

Weekly Media Updates **(15-21 January, 2018)**

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Africa

(Dr Nivedita Ray)

- **South Africa India Strengthen Trade Relations¹**

South Africa and India have committed to strengthen trade relations between the two countries in 2018. This, as the two countries celebrate 25 years of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

These commitments were made during the Foreign Office Consultations that took place on Thursday, 19 January 2018 in New Delhi, India. The meeting was co-chaired with South Africa represented by DIRCO Deputy Director-General Professor Anil Sooklal, who is responsible for the Asia and Middle East Regions.

Ministry of External Affairs Dr Neena Malhotra was the co-chair representative from India. The consultations form part of the structured mechanism which governs bilateral relations between the two countries. This mechanism comprises a Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) and the Foreign Office Consultations (FOC).

The meeting reviewed developments in the bilateral relationship between South Africa and India, since the 9th Joint Ministerial Commission held in Durban, in May 2015.

The department said the meeting reflected on progress made with regard to the conclusion of a number of legal instruments, including agreements and memoranda of understanding, aimed at promoting cooperation within specific areas. These areas relate to visa simplification procedures, cooperation in higher education, audio-visual co-production and renewable energy.

The meeting further reflected on ways to grow commercial links between South Africa and India, especially in the fields of trade and investment, while noting that bilateral trade had grown steadily over the last decade.

"For the year, January to November 2017, two-way trade had reached R97 billion and further areas of cooperation were being explored in the financial services industry, defence procurement, agro-processing and deep mining equipment," said the department.

The two countries pledged to cooperate in order to fast track reform in institutions of global governance.

DIRCO said close collaboration would continue in the fight against terrorism and within important groupings such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

¹ Africa Updates, 26 Decemebr2017, <http://africaupdates.info/sudanese-president-vows-to-remove-trade-barriers-for-turkey/>

(BRICS), India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the latter where South Africa has taken over the chair for the period 2017-2019. The 10th Joint Ministerial Commission will take place in India during the course of 2018.

- **Indian investments in Mozambique are facing bad weather²**

Investment by Indian exploring companies in Mozambique gas field is unlikely to see any returns till 2022. This is due to instability in the host nation and not-so-keen approach by other consortium partners and no signs of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal, required to transport fuel. The field was expected to start production by 2019.

Indian companies have made an investment of \$6.5 billion in the African country. While ONGC Videsh (OVL), the overseas arm of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), holds 16% stake in Mozambique offshore block Rovuma Area 1, having a proven reserve of 75 trillion cubic feet, Oil India has 4% stake and a unit of Bharat Petroleum Corporation holds 10% stake in the around 10,000-square-kilometre block located in northernmost part of offshore Mozambique Rovuma Basin.

According to N K Verma, managing director of OVL, it will take at least four years from the commencement of work of an LNG terminal for production to start. He said “We expect a delay of at least two years.” India’s petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan had met his Mozambique counterpart Leticia Klemens in Tokyo during October 2017 to discuss expediting the work in the fields. In a tweet, Pradhan had said that Klemens agreed to fast-track the gas development project. According to a person close to the development, though the Mozambique field is good, logistics is a problem.

“To carry gas, we need a huge LNG facility. Creating the facility will be an issue as there are many agencies with varied interests at the site. The local government is also not sure of what to do. Mozambique was supposed to start giving returns by 2019 but it will not happen before 2021 as LNG terminal will be ready only by then at the earliest. So far, there is no plan,” said the person. The Rovuma’s Area 1 is one of the largest natural gas discoveries in offshore East Africa and may well become one of the world’s largest LNG producing blocks.

However, reports suggest technical and financial issues, apart from political, are affecting the projects. Verma, though, believes that though there may be some financial losses due to delay, if LNG prices rebound, investors will be able to recover losses. With large LNG supplies from Australia and Russia, especially, global supply is expected to increase 50% during 2014-2021, thus affecting prices. In fact, given that LNG market has become demand-driven, India has been able to renegotiate LNG prices for long-term contracts with Qatar, Australia and Russia. Verma also added that OVL in the meantime is looking to fix sale-purchase agreements.

² Financial Express, 20 January 2017, <http://www.financialexpress.com/economy/why-indian-investments-in-mozambique-are-facing-bad-weather/1022670/>

- **SDGs Center for Africa Establishes West African Center³**

The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa (SDGC/A) signed a host country agreement with the Government of Liberia to establish the West African SDGC/A Sub-regional Center in Monrovia, Liberia. The Center, expected to open during the first half of 2018, will work to accelerate implementation of the SDGs in Côte D'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – also known as the Mano River Union countries – which requested the establishment of the West African SDGC/A.

African leaders established the SDGC/A in July 2016 to support SDG implementation in line with the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063. The SDGC/A is based in Kigali, Rwanda, and works to create partnerships across the SDGs to ensure their effective implementation across Africa. The West African SDGC/A Sub-regional Center will contribute to the Center's overall goal of accelerating SDG implementation across Africa, with a focus on members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The West African SDGC/A Sub-regional Center will focus on strengthening the capacity of the Mano River Union countries to achieve the SDGs, including by providing support for coordinating SDG activities. For example, the Center plans to establish a program to map agricultural policies and interventions in support of SDG 2 (zero hunger).

In remarks before the signing ceremony, Liberia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Marjon V. Kamara welcomed the Center's establishment, emphasizing that the "SDGs embody the aspirations and wishes of the African people and of the developing world." He said the Center will help to maintain momentum to achieve the SDGs in Liberia and in the region.

The SDGC/A plans to open sub-regional centers throughout Africa to support regional partnerships and integration as well as to focus on regional priorities and challenges.

Central Asia

(Dr. Athar Zafar)

- **India Participates in SCO Meet on Military Cooperation**

After joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in June 2017, India for the first time participated in the meeting on defence cooperation in SCO framework. The two-day International Military Cooperation Departments of Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member Countries was held in China on 15-16 January 2018. This is the first meeting attended by India in the field of defense cooperation under the SCO framework. Practical cooperation in this area among the member

³ SDG Knowledge Hub, 18 January 2018, <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/sdgs-center-for-africa-establishes-west-african-center/>

countries was discussed. The Indian delegation was led by Major General Ajay Seth.⁴

- **Kazakhstan President Visits US**

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited the US and held discussions with President Donald Trump on 16 January 2018. This is significant as it is the first visit of Kazakhstan President in 12 years at the invitation of the President of the US.⁵ However, earlier in May 2017, Trump and Nazarbayev had met in Saudi Arabia during the Arab-Islamic-American Summit. At the White House, the two leaders exchanged views on a range of bilateral, regional and international issues, including Afghanistan. During the visit, the US and Kazakhstan increased their bilateral engagement to the level of 'Enhanced Strategic Partnership'. President Trump termed President Nazarbayev as 'highly respected' leader and said that Kazakhstan is a 'valued friend and a strategic partner' in Central Asia.⁶ A joint statement was also issued following the meetings.

China

(Dr. Sanjeev Kumar)

- **Bangladesh blacklists Chinese infrastructure firm** (by Pranab Dhal Samanta)

In what is perhaps the first major blow to Chinese strategic investments in South Asia, the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh blacklisted the Chinese company which helped build key ports in Pakistan and Sri Lanka on 17 January 2018. China Harbour and Engineering Company was blacklisted for alleged attempts to bribe Bangladeshi government officials. The company, which was involved in the expansion of the Dhaka-Sylhet highway, will now be disqualified from participating in any contract in Bangladesh.⁷

- **Shanghai rolls out more policies to introduce foreign talents**

China's Ministry of Public Security and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government have rolled out a plan to woo more overseas high-end talents to work

⁴ 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>

⁵ Almasbek Zhumadilov and Aigerim Seisembayeva, "Nazarbayev, Trump elevate strategic partnership during Washington meeting," Astana Times, 17 January 2017, <https://astanatimes.com/2018/01/nazarbayev-trump-elevate-strategic-partnership-during-washington-meeting/>

⁶ Almasbek Zhumadilov and Aigerim Seisembayeva, "Nazarbayev, Trump elevate strategic partnership during Washington meeting," Astana Times, 17 January 2017, <https://astanatimes.com/2018/01/nazarbayev-trump-elevate-strategic-partnership-during-washington-meeting/>

⁷ <https://theprint.in/2018/01/18/blow-beijing-bangladesh-blacklists-chinese-infrastructure-firm/>

in Shanghai, Chinanews.com reported on January 17. More convenience to apply for permanent Shanghai residency will be provided for core foreign members at top research institutions in Shanghai, said Lou Pengying, Deputy Director of the Entry and Exit Department under the Public Security Bureau of Shanghai. Foreign talents will be encouraged to make innovations and start businesses in Shanghai, breaking the restriction that they can work for only one company at a time.⁸

- **China's economy expands 6.9 % in 2017**

China's economy ended 2017 on strong footing with a better-than-expected growth rate and improved structure, official data showed 18 January 2018. The economy expanded 6.9 percent year-on-year in 2017, higher than the 6.7 percent growth registered in 2016, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed. The reading marked the first acceleration in the annual growth pace in seven years and was well above the official target of around 6.5 percent.⁹

- **Qinghai's Development and Action Plan of Silk Road Cultural Industrial Belt**

China's Qinghai province has recently released a plan to support development of the Silk Road cultural industrial belt from 2018 to 2025. Under the plan, Qinghai aims at building itself into a high added-value area of harmonious co-existence of multiple ethnic cultures on the Silk Road economic belt, a high added-value area of ecological civilization, and a pioneering demonstration zone of green development, a strategic channel for opening-up of the Silk Road economic belt, and an international people-to-people exchange and cooperation centre.¹⁰

- **Shenzhen: Punishment to people involved in sales of counterfeit cancer drugs in 30 provinces of China**

From overseas purchasing to illegal production and sales, some people in China sold dozens of anti-cancer drugs to over 30 Chinese provinces for over a year and half involving 10 million yuan. The Chinese authorities identified that these anti-cancer drugs are fake drugs, and some do not contain active ingredients.

The eight people involved in the crime have been sentenced to three to 13 years in prison for producing and selling counterfeit drugs, with a fine ranging from 20,000 to 15 million yuan. Ji Weiwei - the main person responsible for the crime was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment and fined 15 million yuan on 18th January 2018. After receiving the complaint in March 2016, Shenzhen police had seized a large number of unsold fake drugs and arrested suspects including Ji Weiwei.¹¹

⁸ <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0118/c90000-9316971.html>

⁹ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/18/c_136905769.htm

¹⁰ <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/dfgg/44723.htm>

¹¹ “无有效成分的假抗癌药为何能畅达 30 省份？——深圳一起特大生产、销售假药案追踪”, available at http://xinhuanet.com/legal/2018-01/18/c_1122277577.htm accessed on 22 January 2018

- **China's Defense ministry warns U.S. against "causing trouble out of nothing".**

China's Ministry of National Defense has told the United States not to "cause trouble out of nothing," and to respect the sovereignty of China. Wu Qian, Spokesperson for the Ministry, made the remarks on 20 January in response to the actions of a US warship on 17 January.¹²

(Dr. Avinash Godbole)

- **State Council pledges to closely follow CPC Central Committee with Xi at the core**

Leading Party members with the State Council on Wednesday (17 January) pledged to closely follow the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee with Xi Jinping at the core. At a meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang, the leading Party members' group of the State Council discussed work on full and rigorous Party management within the government. The State Council will "firmly safeguard Xi's status as the core of the CPC Central Committee and the whole Party, and the authority and centralized, unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee," said the statement issued after the meeting. The cabinet will strictly follow political discipline and fully implement decisions by the Party leadership in government work, the statement said. The State Council will better discipline and encourage civil servants to be devoted and innovative.¹³

- **Chinese vice premier calls for more efforts to build Belt and Road**

Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli called for more efforts in building the Belt and Road Tuesday (16 January). Addressing a conference on the initiative, Zhang said China should continue to push pilot projects under the initiative to connect infrastructure and policy. Trade and investment cooperation should be improved and new growth drivers found for the common development along the Belt and Road, he said. China needs better financial products and services for the initiative, he said. People-to-people exchanges should provide public support for the Belt and Road, he said.¹⁴

- **Xi thought proposed to be included in Constitution**

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee Friday proposed writing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into the Constitution. Major theoretical achievements, principles and policies adopted at the 19th CPC National Congress should be incorporated into a revision to the

¹² http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-01/20/content_4802836.htm

¹³ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/17/c_136903305.htm

¹⁴ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/16/c_136900476.htm

Constitution, according to a communique issued after the second plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee held in Beijing on 16 and 17 January.

A proposal from the CPC Central Committee on the revision was adopted at the meeting. New achievements, experiences and requirements of the development of the Party and nation should be embodied in the revised Constitution, according to the communique. "We should keep pace with the times and improve the Constitution while maintaining its consistency, stability and authority," the document said.¹⁵

- **China to continue playing constructive role in implementing Iran nuclear deal**

China will continue playing a constructive role in maintaining and implementing the Iran nuclear deal, said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Saturday 13 January. Wang, who was on an official visit in Rwanda, held a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif. The two sides exchanged opinions on a statement regarding to the Iran nuclear deal made by the United States.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday he will extend sanctions relief on Iran under the 2015 nuclear deal for the last time, threatening a U.S. withdrawal from the landmark pact unless U.S. Congress and European allies can fix the alleged "disastrous flaws." Calling it "a last chance," Trump said in a White House statement that his country "will not again waive sanctions in order to stay in the Iran nuclear deal."¹⁶

East Asia /South-East Asia

Korean Peninsula and Japan

(Dr. John Jojin)

- **Seoul and Pyongyang agreed to march together at the opening ceremony of the PyeongChang Winter Olympics**

On January 17, 2018, South Korea and North Korea agreed to march together at the opening ceremony of the PyeongChang Winter Olympics under a white "unification flag" showing the Korean Peninsula in blue. The two Koreas also agreed to field a united women's ice hockey team. North Korea will send a delegation of about 550, including 230 cheerleaders, 140 artists and 30 taekwondo players for a demonstration. The agreement was reached in the latest inter-Korean talks at the Panmunjeom Truce Village to discuss details of the North's

¹⁵ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/19/c_136909152.htm

¹⁶ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/13/c_136893506.htm

participation in the Olympics. The two Koreas also agreed to hold a joint cultural event at Mount. Kumgang in the North Korea before the opening ceremony and to conduct a joint training among ski athletes at Masikryong Ski Resort in the North.¹⁷

- **South Korea's People's Party and Bareun Party agrees to merge**

On January 19, 2018, the leaders of minor opposition political party leaders of South Korea Ahn Cheol-soo of People's Party and Yoo Seong-min Bareun Party announced their decision to merge the two parties at a meeting in the National Assembly. Ahn has been striving to bring together the two parties; sometimes dubbed "rational liberals" and "reform-minded conservatives," to counterbalance the two major political forces of the ruling Democratic Party and the main opposition Liberty Korea Party, which together hold nearly 240 seats in the 299-member parliament.¹⁸

- **Sanctions pressure on North Korea must be maintained: Vancouver Foreign Ministers Meeting**

On January 16, 2018 at meeting on North Korea in Vancouver co-chaired by the United States and Canada attended by Foreign Ministers and senior officials from 20 countries agreed to maintain sanction pressure on North Korea to force it to abandon its nuclear weapons program and urged that the world should not be fooled by Pyongyang's current charm offensive in engaging South Korea. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said during the meeting that "we must increase the costs of the regime's behavior to the point that North Korea must come to the table for credible negotiations." Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono said the world should not be naive about North Korea's "charm offensive" in engaging in talks with South Korea ahead of next month's Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. "It is not the time to ease pressure or to reward North Korea," he said. "The fact that North Korea is engaging in dialogue could be interpreted as proof that the sanctions are working."¹⁹

- **Japanese Foreign Minister Kono tells South Korea: Abide by 'comfort women' agreement**

On January 17, 2018 Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said that South Korea's new policy concerning "comfort women" is "totally unacceptable" and called on Seoul to honor an agreement signed between the Seoul and Tokyo in 2015 that was supposed to have resolved the issue. According to Japanese sources Kono and his South Korean counterpart, Kang Kyung-wha, however, found some common

¹⁷ "Two Koreas to march together at Olympics opening ceremony; field united ice hockey team", The Korea Times, January 17, 2018, www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/01/356_242637.html

¹⁸ "Ahn and Yoo announce decision to merge", The Korea JoongAng Daily, January 19, 2018, www.koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3043482

¹⁹ "US-led meeting says sanctions pressure on North Korea must be maintained", The Nikkei Asia Review, January 17, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/Policy-Politics/US-led-meeting-says-sanctions-pressure-on-North-Korea-must-be-maintained>

ground in trying to “properly manage the prickly issue” and “building future-oriented bilateral relations”. On January 9, 2018 South Korean government announced that it will not seek to renegotiate the 2015 agreement reached between Tokyo and Seoul that “irreversibly” resolves the issue of comfort women, who were forced to provide sex to Japanese troops before and during World War II.²⁰

- **Japan’s Democratic Party and Kibo no To (Hope) agrees to form alliance**

On January 15 , 2017, the Democratic Party and Kibo no To (Hope) reached an agreement that could form the largest opposition force in the Diet. If the agreement is carried out, the new parliamentary group would overtake the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), which emerged as the main opposition party in the Lower House election in October.²¹

(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)

(Dr. Temjenmeren Ao)

- **Philippine to move from a Unitary to a Federal System of Government**

Philippine lawmakers on January 16, began formal proceedings on changing the government into a federal system. According to the House of Representatives constitutional amendments committee chairman, Mr Roger Mercado, the proposed shift from a unitary system would give the next president two five-year terms and strong federal powers over a nation that would be divided into five federal states. Further, he also adds that although the proposed charter calls for a federal, parliamentary system with the prime minister as head of government, the president would have oversight power over all branches of government including Parliament and the courts. Under the proposed draft President Duterte, whose single six-year term 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. President Duterte has been pressing the charter-change effort, and wants the new Constitution ratified in a vote by May 2019 with Mr Mercado pushing his committee's version to be adopted. The president says giving more power to the regions will answer the demand by the country's rebellious Muslim minority for more self-rule by creating a federal autonomous state for them. But critics charge

²⁰ "Kono tells South Korea: Abide by 'comfort women' agreement", The Asahi Shimbun, January 17, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201801170057.html

²¹ "2 parties agree on opposition alliance, but members protest", The Asahi Shimbun, January 16, 2018, www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201801160049.html

that the switch is unnecessary and fear that it will weaken the current Constitution's safeguards against dictatorship.²²

- **Indonesia's new Air Force chief to prioritise procurement of jet fighters**

Indonesia's newly sworn-in Air Force chief of staff Air Marshall Yuyu Sutisna has said he would make the procurement of Russian-made Sukhoi SU-35 jet fighters and radar top of the list of the first priority programmes. The Indonesian Military (TNI) had announced the planned acquisition of the 11 Russian-made Sukhoi Su-35 Flanker jet fighters last year. Russia has pledged to buy Indonesian commodities for half of the value of the contract, which was worth some US\$1.14 billion (S\$1.4 billion), and provide a transfer-of-technology worth another 35 per cent. Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu stated last week that the contract documents have been ready since early January and the signing would take place in Jakarta in the near future. The Flanker deal is the first major arms deal during the presidency of Joko Widodo to adhere to the 2012 Defence Industry Law, which requires every foreign arms purchase to include a combined deal of 85 per cent of counter-trade, local content and offset. The local content is set at a minimum of 35 per cent.²³

- **Thailand introduces tax incentives to encourage more babies**

The Thai government will be introducing tax incentives to encourage families to have more children as the country is becoming an ageing society. According to Nathaporn Chatusripitak, advisor to the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, stated that the Cabinet has approved the Finance Ministry's proposal to allow households to deduct 60,000 baht (US\$1,876) from their taxable income this year for their second legitimate child. The government will also allow families to deduct expenses of up to 60,000 baht on birth delivery or prenatal care from their taxable income. Nathaporn said that the tax measures are expected to cope with Thailand en route to become an ageing society in 2036 when the elderly would form 30 per cent of its population. The Cabinet also endorsed a tax incentive for operators setting up day care centres for employees' children at their workplaces. Operators can deduct their day care centre's expense worth up to one million baht from their taxable corporate income.²⁴

²² "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.

²³ "Indonesia's new Air Force chief to prioritise procurement of jet fighters", *The Straits Times*, January 17, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesias-new-air-force-chief-to-prioritise-procurement-of-jet-fighters>, accessed on January 20, 2018.

²⁴ "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.

- **Malaysia and Singapore to stop Confrontational Diplomacy and proceed with projects on connectivity**

At a joint press conference at the 8th Singapore-Malaysia leaders retreat in Singapore held on January 16, 2018, Malaysian PM Najib stated that “We certainly don’t want to return to the era of confrontational diplomacy and barb rhetoric between the two countries... It was an era that we want to forget; we certainly don’t want to come back to that era...” Mr Najib also stated that despite any change that may come in the political environment in the aftermath of the Malaysian general elections, the Rapid Transit System (RTS) and High-Speed Rail (HSR) between Malaysia and Singapore would continue which is scheduled to get completed by 2024 and 2026 respectively. PM Lee, in his response, said all projects which involved more than one country and spanned more than one term of a government “requires long-term commitment....The commitment is formalised, and the agreements which we signed between the two governments today are a binding agreement and whoever the government is on either side, well, this is the agreement which they have to inherit and which they are a party to...(But) I don’t have any doubt on the Singapore side (that) we have every intention to implement what we signed and what we committed to today,” he said.²⁵

- **PM of Cambodia states no elections to take place amidst chaos**

Prime Minister Hun Sen issued an oblique warning in a speech to garment workers on January 17, stating that no elections would take place in a “chaotic country” – an apparent reference to the protests foreshadowed by the newly announced Cambodia National Rescue Movement. Hun Sen said Cambodia had earned peace with great difficulty and thus, will not permit anyone to destroy it. Earlier this week, former CNRP leaders Sam Rainsy and Mu Sochua announced the creation of the Cambodia National Rescue Movement as a mechanism for organising protests against the current political situation. In November 2017, the Supreme Court summarily disbanded the Cambodia National Rescue Party – the long ruling Cambodian People’s Party only legitimate competitor – accusing it of fomenting “revolution”. The CNRP’s president, Kem Sokha, was arrested on widely decried charges of “treason” in September.²⁶

²⁵“No more confrontational diplomacy, says Najib of ties with Singapore”, *Borneo Bulletin*, January 17, 2018, <http://borneobulletin.com.bn/no-more-confrontational-diplomacy-says-najib-of-ties-with-singapore/>, accessed on January 18, 2018.

²⁶ Ben Sokhean and Andrew Nachemson, “After Rainsy calls for future protests, Hun Sen says elections will not take place amidst ‘chaos’”, *The Phnompenh Post*, January 18, 2018, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-politics/after-rainsy-calls-future-protests-hun-sen-says-elections-will-not-take-place>, accessed on January 22, 2018.

Myanmar

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- **Myanmar to accept 150 refugees daily: minister**

Myanmar will accept back some 150 refugees per day from Bangladesh when the repatriation process begins next week, Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population U Thein Swe told The Myanmar Times. “We’ve said that 150 [people] will be accepted per day, five days a week,” the minister said. Bangladesh and Myanmar estimated it will take two years to repatriate over 650,000 refugees who fled to Bangladesh after violence in northern Rakhine erupted in August last year.²⁷

- **ARSA terrorists say Myanmar refugee return plan ‘deceitful’**

Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) has hit out at a repatriation plan for refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar set to begin this week, saying it aims to trap the Muslim minority in long-term camps while their ancestral lands are seized. Bangladesh and Myanmar have agreed to send back around 750,000 refugees who arrived since October 2016 over the next two years, a process set to begin soon.²⁸

- **Record Narcotics Haul in Shan State**

Myanmar’s Minister of Home Affairs reported a record haul of narcotics from northern Shan State’s Kutkai Township. Seizure of more than 12 kilos of heroin and 4,000 methamphetamine tablets from two men at a tollgate at the exit of Hseni Township, by the Lashio police force’s anti-drug department, led to the record of 72.8 billion kyats worth of confiscated drugs²⁹.

- **Thailand, Myanmar in border operation**

Thailand and Myanmar have launched a joint border patrol along the Moei River aimed at preventing the smuggling of drugs, labourers, military-grade weapons and other illegal activities. Taking part in the joint patrols on the Thai side are soldiers from the Mae Sot-based 14th Infantry Regiment and 35th Ranger Regiment and Tha Song Yang-based provincial and border patrol police. Patrolmen on the Myanmar side are from the 28th Battalion of the 22nd Division and a Karen border guard force (BGF)³⁰.

²⁷Myanmar to accept 150 refugees daily: minister, 18 January 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/myanmar-accept-150-refugees-daily-minister.html>

²⁸ARSA terrorists say Myanmar refugee return plan ‘deceitful’, 22 January 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic-regional/arsa-terrorists-say-myanmar-refugee-return-plan-%E2%80%98deceitful%E2%80%99>

²⁹Record Narcotics Haul in Shan State, 19 January 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/record-narcotics-haul-shan-state.html>

³⁰Thailand, Myanmar in border operation, 22nd January 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/thailand-myanmar-border-operation.html>

- **Expert urges government to allow independent observers more access to Rakhine**

The leader of international experts of the Rakhine Advisory Team urged Myanmar to give full access to independent observers who have a good understanding of the complexity of the local situation in the troubled northern Rakhine State in order to put into proper context the ongoing crisis. Surakiart Sathirathai, the leader of international experts in the Rakhine Advisory Team, said the international observers that would be given full access in northern Rakhine might be able to mitigate the criticisms from the international community.³¹

- **Myanmar reaches naval agreement with Russia**

An intergovernmental agreement on simplified procedure for calls of warships to the ports of Russia and Myanmar was reached on Saturday after talks between Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, The Maritime Executive reported on 21 January. The agreement was part of moves to extend military cooperation between the two nations, and Shoigu says the nations are ready to implement a large-scale bilateral military cooperation plan.³²

North America

(Dr. Stuti Banerjee)

Canada

- **At Davos, Justin Trudeau will focus on trade, Trump, NAFTA ... and gender equality**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will be among the headliners when 3,000 of the world's elite business leaders, activists and politicians gather for the annual invite-only World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. As Trudeau flies to Switzerland on Monday, Canadian, American and Mexican negotiating teams will be setting up shop in Montreal for the seventh round of NAFTA negotiations, a round which opens up amid increasing expectations that U.S. President Donald Trump will pull his country out of NAFTA. While in Davos, Trudeau will host a "Canada-US economic round table" discussion with business leaders that will

³¹ Expert urges government to allow independent observers more access to Rakhine, 19 January 2018, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/expert-urges-government-allow-independent-observers-more-access-rakhine.html>

³² Myanmar reaches naval agreement with Russia, 22 January 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/myanmar-reaches-naval-agreement-russia>

emphasize the ties between the two countries. And Trudeau will cap off his week overseas by hosting a reception where he and the four cabinet ministers accompanying him will promote new investment in Canada by touting Canadian innovation.³³

- **In Tokyo meeting, officials seek to forge ahead with TPP — even as Canada wavers**

As trade officials gather in Tokyo this week to try and forge ahead with a trade pact that U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned last year, the new 11-member club risks getting bogged down by resistance from Canada. The member countries of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTTP), also known as TPP 11, reached a basic agreement on the pact in November. But Canada is holding out to secure protection of its cultural industries, like movies, TV, and music, and has said it will not be rushed into signing a deal that other members hope to conclude by March 2018. That is casting a shadow over a meeting of trade officials from member countries this week in Tokyo and is raising questions about the economic benefits of a pact that doesn't bring Canada into the fold.³⁴

- **Justin Trudeau won't compromise Canadian values for seat on UN Security Council**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says he is not willing to compromise Canadian values and principles just to get the country a seat at the UN Security Council. In an interview with The Canadian Press, Trudeau insisted that landing the seat was not so much a "goal" but rather a way to "continue having a positive impact in the world." Trudeau also said Canada's abstention from a UN vote on U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital was about staying above "political games" aimed at isolating Israel. Trudeau reiterated that Canada won't move its diplomatic corps from Tel Aviv. He said Canada is engaged in a "thoughtful and responsible manner" to demonstrate ways to advance the debate in a constructive manner.³⁵

- **Trump's National Security Strategy: What Does it Mean for Canada?**

Not only will the strategy challenge Canada's approach to NAFTA renegotiations, but it also has the potential to cause unnecessary economic instability for other allied countries and prevent supply chains actively seeking to promote sustainable

³³ David Akin, "At Davos, Justin Trudeau will focus on trade, Trump, NAFTA ... and gender equality," <https://globalnews.ca/news/3978318/justin-trudeau-world-economic-forum-preview/>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

³⁴ Reuters, "In Tokyo meeting, officials seek to forge ahead with TPP — even as Canada wavers," <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/21/in-tokyo-meeting-officials-seek-to-forge-ahead-with-tpp--even-as-canada-wavers.html>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

³⁵ Melanie Marquis, "Justin Trudeau won't compromise Canadian values for seat on UN Security Council," <https://globalnews.ca/news/3968957/justin-trudeau-canada-bid-un-security-council/>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

practices from flourishing. These issues stem from the priority action focusing on “Counter[ing] unfair trade practices,” which states the US will “counter all unfair trade practices that distort markets using all appropriate means, from dialogue to enforcement tools.” It’s clearly a broad statement, but what exactly do the means of dialogue and enforcement tools mean?³⁶

The United States

- **Shutdown to enter a third day as Senate plans to vote Monday after failing to reach deal**

The U.S. government shutdown will go into a third day, as the Senate failed to strike a deal to break an impasse before the work week starts in Washington. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell will move to advance a stopgap spending bill. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer objected as Democrats still had not seen enough progress in talks on issues like immigration to move forward. The stalemate will now last through the start of business Monday, when the effects of the government funding lapse will be felt more heavily. Just under a million federal workers would not go into work if the shutdown persists, while financial markets would have their first chance to react to the dysfunction in Washington. Issues including immigration, health care, disaster relief and military spending have tripped up talks on a longer-term budget. To get behind the bill, Democrats appear to want an assurance that McConnell will put a bipartisan immigration bill up for a vote, with or without Trump's blessing. Schumer has repeatedly expressed frustration about nailing down Trump's demands for an immigration deal that would protect hundreds of thousands of young undocumented immigrants from deportation.³⁷

- **A year of Trump's 'America First' agenda has radically changed the U.S. role in the world**

From the opening moments of his presidency, Donald Trump set forth a radically altered vision for the United States and its dealings with the rest of the world — one he dubbed “America first.” Supporters say he has delivered: a military defeat of the Islamic State, greater spending by U.S. allies on defense and a commitment to transform or abandon international agreements such as NAFTA, the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris climate accord. But the “America first” approach has also left the United States far more isolated. The overall impact of the policy, say diplomats, politicians and analysts interviewed around the world, has been a clear retrenchment of U.S. power — and an opportunity for U.S. adversaries such as China and Russia. The American role in the world has been diminishing for years

³⁶ Kumail Janmohamed, “Trump’s National Security Strategy: What Does it Mean for Canada?,” <https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/01/20/trump-s-national-security-strategy-what-does-it-mean-for-canada/>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

³⁷ Jacob Pramuk, “Shutdown to enter a third day as Senate plans to vote Monday after failing to reach deal,” <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/21/government-shutdown-news-congress-trump-appear-to-make-progress.html>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

as other countries have expanded their economies, militaries and ambitions. Foreign-policy players, however, say they see something different now: a disorderly U.S. transformation from a global leader working with partners to try to shape the world to an inwardly focused superpower that defines its international role more narrowly. The Trump administration has emphasized counterterrorism and American economic advantage in its foreign policy, while downgrading such traditional U.S. priorities as promoting human rights, democracy and international development.³⁸

- **Mattis: US national security focus no longer terrorism**

US Defence Secretary James Mattis has said competition between great powers, not terrorism, is now the main focus of America's national security. The US faced "growing threats from revisionist powers as different as China and Russia", he said, unveiling the national defence strategy. In an apparent reference to Russia, he warned against "threaten[ing] America's experiment in democracy". Speaking in Washington, Mr Mattis also appealed to Congress to fund the military adequately and refrain from "indiscriminate and automatic cuts" to the US federal budget. US President Donald Trump is seeking to boost defence spending by 10 per cent, or \$54 billion, in his proposed budget plan for this year, and hopes to recoup that sum through deep cuts elsewhere, including to foreign aid.³⁹

- **Tillerson vows to continue sanctions campaign against N. Korea**

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that North Korea will continue to face sanctions until it takes "decisive steps" to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Tillerson was speaking at a foreign ministers' meeting in Vancouver, Canada, that focused on addressing the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The meeting brought together foreign ministers from 20 nations, including South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono and their counterparts from countries that fought alongside the South in the 1950-53 Korean War. It was co-hosted by Tillerson and Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland. The gathering came against the backdrop of resumed dialogue between South and North Korea following months of heightened tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile provocations. While many have welcomed the inter-Korean talks as the first step to easing tensions, critics are skeptical they will lead to a change in North Korea's behavior. They

³⁸ Griff Witte and Michael Birnbaum, "A year of Trump's 'America First' agenda has radically changed the U.S. role in the world," <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-trump-america-first-agenda-20180121-story.html>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

³⁹ BBC, "US national security focus no longer terrorism, says US Defence Secretary James Mattis," <http://www.financialexpress.com/world-news/us-national-security-focus-no-longer-terrorism-says-us-defence-secretary-james-mattis/1022744/>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

suspect the North is using the talks as a means to gain concessions and weaken the international sanctions regime.⁴⁰

- **Tillerson seeks UK, French support for new penalties against Iran**

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is seeking British and French support for tough new penalties against Iran and preventing a US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. Tillerson began a nearly weeklong trip to Europe. The State Department said he is conducting foreign relations that are essential to national security. Earlier this month, Trump pledged to stop waiving US sanctions unless the Europeans agreed to strengthen its terms by consenting to a side deal that would effectively eliminate provisions that allow Iran to gradually resume some advanced atomic work. Trump also wants tighter restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile program. Iran has rejected any renegotiation. Britain, France and the other European party to the accord, Germany, have expressed some willingness to work with the US over the issue. A US withdrawal probably would scrap the agreement, a chief foreign policy achievement for President Barack Obama, by reimposing a broad range of sanctions that isolate Iran from the international financial system. Iran has said it will no longer be bound by the terms of the deal if that happens.⁴¹

Mexico

- **Mexico's leftwing frontrunner laughs off Russia jibes and says: I'm no Moscow stooge**

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a populist former mayor of Mexico City, has become the focus of escalating – if unsubstantiated – allegations of Russian interference in the 1 July election. In December, the US national security adviser HR McMaster said there had been “initial signs” of Russian meddling in Mexico. He offered no details, but the ruling PRI has made such claims a central plank of its campaign against López Obrador, popularly known as Amlo. According to western officials, Russia has used hackers, bots and fake news to influence campaigns from the US presidential election to the Brexit referendum and Catalonia's independence vote. And as the presidential election draws closer, similar suspicions have been voiced in Mexico – though evidence remains elusive. The Washington Post and Bloomberg have both run recent opinion columns arguing that a victory for Amlo would benefit Moscow. Such comments have been seized upon by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). But the suggestion that López Obrador is a Trojan horse for a foreign power has also brought back memories of the country's contentious 2006 election, in which Amlo was ahead in

⁴⁰ ----, “Tillerson vows to continue sanctions campaign against N. Korea,” <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2018/01/17/0301000000AEN20180117000300315.html>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

⁴¹ AP, “Tillerson seeks UK, French support for new penalties against Iran,” <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1230331/world>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

the polls until attack ads compared him with the late Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chávez; Amlo's support cratered and he lost by less than a percentage point.⁴²

- **Vowing anti-graft revolution, Mexican governor shakes election**

The governor of border state Chihuahua is shaking up Mexico's presidential election, without being in the race. Governor Javier Corral's national profile exploded in late December when his prosecutors arrested a senior figure in President Enrique Peña Nieto's party for his role in an alleged scheme to siphon \$13 million of state funds for electoral campaigns. The election financing irregularities his government is probing in Chihuahua, where five people have been jailed for political corruption under his predecessor, should now be investigated in other states. A member of the opposition National Action Party, Corral says none of this is linked to the July 1 election. But his actions are widely seen as benefiting Ricardo Anaya, the party's candidate in coalition with a center party. When the federal government withheld some \$36 million in federal financing to Chihuahua after the arrest of PRI operative Alejandro Gutierrez last month, Corral broke with Mexican political etiquette by vocally accusing Peña Nieto's administration of using the budget as a weapon to control unruly states. The federal government says funds were cut to Chihuahua for budgetary and technical reasons, not as revenge, and Peña Nieto has criticized Corral for politicizing the matter.⁴³

- **Mexico leftist leads presidency race, PRI hopeful struggles: poll**

The leftist front-runner for Mexico's presidency has retained his lead ahead of this year's election while the ruling party hopeful failed to gain traction during the festive season and slipped back slightly. Former Mexico City mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) had 23.6 percent support in a survey by polling firm Mitofsky for newspaper El Economista, up 0.6 percentage points from a December poll. Jose Antonio Meade, who is seeking the nomination of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for the July election, trailed in third place at 18.2 percent, down 1.2 percentage points from the Mitofsky poll in Dec. 2018. Meade's lackluster polling figures could aggravate grumblings among party members that the former finance minister - who is not a PRI member - is failing to energize the campaign, and cannot take his nomination for granted. The PRI is due to formally elect its candidate on Feb. 18.⁴⁴

⁴² David Agren, "Mexico's leftwing frontrunner laughs off Russia jibes and says: I'm no Moscow stooge," Accessed on 22 January 2018.

⁴³ Frank Jack Daniel, "Vowing anti-graft revolution, Mexican governor shakes election," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-election-coral/vowing-anti-graft-revolution-mexican-governor-shakes-election-idUSKBN1F912F>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

⁴⁴ Daina Beth Solomon, "Mexico leftist leads presidency race, PRI hopeful struggles: poll," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-election-poll/mexico-leftist-leads-presidency-race-pri-hopeful-struggles-poll-idUSKBN1F61RH>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

- **Far from home, Mexican migrants eager to influence presidential race**

Seven times as many Mexicans in the United States have received voting credentials under new rules that let citizens sign up at local consulates rather than in Mexico, compared with the last presidential election six years ago. Many are first time voters. Mexico's National Electoral Institute (INE) says it has already approved more than 460,000 credentials for voters abroad, and is processing thousands more applications, ahead of a March 31 deadline to register. Most Mexican political parties have been staying quiet in the United States, restricted from campaigning abroad under INE rules although news and social media flow across borders. Some Mexican politicians are recognizing the burgeoning influence of voters far from home.⁴⁵

Russia

(Dr. Indrani Talukdar)

- **Russia and India**

On 16 January, India for the first time took part in a meeting of the international military cooperation departments of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) since joining the bloc last year. An Indian delegation led by Major General Ajay Seth participated in the meeting, which discussed issues of practical cooperation among SCO nations.

After Qatar and Australia, India has got Russia to lower price of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to be imported from May that will help save millions of dollars in import bill. State gas utility GAIL India Ltd has convinced Russia's Gazprom to lower price of gas under a 20-year deal as well as defer delivery of some of the quantities by 3-4 years. Exact price changes were not immediately known. Gazprom will supply LNG from Yamal LNG project in the Arctic peninsula, adding that supplies have been delayed due to weak demand at home.

On 18 January, Russian Konstantin Kosachev, head of Russia's senate committee on foreign relations, told ET that Russia will not be jealous of India's growing ties with the US. At the same time said that India should not be jealous of Russia's growing ties with China either. Kosachev said in an exclusive interview that Russia is helping address differences between India and China, and suggested that if India has objection to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), countries (probable reference to China) should be flexible and cautious to address that. "India is today a global player and understandably a centre of attraction. Indo-Russian ties are working well enough. Having said that expanding US sanctions on Russia can

⁴⁵ Daina Beth Solomon, Lizbeth Diaz, "Far from home, Mexican migrants eager to influence presidential race," <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-election-usa/far-from-home-mexican-migrants-eager-to-influence-presidential-race-idUSKBN1F81GD>, Accessed on 22 January 2018.

impact Indo-Russian defence partnership. Russia is hopeful that India, like Germany, France, Italy and Austria, would make some public mention against US sanctions," Kosachev said.

- **Russia and Ukraine**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on 11 January said that Russia is not interested in seeing the situation in Donbass degenerating into a frozen conflict. He expects that Russian-Ukrainian relations will improve after the settlement in the southeast of Ukraine. He said that "As for prospects for the settlement in Donbass, this is acquiring the nature of a frozen conflict; nobody is interested in this, including Russia. We would like to see the situation settled". He said the Russian-Ukrainian relations see "an absolutely abnormal situation in which the two close, fraternal countries, the parts of practically the same people, are facing the developments we are witnessing now instead of a constructive development of ties".

- **Russia and Canada on North Korea**

On 12 January, during a conference in Canada on the North Korea crisis, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that must help defuse tensions on the Korean peninsula. In this conference, both the countries were not invited. Canada and the US co-hosted foreign ministers from more than a dozen countries in Vancouver on January 15-17 with the goal of strengthening diplomatic efforts toward denuclearizing the Korean peninsula.

- **Russia and Afghanistan**

On 19 January, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Northern Afghanistan is turning into a main base for international terrorism with the Afghan wing of the Islamic State in the lead as surviving jihadists are fleeing from Syria to Central Asia, including Northern Afghanistan. According to him, drug production in Afghanistan, which saw an unprecedented growth last year, is fuelling international terrorism. Mr. Lavrov said that Russia will continue to help Kabul train national civil and law enforcement personnel and strengthen combat effectiveness of the Afghan armed forces. According to him, ensuring sustainable socio-economic development in Afghanistan is a major factor of stabilization in that country. "The Eurasian Economic Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States may make their contribution to the common efforts by means of opening a big promising market for Afghanistan," he noted. Russia "is open for multilateral cooperation on the implementation of large-scale economic and infrastructure projects," such as the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan, India) gas pipeline project and the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) energy bridge.

- **Russia and US**

In an interview with Russian daily Kommersant on 22 January, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that US President Donald Trump is forced to make anti-Russian decisions under the pressure of his national political opponents, however, judging by personal meetings, he is not refusing his pre-election pledges to restore relations with Moscow. The Russian foreign minister said the current stance of the United States in regard to Russia was the result of three factors, which are the defeat of Hillary Clinton at the presidential election, the non-system character of Donald Trump and the need to explain why not everything goes well for the United States on the international arena. Trump is forced into making anti-Russian decisions under such conditions, according to Lavrov.

On 13 January, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that a new round of sanctions likely to be imposed on Moscow by Washington will be an obvious attempt to disrupt Russian internal affairs ahead of the presidential elections. The sanctions are expected to follow the presentation of two Trump administration reports in Congress at end of January. The reports are the latest step in the implementation of the 'Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act' signed by US President Donald Trump last August. Sanctions imposed at that time targeted a range of entities and individuals – namely Russian weapon manufacturers, banks and the energy sector, as well as those the US accuses of meddling with the 2016 presidential elections.

During his annual press conference at Moscow, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov sharply criticized the US for being a destabilizing force in the world, saying Washington was provoking North Korea into a military confrontation and attempting to derail the Iran nuclear agreement. He said that despite the Kremlin's attempts to rebuild bilateral relations with Washington, the US continues to push an anti-Russia agenda aimed at undermining Moscow's emergence as a global power in a multipolar world. He added that the US needs to face the difficult reality that it is no longer the world's only superpower and adapt to an increasingly multipolar world. On Iran's nuclear deal, Mr. Lavrov warned Washington from backing out of it. He said that changes to Iran's nuclear agreement with the US could have broader negative effects, namely on North Korea, which could view Iran's experience as a cautionary tale with implications for its own approach to the West. On further imposition of sanctions on Russia by the US, he believed the sanctions on Russia were aimed more at boosting American's position in the gas sector as well as at preventing Russia from securing a foothold in international weapons sales.

The US has confirmed it is helping Syrian Kurdish fighters set up a border force of 30,000 personnel. The troops will patrol the borders of territory carved out of northern Syria by the Syrian Democratic Forces, which are mainly composed of Kurdish YPG fighters. The move has angered Russia, which still has troops in Syria, as well as NATO-member Turkey, which considers the YPG a terrorist group.

On 20 January, Russia's Defense Ministry said that under an invented pretext, the US has first suspended and now stopped destructing own chemical weapons. A senior State Department official said that Russia has allegedly "used every opportunity at its disposal to protect the Assad regime in its continued use of chemical weapons."

South Asia

Afghanistan

(Dr. Smita Tiwary)

- **Taliban chief sends delegation to Islamabad to explore ways for peace talks**

The Taliban supreme leader Mullah Hebatullah has reportedly approved the visit of a Taliban delegation to Islamabad for preliminary talks on exploring ways to revive peace talks. The Pakistani officials have said the Taliban group is not prepared to hold talks with the government. Pakistani officials privy of the development have confirmed to *Dawn News* that a delegation of the Taliban including Shababuddin Dilawar and Malawi Rasool, came from Qatar to explore prospects of resuming talks. The officials have also added that Islamabad has proposed to the Taliban delegation to hold direct talks with the Afghan government which has been turned down by the group, though they want to negotiate with the US through Qatar office.⁴⁶

- **Uzbekistan to Host Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan**

Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov said the aim of the multilateral meeting was to agree to basic principles for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have come forward with a joint initiative to hold an international ministerial conference titled "Afghanistan – path to a peaceful future" in Tashkent in late March 2018. According to the Uzbekistan news agency, Kamilov said peace in Afghanistan will bring tangible benefits to all countries of the Eurasian continent - promoting the construction of roads and railways, laying of pipelines, and developing regional and trans-regional trade in all directions. The Tashkent meeting would become a logical continuation of the second meeting of the "Kabul Process", scheduled for late February, and consolidate the results

⁴⁶ "Taliban chief sends delegation to Islamabad to explore ways for peace talks", *Khaama Press*, 18 January 2018. <https://www.khaama.com/taliban-chief-sends-delegation-to-islamabad-to-explore-ways-for-peace-talks-04291> accessed on 19 January 2017.

achieved within the framework of the common international efforts at various levels.⁴⁷

- **Ghani urges UNSC for actions against supporters of terrorists after**

Kabul attack

The Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani urged to step up fight against the terrorist groups without any distinction and in line with the consensus achieved during the visit of the United Nations Security Council members in Kabul. President Ghani in reaction to the coordinated attack on Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul said the members of the UN Security Council during visit to Kabul agreed to increase pressures on supporters of the terror groups. He said strict measures are needed to counter-terrorism without any distinction and in line with the UNSC consensus considering the Kabul attack and other terrorist attacks. This comes as a group of insurgents launched a coordinated attack on Kabul Intercontinental Hotel late on Saturday night, sparking clashes that continued for almost 15 hours. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid in a statement claimed that the attack was carried out by a group of at least five insurgents who stormed into the hotel and managed to resist the security forces for almost 14 hours. Mujahid also claimed that several people were killed in the attack including the foreigners, accusing all the victims of the attack as invaders.⁴⁸

(Dr. Nihar Ranjan Das)

- **Pakistan 'Impeding' Afghan Peace Process: HPC Official**

Two days after unofficial peace talks between government officials and Taliban members in Turkey, the High Peace Council said the group has not officially given the go-ahead to hold formal negotiations. "Unfortunately, Taliban has not given an official response to the joint call of the nation for starting real negotiations," the head of High Peace Council secretariat Mohammad Akram Khpulwak said. "Some factors which are impeding the peace efforts (in Afghanistan) are (because of) the interference by some countries who are not in favor of peace in Afghanistan, the clear interference of Pakistan in this respect, the interference of drug smugglers and activities of terrorist networks," Khpulwak told a gathering on January 16.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Uzbekistan to Host Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, 22 January 2018. http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19992 accessed on 22 January 2018.

⁴⁸ "Ghani urges UNSC for actions against supporters of terrorists after Kabul attack", *Khaama Press*, 21 January 2018. <https://www.khaama.com/ghani-urges-uns-against-supporters-of-terrorists-after-kabul-attack-04312> accessed on 22 January 2018.

⁴⁹ "Pakistan 'Impeding' Afghan Peace Process: HPC Official", *Tolo News*, January 16, 2018, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/pakistan-impeding-afghan-peace-process-hpc-official> (accessed on January 22)

- **Refugees return prerequisite to deny safe havens to Afghan militants: Iqbal**

The Minister of Interior of Pakistan Ahsan Iqbal has also said that the return of Afghan refugees is prerequisite to deny safe havens to the Afghan militants. Iqbal told reporters that around three million refugees still reside in Pakistan emphasizing that no one should expect that the country would be able to certify those involved in the cross-border terrorist activities.

According to Iqbal, Pakistan could only guarantee having no terrorists on its soil when all refugees return to their homeland.⁵⁰

- **New IEC Commissioner's Credentials Queried**

The higher education ministry said on Saturday (January 20) it has started reviewing the new Independent Election Commission (IEC) member's credentials. This comes after reports surfaced that the new commissioner, Sayed Hafizullah Hashemi, has fake education certificates. The Ministry of Higher Education's (MoHE) spokeswoman Arifa Paikar said they have sent letters to the universities in the United States to verify Hashemi's claims that he graduated there. She said a letter has also been sent to the Afghan embassy in the US requesting their assistance to gather information on the issue.⁵¹

- **Taliban Running 'Customs Check-Point' on Nimroz Road**

Taliban militants have established a 'check-point' on a key highway in southwestern Nimroz province charging taxes on goods carrying vehicles, sources said Saturday (January 20). The rebels have been taking money what they call customs duty from vehicles carrying commercial goods on the Zaranj-Dilaram highway, confirmed Farida Hameedi, a lawmaker from Nimroz province. She said the Taliban had established their 'customs check-point' on the Zaranj-Dilaram Road and charged vehicles customs levy.⁵²

⁵⁰ "Refugees return prerequisite to deny safe havens to Afghan militants: Iqbal", *Khaama Press*, January 20, 2018. <https://www.khaama.com/refugees-return-prerequisite-to-deny-safe-havens-to-afghan-militants-iqbal-04302> (accessed on January 22)

⁵¹ "New IEC Commissioner's Credentials Queried", *Tolo News*, January 20, 2018, <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/new-iec-commissioners-credentials-queried> (accessed on January 22)

⁵² "Taliban Running 'Customs Check-Point' on Nimroz Road", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, January 21, 2018, http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19976 (accessed on January 22)

नेपाल

(Dr. Rakesh Kumar Meena)

- राज्यपालों के नाम देने में देरी करने से राष्ट्रीय सभा के चुनाव पर असर पड़ेगा:

सरकार महत्वपूर्ण निर्णयों में देरी के चलते दिनों चार दो सरकार यदि कि कहा ने आयोग चुनाव , है सकता हो परिवर्तन में तिथि की चुनावों के सभा राष्ट्रीय तो है देती नहीं नाम के राज्यपालों में⁵³

- सरकार ने अस्थायी राज्यों के मुख्यालय और राज्यपाल नियुक्त किये:

काफी विवादों के बाद बुधवार को सरकार ने सातों प्रान्तों के अस्थायी मुख्यालय और राज्यपालों की नियुक्ति कर दी है हालाँकि एमाले ने इस कदम का स्वागत नहीं किया दिया संकेत ने एमाले . इसमें पर आधार के जनादेश के संविधान तो बनेगी सरकार जब मैं गठबंधन वाम आगे कि परिवर्तन होगा .⁵⁴

- प्रान्तों के मुख्यालयों को लेकर हिंसा:

सरकार के प्रान्तों के अस्थायी मुख्यालयों के निर्णय के बाद देश में हिंसा और प्रदर्शन शुरू हो गये हैं प्रान्तों लोग सभी ये .है गये हो घायल लोग 25 चलते के हिंसा में जिलों दिपायल और धनकुटा . मुख्यालयों केको बदलने की मांग कर रहे हैं.⁵⁵

- प्रांतीय विधानसभाओं के सदस्यों ने शपथ ग्रहण की:

सातों प्रान्तों की विधानसभाओं के सभी सदस्यों ने रविवार को अपने अपने कार्यालयों की शपथ ग्रहण की हो न चुनाव का सभा प्रांतीय तक जब जायेगा माना स्पीकर को सदस्य वरिष्ठ इसमें . जायेमुख्य बात यह रही कि प्रांत संख्या दो के सदस्यों ने चार भाषाओं ,भोजपुरी ,मैथिली , .की ग्रहण शपथ में हिंदी और नेपाली⁵⁶

⁵³ "Delay in naming guvs may affect NA elections", The Kathmandu Post, 16 January 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-01-16/1>

⁵⁴ "Govt fixes temporary state HQs, Guvs", The Kathmandu Post, 19 January 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-01-18/1>

⁵⁵ "Protest erupt over Provincial centers", The Kathmandu Post, 19 January 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-01-19/1>

⁵⁶ "Provincial Assembly members sworn in", The Kathmandu Post, 23 January 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-01-22/1>

Pakistan

(Dr. Dhruvajyoti Bhattacharjee)

- **US and Pakistan**

The United States on January 15th proposed enhanced intelligence cooperation to Pakistan as their diplomats sat down in an effort to fix their frayed relationship. The two sides looked to be having a consensus on the need to work together for stabilising Afghanistan as US Acting Assistant Secretary of State Alice Wells opened her visit to Islamabad, accompanied by senior officials from the National Security Council. However, at the end of Ms Wells's two days trip, there was little to suggest if they were any closer to finding the elusive common ground except for the broader understanding on the need for working together for peace and stability in Afghanistan.⁵⁷ Wells urged the government of Pakistan to address the continuing presence of the Haqqani network and other terrorist groups within its territory, demanding Islamabad to clear its territory of “externally focused terrorists”.⁵⁸ The US State Department on January 18th renewed its call for Pakistan to arrest and prosecute Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed to the “fullest extent of the law”.⁵⁹

- **China and Pakistan**

Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Sartaj Aziz requested Chinese Ambassador in Islamabad Yao Jing on January 16th to encourage Pakistani products — mainly the eatables — into Chinese markets to contain tilted expansion in bilateral trade and focus on future administration of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) after completion of ongoing projects.⁶⁰

- **Cases Against Hussain Haqqani**

Former ambassador to the US Hussain Haqqani was nominated in FIRs lodged by three people in two police stations of Kohat on January 21st for delivering hate speeches and writing books and articles against armed forces and the sovereignty of Pakistan.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “US moots enhanced intelligence sharing with Pakistan”, *Dawn*, January 16, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383211> accessed on January 22, 2018

⁵⁸ “US renews call for steps against ‘externally focused terrorists’”, *Dawn*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383416/us-renews-call-for-steps-against-externally-focused-terrorists> accessed on January 22, 2018

⁵⁹ “US renews call for Hafiz Saeed’s arrest, prosecution”, *Dawn*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1384052/us-renews-call-for-hafiz-saeeds-arrest-prosecution> accessed on January 22, 2018

⁶⁰ Khaleeq Kiani, “China urged to encourage imports from Pakistan”, *Dawn*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383428> accessed on January 22, 2018

⁶¹ Abdul Sami Paracha, “Ex-envoy booked over hate speeches”, *Dawn*, January 22, 2018, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1384429/ex-envoy-booked-over-hate-speeches?preview> accessed on January 22, 2018

Indian Ocean Region

Sri Lanka

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- **US to grant Rs.183 mn to counter human trafficking in SL**

The US government will grant more than Rs.183 million (\$1.2 million) to counter human trafficking in Sri Lanka during the next three years, the US Embassy said. It said the US State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs would award the new project "Equipping Sri Lanka to Counter Trafficking in Persons (EQUIP)" to the International Labor Organization (ILO) Country Office for Sri Lanka and Maldives.⁶²

- **Parts of an LTTE submarine found in Mullivaikal**

Parts of an LTTE submarine have been found in Mullivaikal in Mullaitivu. Two parts of an LTTE submarine were recovered in the area by the security forces. The security forces believe that while the submarine had been manufactured by the LTTE before the end of the war, it was not likely to have been used. Investigations have been launched into the discovery. Mullivaikal was among the areas where the LTTE fought its final battle before eventually losing to the Army in May 2009.⁶³

- **SL delays implementing pledges to UN: HRW**

The Sri Lankan Government has stalled on its key pledges to provide justice for conflict-related violations and to strengthen human rights protections, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in its 2018 World Report. It said the government took some steps in 2017 to reduce restrictions on speech and assembly, but there was little progress on transitional justice initiatives agreed to at the UN Human Rights Council in 2015⁶⁴.

- **EU, SL discuss unmet expectations of justice in 'emblematic cases'**

The European Union (EU) and Sri Lanka had discussed unmet expectations of justice in the 'emblematic cases' in the country among many other areas of concern during the 21st meeting of the EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission held on 18 January. In a statement, the EU Embassy in Sri Lanka said progress with regard to the

⁶² US to grant Rs.183 mn to counter human trafficking in SL, 20 January 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/-US-to-grant-Rs-mn-to-counter-human-trafficking-in-SL-144303.html>

⁶³ Parts of an LTTE submarine found in Mullivaikal, 20 January 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/01/20/parts-of-an-ltte-submarine-found-in-mullivaikal/>

⁶⁴ SL delays implementing pledges to UN: HRW, 19 January 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/SL-delays-implementing-pledges-to-UN-HRW-144291.html>

enactment of the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance Act, the further release of land and the normalisation of civilian life in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka were also discussed during the meeting. At the meeting, both sides had welcomed the formal restoration of the GSP Plus concession to Sri Lanka, providing duty free access for more than 80% of Sri Lankan exports to the European Union. Sri Lanka said that the restoration of GSP-plus had contributed to a near doubling of export growth.⁶⁵

Maldives

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- **Opposition leader's resorts raided by police and customs**

A key opposition party leader's resorts were raided by police and customs under a court warrant. Jumhooree Party leader Gasim Ibrahim is currently in Germany after fleeing the Maldives on medical leave while serving a three-year jail term after being convicted of bribery. Sun Island Resort was searched under the suspicion that it was illegally in possession of alcohol released by customs to Royal Island and Spa. The warrant permitted a search through documents, physical stocks of alcohol and pork, computer systems and storage devices.⁶⁶

- **Protest held over the actions taken by the government against Villa Group**

A protest was held in Male' over the actions taken by the government against Villa Group. The protestors described the actions of the government as "political attacks". They said that the government wants to silence the opposition. In addition, they said that, going to the resorts and conducting operations at the resorts will damage the tourism industry and this was unprecedented in the history of Maldives.⁶⁷

- **Maldivian insurgents in foreign wars have increased: minister**

Defence minister Adam Shareef on Monday declared that the number of Maldivians traveling to fight in the Syrian civil war has again increased. Speaking at a press conference held at the Coast Guard building in capital Male, Shareef revealed that the number of Maldivians involved in the Syrian civil war has risen to 61 from 49. This is an increase of 12, since the government announced the latest number in 2016.

⁶⁵ EU, SL discuss unmet expectations of justice in 'emblematic cases', 19 January 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/EU-SL-discuss-unmet-expectations-of-justice-in-emblematic-cases--144214.html>

⁶⁶ Opposition leader's resorts raided by police and customs, 18 January 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/opposition-leaders-resorts-raided-by-police-and-customs-135250>

⁶⁷ Protest held over the actions taken by the government against Villa Group, 20 January 2018, <http://miadhu.mv/article/en/9715>

The authorities have detained 68 people who attempted to go to war during this period. The minister stated that they were 59 adults and 9 minors. Shareef clarified that the minors detained were with families travelling to join conflict-ridden areas. He also noted that, of those attempting to go to war, 12 were detained in Turkey, 13 in various other countries and 21 were taken into custody in Male. Based on intelligence information, the people travelling to join the Syrian war were tracked and detained by the integrated effort of Customs, Immigration, Police and the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC).⁶⁸

- **Foreign Minister Addresses OIC Ministerial Meeting on Yemen**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs His Excellency Dr Mohamed Asim addressed on 21st January 2018 the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) at the Extraordinary Meeting held to discuss the situation in Yemen, and in particular the ballistic missiles fired by the Houthi militia towards Riyadh. Minister Asim condemned the offensive actions of the Houthi militia in launching the ballistic missile attack against Saudi Arabia, and expressed the Maldives' solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He stated that the "blatant disregard exercised by the Houthis in undermining the security and sovereignty of a neighbouring State is a grave provocation, which would add no value to the on-going international efforts to reach a political settlement". The Maldives supports the actions of the UN Security Council, and the work of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in finding a solution to the conflict.⁶⁹

West Asia

Turkey

(Dr. Omair Anas)

- **Turkey launches 'Olive Branch Operation' against 'PKK threat in Syria'**⁷⁰

Turkey has begun a land operation against the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which it sees as a terrorist group for its links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), with troops crossing the border in cooperation with Syrian rebel groups.

⁶⁸ Maldivian insurgents in foreign wars have increased: minister, 16 January 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/maldivian-insurgents-in-foreign-wars-have-increased-minister/>

⁶⁹ Foreign Minister Addresses OIC Ministerial Meeting on Yemen, 21 January 2018, <http://www.foreign.gov.mv/index.php/en/mediacentre/news/4317-foreign-minister-addresses-oic-council-of-foreign-ministers-meeting>

⁷⁰ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-launches-major-land-operation-into-ypg-militants-in-syrias-afirin-126031>

“Our units have entered Afrin from two branches at 11:05 a.m. with the Free Syrian Army [FSA]. This means the land operation has begun,” Yıldırım told the editors of news outlets in a meeting in Istanbul.

The “Olive Branch Operation,” which came hours after a major air strike on the YPG on Jan. 20, will consist of four phases to create a safe zone with a depth of 30 kilometers, he added.

Turkey is also supporting the FSA advance with tanks and cross-border artillery fire.

The operation, which came hours after a major air strike on the YPG on Jan. 20, will consist of four phases to create a safe zone with a 30-kilometer depth, he said.

The first phase will be aimed at forming a secure zone on the Turkish borders between Azaz and Afrin, Yıldırım said, adding that following the first phase the “cleaning” would require an even more thorough work and “there was no need to rush.”

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing YPG are not the only groups in the operation area, Yıldırım claimed, pointing to the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) militants who were allowed to leave Raqqa under U.S. watch, referring to a BBC report.

“There are around 8,000 to 10,000 terrorists in Afrin,” Yıldırım said.

“The PKK, the YPG, the PYD are all the same. Changing their names does not change fact they are terror organizations,” President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also said at a public rally in the northwestern province of Bursa on Jan. 21.

Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, who commanded the air operation from the General Staff headquarters in Ankara, went to the southern border province of Hatay on Jan. 21 to inspect units taking part in the Afrin operation.

Eight F-16 fighter jets took off from the Diyarbakır 8th Main Jet Base within 20 minutes at around 12:42 p.m. local time, Doğan News Agency reported. Fighter jets also took off from Konya’s 3rd Main Jet Base. Military sources told daily Hürriyet that FSA units backed by Turkish tanks are advancing on the field and

By the evening of Jan. 20, the military said it had struck almost all of its targets in the area, adding that the 72 fighter jets that took part in the operation had safely returned to their bases.

“Out of the 113 PYD targets, 108 have been destroyed as of 18:30 [15:30 GMT]. All the killed and wounded people, who have been sent to hospitals, are members of terrorist groups,” read the statement from the Turkish General Staff.

The next day, on Jan. 21, the Turkish General Staff said 153 targets were hit in an operation carried out “with respect for Syria’s territorial integrity” and stemming from Turkey’s rights under international law.

The Air Forces also hit the Menagh Military Airbase in northwestern Syria, which the U.S. used for supplying weapons to the YPG.

- **'Operation Olive Branch to create 30-km-deep safe zone'⁷¹**

Operation Olive Branch aims to create 30-kilometer-deep (approx. 19 miles) safe zone in northwestern Afrin region of Syria, Turkish prime minister said Sunday.

"First goal [of the operation] is to create a safe area there and then we can take concrete steps to eliminate terrorist elements," Binali Yildirim told media representatives in Istanbul.

He said there are 8,000-10,000 terrorists in Afrin and Turkey would clear all the terrorists on its borders.

Yildirim said Russia, the U.S. and Iran were informed about Turkish plan ahead of the operation.

"There is confusion in U.S. [regarding the operation]. Everyone speaks different things," he said, adding that they also did not voice a firm opposition to the operation.

- **25,000 FSA fighters back Turkey's Operation Olive Branch in Syria's Afrin: commander⁷²**

Around 25,000 Free Syrian Army fighters are joining Turkey's Operation Olive Branch in Syria's Afrin with the goal of liberating Arab towns and villages seized by PKK's Syrian affiliate the People's Protection Units (YPG), an FSA commander said on Sunday.

Major Yasser Abdul Rahim, who is also the commander of Failaq al Sham, a main FSA opposition group in the operations room of the campaign, told Reuters that the FSA fighters are aiming to expel the YPG terrorists from the town.

"We have no interest in entering the city only the military targets inside the city and the villages around it. We aim to encircle the city and ensure the militias are evicted. We won't fight in the city as we have no problem with civilians," he said.

⁷¹ <http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/operation-olive-branch-to-create-30-km-deep-safe-zone/1037992>

⁷² <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/01/21/25000-fsa-fighters-back-turkeys-operation-olive-branch-in-syrias-afrin-commander>

"The task of the Free Syrian Army is first to regain sixteen Arab towns and villages occupied by the foreign militias (YPG) with the help of the Russian air force," Abdul Rahim told Reuters in a phone interview from inside Syria.

The Arab elements in the area accuse the YPG terrorists of forcibly displacing Arabs from the villages in what they say is a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing.

- **UN Security Council to discuss Afrin operation on Monday at France's request⁷³**

Kurdistan Region (Kurdistan 24) – The United Nations Security Council said it would hold an emergency session on Monday to discuss the situation in Syria following Turkish cross-border operations, France's Foreign Ministry confirmed on Sunday.

The French Foreign Ministry said the UN Security Council had agreed to hold a session to address Turkey's attack on the Syrian Kurds in Afrin at France's request, adding that all issues need to be resolved through peaceful means.

Earlier in the day, France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian had urged a ceasefire in Syria and encouraged the start of urgent meetings at the UN Security Council regarding the events in Afrin, Idlib, and Ghouta.

"France calls on Turkey to act with restraint in a difficult context, with the humanitarian situation deteriorating in several regions of Syria as a consequence of the military actions of the Damascus regime and its allies," *Reuters* quoted Le Drian's statement following a phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

- **Turkey to brief NATO deputy secretary general about crossborder Afrin operation⁷⁴**

NATO's Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller is set to visit Ankara on Jan. 22, and Istanbul on Jan. 23, amid the Turkish military's ongoing cross border operation against Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militants in Syria's northwestern Afrin province.

Ankara will brief the NATO official about the ongoing incursions, as part of the diplomatic briefings given to partners and international bodies, a foreign Ministry official told *Hürriyet Daily News*.

⁷³ <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/010775ef-2886-4b94-851c-61d6d63b023e>

⁷⁴ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-brief-nato-deputy-secretary-general-about-crossborder-afrin-operation-126074>

Gottemoeller will hold meetings with Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Ambassador Ahmet Yıldız, and other high level officials. Gottemoeller will also visit the NATO Center of Excellence for Defense against Terrorism, and participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at Atatürk Mausoleum. In Istanbul, she is scheduled to visit the 3rd Army Corps and Multinational Joint Warfare Centre Command and deliver a speech at the National Defense University.

Her visit comes after Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg sent a letter last week to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Stoltenberg informed Erdoğan about the measures taken after an incident at NATO's Joint Warfare Centre in Norway in November. The Secretary General once more apologized for the scandal, diplomatic sources told Hürriyet Daily News on condition of anonymity.

- **Turkey summons UN Security Council member envoys, writes to Syrian regime⁷⁵**

The Turkish Foreign Ministry on Jan. 20 summoned Russia and the U.S.'s top Ankara-based diplomats to inform them about the ongoing military operation in Syria's northwestern Afrin province.

Turkey has also summoned the Iranian ambassador to Ankara, a ministry official told Hürriyet Daily News, speaking on conditions of anonymity.

Ambassadors from the three remaining permanent members of the U.N. Security Council – Britain, France and China – will also be summoned, with Foreign Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Kaan Esener set to conduct the talks, the source said.

- **Syrian regime notified on operation: Turkey**

Turkey is notifying the Syrian regime about the Afrin operation through letters, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said on Jan. 20 in a televised interview with T24.

Turkey had to reach out to Syria, a U.N. member, even if only through letters, Çavuşoğlu said in another interview with broadcaster NTV on the same day.

Despite these “diplomatic efforts,” Syria has roundly condemned the military operation.

⁷⁵ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-summons-un-security-council-member-envoys-writes-to-syrian-regime-126034>

"The Syrian Arab Republic decisively condemns Turkish aggression against the town of Afrin, which is an inseparable part of Syria," a statement released by the Syrian regime said, as quoted by the SANA news agency.

With diplomatic channels unusually busy following the announcement of the Turkish military operation dubbed "Olive Branch" by the Turkish army, a Turkish foreign ministry official on Jan. 20 said Çavuşoğlu had held talks with U.S. counterpart Rex Tillerson in the wake of the announcement at Washington's request, Agence France-Presse reported.

Meanwhile Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov has spoken on the phone with his U.S. counterpart General Joseph Dunford following Turkey's military engagement in Syria, Sputnik reported.

Countries/Parties	Reaction
Turkey's Opposition parties	<p>Turkey's opposition parties lend support to Afrin operation</p> <p>The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and the recently formed İYİ (Good) Party have all lent full support to the military operation against the People's Protection Units (YPG) militants in Syria's Afrin province.</p> <p>"We are totally confident about our brave army and give full support to the operation. What we care about is the security of our borders. No countries would want a terrorist organization on their border," CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu told Hürriyet on Jan. 20.</p> <p>He also said it was important that Turkey used the Syrian air space as a result of diplomatic efforts.</p> <p>CHP Vice Chairman and spokesman Bülent Tezcan similarly voiced the party's support for the operation on Jan. 21 during a press conference organized at the party headquarters in Ankara.</p> <p>"Our glorious army has initiated an important operation. Our support is full. We stand behind this operation as the nation and will continue to do so," Tezcan said.</p> <p>"The most important thing to keep in mind at the end of</p>

	<p>this process is that Syria should have territorial integrity. A strategic political solution on Syria should be focused on. We should stand behind the sovereignty of Syria and territorial integrity,” he added.</p> <p>“It is our biggest wish that the Olive Branch Operation, which was launched by our glorious army, achieves its target in the shortest time possible and our soldiers come back home without harm,” Tezcan had written in an earlier message posted on Twitter on Jan. 21.</p> <p>The MHP has also voiced support for the Afrin operation. “There is no other way to clear our borders from terror,” MHP leader Bahçeli told reporters on Jan. 21 at a news conference in Ankara’s Kızılcahamam district, describing the operation as a “national cause.”</p> <p>“The operational partner of the United States should be rooted out. The PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party], the PYD [Kurdish Democratic Union Party], and the YPG, which are disguised as the Syrian Democratic Forces should be cleared from our borders,” Bahçeli said.</p> <p>İYİ Party leader Meral Akşener also voiced support for the operation. “Our full prayers are with our glorious army and heroic soldiers in the Afrin operation. May God ensure that this operation is completed without any loss of lives and may our soldiers be full of power and strength. May God protect them,” Akşener tweeted late on Jan. 20.</p>
Pro Kurds HDP	<p>However, Serpil Kemalbay, the co-chair of the Kurdish issue-focused Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), slammed the operation, describing it as the “start of an invasion” of Afrin.</p> <p>Kemalbay also called on the public to “show their democratic reactions” against the operation during a press conference at the party headquarters in Ankara on Jan. 20.⁷⁶</p>

⁷⁶ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-opposition-parties-lend-support-to-afrin-operation-126064>

<p>United States. State department</p>	<p>State Secretary Tillerson statement⁷⁷</p> <p>As expressed by Secretary Tillerson in calls to his Turkish and Russian counterparts yesterday, the United States is very concerned about the situation in northwest Syria, especially the plight of innocent civilians who are now faced with an escalation in fighting. We continue to be supportive of addressing the legitimate security concerns of Turkey as a NATO Ally and critical partner in the effort to defeat ISIS. However, we urge Turkey to exercise restraint and ensure that its military operations remain limited in scope and duration and scrupulous to avoid civilian casualties. We call on all parties to remain focused on the central goal of defeating ISIS. Now is the time for great nations to work together to secure a peaceful stability for the people of Syria.</p>
<p>US Defence Secretary</p>	<p>‘Candid’ Turkey warned US before launching op against YPG, Mattis says</p> <p>Turkey warned the United States ahead of its air strikes in Syria against the US-backed YPG, and Washington is in contact with Ankara about the way forward, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Sunday during a flight to Asia.</p> <p>"Turkey was candid," Mattis said, without disclosing the U.S. reaction to Turkey's notification. "They warned us before they launched the aircraft they were going to do it, in consultation with us. And we are working now on the way ahead. We'll work this out."</p> <p>"Turkey has legitimate security concerns," Mattis added, noting it was the only NATO ally with an active insurgency inside its borders, pointing to PKK terrorists tied with the YPG.</p> <p>Mattis also added that Turkish military informed Washington of its air operation in a phone call to high levels of the U.S. military. He said no U.S. forces were currently at risk from the Turkish operations.</p> <p>Asked whether he was concerned about the situation, Mattis said: "We are very alert to it. Our top levels are</p>

⁷⁷ <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/01/277563.htm>

	<p>engaged ... And we're working through it."⁷⁸</p> <p>U.S. Continues to Train Local Security Forces in Syria⁷⁹</p> <p>The U.S. continues to train local security forces in Syria. The training is designed to enhance security for displaced persons returning to their devastated communities. It is also essential so that ISIS cannot reemerge in liberated and ungoverned areas. This is not a new "army" or conventional "border guard" force.</p> <p>This training and these forces are consistent with campaign objectives to ensure an enduring defeat of ISIS, facilitate stabilization efforts, and create the conditions that support the UN-led Geneva process.</p> <p>The military campaign against ISIS in Syria is not over and heavy fighting is still underway in the Middle Euphrates River Valley.</p> <p>These security forces are internally-focused to prevent ISIS fighters from fleeing Syria and augment local security in liberated areas. These forces will protect the local population and help prevent ISIS from launching new attacks against the U.S. and its allies and partners, pending a longer-term political solution to the Syrian civil war in Geneva.</p> <p>To date, through Coalition-enabled operations in Syria, ISIS has not reclaimed any of the areas they lost. We intend to keep it that way.</p> <p>We are keenly aware of the security concerns of Turkey, our Coalition partner and NATO ally. Turkey's security concerns are legitimate. We will continue to be completely transparent with Turkey about our efforts in Syria to defeat ISIS and stand by our NATO ally in its counter-terrorism efforts.</p> <p>The U.S. and its partners in the Global Coalition remain unwavering in our shared commitment to defeat ISIS and stabilize Syria.</p>
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⁷⁸ <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2018/01/21/candid-turkey-warned-us-before-launching-op-against-ypg-mattis-says>

⁷⁹ <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1417632/us-continues-to-train-local-security-forces-in-syria/>

	<p>Ultimately, Syria must determine its own future through the political process outlined in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254.</p>
<p>Pentagon: US Defence</p>	<p>Pentagon: Turkey's Afrin operation will not affect ties⁸⁰</p> <p>The U.S. Defense Department on Friday dismissed comments that a Turkish military operation against the PYD/PKK-held city of Afrin in northern Syria would throw diplomatic relations between Ankara and Washington into chaos.</p> <p>"One action does not typically result in chaos or a breakdown. We have regular communication with our ally Turkey," Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon told Anadolu Agency, adding he would not even pass judgement on such extreme remarks.</p> <p>Pahon's comments follow remarks by some unnamed American officials to CNN that a military operation by Turkey in Afrin could undermine the fight against Daesh, spark a regional clash and throw diplomatic relations between the U.S. and its NATO ally into chaos.</p> <p>"We talk about these things. That is [part of] being allies. Allies do not always see eye to eye, but they are willing to work together," Pahon reiterated.</p> <p>"In Afrin in particular, we do not have people operating in Afrin, so that does not directly affect what we are doing. We would like to see everybody maintain their focus on our main goal -- the defeat of ISIS," said Pahon, using another acronym for Daesh.</p>
<p>NATO</p>	<p>NATO makes first statement following operation</p> <p>NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg has been in regular communication with the Turkish authorities, a NATO source told daily Hürriyet on Jan. 21, adding that Turkey has informed NATO countries on the operation.</p> <p>Stressing that NATO forces are not present on the ground in Syria, the source said that 'all countries have</p>

⁸⁰ <http://aa.com.tr/en/americas/pentagon-turkey-s-afrin-operation-will-not-affect-ties/1036192>

	<p>the right to self-defense, but it's important that this is done in a proportionate and measured way.'</p>
<p>NATO General Secretary to visit Turkey</p>	<p>NATO Deputy Secretary General to visit the Republic of Turkey⁸¹</p> <p>The NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ms. Rose Gottemoeller, will travel to the Republic of Turkey on Monday, 22 January and Tuesday, 23 January 2018.</p> <p>In Ankara on Monday, Ms. Gottemoeller will have meetings with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Ahmet Yildiz, and other high level officials. She will also visit the NATO Centre of Excellence for Defence against Terrorism, and participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at Ataturk Mausoleum.</p> <p>In Istanbul on Tuesday, the Deputy Secretary General will visit the 3rd Army Corps and Multinational Joint Warfare Centre Command, and deliver remarks at the National Defence University.</p>
<p>Germany⁸²</p>	<p>German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said the "military confrontation" between Turkish and US-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria "entails unpredictable risks," in a tweet on Sunday. "Everyone's efforts need to aim at making progress in the political process," he said.</p>
<p>France</p>	<p>France asks Turkey to act with restraint in Syria</p> <p>France calls on Turkey to act with restraint in a difficult context, with the humanitarian situation deteriorating in several regions of Syria as a consequence of the military actions of the Damascus regime and its allies," <i>Reuters</i> quoted Le Drian's statement following a phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.</p> <p>The French Foreign Ministry said the UN Security Council had agreed to hold a session to address Turkey's attack on the Syrian Kurds in Afrin at France's request,</p>

⁸¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/news_150901.htm

⁸² <http://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/21/middleeast/turkey-military-forces-enter-syria-intl/index.html>

	<p>adding that all issues need to be resolved through peaceful means.⁸³</p>
Iran	<p>The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Sunday also called for Turkey's operation in Afrin to be "completed immediately" and for the prevention of a crisis in the border region of Turkey and Syria, according to state-run news agency IRNA.</p> <p>Earlier Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi said the planned Kurdish-led force will further complicate the conflict in Syria and is a "blatant intervention" in that country's internal affairs. Ghasemi's comments were carried by Iran's official IRNA news agency. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani later told the visiting Syrian parliament speaker that the U.S. plan is a "plot" against Syria's territorial integrity and security, according to comments posted on the president's website.⁸⁴</p> <p>Foreign Ministry Statement: Iran Closely Monitoring Turkey's Operation in Syria's Afrin⁸⁵</p> <p>Iran's foreign ministry spokesman says the country is concerned about and closely watching Turkey's ongoing operation in Syria's Afrin, and hopes that the operation would be immediately terminated so as to prevent the deepening of crisis in northern Syria.</p> <p>In a statement on Sunday, the Ministry's Spokesman Bahram Qassemi said the continuation of the crisis in Afrin may reorganize Takfiri terrorist groups in the northern Syrian regions and fan the flames of war in this country again.</p> <p>Qassemi went on to say that Tehran strongly stresses the necessity of preserving the territorial integrity of Syria and respecting the country's sovereignty to prevent intensification of the humanitarian crisis and to save the lives of the innocent people of Syria.</p> <p>The Iranian spokesman further noted that Iran expects all countries, especially the Turkish government as one</p>

⁸³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-france-restraint/france-asks-turkey-to-act-with-restraint-in-syria-idUSKBN1FA0KF>

⁸⁴ <http://www.the-japan-news.com/news/article/0004185645>

⁸⁵ <http://en.mfa.ir/index.aspx?siteid=3&fkeyid=&siteid=3&pageid=36409&newsview=496861>

	<p>of the guarantor states [of the Astana Process], to remain committed to the diplomatic settlement of the Syrian crisis, especially within the framework of Astana Talks, and to continue to play a constructive role and carry out its responsibility to resolve the crisis in Syria diplomatically.</p> <p>“We have always believed that the root cause of the devastating crisis in Syria is the irresponsible behaviours, provocative actions, and illegal interventions of trans-regional powers, including the US and certain autocratic and belligerent sides like the Zionist regime,” underlined Qassemi.</p> <p>“As long as the US forces and their allies, including the Takfiri terrorist groups, continue to engage in illegitimate and unlawful practices that are against the international rules and the interests of the Syrian people and are opposed to the will of the legitimate Syrian government, the humanitarian crisis in the Arab country will continue.”</p> <p>“Therefore, all the responsible countries of the international community, especially the neighbours of Syria, are expected to avoid taking any measure that would boost the illegitimate presence of transregional interventionist forces and encourage the terrorist groups,” he added.</p> <p>Moreover, the Iranian spokesman called on the involved countries to remain committed to peaceful and diplomatic ways to resolve the Syrian crisis through processes like Astana Talks.</p>
<p>Syria Foreign Ministry Statement:</p>	<p>Syrian President Bashar al-Assad denounced what he called "Turkish brutal aggression on the Syrian city of Afrin," according to the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency.⁸⁶</p> <p>An official source at the Foreign and Expatriates Ministry said on Saturday that the Syrian Arab Republic strongly condemns the flagrant Turkish aggression on the city of Afrin, which is an integral part of Syrian territory, stressing that this aggression is the most recent in a series of Turkish transgressions against</p>

⁸⁶ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=124986>

	<p>Syrian sovereignty.</p> <p>The source affirmed that Syria refutes the claims made by Turkey about it being notified of this military operation, saying that these claims are part of the series of lies that the Turkish government continues to spout.</p> <p>The source concluded by saying that Syria demands that the international community condemn this aggression and take the necessary steps to stop it immediately.</p>
Egypt Foreign Ministry Statement:	<p>Egypt Rejects Military Operations in Afrin and Considers Them a New Violation of Syrian Sovereignty</p> <p>In a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 21st, the Arab Republic of Egypt expressed its rejection of the military operations carried out by the Turkish forces against the city of Afrin in north-west Syria, which are considered as a new violation of Syria's sovereignty. Further, the statement added that such operations undermine the ongoing endeavors to reach a political solution, as well as the efforts of counter-terrorism in Syria.</p> <p>The Statement also reiterated Egypt's steadfast stance towards rejecting military solutions, as they only lead to increase the suffering of our brotherly Syrian people. Further, the statement called for involving the whole sects of the Syrian community in serious negotiations in the framework of a comprehensive and objective political process with no exclusion, while stressing on the need to preserve Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁸⁷</p>
Russia	<p>20 January 2018</p> <p>Comment by the Information and Press Department on Turkey's use of armed forces in the northwest of Syria</p> <p>According to incoming reports, on January 20, Turkey began using its army in the area of Afrin in the northwest of Syria. The Turkish General Staff announced that the Turkish military shelled Syrian</p>

⁸⁷ <https://www.mfa.gov.eg/english/MediaCenter/News/Pages/Egypt-rejects-military-operations-in-Afrin.aspx>

	<p>Kurds' positions in response to provocative shelling by the militants of the Democratic Union, a Syrian Kurdish party.</p> <p>This information was received with concern in Moscow. We are closely monitoring the development of the situation.</p> <p>Russia holds a consistent stand on the search for solutions in Syria based on preserving Syria's territorial integrity, respect for its sovereignty and pursuing a long-term political settlement in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and the agreements on de-escalation zones reached within the Astana process. In this connection we urge the opposing sides to show mutual restraint.</p> <p>After the defeat of the military political stronghold of international terrorism in the form of ISIS and the withdrawal of a considerable part of Russian troops from Syria, the major objective of the remaining Russian military in that country is currently to ensure the ceasefire in the de-escalation zones.⁸⁸</p> <p>17 January 2018</p> <p>Press release on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's telephone conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu</p> <p>On January 17, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke over the telephone with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey Mevlut Cavusoglu.</p> <p>The ministers discussed preparations for the Syrian National Dialogue Congress as a major event on the road to a Syrian political settlement in the framework of talks under the aegis of the UN on the basis of Security Council Resolution 2254.</p> <p>The ministers discussed ways of alleviating the humanitarian problems of civilians in Syria and observance of the ceasefire in the de-escalation zones in line with the agreements reached in Astana.⁸⁹</p>
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⁸⁸ http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3026297

⁸⁹ http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3020740

	<p>Russian troops in Afrin begin withdrawing: Turkish state-run agency⁹⁰</p> <p>Russian military police stationed in the Afrin region of Syria have begun withdrawing before a potential military operation by the Turkish army, Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency has reported, in a development that comes only a day after key military and intelligence talks between the two sides in Moscow.</p> <p>Anadolu Agency reported on Jan. 19 that tens of Russian military police that pulled back from villages near Afrin arrived in Nubul and Zahra districts under the control of the Syrian regime forces. Citing "reliable local sources" in Afrin, the agency did not provide further details on the motive and scope of the withdrawal.</p> <p>There was no immediate reaction from Moscow and Ankara to either confirm or deny the military pullback from this region.</p> <p>It's believed that Russia has a few hundred military observers in that particular region in northern Syria which is largely under the control of the People's Protection Units (YPG), a group Turkey considers as the offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), therefore, a terrorist organization.</p> <p>The development followed Chief of General Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar and National Intelligence Organization (MIT) chief Hakan Fidan held talks with Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov in Moscow on Jan. 18.</p>
Azerbaijan	<p>Azerbaijan backs Turkey's operation in Syria's Afrin⁹¹</p> <p>Turkey's Operation Olive Branch in northwestern Afrin region of Syria aims to secure Turkey's border and remove terror threats, Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry's spokesman said on Sunday.</p> <p>Speaking to Anadolu Agency, Hikmet Hacıyev said Azerbaijan condemned all kinds of terrorism and voiced support for international efforts to counter them.</p>

⁹⁰ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russian-troops-in-afrin-begun-to-be-withdrawn-state-run-media-125999>

⁹¹ <http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/azerbaijan-backs-turkey-s-operation-in-syria-s-afrin/1037984>

	<p>"The operation aims to secure Turkey's border, remove the terror threat and protect the civilians in the region," Hajiyeve said.</p> <p>The fight against terrorism was needed to attain international and regional peace, he added.</p> <p>"Turkey has faced terror attacks many times and a lot of lives were lost during these attacks. Azerbaijan understands Turkey's concerns...", Hajiyeve said.</p>
United Nations General Secretary	<p>Meanwhile, Stephane Dujarric, spokesman of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, warned against more military activities in Syria.</p> <p>"We've seen the reports of shelling in Afrin. We reiterate our call on all concerned parties to avoid further escalation and any acts that could deepen the suffering of the Syrian people," Dujarric said.</p> <p>"All parties must ensure protection of civilians at all times, under any circumstances."⁹²</p>

Cyber Security

Dr. Chayanika Deka

- **Cabinet approves MoU between India and Canada for cooperation in the field of Science & Technology⁹³**

On 10 January 2018, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aiming to implement a mechanism and strengthening scientific cooperation between R&D and academic institutions of India and Canada has been approved by the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The Department of Science and Technology and Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) of Canada concluded that this MoU would support the India-Canada Centre for Innovative Multidisciplinary Partnership to Accelerate Community Transformation and Sustainability (IC-IMPACTS) programme that would in turn promote India-Canada multidisciplinary research partnerships. The project would involve researchers from both India and Canada ranging from academia, scientific

⁹² <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/erdogan-operation-syria-afrin-begun-180120120424928.html>

⁹³ Press Information Bureau, Government of India,

authorities and R & D laboratories and would cooperate in safe and sustainable infrastructure and integrated water management, assisting to develop institutional networking and enlarging networks between scientists of India and Canada.

- **Facebook reacts to pressure on propaganda⁹⁴**

In the year 2017, Facebook had been constantly criticised for its failure to avert Russian interference in the US presidential election 2016. It is well-known that nearly two billion people across the world use Facebook and Facebook, Twitter and Google; all these social platforms had been misused for fake news, cyber bullying and other malicious purposes. Various sources claimed that through Facebook and other social medium, foreign influences tried to manipulate democratic processes in Europe and other western countries. Amidst this, on 17 January 2018, Facebook's policy director Simon Milner wrote to British parliamentary committee on digital affairs and said "We are committed to making all reasonable efforts to establish whether or not there was coordinated activity similar to that which was found in the US." Facebook is planning to launch a "detailed analysis of historical data" to investigate whether Russia was involved in misleading the election campaign of Brexit vote in 2016.

- **MeitY launches new Cyber security initiative⁹⁵**

On 19 January 2018, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) along with National e-governance Division and industry partners launched a cyber initiative involving both public and private sectors called as *Cyber Surakshit Bharat*. The chief aim of this initiative is to boost cyber security of the country by focussing on three principles i.e. awareness, education and enablement. At the launch, Minister of State for Electronics & Information Technology KJ Alphons said, "It will include an awareness program on the importance of cyber security; a series of workshops on best practices and enablement of the officials with cyber security health tool kits to manage and mitigate cyber threats". Various organisations such as Microsoft, Intel, WIPRO, Redhat and Dimension Data, Cert-In, NIC, NASSCOM and the FIDO Alliance, Deloitte and EY contributed to this initiative and believed that it would keep data safe and secure. Cyber Surakshit Bharat is planning to open training programs in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai for the next six months. The participants would consist of various technical officials from central and state government employees.

⁹⁴ The Strait Times, 19 January 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/facebook-reacts-to-pressure-on-propaganda>

⁹⁵ <https://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20180119/3256249.html>

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

(Dr. Ambreen Agha)

Pakistan

Sr.No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1.	January 15	Balochistan	At least five security personnel were killed and six others were injured when a vehicle carrying them overturned following an ambush by unidentified militants in Shapok area of Kech district. ⁹⁶	5	0
2.	January 16	Balochistan	A Police constable, identified as Naseer Ahmed, was shot dead by unidentified armed assailants in a targeted attack on Raisani Road in provincial capital Quetta. ⁹⁷	1	0
3.	January 17	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	The Federal Government decided to prepare a contingency plan for the return of the Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. A senior official in the State and Frontier Region (Safron) Ministry said that the government would not give another extension to registered refugees for their stay in the country. ⁹⁸		
4.	January 18	Balochistan	Two female polio workers were shot dead in a targeted attack in Shalkot area of Quetta. The assailants escaped unhurt from the site of the attack as a heavy contingent of law enforcers reached the area. ⁹⁹	2	0
5.	January 21	Balochistan	A former Police official, identified as Fazlur Rehman Kakar, was shot	1	0

⁹⁶ Syed Ali Shah, 5 security personnel martyred in Balochistan as vehicle turns over after ambush, *Dawn*, January 15, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383113/5-security-personnel-martyred-in-balochistan-as-vehicle-turns-over-after-ambush>, accessed on January 22, 2018

⁹⁷ Syed Ali Shah, Police constable gunned down in Quetta, *Dawn*, January 16, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383291/police-constable-gunned-down-in-quetta>, accessed on January 22, 2018

⁹⁸ Zulfiqar Ali, No more extension in stay of Afghan refugees, *Dawn*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383493/no-more-extension-in-stay-of-afghan-refugees>, accessed on January 22, 2018

⁹⁹ Syed Ali Shah, 2 female polio workers shot dead in Quetta, *Dawn*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383730/2-female-polio-workers-shot-dead-in-quetta>, accessed on January 22, 2018

			dead on Masjid Road in provincial capital Quetta. No outfit claimed responsibility for the killing. ¹⁰⁰		
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Afghanistan

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1.	January 19	Nangarhar	Five al Qaeda terrorists were killed in a joint operation led by Afghan and foreign security forces in Sherzado district. ¹⁰¹	5	0
2.	January 20	Logar	At least eight Taliban militants were killed and six others were wounded during an operation in Charkh district. Saleem Saleh, the governor's spokesman said that the Afghan Forces conducted clearing operation in the district two days ago that led to the killing of eight militants. ¹⁰²	8	6
3.	January 21	Jawzjan	Heavy clashes continue between the Taliban militants and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Qosh Tapa district. Provincial governor's spokesman Mohammad Reza Ghafoori confirmed that Taliban launched a coordinated attack on ISIS hideouts, killing 10 of them. ¹⁰³	10	NS
4.	January 22	Kabul	At least 18 people, including Farah province's telecommunication department head, Jamaluddin Padshakhil	23	6

¹⁰⁰ Syed Ali Shah, Ex-SHO sacked over 2011 Kharotabad incident gunned down in Quetta, *Dawn*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1384347/ex-sho-sacked-over-2011-kharotabad-incident-gunned-down-in-quetta>, accessed on January 22, 2018

¹⁰¹ 5 Al-Qaeda members killed in overnight Nangarhar raid, *Pajhwok News*, January 19, 2018, https://www.pajhwok.com/en/subscription-required?redirect_from=504520, accessed on January 22, 2018

¹⁰² Abdul Maqsood Azizi, 8 Taliban killed, 6 injured in Logar operation, *Pajhwok News*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2018/01/21/8-taliban-killed-6-injured-logar-operation>, accessed on January 22, 2018

¹⁰³ Heavy clashes continue between Taliban and ISIS in North of Afghanistan, *Khaama Press*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.khaama.com/heavy-clashes-continue-between-taliban-and-isis-in-north-of-afghanistan-04313>, accessed on January 22, 2018

			and one foreigner, were killed while six others were injured in coordinated attack on Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul claimed by the Taliban. Following the Taliban siege, After a 17-hour stand-off against the militants, the SFs were able to bring the Hotel under their control and shot dead all five attackers. ¹⁰⁴		
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Iraq

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Incident	Killed	Injured
1.	January 17	Mosul	Three ISIS militants were killed in an attack launched by the militant group against paramilitary troops in west of Mosul. "Al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces) repulsed an attack by IS members against Tal Afar town, killing three of the attackers," said an unnamed source. ¹⁰⁵	3	0
2.	January 17	Diyala	Two policemen were killed and seven others were injured in a bomb blast in al-Tarfaya region of Diyala. Walhan al-Karwi, member of Jalawla Municipal Council confirmed the incident. ¹⁰⁶	2	7
3.	January 18	Mosul	Nineveh Operations commander Najm al-Jubouri said that the command was	Iraqi command coordinating with international	

¹⁰⁴ Siege On Kabul Hotel Ends After 17 Hours, *Tolo News*, January 22, 2018, <http://www.tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/kabul-hotel-siege-reportedly-ends-after-13-hour-gun-battle>, accessed on January 22, 2018

¹⁰⁵ Nehal Mostafa, Three Islamic State members killed as paramilitary troops foil attack, west of Mosul, *Iraqi News*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/three-islamic-state-members-killed-paramilitary-troops-foil-attack-west-mosul/>, accessed on January 22, 2018

¹⁰⁶ Nehal Mostafa, Nine policemen, including commander, killed, wounded in bomb blast in Diyala, *Iraqi News*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/features/nine-policemen-including-commander-killed-wounded-bomb-blast-diyala/>, accessed on January 22, 2018

			coordinating with the United States-led coalition to eliminate the sneaking IS militants in al-Jazirah region and southern Mosul. ¹⁰⁷	coalition	
4.	January 21	Salahuddin	Two IS suicide bombers were killed in a military operation in Samarra city. A statement from the Military Intelligence Directorate confirmed the incident. "The military operation was launched upon directives by the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces to continue pursuing and eliminating Islamic State remnants throughout the country," the statement read. ¹⁰⁸	2	0
5.	January 21	Baghdad	A public servant was injured in a car bomb blast west of Baghdad. "An explosive charge fixed into a car of an employee of the Electricity Ministry went off at al-Ghazaliya neighborhood west of Baghdad," the source said, adding, "The explosion left the employee injured." ¹⁰⁹	0	1

International Economic Issues

(Dr. Arundhati Sharma)

- **India mulls 'mini meet' of 40 WTO members**

Speaking at the third edition of the geo-political conference 'Raisina Dialogue' on January 17, 2018, Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu said that India is considering holding a mini-ministerial meeting of about 40 World Trade Organization (WTO)

¹⁰⁷ Mohamed Mostafa, Iraqi command: coordinating with intel coalition to remove IS remnants, *Iraqi News*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/iraqi-command-coordinating-with-intel-coalition-to-remove-is-remnants/>, accessed on January 22, 2018

¹⁰⁸ Mohammed Ebraheem, Two Islamic State suicide bombers killed in Salahuddin military operation, *Iraqi News*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/two-islamic-state-suicide-bombers-killed-salahuddin-military-operation/>, accessed on January 22, 2018

¹⁰⁹ Mohammed Ebraheem, Public servant wounded in car bomb blast in Baghdad, *Iraqi News*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/public-servant-wounded-car-bomb-blast-baghdad/>, accessed on January 22, 2018

members to discuss ways to increase global trade. He said the idea of the meeting was to deliberate on ways to “create bigger markets,” rather than finding out ground of contentious issues.¹¹⁰

- **IMF, World Bank laud RBI for ‘strengthening’ supervision**

On January 19, 2018, the IMF and the World Bank released two detailed assessment reports (DARs) relating to the 2017 *India Financial Sector Assessment Programme* (FSAP). Both the reports have commended the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for its “remarkable progress in strengthening banking supervision” saying the regulation by the central bank has improved in recent years. The report on a ‘Detailed Assessment of Observance — Basel Core Principles for Effective Banking Supervision’ — commends the Reserve Bank of India for the remarkable progress in strengthening banking supervision since the last FSAP. The report also notes that most of the Basel III framework (and related guidance) has been implemented and cooperation arrangements, both domestically and cross-border, are now firmly in place. It further acknowledges that banking reforms, including the Indradhanush plan for revitalising the public sector banks and the Bank Board Bureaus have helped usher in an era of transparency and improved discipline and will go a long way in resolving the problem of bad loans in India. The ‘Detailed Assessment of Observance of Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL) Central Counter Party (CCP) and Trade Repository (TR), released by the World Bank, concluded that the CCIL systems have a high degree of observance of the principles.¹¹¹

- **Trump administration says U.S. mistakenly backed China WTO accession in 2001**

In an annual report to Congress on China’s compliance with WTO commitments, released on January 19, 2018, the Trump administration held that the United States mistakenly supported China’s membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 on terms that it has failed to force Beijing to open its economy. In the report, Trump’s trade envoy, Robert Lighthizer, said the global economy was threatened by major economies that undermined the global trading system. A White House official said despite consultations with China, it had failed to follow through on promises of moving more toward a market-orientated economy and playing by international trading rules.¹¹²

¹¹⁰“India mulls ‘mini meet’ of 40 WTO members”, *The Hindu*, January 18, 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-business/india-mulls-mini-meet-of-40-wto-members/article22459498.ece> (accessed on January 22, 2018)

¹¹¹ “IMF, World Bank laud RBI for ‘strengthening’ supervision”, *Livemint*, January 20, 2018, <http://www.livemint.com/Industry/CpyEgVIZr9NAzclGvVeFOK/IMF-World-Bank-laud-RBI-for-strengthening-supervision.html> (accessed on January 22, 2018)

¹¹² Trump administration says U.S. mistakenly backed China WTO accession in 2001” *Reuters*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china/trump-administration-says-u-s-mistakenly-backed-china-wto-accession-in-2001-idUSKBN1F82U1> (accessed on January 22, 2018)

