending strong messages of hope that Egyptian economy is on the right path. Indicators of the Egyptian economic performance in recent past have shown a substantial growth in all sectors after the government came with some initiatives like "Start Egypt", "Your idea is your company" and "Establish your own service".

On the bilateral front, the foreign minister of Egypt visited India in March 2018 and held meeting with his counterpart in New Delhi. During his visit, the 7th Session of India Egypt Joint Commission Meeting was held on March 23, 2018 in New Delhi. The then EAM Sushma Swaraj led the Indian side, whereas Foreign Minister of Egypt led the Egyptian side. Both leaders discussed entire gamut of bilateral issues and also held deliberations on how to deepen and diversify the bilateral cooperation between India and Egypt. They also discussed regional, international and multilateral issues of mutual interest. The Foreign Minister of Egypt also called on the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and handed over a letter to him from President of Egypt Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

Many Moroccans started a national campaign in April 2018 to boycott three major companies in Morocco: Centrale Danone dairy, Sidi Ali bottled water, and Afriquia gas stations. The campaign aimed to speak out against rising commodity prices. The boycott lasted through the spring and early summer and negatively impacted the earnings of the companies it targeted.

The main actor in the Moroccan dairy sector, Centrale Danone, experienced the largest loss this year. In June, the judge of Casablanca's Appeals Court pronounced sentences in the case of 53 involved in the strikes and other activities of vandalism in the country.

The Hirak Rif leader, Nasser Zefzafi, received 20 years in prison. Other leaders of the protest movement, such as Nabil Ahemjik, El Boustati, and Samir Ghid, received similar sentences. The court convicted most of the activists of undermining the internal security of the state and "preparing a conspiracy" against internal security.

In August 2018, the Moroccan Council of Ministers approved a draft bill to reintroduce mandatory military service. Many Moroccan youth and activists opposed the legislative speed that accelerated the ministerial council's approval of Bill 44.18 unlike other more important laws that have not been adopted yet. Both men and women aged 19 to 25 would be subject to 12 months of military service. Beginning in September 2019, 10,000 young people are expected to begin service in the military each year.

TUNISIAN REPUBLIC

The year 2018 witnessed large scale protests across the country in Tunisia over the price rise of daily commodities. The immediate trigger for the protests was the new state budget for 2018, whose implementation began on 1 January. It introduced tax hikes on many consumer goods (especially on imports) and services, as well as a one-percent increase in value-added tax, contributing to a pre-existing rise in the cost of living, that in a gloomy economic context for most Tunisians, was understandably unpopular. The government said it needed to raise income to balance its finances, and especially to pay for public sector salaries, which account for over half of expenditures. The police arrested over 700 persons during the period of unrest and majority of them were left-wing bloggers and activists.

The tourism industry in Tunisia after years of decline due to insecurity and political instability started doing better. The year 2018 has seen a substantial growth in field of tourism from across the world and more than four million tourists visited Tunisia in 2018.

STATE OF LIBYA

Clashes between rival militias in the capital Tripoli in September 2018 served to highlight the delicate security climate in Libya and worked as an incentive to demobilise and integrate armed groups into the formal security apparatus. Clashes between militias in the suburbs of the capital left more than 100 people dead between August and September 2018.

The city of Derna in Libya was subjected to heavy air strikes in May 2017 by the Egyptian air forces to chase out the ISIS. In July, Khalifa Haftar claimed that his forces were fully in control of Derna, the last Islamist stronghold in the east and the only city in the region hitherto outside his control. Later in another development in September 2018, Libya's UN-backed government declared a state of emergency in Tripoli, after dozens of people were killed in clashes between rival militia groups in the city's southern suburbs.

A high-level Summit was held in Paris in June 2018 where all major political factions were present, but there was a sharp division among all major stakeholders. The Italians, Turks, and Qataris believed the constitution should come before elections, whereas the French,

Egyptians and Emiratis were for elections first. France and Italy were pulling in opposite directions as Rome stood behind Sarraj, hoping that he could find a solution to the migration issue, whereas Paris supported Haftar, viewing his army as an effective counter-terrorism measure.

UN Special Envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame said that he expected elections to take place in the war-wrecked country in early 2019. The announcement on 9 November 2018 was the first official acknowledgement that elections in Libya would be difficult to hold on December 10, as had been agreed by rival leaders at a Paris summit in May. The National Conference was scheduled to be held in the first weeks of 2019. Salame informed the UN Security Council that the subsequent electoral process should commence in the spring of 2019.

Dr. Fazzur Siddiqui

Sub-Saharan Africa

WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

The year 2018 was quite significant for West and Central Africa as the region witnessed various eventful moments in the political, economic, security and development arenas. The most transformative event was the peaceful election that came as a respite for many African countries. In Sierra Leone, the opposition leader Julius Maada Bio from the Sierra Leone People's Party became the President by defeating the ruling All People's Congress Candidate Samura Kamara. He obtained 51.8 percent of votes against Kamra's 48.1 percent of votes, signalling a narrow victory.¹⁹⁹ The voter turnout was 81 percent out of 3.1 million people who were registered to vote. In Central Africa, Cameroon witnessed presidential election on October 7, 2018. However, many termed election as meaningless in the backdrop of incumbent President Paul Biya having ruled the country for 36 long years.²⁰⁰ During the election, 71.28 percent of the votes were cast for President Paul Biya. Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the most significant and largest countries in the region witnessed the first historic transfer of power on December 10, 2018. The election was the testimony of beginning of democracy in the country as its longest reigning ruler Joseph Kabila made an exit after 18 years of being in power. 60.04 percent out of 40 million registered voters turned out on the day of voting which went quite peacefully though, the aftermath of the election had few disturbances. A close competition between Martin Faylu

¹⁹⁹ "Opposition Candidate Julius Maada Bio Wins Sierra Leone Presidential Runoff", *Africa News*, 5 April 2018, URL: <https://www.africanews.com/2018/04/05/opposition-candidate-julius-maada-bio-wins-sierra-leone-presidential-runoff/>

²⁰⁰ *The Guardian*, 22 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/paul-biya-cameroon-85-year-old-president-wins-re-election-lands/>

of Lamuka opposition alliance and Felix Tshisekedi from Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) was predicted. Felix Tshisekedi was declared as the winner.

In the area of security, Al-Qaeda and IS linked groups carried out attacks in Mali and Burkina Faso, leading to heavy casualties. Their target was G5 Sahel force headquarters in Central Mali that was supported by France and US²⁰¹. Violent attacks by Boko Haram terror group against the security personnel were on rise that intensified in the entire region of West Africa.

On the economic front, there was positive development in the region. The African Union (AU) launched African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in March 2018, setting the beginning of a massive free trade area. The trade agreement was signed by 44 African countries during the 10th Ordinary Session of African Union Heads of State summit held in the Rwandan capital, Kigali. The basic objective of the agreement was to liberalise the market for goods and services across the continent under the theme 'Creating One African Market'. The session was attended by a total of 19 Presidents. It was a historical moment for the continent.

In the international forum, the recent inclusion of the republic Congo under the OPEC makes it the 7th country from Africa. It has been observed that in recent years, many African countries such as Equatorial Guinea and Gabon joined OPEC and increased the number of members in the international grouping from the continent.²⁰²

With regard to regional development, at the 31st AU Summit, held in Nouakchott, Mauritania from 25 June-2 July 2018, corruption was the major focus. Member states committed themselves to end bribery, fraud, tax evasion, illegal mining and other illicit tactics of corruption in the continent. They also stressed the continental free trade area as a crucial step for promoting trade and innovation in the region. The AU also welcomed efforts to strengthen AMISOM, the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Multinational joint task force to fight against Boko Haram terrorists.

In the diplomatic front, there was a major development with China. At the Forum on China Africa Cooperation, held in Beijing in September 2018, China and Africa delved into various opportunities to reinvigorate cooperation between them. At the opening ceremony, Chinese President pointed out that China follows a "five-no's" approach in its relations with the countries of Africa: no interference in the development paths of individual countries; no interference in their internal affairs; no imposition of China's will; no attachment of political

²⁰¹ "Six dead in the attack against the G5 Sahel force HQ in Mali", *Africa News*, 29 June 2018, <https://www.africanews.com/2018/06/29/six-dead-in-the-attack-against-the-g5-sahel-force-hq-in-mali-hospital-and/>

²⁰² "Africa prevails in the OPEC in member numbers", 12 July 2018, <https://www.africanews.com/2018/07/12/africa-prevails-in-the-opec-in-member-numbers-business-africa/>

strings regarding assistance; and no seeking of selfish political gains in investment and financing cooperation²⁰³. Apart from connectivity, the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China would assist Africa to modernise its agriculture and achieve food security by 2030.

At the international front, the continent witnessed several high profile visits. In August 2018, British Prime Minister Theresa May along with a business delegation visited South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. With the slogan "U.K.-Africa: Partners For Opportunity", Theresa May sought to strengthen bilateral relationship between UK and Africa. In the end of July, German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria, all situated in West Africa. This trip fulfilled Germany's twin objectives in Africa i.e. to increase investment in Africa and secondly, to tackle migration issue between both continents. Many analysts reiterated that promoting investment opportunities in Africa would raise the employment prospects that would in-turn restrain the population from migrating to Europe across the Mediterranean.²⁰⁴

In the health situation, the continent portrayed a dismal picture. On August 1, 2018, Democratic Republic of Congo announced fresh outbreak of Ebola in North Kivu Province. Ebola virus resurfaced in remote areas in the region despite efforts of the international community, especially that of WHO. The virus has killed thousands of people and is expected to rise. The reasons for its outbreak are lack of surveillance system that makes it very hard to detect the Ebola case. Besides, tracing the contact and proper vaccines are limited.

India-West & Central Africa bilateral relations

On the bilateral front, India Africa relationship witnessed major developments. After the approval of the Union Cabinet, India announced that it would open 18 new Indian missions in Africa to expand India's diplomatic footprints in Africa. This project is expected to cover countries from west and central Africa such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland and Togo within a period of four years, from 2018-2021.

There were no major high level visits between India and West & Central Africa except Foreign Ministers' visits from Gabon and Ghana. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabon visited India on November 30, 2018. In a high-level meeting with Indian counterpart, both India and Gabon identified priority areas such as tackling terrorism and development

²⁰³ Xinhua Net, 9 April 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/04/c_137444088.htm)

²⁰⁴ "Merkel Arrives in Ghana; Migration Key Concern", <https://www.voanews.com/a/merkel-arrives-in-ghana-migration-key-concern/4550570.html>, 30 August 2018

partnership to increase bilateral trade and investment between both countries. On 16-19 July 2018, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana paid an official visit to India. A Cultural Exchange Programme (2018-2022) and an MoU between the Bureau of Indian Standards and Ghana Standards Authority were been signed during this visit.

Eastern and Southern Africa

In the latter half of 2017, some historical events with a long-term impact on regional politics and Africa's relations with the world had started unfolding in the Southern African region. The two most important events in the year that had their influence during 2018 as aftermath were the resignation of José Eduardo dos Santos, the President of Angola for 37 years; and the forced removal of Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe since December 1987. Moreover, South Africa, which has been the most sought after country not only in the Southern Africa region but in Africa as well, saw an important change in its leadership due to a kind of internal coup within the African National Congress (ANC).

Angola's President JoãoLorenço was consolidating his power throughout the year 2018. He initiated investigations into the corruption charges against the daughter and the son of ex-President Santos. He removed Isabel dos Santos from heading Sonangol, Angola's state oil firm. Jose Filomeno dos Santos, the son of ex-President Santos, was also arrested on charges and investigation of embezzlement of USD 1.5 billion while heading Angola's Sovereign Wealth Fund. President Lorenço also terminated several state contracts with companies associated with the Santos clan.

Elections in Zimbabwe, as promised by the new President who came to power with the support of the Zimbabwe military, were held in July 2018. These elections formally legitimised President Emmanuel Mnangagwa's position as the president. The Presidential post was fiercely contested by the opposition leader Nelson Chamisa who challenged the election results in the country's highest court. However, the court declared President Mnangagwa as victorious. Although there were allegations of fraud and manipulations by the opposition and certain post-election violence as well, international observers broadly termed the elections as the fairest election in Zimbabwe's history. Some western observers pointed towards the discrepancies in the electoral process, but they also agreed about the whole process being a great improvement on previous elections in Zimbabwe. The Mnangagwa Government, in general, was legitimised by the international community.

Cyril Ramaphosa, who had become the President of the ANC in mid-December 2017, became the President of South Africa in February 2018. With President Ramaphosa's appointment as the leader of the ANC and Head of the State, South Africa initiated a kind of social churning, where there was a push for correcting the wrongs done in the colonial period. The ANC advocated that land in South Africa, disproportionately owned by white people due to colonial legacy should be expropriated without compensation. It insisted that

the Constitution of South Africa should be amended if it came in the way of correcting an historical injustice. However, President Ramaphosa, who inherited an economic recession in the country, said that the process of land redistribution shall not affect the status and the performance of economy of South Africa. He further assured that the process of land expropriation would happen legally and illegal land grabs would not be allowed. Expropriation without compensation would be one of the measures among several in the process of holistic land reforms. Neighbouring country Namibia, inspired by South Africa, also started contemplating such land reforms correcting the colonial wrongs. Meanwhile, South Africa was voted to be a non-permanent member in the Security Council for a two-year term starting on January 1, 2019. Its candidature to represent the East and Southern African group was endorsed by Southern Africa last year and the AU in January. This will be Council.

The region saw several incidents attributed to Islamist terrorism. There were violent and gruesome attacks in two mosques in South Africa killing many innocent people. Mozambique also experienced attacks, which were attributed to Islamist terrorists. The South African and Mozambican governments have been investigating into the claims of the attacks for being inspired or executed by the IS, as there were reports about infiltration of many ISIS terrorists into northern Mozambique. However, the Mozambican police denied ISIS infiltration in the country.

The year 2018 was also the year of economic reshuffling for the major economies in the Southern African region. Political changes in the form of the changes of leaderships in South Africa, Angola and Zimbabwe had economic distress and corruption as important stimulating factors in the background. The new President of South Africa inherited a slump in the country's economy. Therefore, he promised 'new dawn' in the country and announced plans to attract USD 100 billion investments. Saudi Arabia's pledge to invest USD 10 billion in South Africa with a focus on energy, while his visit to the country came as a booster to President Ramaphosa's efforts to revive the economy. President Ramaphosa focused on engaging China, Russia and India for greater investment and economic cooperation, to put the South African economy back on track. President Lorenzo of Angola also inherited a shrinking economy due to an international slump in the oil prices. He, therefore, focused on reviving economic relationship with all possible traditional and new investors in its economy. He especially looked to improve trade and investment relations with Portugal and China. Economic diversification remained the principal guiding factor for his internal and external economic policies.

Despite political tug of war between the opposition and the government, Tanzania went ahead with its flagship economic projects. The country opened a new USD 344 million, 167.82 megawatt natural gas power plant as a part of President Magufuli's plan to transform the sub-Saharan country into an industrial powerhouse. Tanzania-China talks and cooperation on the construction of Bagamoyo Port seemed to be progressing in a positive direction as the

construction of the port started in mid-2018. The project is also supported by the Omani Sovereign Wealth Fund. Tanzania also unveiled a cargo train to Uganda. The US announced that Tanzania would be included in its USD 175 billion gas power project in Africa; and the African Development Bank (ADB) also approved USD 123.39 loan for construction of power transmission lines in the country.

In a negative development on the economic front, Zambia faced a scrutiny regarding its debt status. The scrutiny was triggered by the debt scandal of neighbouring Mozambique where the government did not declare the USD 2 billion loan before the funding agencies, and went for default. There were reports that Zambia would hand over its public infrastructure projects to China due to debt repayment crisis. Among speculations of external debt crossing the acceptable limits, the Government of Zambia had to delay all borrowing plans. However, the Zambian Government denied any debt crisis and possibility of handing over public infrastructure to China.

Increase in the Chinese economic penetration and influence was also visible in the region as it concluded important deals with South Africa, Angola, Zambia, Namibia and Mozambique. China turned out to be Mozambique's largest financier and builder of infrastructure. The country provides more than half of Mozambique's external financing for road network. China is helping the country to build an USD 2.7 billion railway coal project known as Moatize-Macuse Railway line. Mozambique also looked forward to financial assistance from China to build a polytechnic institute in the country. Meanwhile, the Namibian government signed several important agreements with China. These were signed as part of Namibian President Hage Geingob's one-week trip to China. South Africa's trade with China also rocketed to its historic high.

President of India Ram Nath Kovind visited Mauritius, Madagascar, Zambia and Swaziland (eSwatini) during March-April 2018. The visits covered a wide spectrum of political, economic and cultural relations and signed several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). His visit to Mauritius resulted in signing of agreements/MoUs on cooperation between the two countries on India's Nalanda University, establishment of an Ayurveda Chair in the University of Mauritius, cooperation between the public service commissions of the two countries for capacity building, and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Four documents were signed during President Kovind's visit to Zambia. They included agreements on: double taxation avoidance to further boost economic cooperation; visa exemption on diplomatic and official passports; judicial cooperation; and the establishment of Entrepreneurship Development Institute in Zambia to foster new ideas, enterprises and start-ups in the country, conforming to Zambia's Vision 2030 to develop entrepreneurship. The agreements in eSwatini were in the fields of medicine, information and communication technology. President Kovind also unveiled an IT park built by an Indian company in Swaziland. The special highlight of President Kovind's visit to Madagascar were the understandings signed on defence and air services. The MoU on defence was to establish a framework for possible future cooperation in the field of defence and to promote cooperative

activities in this dimension of the relationship. This can be seen as India's efforts to forge a security partnership with the countries of the region in the longer term. In another gesture of its friendship and support to Mauritius, India sided with Mauritius on its claim over the disputed Chagos Islands currently under UK jurisdiction.

The first India-South Africa Business Summit 2018 at the Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, was inaugurated in the presence of the then Indian Minister of Commerce, Industry and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu, and South Africa's Minister of Trade and Industry Rob Davies. An MoU was also signed between Invest South Africa and Invest India, for strengthening a rapidly growing economic and trade partnership between the two countries. The summit was also marked by the presence of trade and industry ministers from SADC countries and top CEOs and industry specialists from India, South Africa and SADC countries.

Dr. Nivedita Ray, Dr. Saurabh Mishra & Dr. Chayanika Deka

6. Indian Ocean Region, Pacific Islands and Oceania

INDIAN OCEAN REGION

Indian Ocean region remains one of the key priorities for India. China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region continued to be a challenge for India. India patiently worked to enhance cooperation with littoral states and likeminded major powers to maintain peace and stability in the region. Maintaining maritime safety and security, and freedom of navigation and over flight in the region remained the priorities for India in the region. Maldives was added as 22nd member of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Turkey and South Korea as 8th and 9th dialogue partners of the Association.

In the then EAM Sushma Swaraj's remarks at the 3rd Indian Ocean Conference, Vietnam (August 27, 2018), she reiterated following key objectives of India's Indian Ocean policy in the coming years²⁰⁵:

²⁰⁵Key excerpts from EAM speech- External Affairs Minister Remarks at the 3rd Indian Ocean Conference, Vietnam (August 27, 2018), <https://mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?30327/Remarks+by+External+Affairs+Minister+at+the+3rd+Indian+Ocean+Conference+Vietnam+August+27+2018>, Accessed on 10 June, 2019

- Ensuring maritime peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region is imperative for economic prosperity of the region, and through collective actions countries of the region can tackle the problems of maritime security.
- Maintaining and promoting peace, stability and maritime safety and security, and freedom of navigation and over flight in the region.
- Support the lawful uses of the seas and unimpeded lawful maritime commerce and to promote peaceful resolutions of disputes, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, notably the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- India considers the IORA as an important instrument for achieving peace and security in the region.
- India is supportive of the invigoration of IORA activities, including blue economy and renewable energy.
- The concept of SAGAR stand for ‘Security and Growth for All in the Region’ reflects vision for India’s engagement with the Indian Ocean region. As EAM outlined, this approach includes²⁰⁶: (a) projects to promote hinterland linkages and strengthen regional connectivity, (b) linking South Asia to South East Asia (Act East) and to the Gulf (Think West), and (c) playing an active and constructive role in strengthening regional maritime security.

Expansion of IORA

The 18th IORA) Council of Ministers (COM) meeting under the theme “IORA – Uniting the Peoples of Africa, Asia, Australasia and the Middle East through Enhanced Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Sustainable Development,” was held in Durban, South Africa on November 2, 2018. During the meeting, the COM approved the inclusion of Maldives as 22nd member of IORA and Turkey and South Korea as 8th and 9th dialogue partners of the Association. The meeting also decided the Vice Chair for the next term (2019-21).

From India, V K Singh, the then Minister of State for External Affairs attended the IORA's 18th Council of Ministers meeting in Durban. During his remarks in the meeting, he reiterated India's commitment to collectively pursue the goals of Maritime Safety and Security in the Indian Ocean region. Singh praised the collective commitment of IORA members towards the formation of IORA "Working Groups on Maritime Safety and Security, Blue Economy and Women Economic Empowerment"²⁰⁷ and reiterated India's support for

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷ 18th Indian Ocean Rim Association Council of Ministers Meeting (November 02, 2018), https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30562/18th_Indian_Ocean_Rim_Association_Council_of_Ministers_Meeting_November_02_2018, Accessed on 18 November, 2018, Accessed on 10 June, 2019

IORA's recent steps for "intensification and invigoration"²⁰⁸ of the Association. As the secretariat of the organisation of 22 member states and nine dialogue partners is facing a staff shortage, the Minister also reiterated the long pending demand for strengthening of IORA Secretariat.

Fusion Centre

The Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) was launched by Nirmala Sitharaman, the then Minister of Defence, on December 22, 2018, in Gurugram.²⁰⁹ She remarked that, "The objective of having an IFC-IOR is to work towards keeping the global commons safe and democratically available for all of us. More significantly, the IFC-IOR will help foster bonds of trust, camaraderie and partnership; ingredients that are vital for relationships between nations to transcend from being merely transactional to ones that are transformational".²¹⁰

Strengthening Engagements with Littoral States

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Maldives in November 2018 for the swearing-in of its new president, and it was expected that the visit would help to reset strains in India-Maldives relations. Joint Press Statement after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of Maldives Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, read²¹¹:

"The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, paid visit to Mauritius and Madagascar on March 11-14, 2018. During Mauritius Visit, underlining the importance of the Indian Ocean in India's strategic and economic calculus, he said "Mauritius is a gateway to the Indian Ocean region and to Africa. As the proverbial Star and Key of the Indian Ocean, Mauritius has a natural convergence of interests with India."

Dr. Amit Kumar

PACIFIC ISLANDS

The small island nation of Papua New Guinea came to the spotlight as it hosted the annual APEC Summit in November 2018 in the capital Port Moresby. The US-China trade frictions

²⁰⁸ Ibid

²⁰⁹ Raksha Mantri Inaugurates Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), 22 December 2018, <http://pib.nic.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1557074>, Accessed on 10 June, 2019

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Joint Press Statement after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of Maldives Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, <https://mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?30605/Joint+Press+Statement+after+talks+between+Prime+Minister+Narendra+Modi+and+President+of+Maldives+Ibrahim+Mohamed+Solih>, Accessed on 10 June, 2019

overshadowed the deliberations at the meeting. US President gave a miss to the summit meeting instead Vice-President Mike Pence attended the meeting. The meeting was arguably the biggest event to take place in the former Australian colony since independence in 1975, and highlighted the growing importance of South Pacific nations in the strategic tussle between China on the one hand and Washington's regional allies, like Australia and Japan, on the other.²¹²

Pacific Islands including Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Niue signed MoUs with China on the Belt and Road cooperation in 2018. Ahead of the APEC summit in November 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a special forum with leaders of eight small island countries, which have diplomatic relations with China, in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, to discuss areas of cooperation particularly the BRI. These included leaders from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Micronesia, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea.

Amidst the Australian media reports of a potential Chinese military base in Vanuatu, Australia was prompt in replacing China for construction of high-speed undersea telecommunications cables to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, formally announced that the government would partner with the telecommunications company Vocus, for physical installation of the Coral Sea Cable System.²¹³ Originally the 4,000 kilometres long cable network was set to be built by the Chinese giant Huawei.

AUSTRALIA

The year 2018 has seen significant particularly from the point of view of domestic political changes in Australia. After a chaotic week of political manoeuvring in Canberra, following his victory in the Liberal leadership spill, Scott Morrison replaced Malcolm Turnbull as the 30th Prime Minister of Australia on August 24, 2018. He secured the Liberal leadership in a hotly anticipated three-way contest with former cabinet colleagues Julie Bishop and Peter Dutton.²¹⁴ It was the fourth time since 2010 the country's ruling party had overthrown its leader from the inside. The election results saw a miraculous victory for the conservative Liberal-National coalition. The leader of the party Scott Morrison was sworn-in for a new term on May 29, 2019. The victory for the incumbent Prime Minister came as a big surprise even for the Liberal party itself as the analysts and pre-election polls had predicted victory for Centre-Left Labour Party. Liberal-National coalition won a total 78 seats out of a total of 151 seats in the House of Representatives.

²¹²APEC Leaders Are Descending on the Pacific's New Geopolitical Battleground, Papua New Guinea, 14 November 2018, <https://time.com/5453956/apec-summit-2018-papua-new-guinea-png/>

²¹³ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Media Release, 19 June 2018, https://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2018/jb_mr_180619.aspx

²¹⁴Scott Morrison sworn in as Australia's 30th prime minister, 24 November 2018, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/scott-morrison-sworn-in-as-australia-s-30th-prime-minister>

Australia and Indonesia successfully concluded negotiations on the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA) on August 31, 2018. A renewed economic partnership with Indonesia is a major boost for Australian farmers with the grains, live cattle, dairy and horticulture sectors to benefit from greater certainty of access and lower tariffs. IA-CEPA has attracted strong support from the Australian business community.²¹⁵ Australia has also launched negotiations for Australia and the E) free trade agreement (FTA) on 18 June 2018. As a bloc, the EU is Australia's second largest trading partner, and the third largest export destination.²¹⁶

India-Australia Relations

The third iteration of bilateral naval exercise between the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Indian Navy (IN), AUSINDEX was held from 2-14 April in Vishakhapatnam. It conducted a series of advanced warfare drills including anti-submarine warfare exercises.²¹⁷ This year's exercise had the highest number of units from Joint Task Force thus far and for the first time 55 American and 20 New Zealand military personnel also embarked onboard the RAN ships. Australian Defence Minister Christopher Pyne said at the commencement of the exercise that, "engagement with India through AUSINDEX is the cornerstone of Australia's Indo-Pacific Endeavor series this year".²¹⁸

Marking a significant development in India-Australia relations, the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind paid a historic three-day state visit to Australia from 21-23 November 2018. This was the first-ever Indian head of state's visit to Australia. The timely visit reflected the upward trajectory of India-Australia relationship. Five agreements were exchanged mainly focusing on education and business ties between the two countries. The Indian President also addressed the Australian Financial Review India Business Summit and also the annual Australia-India Business Council. He also unveiled the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Paramatta, Sydney.²¹⁹

Earlier in the year, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government released a report on its India economic strategy. The report titled *An India Economic Strategy to 2035: Navigating from Potential to Delivery* was authored by Peter N Varghese, a former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and a former High Commissioner to India. It was first presented to the Australian Prime Minister, on July

²¹⁵ A new chapter of economic partnership with Indonesia,
https://trademinister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2018/sb_mr_180831.aspx

²¹⁶ Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement,
<https://dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/negotiations/aeufta/Pages/default.aspx>

²¹⁷ AUSINDEX-19 Concludes, 16 April 2019, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=189774>

²¹⁸ AUSINDEX 2019 commences in India, 9 April 2019, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/cpyne/media-releases/ausindex-2019-commences-india>,

²¹⁹ List of documents exchanged during the visit of President to Australia, November 22, 2018
https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30619/List_of_documents_exchanged_during_the_visit_of_President_to_Australia.

12, 2018. The report argued that the scale of Indian economy and the complementarities between the two economies, underpinned by people-to-people ties and shared values provided the foundations for an enhanced economic partnership between the two countries over the coming two decades. The work on the report was announced during the former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's visit to India in 2017. The report identifies ten sectors and ten states in India to be focused in cementing ties with India as a priority economic partner.²²⁰

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand's Minister for Defence launched the *Strategic Defence Policy Statement* on July 6, 2018. It highlighted the changing strategic environment for New Zealand and priorities for country's defence forces. The document emphasised that rules based order is coming under immense pressure from competition for increasing sphere of influence, challenges to open society and complex disruptions like climate change, extremism and transnational crimes.

In February 2018, New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters announced a refreshed approach to the Pacific Islands region, with the "Pacific Reset" policy. The main aim was to demonstrate New Zealand's commitment to the Pacific neighbours' prosperity, and to enhance New Zealand's role in the region.

In a deadly attack, a single gunman, Australian national, Brenton Tarrant, carried out the killing of 50 people at two mosques on 15 March 2019 in Christchurch. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described it as that the "worst act of terrorism on our shores" and reformed the gun laws within six days of the attacks banning the sale of range of semi-automatic rifles and large ammunition magazines.²²¹

INDO-PACIFIC: MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE REGION

Shangri-la Dialogue was held in 2018. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a keynote address at the dialogue. In his speech, he emphasised the Indo-Pacific region as a central focus of India's foreign policy. The region, he said, is home to a vast array of global opportunities and challenges. In his speech he clearly enunciated India's vision for the Indo-Pacific which "stands for a free, open, inclusive region", based on a common rules-

²²⁰An India Economic Strategy to 2035: Navigating from Potential to Delivery, 2018, <https://dfat.gov.au/geo/india/ies/pdf/dfat-an-india-economic-strategy-to-2035.pdf>

²²¹New Zealand's swift change to gun laws highlights 25 years of US inaction, 21 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/21/new-zealand-shooting-swift-gun-law-changes-contrast-us-inaction>,

based order. It is not a club of limited members; it includes all nations in this geography as well as others beyond who have a stake in it.²²²

In coherence with India's vision for the region, India's Ministry of External Affairs, announced the setting up of Indo-Pacific Division in April 2019. The new wing will bring together ASEAN region, IORA, and the Quad with the Indo-Pacific.

In a strategic move, the US renamed its Pacific Command as Indo-Pacific Command in May 2018 recognising what Secretary of State James Mattis had remarked, "increasing connectivity, the Indian and Pacific Oceans"²²³. The 22nd edition of the Malabar naval exercises was held off the coast of Guam in June in 2018. For the first time the Malabar exercises were held in Guam. The Malabar exercises which had begun as a bilateral event between India and the US in 1992 became trilateral with Japan's entry as a permanent participant since 2015.

India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations was held on June 07, 2018 as the Foreign Ministry officials of the four countries met in Singapore on the margins of ASEAN-centred Senior Officials Meeting for consultations on issues of common interest in the Indo-Pacific region.²²⁴ This was an important meeting of the Quad countries since the revival of the Quad in 2017. Ways to pursue shared objectives in the areas of connectivity and development; regional security, including counter-terrorism and non-proliferation; HA-DR and maritime cooperation were discussed. The participants also highlighted the shared vision of a peaceful, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific, including through such plurilateral formats.²²⁵

Australia-Japan-United States Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) was held in Singapore on August 4, 2018, on the sidelines of the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, ASEAN+3 and ARF meeting. The eighth ministerial meeting was attended by Foreign Ministers of the three countries, and provided a platform for bringing the three democracies and developed economies of the region together, who are committed to the common cause of stability and security in the wider Indo-Pacific region.

Dr. Pragya Pandey

²²²Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018),

<https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>,

²²³Remarks at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Change of Command Ceremony, Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1535689/remarks-at-us-indo-pacific-command-change-of-command-ceremony/>,

²²⁴India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations, June 07, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29961/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS+Consultations>

²²⁵Ibid.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

7. Latin America and the Caribbean

The year 2018 was a year of elections for Latin America and the Caribbean region. Brazil elected Jair Bolsonaro as its President, breaking the four election winning record of the Workers' party. Former President Lula was not only sentenced to jail on corruption charges but was also debarred from contesting elections. Ivan Duque won the elections in June 2017 to become the youngest President of Colombia. He has claimed that he is an 'extreme centralist' trying to find the right balance between the policies of the right and the left. President Nicolás Maduro won a second term as president of Venezuela in May 2018, in an election boycotted by the opposition and with a low voter turnout. The elections were largely condemned by the international community as unfair and anti-democratic due to the hurdles the government placed on the opposition parties. President Raul Castro retired from the Presidency of the Cuban Council of State and the Council of Ministers in April 2018. He will now head the Communist Party of Cuba, the only legal party of the island nation, till 2021. As a result of his retirement, Cuba went to elections to elect new members to its National Assembly and Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, became the new President of Cuba in March 2018. He is the first President of the country in the post revolution years, who does not belong to the Castro family. Costa Rica and Paraguay also elected new Presidents to lead them. El Salvador elected a new legislative assembly.

Within the region, Nicaragua witnessed popular protests against President Daniel Orgeta. The protests, which started on April 18, 2018, were sparked by changes introduced by the government to the social security system. The situation in Venezuela continued to occupy the region with Colombian and Brazilian border towns witnessing clashes between the refugees and residents. It led to the two nations to deploy forces on their open border and monitor the influx of refugees. The Organisation of the American States also stated that it did not rely on military intervention in Venezuela, dividing the organisation between those who supported the call made by the US and those who opposed the move.

Internationally, there was a lot of concern for the situation in Venezuela. On the economic front, China invited the LAC countries to take part and join the BRI. While battling economic downturn, Argentina hosted the G-20 Summit in December 2018. The meeting was important in the face of growing aggressive trade policies of the US and its growing tariff war with China. The focus of the meeting was on the following pillars: the future of work,

infrastructure for development, a sustainable food future and a gender mainstreaming strategy across the G20 agenda.

India and Latin America and Caribbean Relations

In India's efforts to reach out to all regions of the world and strengthen its relations, it has over the past few years, worked towards engaging with the nations of the LAC region. The momentum was carried forward with the visit of Vice President of India M. Venkaiah Naidu to three nations in the region. Vice President Naidu visited Guatemala, Panama and Peru from 06-11 May 2018. It was his first official overseas visit, and was accompanied by a high-level delegation which included the then Minister of State for Tribal Affairs Jasvantsinh Sumanbhai Bhabhor, four Members of Parliament and senior officers of the Government of India.²²⁶ The visit was significant for relations with the countries which allow India to strengthen its relations with both North and South America and also the Caribbean region through the CARICOM. President Ram Nath Kovind followed it with his visit to Suriname and Cuba from June 19 to 24. The visit to Suriname was significant for India from the diaspora perspective. In recent years, there has been great dynamism in India-Suriname relations. Vice President of Suriname Ashwin Adhin has visited India a few times and interacted at the highest level of Indian leadership. On multilateral matters India and Suriname share and have common views especially with respect to reforms in the UNSC. Suriname supports India's membership in an expanded UNSC including support to the G4. With Cuba, India shares very strong and friendly relations. Discussions were held with Cuba on important issues such as climate change, sustainable development and south-south cooperation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Argentina for the G20 summit. He also met the President of Brazil at an informal BRICS meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit.

²²⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Visit of Vice President of India to Panama (May 8-10, 2018)," http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29888/Visit_of_Vice_President_of_India_to_Panama__May_8_10_2018, Accessed on 07 June 2019.

North America

8. North America

CANADA

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau faced a number of challenges in the year 2018. On the domestic front, the Conservatives demanded that he must answer questions to the parliament on his ethics-code breaking vacation on the Aga Khan's island and on his visit to India.

In foreign relations, Canada's relations with the US witnessed some tensions as the Trump administration imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium imports and auto imports from Canada and other nations, which were highlighted during the G7 Summit in Canada. The two nations also with Mexico continued to renegotiate the North Atlantic Free Trade (NAFTA) with the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) release in 2018. Canada also made progress with the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which entered into force when it was ratified by six countries including Canada, Australia, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, and Singapore. The agreement provides Canada with an opportunity to trade with countries such as Japan and Vietnam, with which it does not currently have FTAs and where tariffs remain high. In an effort to diversify its trade relations, Canada also started free trade talks with its South American blocs.

In its efforts for the UN peacekeeping, Canada in 2018 announced it would be contributing to the UN mission in Mali and started to lobby other nations for a non-permanent member seat at the 2021 UN Security Council.

In the NATO summit in Brussels on 12 July 2018, Prime Minister Trudeau announced increased support for NATO. These contributions underscore Canada's commitment to play an active role in the Alliance and advance international peace, security, and stability. Prime Minister announced that Canada would extend its contribution to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence through Operation REASSURANCE for another four years and increase the number of personnel taking part in this mission from 455 to 540.

Canada was criticised for the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia, however, relations between the two nations deteriorated by the end of the year due to Canada's criticism over the arrest of human rights activist Samar Badawi and killing of Jamal Khashoggi.

India-Canada Relations

Prime Minister Trudeau visited India on February 17-24, 2018. He met Prime Minister Modi and members of the business community. The visit created controversy when it was found that Jaspal Atwal, a former member of the terrorist outfit was invited to attending formal events by the Canadian High Commission. The visit and its outcome was criticised in Canada,

and to 'repair' relations, Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer visited India in October 2019. The year ended with the release of the Public Report on the Terrorism Threat (December 2018), listed Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) as terrorist organisations. It was the first time that Khalistani extremism has been mentioned as a terror threat during the Justin Trudeau regime. However, the language was sent for review after protests by Sikh groups.

MEXICO

In 2018, Mexico elected a new government. Andrés Manuel López Obrador from the National Regeneration Movement (Morena) party won the elections (by 53.19 percent votes) to be the next president of Mexico in July 2018. He also presented his budget that highlighted the need to reduce the size of the government.

In foreign relations, disagreements with the US on the movement of migrants from Central America via Mexico marred US-Mexico relations. President Trump continued to use derogatory language when talking about Mexican migrants and stated that Mexico would pay for the border wall that he wanted to build. President Peña Nito and later President Obrador both clarified that they would not pay for any such wall. Mexico has also stated that the majority of migrants seeking to enter the US were from Central America and not Mexican citizens. To maintain cordial relations and address the issues President Obrador proposed a 'Marshall Plan' for Central America - a long term strategy to reduce the flow of migrants from Central America to the US via Mexico. It was under his government that Mexico agreed on the new USMCA with Canada and the US. Mexico became one of the six countries to ratify the CPTPP in 2018.

Mexico had also differed with the Lima groups of nations on its relations with Venezuela. The new government of President Obrador has maintained that it would not like to interfere in the internal affairs of Venezuela and that it would not support military intervention by external powers. However, it has clarified that it is concerned about the situation in Venezuela and would like to resolve the same through dialogue. On Cuba too, Mexico rejected the call by the Organisation of the Americas to break ties with the island nation. Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel was also invited to the inauguration of the new President on December 1, 2018.

In a renewed effort to diversify its trade relations and offset the effects of unilateral tariffs by the US and other issues, Mexico strengthened its economic relations with China. EU and Mexican negotiators wrapped up a ninth-round of talks aimed at modernising their two-decade-old free trade deal, saying they had agreed on five new chapters and made important progress on others.

India-Mexico Relations

There were no high level visits between the two countries. India did participate as the Guest of Honour at Cervantino Festival in 2018 to promote India's cultural, literary, tourism and people to people ties with Mexico. The 7th Meeting of the Mexico-India Joint Commission (JCM) and 4th round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) were held in Mexico City on June 23, 2017. The meeting was co-chaired by Ambassador Carlos de Icaza, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico and by Preeti Saran, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, and head of the Indian delegation. Both the Joint Commission and the Foreign Office Consultations aimed to continue the excellent level of bilateral dialogue as well as to increase economic and cooperation exchanges.

Dr. Stuti Banerjee

Major Powers

9. Major Powers

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The US decided to withhold at least \$900 million in military aid to Pakistan for not acting against the Haqqani network and Afghan Taliban. Financial aid to Pakistan was also cut by 75 percent to \$150 million from \$1 billion for the same reason. President Trump also made it clear that he would like to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan and start negotiating a peace process with the Taliban.

President Trump had a historic meeting with Chairman Kim Jong-un on June 12, 2018. The two leaders sign a joint statement pledging to pursue lasting peace and complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, although the declaration provides few details. They also committed to recovering the remains of US soldiers who fought in the Korean War²²⁷. After the summit with Chairman Kim, President Trump announced the suspension of the US-South Korea military exercises and North Korea agreed to destroy a missile-engine test site. While pursuing denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula, President Trump withdrew the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on May 08, 2018. He stated that the deal did not stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons and did not cover missile defence. In May, the US moved its embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem after formally recognising it as the capital of Israel. This move was ordered by President Donald Trump in a reversal of decades of US policy. On June 1, the US also withdrew from the Paris Climate change agreement. The US also imposed sanctions on Russia for its support to Syrian government. President Trump imposed taxes on imports from China, Mexico, Canada and the EU, to encourage consumers to buy American products. All these countries have retaliated.

In the Americas, the US imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium and auto imports from Mexico and Canada among other nations. The US also imposed sanctions on Venezuelan oil in a bid to pressure President Maduro to 'return to the constitution'. The US continued with its criticism of the Cuban government. Domestically, President Trump delivered his first State of the Union Address, in which he spoke about the state of the economy that, "small business confidence is at an all-time high. The stock market has smashed one record after another, gaining \$8 trillion in value. That is great news for Americans' 401k, retirement, pension, and college savings accounts..." He also spoke about record low employment among African Americans and Hispanics. He addressed the issues of unfair deals and the need to improve border security.

²²⁷ CFR, "North Korean Nuclear Negotiations 1985 – 2019," <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/north-korean-nuclear-negotiations>, Accessed on 06 June 2019.

The investigations by special council Robert Muller into allegations of Russian interference in the US elections led to arrests and indictments of some close aids of President Trump. The US held Congressional elections in which the Democrats were able to gain majority in the House of Representative, while the Republicans controlled the Senate. The differences between the two parties on the spending bill for President Trump's border wall on the US-Mexico border led to a 34 day government shutdown that began on December 11, 2018, and was the longest such shut down triggering a crisis in the US.

India-United States Relations

India and the US made "landmark" progress in 2018 to bolster their strategic and defence ties from holding the maiden trilateral meeting with Japan to the first-ever 2+2 dialogue during which they signed the long-pending COMCASA agreement that would open the way for sales of more sensitive US military equipment to India.²²⁸ India and the US are in talks for the sale of missile shields to India. After a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis on the sidelines of the International Institute for Strategic Studies' 17th Asia Security Summit (Shangri-La Dialogue) in Singapore, both countries pledged to continue their strong bilateral strategic partnership. The then EAM Sushma Swaraj and the then Minister of Defence Nirmala Sitharaman welcomed Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis to India on September 6, 2018 for the inaugural India-US Ministerial 2+2 Dialogue. US President Donald J. Trump, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meet on the sidelines of the 2018 G20 leaders' summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina (30 Nov-01 Dec 2018). India's status as major US Defence Partner was reaffirmed in this meeting. India's strategic partnership with the US and its emergence as a leading global power was on display during other high-level gatherings this year, including two meetings of the quadrilateral partners (Australia, India, Japan, and the US) and at the India-Japan-US trilateral meeting at the G-20 summit.

Dr. Stuti Banerjee

RUSSIA

The tensed relationship between Russia and the West (especially with the US) was prevalent during 2018. In an interview in January, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noted that Russophobic sentiment among western countries had hit unprecedented levels. He said that Russia has repeatedly claimed that the country was not searching for confrontation and considered the sanctions imposed on it, since 2014, as ungrounded. He said that the architects of the sanctions should have gotten the point that such measures cannot change

²²⁸ PTI, "2018 - A landmark year for India-US strategic relationship," <https://www.businesstoday.in/top-story/2018--a-landmark-year-for-india-us-strategic-relationship/story/305334.html>, Accessed on 07 June 2019.

the fair and efficient policy of the Russia. He also said that in private, certain Congressional members, diplomats, and (representatives) of US political circles acknowledge that the situation between Russia and the US was absolutely abnormal and needed to be changed.²²⁹ On 30 January, the US Department of the Treasury listed 114 major Russian politicians and members of the country's leadership, including Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, his deputies, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, Presidential Administration Chief Anton Vaino, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov, Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller, Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin, Sberbank CEO German Gref and other members of the cabinet in its 'Kremlin report'. The list was drawn up based on the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act of 2017 (CAATSA). This is not a sanctions list, the Treasury Department declared. No restrictions are being slapped on the persons in question. Listing these individuals does not create any obstacles for business contacts with US citizens provided that they are not subject to sanctions. Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the US 'Kremlin report' was an attempt to drive a wedge between Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian business elite and influence the March presidential election.²³⁰

On 5 February, Russian President signed the Federal Law on the Ratification of the Protocol to the Agreement between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, where he wrote off Kyrgyzstan's debt to Russia under loans provided on September 20, 2012.²³¹

President Putin signed the Federal Law on Amending Article 5 of the Federal Law on the Liquidation of Chemical Weapons on 5 February. According to the new amendments to this article, following the completion of the liquidation of chemical weapons at the chemical destruction facilities and the verification of this procedure by the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the property of the destruction facility, excluding waste from the destruction process, shall be considered tradable. This Federal Law will allow economic use of the property of chemical destruction facilities through investment projects designed to establish high-tech production facilities there.²³²

At a meeting with the heads of international news agencies on 6 June, President Putin said Russia's most advanced hypersonic weapons will be capable of defending the country, even if the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (the New START Treaty) is terminated. He recalled the event in 2002 when the US quitted the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty. He said that quitting from that treaty was the

²²⁹"Press review: Lavrov blasts West's Russophobia", *TASS*, January 22, 2018.

<http://tass.com/pressreview/986198>.

²³⁰"Key facts about the US 'Kremlin report'", *TASS*, January 30, 2018. <http://tass.com/world/987474>.

²³¹"Law ratifying protocol to agreement on writing off Kyrgyzstan's debt to Russia", *President of Russia*, February 5, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/56784>

²³²"Amendments to Article 5 of law on liquidation of chemical weapons", *President of Russia*, February 5, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/56790>.

first step America took towards fundamentally shaking the entire framework of international relations in the sphere of global security, which was a very serious step. The Russian president recalled the INF clauses on the ban on placing the launchers of intermediate-and shorter-range missiles on the land, stressing that despite this, the US had delivered such launching systems to Romania and was going to deploy them in Poland.²³³

On 1 March, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered the State of the Nation Address to the Federal Assembly. On the domestic economic front, the main ideas included stepping up 1.5-fold per capita GDP by 2024, stabilising social expenditures at a slightly higher level than in 2017, supporting urbanisation and the mortgage boom, encouraging self-employment, and raising the investment rate. In the defence sector, President Putin talked about the progress of new strategic nuclear developments and hypersonic weapons, declassifying some of their characteristics, and other new weapons. All these projects are included in the state program of armaments for 2018-2027, which President Putin had signed in a decree on December 14, 2017.²³⁴

In the month of July 2018, Russia organised one of the biggest events in the sports sector, FIFA World Cup. During the opening ceremony, President Putin expressed his and his country's happiness on being able to organise the event in Russia, for which Russia had prepared responsibly.²³⁵

On September 11–15, Russia conducted the Vostok 2018 - one of the biggest military exercises with China and Mongolia. The exercise was held in Russia's Far East and adjacent areas of the Pacific Ocean. It involved about 300,000 Russian service personnel, over 1,000 fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters and drones, up to 36,000 tanks, armoured personnel carriers and other vehicles together with up to 80 ships and support vessels. 87 observers from 59 countries were present during the exercise. President Putin told the Russian personnel who were taking part in the exercise that they should be ready to stand up for Russia's sovereignty, security and national interests, and also support the country's allies.²³⁶

On 31 October, President Putin approved the State Migration Policy Concept of the Russian Federation for 2019–2025. It was in the light of the need to update the goals, tasks and key priorities of Russia in the area of migration.²³⁷

²³³"Putin says Russia has most advanced weapons for its security, even if New START is nixed", *TASS*, June 6, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1062243>.

²³⁴"Press review: Putin unveils new nukes in annual address and Rosneft loses foreign partners", *TASS*, March 2, 2018.

²³⁵"2018 FIFA World Cup opening ceremony", *President of Russia*, June 14, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57787>.

²³⁶"Vostok-2018 military manoeuvres", *President of Russia*, September 13, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58548>.

²³⁷"Order on Russia's state migration policy concept for 2019–2025", *President of Russia*, October 31, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/58986>.

On 28 November, President Putin signed Federal Law on Ratification of the Agreement on the Eurasian Economic Union's (EAEU) International Treaties with Third Countries, International Organisations or International Integration Associations. The agreement determines the procedure of signing, cancelling or suspending EAEU international treaties with third countries, international organisations or international integration associations, with respect to the subject of regulation in which the Union has the required competence according to the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union of May 29, 2014 and international treaties within the Union.²³⁸

On 13 December, President Putin signed the Executive Order on Amending the List of Federal Districts Approved by the Russian Presidential Executive Order No. 849 of May 13, 2000. According to this order, the capital of the Far Eastern Federal District has been transferred from Khabarovsk to Vladivostok.²³⁹

On 28 December, President Putin signed Federal Law on Amendments to Federal Law on the Peculiarities of Granting Citizens Land Plots in State or Municipal Ownership and Located on the Territories of the Russian Federation Constituent Entities Comprising the Far Eastern Federal District, and On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation and Article 3 of the Federal Law on Turnover of Agricultural Lands. According to the Federal Law, a land plot is being granted for gratis use to a foreign citizen or a stateless person participating in the State Programme to Assist Voluntary Resettlement to the Russian Federation of Compatriots Living Abroad and their Family Members Resettling Together for Permanent Residence in the Russian Federation.²⁴⁰

India-Russia Bilateral Relations

India and Russia enjoy a special and privileged strategic partnership. Cooperation between India and Russia spans across the whole gamut of sectors and rests on the fundamental pillars of political and strategic cooperation, military and security cooperation, cooperation in the spheres of economy, energy, industry, science and technology, and cultural and humanitarian cooperation. India attaches the highest importance to its relations with Russia.

In October 2018, India-Russia concluded the 19th Annual Summit. During the summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the inking of the supply of S-400 Long Range Surface to Air Missile System to India. In the economic sector, the annual trade between India and Russia in 2017 reached USD\$ 10.17

²³⁸“Agreement on EAEU international treaties with third countries, international organisations or integration associations ratified”, *President of Russia*, November 28, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/59223>.

²³⁹“Capital of Far Eastern Federal District moved to Vladivostok”, *President of Russia*, December 13, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/59396>.

²⁴⁰“Procedures for granting land in the Far East to compatriots living abroad”, *President of Russia*, December 28, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/59541>.

billion. During the 2018 annual summit, the two leaders noted that there was an increase of 20 percent in 2017 in the trade volume between India-Russia.²⁴¹ In that same summit, India-Russia decided to hold a meeting of the 1st India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue (IRSED). The meeting was held in St. Petersburg on November 25-26, 2018. The meeting was held with the objective to identify the most promising areas to improve bilateral trade, economic and investment cooperation, and to define joint projects in the framework of national programs.²⁴² Both countries are optimistic from the deliberations and agreements of the 1st India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue.

During the 18th meeting of the India-Russia Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC) held on December 13, 2018, India and Russia agreed to extend bilateral cooperation on defence joint-venture (JV) manufacturing projects including the Kamov-226T helicopters, naval frigates and projects related to land systems.²⁴³ A joint venture on Kalashnikov rifle production was agreed during the 2018 annual summit. In other sectors too, there was progress between the two countries. For example, Russia's Alrosa, the world's largest diamond mining company, has invested in Mumbai in sales, marketing and support projects. It opened its representative office in 2018.

Dr. Indrani Talukdar

CHINA

Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister of China stated that the year 2018 was marked by uncertainty in the world. He noted that, "The shift in the balance of power accelerated, unilateralism and protectionism further developed, and the international system came under serious strain."

Chinese government sources highlighted that China established "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy" as the fundamental guideline for conducting China's foreign affairs. Further, it advocated the vision of a "community with a common destiny for mankind".

²⁴¹"India-Russia Joint Statement during visit of President of Russia to India (October 05, 2018)", Ministry of External Affairs, October 5, 2018. [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30469/IndiaRussia Joint Statement during visit of President of Russia to India October 05 2018](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30469/IndiaRussia%20Joint%20Statement%20during%20visit%20of%20President%20of%20Russia%20to%20India%20October%2005%202018).

²⁴²"Joint Statement following the results of the 1st India-Russia Strategic Economic Dialogue", Press Information Bureau: NitiAyog, February 5, 2019. <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=188068>.

²⁴³Manjeet Singh Negi, "India, Russia agree to extend bilateral cooperation on defence joint-venture projects", India Today, December 14, 2018. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-russia-agree-to-extend-bilateral-cooperation-on-defence-joint-venture-projects-1409162-2018-12-14>

The leadership of Communist Party of China (CPC) convened its Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs on June 22-23, 2018. President Xi Jinping delivered a comprehensive and important speech at the Foreign Affairs Conference. It was evident that upholding the authority of the CPC Central Committee and strengthening Party leadership in foreign affairs were among the most important aspects of Xi's speech. This was in line with directions of the 19th Party Congress (October 2017).

China's Foreign Ministry highlighted their achievements in the following six aspects:

- (a)** China was a force for stability: in an uncertain world, China emerged as a pillar of stability.
- (b)** China was an advocate for openness: China celebrated the 40th anniversary of 'reform and opening-up' and expressed unwavering commitment to further reform and opening-up.
- (c)** China was a driver of cooperation: Belt and Road projects and Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation were quoted in this regard.
- (d)** China was a promoter of peace: China's role in the Korean Peninsula peace process, its initiatives such as China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, and its active mediating role on the Syrian and Palestinian issues were cited in this regard.
- (e)** China was an important upholder of the international order: It took a clear stand against protectionism and unilateralism and called for a stronger commitment to the UN-centred international system and rules-based multilateralism.
- (f)** China was an important engine of development: Despite economic difficulties and downward pressure, China acted on the new development philosophy and achieved a medium-high GDP growth rate of 6.6 percent, for 2018.

It is noteworthy that China's BRI faced criticism in some countries. China was accused of "debt diplomacy" to expand its influence. Some non-Chinese experts criticised China for not meeting 'international standards' on environmental and social sustainability, procurement, transparency, and debt sustainability. Chinese government and some Chinese scholars refuted such allegations.

China issued a white paper titled "China's Arctic Policy" in January 2018. The document asserted China's position as "an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs". It also talked about cooperation in the Arctic region under the BRI and joint construction of the "Polar Silk Road".

Amidst the rising trade-related tensions with the US, China issued its white paper titled "The Facts and China's Position on China-US Trade Friction" in September 2018. It stated China's

stance and commitments to various principles to facilitate sound development of economic and trade relations with the US.

The year 2018 was marked by introduction of several reforms in terms of military organisational structure, discipline inspection, teaching in military academies, personnel training, technological development and recruitment of civilian staff towards building a world-class military under the absolute leadership of the CPC. At the “start training” mobilisation ceremony held on January 3, 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered the military to strengthen combat readiness and joint-operation under a new training system across all the five theatre commands and abroad. At the plenary meeting of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force (PAP) held on March 12, 2018, President Xi Jinping stressed the importance of deepening military-civilian integration for realising the Party’s goal of building a strong military in the new era.

India – China in 2018

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping held their first ‘informal summit’ on April 27-28, 2018 in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province in China. The objective of the Summit was “to exchange views on overarching issues of bilateral and global importance, and to elaborate their respective visions and priorities for national development in the context of the current and future international situation”. Both sides emphasised the need for maintaining strategic communication with each other.

The informal summit signifies a new model of political engagement at the highest level between India and China. It led to intensification of political, strategic, economic and cultural dialogues on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with President Xi Jinping in the Chinese port city of Qingdao on June 9, 2018, prior to the 18th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit. An analysis of official statements suggests that both countries primarily discussed implementation of the consensus reached by the two leaders at Wuhan.

Prime Minister Modi and President Xi held another meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg in July 2018. The bilateral meeting proved to be an important exercise to take forward the consensus reached at the Wuhan summit.²⁴⁴

Dr. Sanjeev Kumar, Dr. Puyam Rakesh Singh & Dr. Priyanka Pandit

²⁴⁴ Source: Foreign Ministry of PRC, Ministry of National Defence of PRC and MEA of India

EUROPE

The year 2018 represented a period of ups and downs for the EU. The year saw the shifting trajectory of transatlantic relations, where President Trump continued his rebuke of his European allies on various issues like trade, defence and international commitments. This led the Council's president Donald Tusk urging European leaders to form a "united European front" against Trump's move to impose trade tariffs on Europe and withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal.²⁴⁵ After the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, Washington and all its major partners across the Atlantic have found themselves on opposing sides again over how to deal with Iran. To safeguard the deal, the EU in 2018 initiated proposals on four fronts: firstly, it activated the Blocking Statute by updating the list of US sanctions on Iran falling within its scope. Secondly, EU on July 4, 2018 launched the formal process to remove obstacles for the European Investment Bank (EIB) to decide under the EU budget, the guarantee to finance activities in Iran. Thirdly, as part of confidence building measures, the Commission would continue to strengthen sectoral cooperation and assistance to Iran, including the energy sector and small and medium-sized companies. Fourthly, the Commission in May 2018 encouraged its member states to explore the possibility of one-off bank transfers to the Central Bank of Iran.

Internally, three issues dominated the Union in the year 2018. Firstly, the EU struggled to settle migrants as planned in the quota system (Dublin regulations). Despite the decrease in the number of migrants arriving at the European shores, some member states refused to accept refugees and migrants leading to the rise in differences between the EU and its member states. Secondly, Brexit continued to make headlines throughout the year. The UK and EU on November 25, 2018 endorsed a draft Brexit deal which proposed how and when the UK would withdraw from the EU. Prime Minister Theresa May secured her Cabinet's approval, defended the Brexit deal in the Parliament and survived a vote of no-confidence moved by her Conservative Party. The safeguarding of the open border between Ireland and North Ireland remained the bone of contention in the passing of the bill by the British Parliament. Thirdly, the electoral success of the Eurosceptic parties was witnessed in various member-states like Italy, Sweden, Germany, etc. Most important of these was the March elections in Italy that resulted in the formation of the coalition government of the Lega and the Five Star Movement that raised concerns in some European quarters.²⁴⁶ Italy's new government has been on a collision course with Europe, as top ministers from the Lega and the Five Star Movement have taken a harsher line on migrants and implemented a number of spending measures resulting in a stand-off with the EU.

²⁴⁵Euractiv, 16 May 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/tusk-with-friends-like-trump-who-needs-enemies>

²⁴⁶The Guardian, 1 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/31/italys-populist-leaders-strike-deal-resurrect-coalition>

On the positive note, two major initiatives were taken in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyber-security by the EU. In April 2018, the European Commission presented a series of measures to put AI at the service of Europeans and boost Europe's competitiveness in this field. This was initiated following the call of the leaders to formulate a European approach on AI. The Commission proposed a three-pronged approach to increase public and private investment in AI, prepare for socio-economic changes, and ensure an appropriate ethical and legal framework. Second most important initiative was the implementation of the first EU cyber-security law, which came into effect on May 09, 2018. The new law required firms running "essential" services, including water, energy, transport, health and banking operations, to inform national authorities if they were hit with serious cyber-security breaches. Providers of cloud computing services, search engines and online marketplaces would also need to report those incidents. It said that the companies would face fines if they did not report of such breaches. This was followed by the implementation of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on May 25, 2018. It provides EU citizens with greater control over how companies around the world handle their data. GDPR requirements apply to each member state of the EU, with the aim to create more consistent protection of consumer and personal data across EU nations.

Also, in 2018, the EU held four summits on 22-23 March, 28-29 June, 17-18 October and 13-14 December respectively. Many issues like migration, climate change, eurozone reforms and Brexit were discussed during these summits. The Union also started the process for the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework on the basis of a proposal submitted by the Commission. Another key issue discussed during these meetings was the need for the EU to take responsibility for its defence policies and capabilities. The EU leaders agreed to take concrete steps to strengthen European defence by enhancing defence investment, capability development, and operational readiness. With regard to the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), EU leaders called for the fulfilment of existing commitments and for further developing the initial projects. The EU also announced plans to spend nearly €20 billion on defence over its next long-term budget. The sum includes €6.5 billion for "military mobility", an ambitious project to make it easier to move troops and equipment around the continent, but the bulk of the money- €13 billion would go to the European Defence Fund as part of French-German efforts to provide a fresh impetus to the bloc in the wake of Brexit.²⁴⁷

India-Europe Bilateral Relations

The year 2018 was important for the bilateral relations between India and Europe, as the year saw many important visits by the President, Vice President and Prime Minister to the region. Central and Eastern Europe was the focus of high-level engagement by India. President Ram Nath Kovind visited Cyprus, Bulgaria and Czech Republic (2-9 September

²⁴⁷Euractiv, 3 May 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/eu-defence-gets-e20-billion-budget-boost/>

2018). This visit was followed by that of Vice President M. Venkaih Naidu to Serbia, Malta and Romania (14-20 September 2018). The highlight of these visits was signing of 18 MoUs on a range of issues from academic engagements, boosting trade ties, promoting cooperation in the field of tourism, shipping, plant health and nuclear energy to foster closer economic cooperation between the two sides. These visits were significant as these took place after a gap of several years. Further, India also expanded its outreach in the Nordic region with the First India-Nordic Summit held in Stockholm on April 17, 2018, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi met leaders of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. The summit identified four areas of cooperation between India and Nordic countries in the joint statement, which included economic growth, innovation, climate change and global security.

The year 2018 also marked 70-year anniversary of diplomatic relations with many European countries. Against this backdrop, the then EAM Sushma Swaraj visited four European countries - Italy, France, Luxembourg and Belgium from 17-23 June 2018. In her visits, reaching out to the Indian community in these countries constituted an important part of her visit. The visits focussed on enhancing cooperation at the multilateral fora, boosting trade and investment ties, science and technology, culture and people to people contacts. The EAM, during her visit to Belgium, met the President of the European Commission to discuss the progress in bilateral relations since the 14th India-EU Summit of October 2017.

There were many incoming visits from the Foreign Ministers of European countries such as Malta, Serbia, Switzerland, Iceland, Croatia, Moldova, Romania and Denmark. There were also high-level visits of the Prime Minister of Italy, Prime Minister of Netherlands, President of Germany, President of the French Republic. Of particular importance were the visits by the Prime Minister of Italy Giuseppe Conte and President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron. India and Italy co-hosted the Tech Summit and both sides agreed on strengthening economic engagements, technology partnerships, and cooperation at the multilateral fora. Similarly, India and France co-hosted the Founding Summit of the International Solar Alliance in New Delhi on March 11, 2018. Both countries signed a range of MoUs on reduction of illicit traffic in narcotic drugs, India-France Migration and Mobility Partnership agreement, agreement to facilitate mutual recognition of academic qualifications, agreement in the field of environment, logistics support to the armed forces, exchange and protection of classified information and cooperation in the field of space, hydrography and credit facility for funding of smart city projects.

Towards the end of the year, EU published its new strategy on India which marked a shift in its stance from focussing on trade and culture to political and strategic issues. This was EU's first strategy paper in fourteen years since the signing of the strategic partnership between the two sides in 2004. The strategy covers three areas: prosperity through sustainable modernisation, security and stability through rule based global order and developing joint

responses at EU and bilateral level to address India's expectations from the EU. The strategy presented a long-term strategic vision to redefine and revitalise the partnership.

Dr. Ankita Dutta and Dr. Surabhi Singh.

Research Fellows who contributed to the Year End Review 2018

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Bangladesh	Dr. Ashish Shukla
Nepal and Bhutan	Dr. Rakesh Kumar Meena
Pakistan	Dr. DhruvajyotiBhattacharjee& Dr. Ashish Shukla
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Southeast Asia	Dr. TemjenmerenAo, Dr. SamathaMallempatiand Dr. DhruvajyotiBhattacharjee
North Korea, South Korea and Japan	Dr. Jojin John
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Central Asia	Dr. Athar Zafar
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Iran	Dr. DeepikaSaraswat
Turkey	Dr. Chandra Rekha
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Sub-Saharan Africa	Dr. Nivedita Ray, Dr. Saurabh Mishra and Dr. ChayanikaDeka
Indian Ocean Region	Dr. Amit Kumar
Pacific Islands	Dr. Pragma Pandey
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	Priyanka Pandit
North America and Latin America and the Caribbean	Dr. Stuti Banerjee
Russia	Dr. Indrani Talukdar
European Union	Dr. Ankita Dutta and Dr. Surabhi Singh

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