

## **Weekly Media Updates** **(8-14 January, 2018)**

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## Africa

(Dr Nivedita Ray)

- **Ghanaian President to Trump: We are not a ‘shithole country’**

Two days after President Trump described African nations, along with Haiti and El Salvador, as “shithole countries” whose inhabitants were not desirable as immigrants to the United States, the president of Ghana called the language used by the American leader “extremely unfortunate” and said that his nation was not a “shithole country.” Nana Akufo-Addo, who assumed the presidency last January, made the comments on his Twitter account. Akufo-Addo was the second head of state or government in Africa to publicly respond to Trump. Macky Sall, president of Senegal, had also tweeted that he was “shocked” by Trump’s words, adding that “Africa and the black race deserve the respect and consideration of all.” A group of African ambassadors at the United Nations also issued a statement that condemned the “outrageous, racist and xenophobic” remarks by the president. Samantha Power, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, wrote on Twitter that she had “never seen a statement like this by African countries directed at the United States.

- **Egypt-Sudan Spat Muddies Prospects for Deal on Big Nile Dam<sup>1</sup>**

A diplomatic spat between Egypt and Sudan is spilling over into the long-running dispute over a dam Ethiopia is building on the Nile River, which Cairo sees as an existential threat. On 11 January, 2017, Thursday, Sudan officially warned of threats to its eastern border from massing Egyptian and Eritrean troops, while Egypt has also moved into a disputed triangle of territory claimed by both Cairo and Khartoum. In the previous week, Sudan abruptly recalled its ambassador to Egypt, the latest chapter in a fight that started last summer with trade boycotts and that has only intensified in recent weeks.

At heart, the bad blood is part of a broader regional conflict pitting Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other countries against what they see as Turkey’s meddling in the region. Cairo was particularly incensed when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Sudan in December 2017 and won rights to Suakin Island, a port city on the Red Sea, raising concerns that Ankara could build a military base there. That diplomatic dustup is making it much harder to deal with another potentially explosive problem in the relationship: Sudan’s support for Ethiopia’s construction of a massive \$5 billion dam on the Nile River that could choke off vital supplies of water downstream. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has called the dam a matter of “life or death.”

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<sup>1</sup> FP News, 11 January 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/11/egypt-sudan-spat-muddies-prospects-for-deal-on-big-nile-dam-renaissance-gerd-ethiopia-sisi->

And while the three countries have butted heads over the dam for years, the feud between Egypt and Sudan is escalating quickly.

(Dr Saurabh Mishra)

- **African Union, African UN Envoys Demand Trump Apology<sup>2</sup>**

The African Union and African ambassadors to the United Nations, sharply denounced US President Donald Trump's reference to African nations as "shitholes" and called on him to retract his statement and apologize. "The African Union Mission wishes to express its infuriation, disappointment and outrage over the unfortunate comment made by Mr. Donald Trump, President of the United States of America, which remarks dishonor the celebrated American creed and respect for diversity and human dignity," the African Union mission to the United States said in a blistering statement.

- **Tunisia Hit by New Anti-Austerity Protests<sup>3</sup>**

More than 300 people have been arrested in Tunisia overnight, as anger over the government's austerity measures spilled into the streets once more. Police used tear gas against large crowds demonstrating against price rises affecting basic goods. The army was deployed into towns across the country to protect government buildings, which have become targets. PM Youssef Chahed condemned acts of "vandalism" by the protesters, saying they were trying to weaken the state. Protests have taken place in at least 10 different areas, including the capital, Tunis, in the last few days. The protests began peacefully last week, but escalated on Monday evening. Wednesday was the third successive night of violence, with almost 600 people arrested in total since the start of the week.

- **South Africa's Embattled President Jacob Zuma Survives First ANC Meeting Since Stepping Down<sup>4</sup>**

Embattled South African President Jacob Zuma's position was not considered as senior members of his ruling African National Congress (ANC) party met for the first time since Cyril Ramaphosa won its leadership in December. Speculation had been mounting that Zuma would be ousted at the National Executive Committee meeting on Wednesday, but "the matter was not for any discussion or debate," ANC Secretary-General Ace Magashule told reporters, according to Reuters. Zuma's lingering presence, despite his unpopularity with both markets and voters, has prompted analysts to cast doubt on the South African rand's rebound, which is based on optimism surrounding Ramaphosa's potential as a reformer.

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<sup>2</sup>CNN, 13 January 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/12/politics/african-union-demands-trump-apology/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> BBC News, 11 January 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42644326>

<sup>4</sup>CNBC, 10 January 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/10/south-africa-president-zuma-survives-anc-meeting.html>

- **Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Body Investigates Grace Mugabe's PhD<sup>5</sup>**

Zimbabwe's anti-corruption agency is investigating whether the former First Lady Grace Mugabe fraudulently obtained a doctorate. Lecturers at the University of Zimbabwe filed a petition last week asking to investigate. She was awarded the PhD just months after enrolling at university in 2014 even though doctorates typically require years of full-time research. Mrs Mugabe has previously defended her academic record. In September, she told a governing party rally that she had earned her PhD despite her detractors' scepticism.

- **Ethiopia Bans Foreign Adoptions<sup>6</sup>**

Ethiopia has banned the adoption of children by foreigners amid concerns they face abuse and neglect abroad. Ethiopia is one of the biggest source countries for international adoptions by US citizens, accounting for about 20 per cent of the total. Celebrities Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie are among those who have adopted children from Ethiopia. However, in 2013, a US couple was convicted of killing an adopted Ethiopian girl. That case triggered a debate about foreign adoption. More than 15,000 Ethiopian children have been adopted in the US since 1999.

- **UN Refugee Agency Urges Israel to Halt Forced Relocation of African Asylum Seekers<sup>7</sup>**

The United Nations refugee agency on Tuesday appealed to the Israeli Government to not forcibly send Eritrean and Sudanese refugees or asylum seekers to sub-Saharan Africa. This appeal came after some 80 cases were identified in which people relocated by Israel risked their lives by taking dangerous onward journeys to Europe. "Feeling they had no other choice, they travelled many hundreds of kilometres through conflict zones in South Sudan, Sudan and Libya after being relocated by Israel," the spokesperson of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), William Spindler, told reporters in Geneva.

- **Africa a Priority in China's Diplomacy: Chinese FM<sup>8</sup>**

China's diplomatic tradition of foreign ministers visiting Africa first in the New Year indicates that Africa is always a priority in China's diplomacy, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here Saturday. The tradition has been kept for 28 years till now. Wang addressed media after meeting with Rwandan President Paul Kagame in Kigali, the capital, adding that China is always the most reliable friend and partner of its African brothers. The Chinese minister also introduced his country's expectations of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit to be

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<sup>5</sup> BBC News, 9 January 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42620661>

<sup>6</sup> BBC News, 10 January 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42635641>

<sup>7</sup> UN News Centre, 9 January 2018,

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=58395#.Wl2KjK6WbIU>

<sup>8</sup> Xinhua Net, 14 January 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/14/c\\_136894421.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/14/c_136894421.htm)

held in Beijing this year, an official forum established in 2000 to strengthen friendly cooperation between the two sides.

- **Bill and Melinda Gates Are Paying Off Nigeria's US\$76 Million Debt to Japan<sup>9</sup>**

As some leaders are increasing their focus on issues solely within their own borders, Bill and Melinda Gates continue to show the importance of looking outward — and they've demonstrated this yet again by announcing they will settle Nigeria's US\$76 million debt to Japan. Nigeria's debt to Japan is the result of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) provided by the Japanese government in 2014 for increased polio eradication efforts. The country has made great strides in its efforts to eliminate the disease thanks to this funding. Nigeria did not record a wild case of polio from July 2014 to August 2016, when two cases were reported.

- **Dinka elders strike deal with ex-army chief to not rebel<sup>10</sup>**

Prominent personalities and the members of the Jieng (Dinka) Council of elders in South Sudan have reached a deal with the former army chief of staff, Paul Malong not to rebel against the government under the leadership of President Salva Kiir. The new deal, according to the mediation team, will allow the government to not treat former chief of staff Paul Malong Awan as a rebel as he was declared on Monday. It demands him to cease involving himself in any subversive activities that the government would interpret and equate them to rebellion. The deal further demands the two sides, the government and Awan, to cease all sorts of hostilities including social media and all forms of the negative media campaign.

- **Essar Ports to Invest US\$500 Million in Mozambique, Local Expansion<sup>11</sup>**

Ports arm of the embattled Essar Group today said it will invest US\$500 million to expand capacities at its two existing domestic projects and also build a new coal terminal in Mozambique. The group would increase its capacity at Hazira and Salaya, and also build a new coal handling terminal in Mozambique. The project will be completed over the next two-and-a-half years and will take its cargo capacity to around 150 million tonne per annum (mtpa) from 110 mtpa. For coal exports, Mozambique has built a rail network of 550 km till an existing port, where Essar Ports will be building the new terminal.

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<sup>9</sup> Global Citizen, 8 January 2018, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/gates-paying-off-nigeria-debt/>

<sup>10</sup> Sudan Tribune, 12 January 2018, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article64477>

<sup>11</sup> The Economic Times, 8 January 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/shipping/-transport/essar-ports-to-invest-500-million-in-mozambique-local-expansion/articleshow/62415424.cms>

- **Magufuli Dismisses Proposal to Extend Presidential Term in Tanzania<sup>12</sup>**

Tanzanian President John Magufuli will not seek to extend presidential terms in the country, his party said Saturday, moving to quash calls from some members of the ruling party to prolong his rule. Magufuli “informed party members and other Tanzanians that the ongoing debate about increasing the presidential term from five to seven years displeases him,” his ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) said in a statement. Instead, Magufuli has urged Tanzanians to focus on building the country’s economy. “The debate on extending the term limit is useless. Tanzanians should concentrate on building their economy,”the president said. Such an amendment was against the party’s rules and the constitution of Tanzania, the statement said, adding that Magufuli does not plan to make the change “at any time during his presidency”.

- **Rwanda, Tanzania Agree on Joint Construction of SGR<sup>13</sup>**

Rwanda and Tanzania have agreed on joint construction of a Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) from Isaka (northwestern Tanzania) to Kigali, a move which will facilitate movement of goods between the two countries. The agreement was reached following a meeting between President Paul Kagame and his Tanzanian counterpart John Pombe Magufuli, during the former’s one-day working visit to Dar-es-Salaam, yesterday. President Magufuli said that they have instructed the Infrastructure ministers of the two countries to meet in the coming week to deliberate on an agreeable financing model.

## Central Asia

(Dr. Athar Zafar)

- **Tajikistan, Uzbekistan Finalize Visa-Free Travel**

Continuing to improve their bilateral ties, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have agreed for a visa-free regime between the two countries. Uzbekistan Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov visited Tajikistan on 10-11 January 2018 and the countries agreed to finalize the visa-free visits for their citizens. The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev plans to visit Tajikistan shortly and Uzbek Prime Minister was in Dushanbe in preparation for the proposed visit. The visiting Prime Minister also held talks with Tajik Prime Minister Qohir Rasulzoda and the two agreed to finalize and sign new border arrangements in the near future.<sup>1</sup>

Uzbekistan’s new government under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev is reaching out to neighbours and trying to improve its relations with all other Central Asian

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<sup>12</sup> Africa News, 15 January 2018, <http://www.africanews.com/2018/01/15/magufuli-dismisses-proposal-to-extend-presidential-term-in-tanzania//>

<sup>13</sup> New Times, 15 January 2018, <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/227641/>

countries and Afghanistan. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also plan to start train and bus services between the cities of the two countries.<sup>2</sup>

## China

(Dr. Sanjeev Kumar)

- **“Buddha-like youth” in China**

The phrase “Buddha-like youth” went viral after a popular WeChat article used the term to describe the generation in China born in the 1990s.

A Buddha-like relationship is, apparently, one of forgiveness, and accepting things as they are. A Buddha-like career means employees no longer concern themselves with promotions or office politics, but simply get on with the job at hand.

But there has been a backlash against the mindset, particularly among the older generation. They argue that such an approach is defined by pessimism, indolence and sloth, leading to a reduced work ethic, lack of self-motivation, and an apathetic demeanor.<sup>14</sup>

Comment: the new phrase - 佛系青年 “Buddha Like Youth” is now quite popular in Chinese media. It can be defined as the generation (born in 1990s) of youth who are quite satisfied with their current job, education, personal life, as competition and pressure have made life difficult for many.

- **Chinese Economists forecast stable growth for China in 2018**

Chinese economists expected China's economy to post stable growth in 2018. Economists surveyed by the Institute of Industrial Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, estimated that the country's economy will grow 6.8 per cent year-on-year in 2017, saying the stable momentum will continue into 2018.

The quarterly survey, covering more than 100 domestic economists, showed that confidence in the development of foreign trade has picked up, as 45 per cent of those surveyed estimated that exports in the fourth quarter of 2017 will rise from one year earlier.<sup>15</sup>

- **China makes five proposals on securing shared future for Lancang-Mekong nations**

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201801/08/WS5a52c632a31008cf16da5a44.html>

<sup>15</sup> [http://casseng.ccssn.cn/news\\_events/news\\_events\\_news\\_briefing/201801/t20180109\\_3809140.html](http://casseng.ccssn.cn/news_events/news_events_news_briefing/201801/t20180109_3809140.html)

China is willing to work with others to strengthen the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) as China benefits from regional stability and its neighbors are beneficiaries of China's economic vitality, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said at the second LMC leaders' meeting held in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh on 10 January.

The Chinese premier made five proposals to secure shared future for the LMC countries as he said he believed they will become the biggest and earliest beneficiaries of China's development.

He called for stronger coordination among countries along the Lancang-Mekong River on water resource management, accommodating each other's concern, and properly handling the relations between economic development and environmental protection.

In his speech, Li also urged to map out a five-year action plan for water resource cooperation, enhance emergency management on droughts and floods, carry out joint research on water resource and climate change, and improve water quality monitoring system.<sup>16</sup>

- **China's comments on the 'Taiwan Travel Act'**

While replying to a question on the US House of Representatives' recent passing of the Taiwan Travel Act, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's noted on January 11, 2018:

"We have taken note of relevant reports. I must stress once again that the act severely violates the one-China policy and principles in the three China-US joint communiqués and interferes in China's internal affairs. We express firm opposition to it.

The Chinese side urges the US side to abide by the one-China policy and principles in the three China-US joint communiqués, prudently handle the Taiwan issue, refrain from engaging in any form of official exchange or contact with Taiwan or sending any wrong signals to the "Taiwan independence" separatist forces, and take concrete actions to uphold the larger picture of China-US relations and the China-US cooperation in international affairs."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/43470.htm>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1525118.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1525118.shtml)

(Dr. Avinash Godbole)

- **Rising tide of jihadists stopped trying to return to China, Chinese advisers say<sup>18</sup>**

The number of “trained jihadist fighters” intercepted trying to re-enter China rose dramatically last year, posing a growing challenge for the country, according to Chinese government security and diplomatic advisers. The sources did not specify total numbers but said the increase reflected a higher threat, particularly to China’s western region of Xinjiang. But one London-based analyst said it was difficult to assess the extent of the threat without absolute figures.

Addressing an international relations forum in Beijing late last month, Ji Zhiye, head of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said China faced a “prominent” risk of a terror attack. “The number of jihadists captured on China’s borders [in 2017] was more than 10-fold the number of the previous year,” Ji said.

- **Uyghur Detentions Continue in Xinjiang, Despite Pledge to End With Party Congress<sup>19</sup>**

More than two months since the Communist Party Congress in Beijing, authorities in northwest China’s Xinjiang region continue to place ethnic Uyghurs deemed “extremists” in political re-education camps, despite assurances the detentions would end after the sensitive annual meeting. Since April 2017, Uyghurs accused of harboring “extremist” and “politically incorrect” views have been jailed or detained in re-education camps throughout Xinjiang, where members of the ethnic group have long complained of pervasive discrimination, religious repression, and cultural suppression under Chinese rule.

The detentions ramped up ahead of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, held Oct. 18-24 last year, with officials claiming that the campaign was part of “safety measures” to prevent violent incidents around the time of the event. Some local officials in Xinjiang had told family members arrests would end and detainees be returned home when the Congress was concluded, but sources recently told RFA’s Uyghur Service that authorities continue to round up residents more than two months later.

- **Xi calls for fundamental improvement of CPC political ecosystem<sup>20</sup>**

BEIJING, Jan. 11 (Xinhua) -- Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on Thursday called for more anti-corruption efforts to “fundamentally improve the political ecosystem of the Party.” Xi, also

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2127352/rising-tide-jihadists-stopped-trying-return-china>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/detentions-01082018164453.html>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/11/c\\_136888965.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/11/c_136888965.htm)

Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks at the second plenary session of the 19th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the CPC. "All-round efforts should see the Party's political building enhanced, its theory strengthened, its organizations consolidated, its conduct improved, and its discipline enforced, with institution building incorporated into every aspect of Party building," Xi said. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and the CPC's leadership is a must for the country to advance its great cause."

## European Union

(Dr. Dinoj K. Upadhyay)

- **French President Macron Visited China**

French President Emmanuel Macron was on three-day visit to China from January 8, 2018. It was his first official visit to china. The French President has started his visit from Xian. It is expected that Airbus 320 deal would be finalized. President Macron said that he had confirmation from Chinese President Xi Jinping that a contract would be "finalized shortly".<sup>21</sup> Both countries discussed the trade and political and global issues.

- **Presidential Election in the Czech Republic**

President Milos Zeman has led in the first round of presidential election in the Czech Republic. President Zeman will face Jiri Drahos in the second round which will be held on January 26-27, 2018.<sup>22</sup>

- **Coalition Negotiations in Germany**

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) announced on 12 January 2018 that they had made a breakthrough in their exploratory talks which may lead to formal coalition negotiations.<sup>23</sup> Reportedly,

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<sup>21</sup> Major Airbus A320 and beef sales cap Macron's China visit, DW, January 10, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/major-airbus-a320-and-beef-sales-cap-macrons-china-visit/a-42090091>

<sup>22</sup> Russia-friendly Czech president faces pro-EU rival in run-off, euronews, January 14, 2018, <http://www.euronews.com/2018/01/14/russia-friendly-czech-president-faces-pro-eu-rival-in-run-off>

<sup>23</sup> Ben Knight, German coalition talks reach breakthrough: A look at what comes next, DW, January 12, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/german-coalition-talks-reach-breakthrough-a-look-at-what-comes-next/a-42122334>

some amendments in the preliminary coalition agreement are demanded by SPD senior figures which are not agreed by CSU and CDU. The CSU and CDU want SPD to decide whether it would enter in formal negotiations.<sup>24</sup>

- **Cabinet Reshuffle in Poland**

In a Cabinet reshuffle Poland, President Andrzej Duda swore in new foreign, finance, defence, interior, health and environment ministers. Teresa Czerwińska is new Finance Minister and Mariusz Błaszczak was appointed new Defence Minister. Joachim Brudziński is the Interior Minister and Jacek Czaputowicz takes over as new Foreign Minister of Poland. Łukasz Szumowski is new Health Minister and Henryk Kowalczyk takes over as Environment Minister of Poland.<sup>25</sup>

## **(ASEAN, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Phillipines)**

(Dr Temjenmeren Ao)

- **Indonesia to Push for the Conclusion of the COC in the South China Sea**

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi on January 9, in a press statement stated that it will push for an effective Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea to defuse tensions in the region as a part of the country's strategic foreign policy this year. The minister stated that this would help ASEAN and China to produce a practical and effective COC for the sake of stability and security of the South China Sea. She expressed hope that negotiations on the code of conduct between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and China will start in March in Vietnam, one of the claimants in the sea, and will conclude as soon as possible. The Minister also added that, "For Indonesia, Asean unity and centrality is the key (and) Indonesia will continue to safeguard Asean's unity and centrality".<sup>26</sup>

- **Philippines to Protest against China's Airbase on Fiery Cross Reef**

Philippines Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana stated that the Philippines will make a diplomatic protest to China, which it described as reneging on a promise not to militarise artificial islands in the busy South China Sea waterway, and the south-east Asian nation. The Defence Secretary reaction is after a December 30,

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<sup>24</sup> Angela Merkel's conservatives rule out amendments to preliminary coalition deal, DW, January 14, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkels-conservatives-rule-out-amendments-to-preliminary-coalition-deal/a-42143734>

<sup>25</sup> Poland appoints new ministers in sweeping reshuffle, Radio Poland, January 9, 2018, <http://thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/343457,Poland-appoints-new-ministers-in-sweeping-reshuffle>

<sup>26</sup> "Indonesia takes Asean lead on S.China Sea dispute", *Bangkok Post*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1392970/indonesia-takes-asean-lead-on-s-china-sea-dispute>, accessed on January 10, 2018.

aerial clip of the fiery cross reef which showed build-up of military facilities on the artificial island. According to the presidential spokesman Harry Roque, "We have always been against the militarisation of the area", he added. "It is certainly not OK, because it constitutes a further threat to peace and security in area". However according to Mr Roque, China is holding to a commitment not to reclaim more islands. Reacting to Philippines protest China's foreign ministry spokesman said the construction was on the country's territory and was intended to aid peace in the region, as well as maritime safety and disaster prevention. Further, China has assured the Philippines that it will not occupy new features or territory in the South China Sea, under a new "status quo" brokered by Manila as both sides try to strengthen their relations. According to China State media, the reef has a hospital with more than 50 doctors, high-speed mobile connections and an airport with a runway of 3,160m to serve what Beijing calls a weather station equipped with radar.<sup>27</sup>

- **Indonesian Fisheries minister urged to stop destroying illegal foreign fishing boats**

Senior government and business officials on January 10, urged Indonesia's fisheries minister Ms Susi Pudjiastuti, to stop blowing up foreign boats caught fishing illegally, saying the policy could hurt diplomatic ties and the fisheries industry. Indonesia has destroyed hundreds of foreign illegal vessels since 2014, among them Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese boats, in an effort to protect domestic fish stocks and fishermen. Indonesia's Vice-President Jusuf Kalla also raised his concern stating that the policy could affect relations with other countries. According to estimates cited by the fisheries minister, the fishing industry suffers losses of nearly 200 billion rupiah (\$19.8 million) every year because of illegal fishing.<sup>28</sup>

- **Second Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Meeting**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) Leaders' Meeting began on Wednesday's afternoon in Phnom Penh, under the theme of "Our River of Peace and Sustainable Development". The meeting was co-chaired by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, and his Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang with the participation of Lao Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, Myanmar Vice President Myint Swe, Thai Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha, and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, according to the Cambodian news agency (AKP). The six MLC leaders discussed key issues to develop the Mekong sub-region with strong focus on the commitment to maintain peace, stability, sustainable development and prosperity of the Mekong sub-region. The leaders also stressed on the importance of the socio-economic development of sub-regional countries in terms of

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<sup>27</sup> "Philippines to protest to China over apparent airbase on manmade island", *The Straits Times*, January 9, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-to-protest-to-china-over-apparent-airbase-on-manmade-island>, accessed on January 10, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> "Indonesian minister urged to stop destroying illegal foreign fishing boats", *The Straits Times*, January 10, 2018, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesian-minister-urged-to-stop-destroying-illegal-foreign-fishing-boats>, accessed on January 10, 2018.

enhancing the well-being of their people, narrowing the development gap among countries in support of the ASEAN Community building as well as advancing South-South cooperation to further contribute to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>29</sup>

- **Thailand's Deputy PM backs plan for new political party**

Deputy PM Prawit Wongsuwon, has thrown his support behind a plan to set up a political party to back the incumbent PM Chan-o-cha to return as a non-elected prime minister after the general election, which is due for later this year. The move comes after PM Chan-o-cha last week openly declared for the first time that he is no longer a soldier and is now a politician, fuelling speculation that he intends to stay as PM in the aftermath of the general polls. Under the constitution, PM Chan-o-cha, could resume his premiership after the general election if he is chosen as an outsider PM by parliament after the polls, if MPs fail to select a new premier from candidates nominated by party lists, a provisional clause under Section 272 of the charter would trigger the alternate route. In such a situation, senators can join MPs in proposing a motion to suspend the rule requiring the prime ministerial candidates to come from party lists, paving the way for an outsider PM to be selected. Such a motion requires the support of at least two-thirds of both MPs and senators, or 500 of them, to suspend the rule.<sup>30</sup>

## Myanmar

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- **Indian coast guard ships visit Yangon**

The Indian Coast Guard ships Shaunak and Rajshree are visiting Yangon from 14-18 January, 2018 on a goodwill visit. ICGS Shaunak is an Offshore Patrol Vessel and was commissioned into Indian Coast Guard on 21 February, 2017. ICGS Rajshree is an Inshore Patrol Vessel commissioned on 15 January, 2012. Major activities during their stay at Yangon include courtesy calls, interaction with personnel from the Myanmar Navy, visits to places of interest and friendly sports, according to a press release<sup>31</sup>.

- **Rakhine Chief Minister Says ARSA Threat Continues**

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<sup>29</sup> "2nd Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Leaders' Meeting Kicks Off", *Laos News Agency*, January 10, 2018, <http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.aspx?id=30991>, accessed on January 11, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> "Prawit Backs plan for new political party", *The Bangkok Post*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/politics/1394178/prawit-backs-plan-for-new-political-party>, accessed on January 12, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Indian coast guard ships visit Yangon, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/indian-coast-guard-ships-visit-yangon>

Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu claimed that Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) militants are a continuing threat in the restive state. “There may be around 30 of them who have infiltrated three areas of Rakhine state,” he said. The regional government will tighten security measures as necessary in response, added the chief minister<sup>32</sup>.

- **KNU says UPC should be postponed until differences on security sector clarified**

The Karen National Union agrees with the position of its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army, that the upcoming 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference should be postponed until differences over the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between the government, Myanmar Army, and the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) are resolved. The concerns of the EAOs arose after a representative of the Myanmar Army, or Tatmadaw, said in a November joint review meeting that security sector re-integration was the same thing as the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, an interpretation that the EAOs could not accept.<sup>33</sup>

- **India and Myanmar to streamline free movement for border villagers**

India and Myanmar are set to streamline free movement of people within 16 km along their borders. The Central Government has asked the four States that share an unfenced border with Myanmar to distribute “border passes” to all residents living within 16 km from the boundary line, The Hindu reported on 14 January.<sup>34</sup>

- **Japan backs Myanmar, pledges more aid**

Japan stands steadfastly behind Myanmar against global condemnation over its handling of the violence in northern Rakhine State that forced over 650,000 Muslims to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh. “Japan has confidence in Myanmar and its present leadership,” Toshihide Ando, deputy press secretary, told reporters on 12<sup>th</sup> January, when Foreign Minister Taro Kono met with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw to announce an emergency aid package of US\$3 million (K4.05 billion) to help fund the repatriation of refugees. “This emergency grant aid is to provide humanitarian assistance in rebuilding the living condition, including provision for electricity, water purifiers, fuel and plastic containers, in the sites for resettlement of the returned displaced persons,” Ando said, reading the official statement about the assistance<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Rakhine Chief Minister Says ARSA Threat Continues, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/rakhine-chief-minister-says-arsa-threat-continues.html>

<sup>33</sup> KNU says UPC should be postponed until differences on security sector clarified, 11 January 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knu-says-upc-postponed-differences-security-sector-clarified.html>

<sup>34</sup> India and Myanmar to streamline free movement for border villagers, 14 January 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-regional/india-and-myanmar-streamline-free-movement-border-villagers>

<sup>35</sup> Japan backs Myanmar, pledges more aid, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/japan-backs-myanmar-pledges-more-aid.html>

- **US, UK condemn ARSA attacks on government troops**

The United States and the United Kingdom on Monday condemned the attacks the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) against government troops in restive northern Rakhine last week. In a statement, the United States Embassy in Myanmar expressed its condolences to the injured security personnel and their families. Five soldiers were injured when an explosive device detonated. The US embassy said the attack was an 'act of violence' saying it would only further undermine peace and security in the troubled part of the state<sup>36</sup>.

## North America

(Dr. Stuti Banerjee)

### Canada

- **Justin Trudeau tells Hamilton town hall Canadians can feel safe despite returning ISIS fighters**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a Hamilton town hall that despite concerns over returning ISIS fighters, Canadians were safe in their country and could rely on the security and intelligence services to keep them that way. As the war against ISIS winds down, the government has said it's aware of about 180 individuals "with a nexus to Canada" who had travelled overseas to join ISIS and other groups — and another 60 who had returned to Canada. Unlike Canada's allies in Iraq and Syria, who are directly targeting their own ISIS fighters before they can return to their countries in the West, Canada's Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale said "Canada does not engage in death squads." Goodale said Canada and is instead focused on monitoring returning fighters and helping them to reintegrate, when possible, into Canadian society.<sup>37</sup>

- **After Homeland Security's TPS decision, Canada is telling Salvadorans: Please don't come here**

When the Trump administration issued an immigration ban on citizens of seven majority Muslim countries a year ago, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau sent out an unambiguous tweet about Canada's stance on refugees and asylum seekers. "To those fleeing persecution, terror and war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength," Trudeau wrote on Jan. 28. But when U.S. Homeland Security announced this week that it was withdrawing

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<sup>36</sup> US, UK condemn ARSA attacks on government troops, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/us-uk-condemn-arsa-attacks-government-troops.html>

<sup>37</sup> Peter Zimonjic, "Justin Trudeau tells Hamilton town hall Canadians can feel safe despite returning ISIS fighters," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/hamilton-trudeau-town-hall-1.4481025>, Accessed on 15 januaru 2018.

Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, for 200,000 Salvadorans, giving them 18 months to sort out their immigration status permanently or face deportation, the reaction from the Canadian government was more muted. Fearing an influx of newcomers crossing “irregularly” into Canada from the United States, the Canadian government has embarked on an information campaign to discourage Salvadorans from trekking north, as thousands of Haitians did when threatened with a loss of protected status last summer. The government announced that it was planning to send Pablo Rodriguez, a Spanish-speaking member of Parliament, to California in the coming days to speak to community groups, lawyers and Spanish-language media. His message is simple: If you don’t qualify for refugee or asylum status, don’t try to cross into Canada.<sup>38</sup>

### **Critics fear the government's national security bill puts Canadians in the crosshairs**

The government’s new public safety bill gives new powers to Canada’s foreign intelligence agency that has a growing number of critics worried it will put Canadians in the crosshairs. Bill C-59 is winding its way through parliamentary committees and has been touted as the Liberal government’s improved version of the Harper government’s national security legislation, Bill C-51, which also attracted controversy. The Liberal bill creates a standalone act that governs the CSE and, along with an enhanced mandate for cybersecurity, introduces quasi-judicial oversight on the agency in the form of a newly created Intelligence Commissioner. That enhanced mandate, “extraordinary exceptions” to the CSE’s rule against directing its activities at Canadians and the interconnected nature of the world’s information systems means the bill could create a host of new privacy concerns.<sup>39</sup>

- **On NAFTA, Canada agrees to discuss the unthinkable**

Canada seems to be quietly backing down on the North American Free Trade Agreement. It is now willing to bargain U.S. demands that the Liberal government had formerly dismissed as deal-breakers. That seems to be the gist of several days of confusing messages on the NAFTA negotiations coming out of Ottawa. Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland set the table when she told reporters that Ottawa has come up with “creative” ideas for dealing with the impasse in the three-way talks between Canada, Mexico and the U.S. One would gut portions of the agreement that allow independent panels to rule on disputed trade and economic policies. Another would require autos imported to the U.S. from Canada and Mexico to contain at least 50 per cent American content. Yet others would bias government procurement rules in America’s favour and add a sunset clause

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<sup>38</sup> Alan Freeman, “After Homeland Security’s TPS decision, Canada is telling Salvadorans: Please don’t come here,” <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/world/2018/01/13/After-Homeland-Security-s-TPS-decision-Canada-is-telling-Salvadorans-Please-don-t-come-here/stories/201801120248>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Stuart Thomson, “Critics fear the government's national security bill puts Canadians in the crosshairs,” <http://nationalpost.com/news/politics/critics-fear-the-governments-national-security-bill-puts-canadians-in-the-crosshairs>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

stipulating that the treaty automatically expire after five years unless explicitly renewed. Canada called these ideas deal-breakers and, to the irritation of the Americans, refused to provide counterproposals. How much Canada is willing to compromise on its so-called red line demands in order to accommodate U.S. President Donald Trump remains unclear. Perversely, one indication that the Liberal government may be preparing to cave on NAFTA is its decision to take a harder rhetorical line against the U.S. in the separate softwood lumber dispute.<sup>40</sup>

## The United States

- **Trump waives Iran sanctions for what administration says is last time**

President Trump waived sanctions against Iran that were lifted as part of the landmark 2015 nuclear deal, the White House said. But the Trump administration is imposing new, nonnuclear sanctions in response to Iran's ballistic missile activity and its crackdown on anti-government protestors. Trump also warned that this will be the last such waiver, calling for a follow-on deal with Europeans and a legislative fix from Congress. The White House's announcement keeps alive for now an agreement that Trump has called the "worst deal ever negotiated" while trying project a continued hard-line stance against Tehran. The decision also represents a win for national security Adviser H.R. McMaster, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary James Mattis, who have all advised against walking away from the international agreement. The new sanctions announced Friday are against 14 people and entities for serious human right abuses, censorship or weapons proliferation, an administration official told reporters. The new designations include sanctions against the head of Iran's judiciary, an Iranian prison that is housing many of the arrested protestors, the director of the prison, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' electronic warfare and cyber defense organization, and Iran's supreme council for cyberspace.<sup>41</sup>

- **US Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster outlines 'ambitious' agenda for bilateral ties in maiden speech**

In his speech Ambassador Juster stated, "...As the U.S. National Security Strategy recognizes, India is "a leading power" in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. For India and the United States, the Indo-Pacific is vital to the security and prosperity of our people as well as others. Together, we want to: ensure a free and open region, where the rule of law and democratic principles are reflected in a rules-based order;

promote respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity..." He further stated, "It is now time to make sure that the strategic partnership is a durable partnership. The

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Walkom, "On NAFTA, Canada agrees to discuss the unthinkable," <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2018/01/14/on-nafta-canada-agrees-to-discuss-the-unthinkable.html>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Kheel, "Trump waives Iran sanctions for what administration says is last time," <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/368748-trump-extends-iran-nuclear-deal>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

longstanding commitment of the United States to a free, secure, and open Indo-Pacific has underpinned the stability and remarkable economic rise of this region – to the benefit of all of us. The United States will remain committed to this region – as we are to the rules-based international order – because our future is inextricably linked to it. We welcome India’s leadership with us in this venture – as partners bolstered by conviction and working with like-minded nations on a regional architecture to ensure that the Indo-Pacific – in the words of Secretary of State Tillerson – is increasingly a place of peace, stability, and growing prosperity, rather than one of disorder, conflict, and predatory economic policy.” On defence cooperation he said, “One way to increase cooperation is through military exercises.... A second key area of cooperation involves military hardware and technology.... A third way to advance defense cooperation is through military exchanges.... One last, very important point regarding this pillar is our critical and growing cooperation in the area of counter-terrorism.” On economic cooperation he suggested, “India can seize the strategic opportunity – through trade and investment – to become an alternative hub for U.S. business in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>42</sup>

- **US defence chief Jim Mattis set to visit China in spring, Pentagon spokeswoman says**

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis plans to pay his first official visit to China in the spring to seek further cooperation from Beijing amid rising challenges from North Korea’s nuclear threat, according to the Pentagon. Chinese military and nuclear analysts said Mattis’ trip would help both countries narrow their differences on North Korea, with Beijing still hoping that Washington will not launch a military attack against Pyongyang. During the visit, Mattis and senior Chinese officials are expected to discuss measures to rein in Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile programmes, as well as to expand military-to-military exchanges between Washington and Beijing.<sup>43</sup>

## **Mexico**

- **Mexico Nafta Chief Signals Room for Deal on U.S. Cars Goal**

Mexico’s Economy Minister signaled there is common ground over a key U.S. objective ahead of the next round of Nafta talks, saying that strengthening the regional content rules for cars would be a victory for all three member nations. The Montreal talks are “crucial because it’s the first time we have to send clear signals

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<sup>42</sup> First Post, “US Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster outlines 'ambitious' agenda for bilateral ties in maiden speech,” <http://www.firstpost.com/world/full-text-of-kenneth-justers-remarks-on-us-india-relations-us-envoy-outlines-ambitious-agenda-for-bilateral-ties-4299325.html>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Minnie Chan, “US defence chief Jim Mattis set to visit China in spring, Pentagon spokeswoman says,” <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2128153/us-defence-chief-jim-mattis-set-visit-china-spring>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

of where we find possible accommodations," Ildefonso Guajardo told a gathering of Mexican diplomats. The U.S. demand for more North American, and specifically U.S. content in vehicles is among the most contentious issues on the Nafta negotiating table, along with issues such as government procurement. Negotiators largely avoided these issues in the latest talks in Mexico City in November and Washington in December, setting up the next set of meetings in Canada in two weeks as potentially decisive.<sup>44</sup>

- **Mexico will never pay for Trump wall: Mexican economy minister**

Mexico has made clear it will never pay for President Donald Trump's planned southern border wall, the country's economy minister said, after the U.S. leader again insisted he would make Mexico pay for the barrier. Trump told the Wall Street Journal in an interview published on Thursday that Mexico could pay for the wall, which he hopes will stem illegal immigration, "indirectly" through changes to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Trump has said he will withdraw from NAFTA if the accord cannot be renegotiated in favor of the United States. Guajardo was in Washington for talks this week with U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer over the modernization of NAFTA, according to a statement by Mexico's Economy Ministry.<sup>45</sup>

- **Mexican President Says He's 'Optimistic' About NAFTA Deal**

Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto said he is optimistic that the United States, Mexico and Canada can successfully renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the mutual benefit of the three countries. Mexico had previously hinted it would exit NAFTA hours after Canadian officials claimed the US will most likely pull out of the agreement. The comments sparked fear in international markets and a devaluation of both the Canadian dollar and the Mexican peso. Two government officials told Reuters earlier in the day that Canada is increasingly convinced that US President Donald Trump will soon announce that Washington is pulling out of the trade agreement.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Eric Martin, "Mexico Nafta Chief Signals Room for Deal on U.S. Cars Goal,"

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-09/mexico-economy-minister-signals-opening-for-u-s-nafta-demand>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Reuters Staff, "Mexico will never pay for Trump wall: Mexican economy minister,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trade-nafta-mexico-wall/mexico-will-never-pay-for-trump-wall-mexican-economy-minister-idUSKBN1F106K?il=0>," Accessed on 15 January 2018.

<sup>46</sup> ---, "Mexican President Says He's 'Optimistic' About NAFTA Deal,"

<https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Mexican-President-Says-Hes-Optimistic-About-NAFTA-Deal-20180111-0026.html>, Accessed on 15 January 2018.

## Latin America and Caribbean Countries

(Dr. Abdul Gaffar)

### Brazil

- **Brazilian inflation ends 2017 at 2.95%, below the bottom of central bank target**

The annual inflation rate in Brazil increased to 2.95% in December 2017, from 2.50% in November 2017, rising above economists' projections of 2.80%, but ending the year below the bottom of the central bank's target for 2017, which ranged from 3% to 6%. According to the national statistics office (IBGE), the 2017 inflation was the lowest ever recorded since 1998, when prices rose 1.65%. In a monthly comparison, the Brazilian consumer price index rose 0.44% in December 2017, also accelerating from a 0.28% increase in November 2017, said the IBGE. Analysts expected a 0.30% growth. The inflation strengthening in December 2017 resulted essentially from higher prices for Food and Beverages, which had a monthly inflation rate of 0.54% in December 2017, after a 0.38% deflation in November 2017, and Transportation (from +0.52% to +1.23%). According to Brazilian central bank, since the beginning of the inflation targeting regime in Brazil in 1999, inflation closed the 12-month period near to the central point of the target on only three occasions (2000, 2007 and 2009). Just once, in 2006, did the rate fall below the target center, but remained within the range. In all other years, inflation closed the year above the target.

- **Brazilian stocks edge higher convinced Lula will be barred from running in election**

Brazilian stocks edged higher to mark a record close on Monday (January 8, 2018) underpinned by optimism over the nation's fiscal outlook as well as a strong flow of international investment. The benchmark Bovespa stock index continued its climb following a seven-day string of gains. The rally in Brazilian stocks has been supported by investor betting on a market-friendly winner in this year's presidential elections, who would advance President Michel Temer's austerity platform. Former President Lula da Silva, who has railed against Temer's policies, is leading opinion polls, but he could be barred from running if a conviction for corruption is upheld by a higher court on Jan. 24. Signs that an economic recovery is picking up steam have also supported demand for Brazilian stocks, which should see earnings growth as Latin America's largest economy regain a solid footing. "Inflows from foreign investors remain substantial and the pipeline looks strong," analysts at the Magliano brokerage wrote in a report.

## Chile

- **Bachelet highlights human rights, democracy as her policy in Cuba visit**

Outgoing Chilean President Michelle Bachelet highlighted the guidelines of the international policy of her management based on democracy, human rights and understanding among peoples during her official visit to Cuba. In her speech at the seminar “Perspectives of Trade and Investment: Chile-Cuba”, the President said that in a few weeks her administration will culminate in which “the international policy of my Government has been aimed at promoting understanding among peoples, democracy, human rights, promoting peace, strengthening economic relations and work in cooperation in different areas.” “We trust that this line, which has had such good results in, for example, the growing presence of Chile in Central America and the Caribbean, and certainly in Cuba, will continue to be a predominant trend,” she stressed. In addition, Bachelet stressed that “the great collective project of regional integration, to collaborate together to look for opportunities in our territory and in the rest of the world, is an objective that interprets the whole of our community, let’s continue on that path.” President Bachelet reached Cuba on January 7, 2018, in her last international tour, next to ending her mandate on March 11, 2018. She will be succeeded by Sebastian Piñera, who won in a second round the presidential elections of December 2017.

## Venezuela

- **Venezuelan Regime Blackmails Opposition over Humanitarian Food Aid**

The Venezuelan regime said it would open a humanitarian channel to help those suffering from the country’s shortage crisis if the political opposition agreed to legitimize his unconstitutional Constituent Assembly, which last year usurped the legislative branch’s National Assembly. The country desperately needs food and medicine, which President Nicolás Maduro reportedly is willing to accept in the form of aid from other countries if the opposition recognizes the Constituent Assembly and can control where the resources are distributed. Venezuelans across the country have died from lack of access to the medications they need, while hundreds of children suffer from malnutrition. The regime has thus far denied the need for humanitarian aid, or accused any offers of it as “foreign intervention.” Both sides are reportedly weighing the proposition in the Dominican Republic, where the talks are taking place. Food would come from the World Food Program, an organization run by the United Nations. International sanctions and the upcoming presidential elections are also factors in the discussion. Both the Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray and his Chilean counterpart Hernán Muñoz warned Dominican President Danilo Medina — who is hosting the meetings — that they would withdraw from negotiations if the regime did not take them seriously.

- **Senator Marco Rubio Says “Unreliable” Negotiations in Venezuela Will Not Convince US to Lift Sanctions**

United States Senator Marco Rubio said the dialogues between between Venezuela’s opposition and President Nicolás Maduro’s regime continue to be ineffective. Talks resumed this Thursday, January 12, 2018. The day before, Rubio posted a tweet expressing his distrust of the Maduro regime and the longevity of the sanctions placed on it. Rubio touched on the regime’s tendency to attract members of the opposition to dialogues, even agreeing to certain measures, but never actually making true progress. For this reason, Rubio said, the negotiations are superficial. The Senator also made reference to the sanctions placed on the regime by the US in response to its constant violation of human rights. He said the US would lift sanctions only if free and fair elections were held. Otherwise, Rubio said, the sanctions will not be lifted “under any circumstances,” regardless of the “coercion or deception” that the opposition may succumb to at the negotiating table. Recently, the United States included four senior military officials from Venezuela on its list of sanctions, due to their participation in acts of corruption. The decision by the US shows that President Donald Trump isn’t willing to bow to the threats of the Maduro regime, which has threatened to cancel the 2018 elections if the sanctions are not lifted. The Maduro regime has shown that international sanctions are its weakness, as shown in negotiations he had with the Venezuelan opposition. His primary demand continues to be that the sanctions against him be lifted.

- **Santos to Venezuela’s Maduro: “Don’t Use Colombia to Disguise the Shortcomings of Your Failed Revolution”**

Once again President Juan Manuel Santos rejected Maduro’s suggestion that the health system of Colombia was a failure and that supposedly thousands of Colombians crossed every day into Venezuela in search of healthcare and medicines. The Colombian president also offered humanitarian support with food and medicines to mitigate the shortage of supplies in Venezuela. Santos, in a statement issued from the presidential residence, said: “By God, what cynicism. Everyone knows that the opposite is true. It is here, in Colombia, where we are serving more and more Venezuelan citizens who are unable to find even the most basic drugs in their country.” This is the most recent incident between the two leaders, who have enjoyed a tense diplomatic relationship. On November 28, 2017, President Santos also responded to accusations made by the Chavista leader about an alleged blockade of drugs to Venezuela. The Venezuelan dictator has attacked Juan Manuel Santos on several occasions. In one bizarre incident, he referred to the Colombian president as his son, and suggested that Santos should be asking for “a blessing.” President Santos is concerned about a massive migration of Venezuelans fleeing the country and not returning, as the South American is now suffering from a shortage of 90% of basic medicines and foodstuffs, as well as hyperinflation and the lowest wages in the region.

## South Asia

### Afghanistan

(Dr. Nihar Ranjan Das)

- **Afghanistan Frees 75 Hizb-e-Islami Prisoners**

The Afghan government released at least 75 Hizb-E-Islami prisoners from Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul on Thursday (January 11). The prisoners were released in accordance with the peace agreement signed between Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar last year. The process of releasing the prisoners had been delayed for months after the human rights organisations criticised the Afghan government for releasing the prisoners, who had been involved in insurgency incidents that killed thousands of people in the last few years.<sup>47</sup>

- **Afghan Govt Holds Unofficial Peace Talks With Taliban**

Afghan government representatives have held unofficial talks with five Taliban members in Turkey on Sunday (January 14). Humayun Jarir and Abbas Basir are representing Afghan government in the meeting. Humayun Jarir, a representative of Afghan government in the talks, told TOLONews that the talks are unofficial and that they will discuss mechanisms to pave the ground for official talks between the two sides. He said the Taliban members are representing Quetta Shura, Haqqani network and other factions of the Taliban.<sup>48</sup>

- **Govt Has Not Accepted Jamiat's Offer To Keep Noor As Balkh Governor**

The Government of National Unity has not accepted the offer by Jamiat-e-Islami to keep Ata Mohammad Noor as the governor of Balkh province, it has been reported. According to the sources privy of the development, keeping Noor as Balkh governor and implementation of the National Unity Government treaty were among the key demands of the Jamiat-e-Islami party in the proposal of the party in a bid to end the ongoing political deadlock.<sup>49</sup>

- **Hashimi Appointed New IEC Commissioner**

The Presidential Palace appointed Syed Hafizullah Hashimi as a new Independent Election Commission (IEC) member here on January 13, 2018. The appointment reportedly was made after thorough consultations among the stakeholders. Two

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<sup>47</sup> "Afghanistan Frees 75 Hizb-E-Islami Prisoners", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, January 13, 2018, [http://outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=19894](http://outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=19894) (accessed on January 15)

<sup>48</sup> Sayed Sharif Amiri "Afghan Govt Holds Unofficial Peace Talks With Taliban", *Tolo News*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghan-govt-hold-unofficial-peace-talks-taliban> (accessed on January 15)

<sup>49</sup> "Govt Has Not Accepted Jamiat's Offer To Keep Noor As Balkh Governor", *Khaama Press*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.khaama.com/govt-has-not-accepted-jamiats-offer-to-keep-noor-as-balkh-governor-04264> (accessed on January 15)

days back, the selection committee proposed the names of Hashimi, Abdul Qadir Zazai and Awal Rahman Rodwal to the president one of them had to be selected for the job.<sup>50</sup>

- **UNSC Members, Govt Leaders Meet Behind Closed Doors**

A senior delegation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held talks with Afghan government leadership on Sunday (January 14) where they reportedly discussed a wide range of issues including security and ongoing developments in the political fronts. The delegation arrived in Kabul on January 13, 2018. The results of the talks however have not been made public. Sources say government will announce essentials of the visit by the UN Security Council members to Afghanistan once the delegation completes its visit.<sup>51</sup>

## Bangladesh

(Dr Ashish Shukla)

- **Quader rules out BNP demand for dialogue**

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader on Saturday (January 13) ruled out BNP's demand of holding dialogue with the ruling party ahead of the next election. Quader said there is no complexity in holding the election as the country's constitution has given clear reference about holding of national election. "Had there been any problem regarding holding the election, dialogue would have been needed. As there is no complexity, so there is no need to hold a dialogue," he added.<sup>52</sup>

- **PM's speech disappointed people: BNP**

The BNP yesterday (January 12) claimed that Sheikh Hasina's speech disappointed the people as it had no indication of reaching an understanding to hold a free and fair election. "Prime minister's speech will rather take the country towards a

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<sup>50</sup> "Hashimi Appointed New IEC Commissioner", *Kabul Times*, January 14, 2018, <http://thekabultimes.gov.af/index.php/newsnational/16027-hashimi-appointed-new-iec-commissioner.html> (accessed on January 15)

<sup>51</sup> "UNSC Members, Govt Leaders Meet Behind Closed Doors", *Tolo News*, January 14, 2018, <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/unsc-members-afghan-govt-leaders-meet-behind-closed-doors> (accessed on January 15)

<sup>52</sup> "Quader rules out BNP demand for dialogue," *The Independent*, January 13, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/132528>, accessed on December 13, 2018.

further crisis,” BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said in an instant reaction to Hasina’s speech.<sup>53</sup>

- **Meaningful solution still possible: BNP**

Though the party is 'upset' about the Prime Minister's statement on the next general election, BNP on Saturday (January 13) said it is still confident that a meaningful solution to the crisis over the polls can be found though talks in a congenial atmosphere. In her address to the nation on Friday (January 12), Prime Minister said that the next general election will be held as per the Constitution, and expressed her high optimism that all the parties registered with the Election Commission will take part in the polls for upholding the country's democratic process.<sup>54</sup>

- **Bangladesh, Myanmar meet amid doubts over Rohingya repatriation**

Officials from Myanmar and Bangladesh will on Monday (January 15) to discuss how to implement another deal, signed on 23 November, on the return of more than 650,000 Rohingya who have escaped an army crackdown since late August. The meeting in Naypyitaw will be the first for a joint working group set up to hammer out the details of the November repatriation agreement. The group is made up of civil servants from both countries.<sup>55</sup>

- **Bangladesh, Germany sign agreements worth €337.2m**

Bangladesh and Germany have signed three bilateral agreements on Sunday (January 14)– Technical Cooperation-2016, Financial Cooperation-2016 and Financial Cooperation 2016 (Saidabad-III) at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. Germany will provide €337.2 million for the implementation of these projects. Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Kazi Shofiqul Azam and German Ambassador to Bangladesh Dr Thomas Prinz signed the agreements on behalf of their respective governments.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “PM's speech disappointed people: BNP,” *Daily Star*, January 13, 2018, <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/pms-speech-disappointed-people-bnp-1519207>, accessed on January 13, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> ” Meaningful solution to ‘political crisis’ still possible: BNP,” *The Independent*, January 13, 2018, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/post/132518>, accessed on January 13, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> “Bangladesh, Myanmar meet amid doubts over Rohingya repatriation plan,” *Prothom Alo*, January 14, 2018, <http://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/news/169496/Bangladesh-Myanmar-meet-amid-doubts-over-Rohingya>, accessed on January 14, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> “Bangladesh, Germany sign agreements worth €337.2m,” *Dhaka Tribune*, January 14, 2018, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/2018/01/14/bangladesh-germany-signs-agreements-worth-e337-2m/>, accessed on January 14, 2018.

## नेपाल

(Dr. Rakesh Kumar Meena)

- **नेपाल को इंटरनेट सुविधा चीन से: खत्म निर्भरता की भारत ,**

नेपाल ने चीन द्वारा इंटरनेट के प्रस्ताव को स्वीकार कर लिया है और काफी सालों से इंटरनेट प्रदान करने में भारत का एकाधिकार माना जाता रहा है जो कि चीन से इंटरनेट सुविधा मिलने के बाद खत्म हो जाएगी कम्युनिकेशन टाटा और एयरटेल भारती की भारत तक अभी नेपाल . क लिमिटेडम्पनी से इंटरनेट की सुविधा ले रहे थे .थी रही जा बताई खराब कनेक्टिविटी जिसकी ,

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- **राष्ट्रीय सभा के चुनाव की प्रक्रिया शुरू:**

राष्ट्रीय सभा के चुनाव में एक निर्वाचक मंडल होगा और सदस्यों के विधानसभा प्रांतीय कि जो , से प्रमुखों उप और प्रमुखों के निकायों स्थानीय गठित होगी का सदस्यों 56 में सदन उच्च इस . के संविधान .होगा से पद्धति की पास्ट द पोस्ट फर्स्ट और पद्धति संक्रमणीय एकल चुनाव का बाकी और होंगे मनोनीत द्वारा राष्ट्रपति 3 जिनमे ,होंगे सदस्य 59 में सदन उच्च अनुसार न होना को फरवरी 7 चुनाव का सदन उच्च .होगा चुनाविर्धारित हुआ है.<sup>58</sup> -

- **:होगा संशोधन में संधि की 1950**

भारत नेपाल के मध्य के व्यक्तियों प्रबुद्ध रही कर समीक्षा की संधि मैत्री और शांति की 1950 आठों के समूह इस अभी हालाँकि ,है कही बात की बदलाव इसमें बाद के बैठक छठी ने समूह संश में संधि .है बननी सहमति में सदस्योंोधन के बाद इसकी रिपोर्ट यह समूह दोनों देशों की सरकार को सौपेगा 'असमान' हमेशा को संधि इस से तरफ की नेपाल में बैठकों की समूह इस . है रहा जा बताया<sup>59</sup>

- **माओवादी केंद्र सरकार छोड़ने की इच्छा में:**

तीन महीने पहले माओवादी केंद्र ने एमाले के साथ चुनावी गठबंधन किया था जिसके चलते सरकार में माओवादी मंत्रियों के पोर्टफोलियो सरकार ने ले लिए थे में खेमे के केंद्र माओवादी अब .

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<sup>57</sup> "Nepal ends India's internet monopoly with Chinese link", The Kathmandu Post, 13 January 2018, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-01-13/nepal-ends-indias-internet-monopoly-with-chinese-link.html>

<sup>58</sup> "Poll body defines National Assembly election process", The Kathmandu Post, 9 January 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-01-09/1>

<sup>59</sup> Anil Giri, "1950 treaty to change", The Kathmandu Post, 13 January 2017, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-01-13/1>

प्रधानमंत्री ऊपर के देउबा जिससे जाये लिए ले समर्थन से सरकार देउबा कि है रही उठ बात यह बनेगा दबाव का छोड़ने पद<sup>60</sup> \_

## Pakistan

(Dr. Dhruvajyoti Bhattacharjee)

- **H1N1 in Pakistan**

H1N1 seasonal influenza struck Lahore where a first case was tested positive for the disease January 10<sup>th</sup>. The health authorities confirmed her as 66th patient who was reported positive for the H1N1 seasonal influenza since August 2017. On finding the first case in the provincial capital, the Directorate of Health Services issued on January 10<sup>th</sup> an advisory to all the government hospitals of the province to avoid deaths.<sup>61</sup> Out of the 120 confirmed cases of influenza (H1N1) reported across the country, seven have been reported in Islamabad, the National Institute of Health (NIH) revealed on January 10<sup>th</sup>. A total of 400 suspected cases have been reported in hospitals across the country, of which 120 have been confirmed and 20 have died. The highest number of confirmed cases – 47 – was reported in Multan and nearby areas.<sup>62</sup>

- **Bill Gates and Pakistan**

Days after the Trump administration announced it was suspending security assistance to the country, Bill Gates stated that his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will increase financial aid for Pakistan. In a letter to Minister for National Health Services (NHS) Saira Afzal Tarar Bill Gates praised the government's commitment to the eradication of polio. An NHS official told Pakistani media, that the foundation had so far given Rs72 billion to Pakistan and it was expected that the amount of aid would increase in the future.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> "Maoist centre decides to quit govt, finally", The Kathmandu Post, 12 January 2018, <http://epaper.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2018-01-12/1>

<sup>61</sup> Asif Chaudhry, "First H1N1 case reported in Lahore", *Dawn*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1381966> accessed on January 15, 2018

<sup>62</sup> 'Seven H1N1 cases reported in capital', *Dawn*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1382192/seven-h1n1-cases-reported-in-capital> accessed on January 15, 2018

<sup>63</sup> Ikram Junaidi, "Bill Gates announces aid bump for Pakistan", *Dawn*, January 15, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1382998/bill-gates-announces-aid-bump-for-pakistan> accessed on January 15, 2018

## Indian Ocean Region

### Sri Lanka

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- **Annual Indo-Lanka Defence Dialogue held**

The fifth Indo-Sri Lanka Defence Dialogue was held in New Delhi, India. The Sri Lankan delegation was led by the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence Kapila Waidyaratne PC. The ten-member Indian delegation, led by the Indian Defence Secretary, Shri Sanjay Mitra. Since its inception in 2012, the Annual Indo - Sri Lanka Defence Dialogue reviews a range of Defence Cooperation between the two neighbouring countries while giving attention to other areas of interests as well. The 4th Indo-Sri Lanka Defence Dialogue was held in Colombo in November, last year.<sup>64</sup>

- **Government claims money from MiG deal stored in Hong Kong**

The Government claims money allegedly obtained fraudulently by the former regime through the MiG aircraft deal is stored at a bank in Hong Kong. Health Minister Dr. Rajitha Senaratne said that the former Government purchased a MiG aircraft from Ukraine for USD 7.2 million yet the official documents show the aircraft had been purchased for USD 14.7 million. Senaratne claimed that former Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa had taken USD 7.5 million and it was now stored at a bank in Hong Kong.<sup>65</sup>

- **China Merchant pays second tranche of US\$97.3mn in H'tota Port investment**

China Merchant Port Holdings (CMPort) today made the payment of US\$ 97.365 million to the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) as the second tranche of its investment in the Public-Private Partnership (PPP). Sri Lanka formally handed over commercial activities of the Hambantota Port to the Chinese company in December 2017 and received \$292 million out of the \$1.12 billion deal, as the first tranche. With the second payment, China Merchant Port Holdings (CMPort) had paid US\$ 389.462 million to date.<sup>66</sup>

- **Political parties in North urged not to promote LTTE at polls**

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<sup>64</sup> Annual Indo-Lanka Defence Dialogue held, 15 January 2018, <https://news.lk/news/sri-lanka/item/19244-annual-indo-lanka-defence-dialogue-held>

<sup>65</sup> Government claims money from MiG deal stored in Hong Kong, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/01/14/government-claims-money-from-mig-deal-stored-in-hong-kong/>

<sup>66</sup> China Merchant pays second tranche of US\$97.3mn in H'tota Port investment, 14 January 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/China-Merchant-pays-second-tranche-of-US-mn-in-H-tota-Port-investment-143900.html>

Political parties in the North have been urged not to promote the LTTE while campaigning for the Local Government (LG) election. The Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE) said that there have been reports pro-LTTE songs are being played at events held in support of some political parties in the North.<sup>67</sup>

- **India extends assistance to upgrade KKS Harbour**

An agreement for Indian financial assistance for US \$ 45.27 million (LKR 6.9 billion) for upgrading Kankesanthurai (KKS) Harbour has been inked between Sri Lanka and India. The MoU was signed on 10 January in New Delhi by Mr. David Rasquinha, Managing Director, Export-Import Bank of India and Dr. R.H.S Samaratunga, Secretary to Treasury of Sri Lanka. The upgradation project would make KKS Harbour a full-fledged commercial port, further strengthening Sri Lanka's efforts to become a regional maritime hub. It would also assist in reconstruction efforts in northern Sri Lanka, the Indian High Commission said<sup>68</sup>.

## Maldives

(Dr. M. Samatha)

- **Minister Asim visits India as the Special Envoy of the President, meets Indian leadership**

Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Dr. Mohamed Asim has undertaken an official visit to India, as the Special Envoy of His Excellency the President of the Maldives. During his visit from 10-12 January 2018, Minister Asim called on H.E. Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India and met his counterpart H.E. Ms. Sushma Swaraj, Minister of External Affairs of India. During these meetings, both sides reflected on the close friendly relations between the Maldives and India.

Minister Asim conveyed greetings from His Excellency President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom to His Excellency the Prime Minister of India. Highlighting President Yameen's "India First Policy," Minister Asim reiterated the importance of further strengthening the historical ties between the two countries. He further expressed gratitude to the Government of India for their valuable contribution towards the socio-economic development of the Maldives. Prime Minister Modi assured that the Maldives has, and will always remain, a close friend of India.

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<sup>67</sup> Political parties in North urged not to promote LTTE at polls, 13 January 2017, <http://colombogazette.com/2018/01/13/political-parties-in-north-urged-not-to-promote-ltte-at-polls/>

<sup>68</sup> India extends assistance to upgrade KKS Harbour, 12 January 2018, <https://news.lk/news/business/item/19226-india-extends-assistance-to-upgrade-kks-harbour>

Further, the Prime Minister assured that India would extend its support in all areas of cooperation.<sup>69</sup>

- **Opposition leadership plagued by discord and silence**

Presidential elections are due to be held in the Maldives later this year, with opposition parties in talks to field a unity candidate to defeat Abdulla Yameen. But the Maldives Independent can reveal that discord among opposition leaders is threatening to derail efforts. Opposition sources have confirmed that disunity among the leaders is a major concern. The division is at odds with the united front on display for the public and media. Talks are under way between representatives of former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, former president and leader of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) Mohamed Nasheed, leader of the Jumhooree Party Gasim Ibrahim and leader of the Adhaalath Party Imran Abdulla. But a highly placed source in the Gayoom camp told the Maldives Independent that Gayoom and Nasheed have not spoken to each other since March 2017 – when the two former rivals signed an historic agreement to work together to “restore democracy” to the country.<sup>70</sup>

- **EU, ex-pres Maumoon discuss upcoming elections**

A delegation of the European Union met with former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom on 13 January 2018 to discuss the upcoming presidential election in the Maldives. In a tweet following the sit-down, Maumoon thanked the EU Ambassador and the rest of the delegation, disclosing that the discussion had focused on “concerns over the current political situation & the crucial need for a free fair & transparent presidential election this year.”<sup>71</sup>

- **No threats of terrorism,’ Maldives counters US’ travel advisory**

Tourism minister Moosa Zameer has dismissed the US’ travel advisory for the Maldives. The travel advisory by the State Department of America was issued on January 10, warning US citizens to be cautious about terrorism in the Maldives. However, the tourism minister declared that there were no such threats and that the Maldives is safe<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Minister Asim visits India as the Special Envoy of the President, meets Indian leadership, 1th January 2018, <http://www.foreign.gov.mv/index.php/en/mediacentre/news/4314-minister-asim-visits-india-as-the-special-envoy-of-the-president,-meets-indian-leadership>

<sup>70</sup> Opposition leadership plagued by discord and silence, 10 January 2018, <http://maldivesindependent.com/politics/opposition-leadership-plagued-by-discord-and-silence-135054>

<sup>71</sup> EU, ex-pres Maumoon discuss upcoming elections, 13 January 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/eu-ex-pres-maumoon-discuss-upcoming-elections/>

<sup>72</sup> No threats of terrorism,’ Maldives counters US’ travel advisory, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/no-threats-of-terrorism-maldives-counters-us-travel-advisory/>

- **China firm to lay high voltage cable between Male, Hulhumale**

State Electric Company (STELCO) has decided to award the project to lay a high voltage power cable between capital Male and reclaimed suburb Hulhumale to Dongfang Electric Corporation (DEC) of China for USD 38.6 million (MVR 567.4 million). STELCO's director Ibrahim Rauf stated that the cable will be laid via the landmark bridge being developed from Male to airport island Hulhule, which lies between the capital and Hulhumale.<sup>73</sup>

## West Asia

### GCC & Saudi Arabia

(Dr. Zakir Hussain)

- **'''''''' Saudi Arabia intercepts a ballistic missile launched by Houthis at Najran**

On 11 January 2018, the rebel Houthis once again targeted the Saudi city Najran with ballistic missiles. Col. Turki Al Maliki in a press conference confirmed this news but he also said that the missile was intercepted by the Saudi missile defence batteries and there was no damage except one car parked outside.<sup>74</sup> It is important to note that since Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen in March 2015, Houthi rebels have fired approximately 83 missiles. Initially, these missiles were low in technological capabilities and were used to target the border cities of Saudi Arabia but gradually these missiles have not only increased the distance but also improved precision. In the month of November 2017, Houthis fired missiles on Riyadh, which the Saudi foreign minister termed it as an act of war of Iran. Iran has been accused of supplying missiles to Houthis as the technical features match to the Iranian missiles. Although Iran has denied of supplying any such missiles to Houhtis, experts believe that Iran may not be involved in directly supplying the missiles, definitely the spare parts came from Iran and its experts might have assembled and trained the Houthis in Yemen. Another possibility of getting missiles by Houthis is Hezbollah, which boasts of having 150,000 missiles in its arsenal.

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<sup>73</sup> China firm to lay high voltage cable between Male, Hulhumale, 10 January 2018, <http://en.mihaaru.com/china-firm-to-lay-high-voltage-cable-between-male-hulhumale/>

<sup>74</sup> <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/01/11/Saudi-Arabia-intercepts-a-ballistic-missile-launched-by-Houthis-at-Najran.html>

## Israel

(Dr. Dhruvajyoti Bhattacharjee)

- **Terror attacks in Israel** - The number of security incidents in Israel and the West Bank tripled following US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, according to new statistics released by the Shin Bet security service. Throughout the month of December, there were 249 terror attacks in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Israel, as compared to 84 in November and 71 in October 2017.<sup>75</sup>
- **Hamas, Israel and Egypt** - The Israel Defense Forces on January 14<sup>th</sup> said it had destroyed a border-crossing Hamas attack tunnel, the third in recent months, that penetrated hundreds of meters into both Israeli and Egyptian territory from the Gaza Strip, in an airstrike in southern Gaza on January 13<sup>th</sup> night. It was the third tunnel entering Israeli territory destroyed by the IDF in under three months.<sup>76</sup>
- **PM Netanyahu in India** - Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reached New Delhi on January 14<sup>th</sup> on a five day trip to India. Over the course of the visit, Israel and India will sign a series of bilateral agreements, including in the fields of aviation, renewable energy, cybersecurity, alternative medicine, and cinema.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Judah Ari Gross, "Terror attacks tripled after Trump Jerusalem recognition, Shin Bet stats show", *The Times of Israel*, January 10, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/terror-attacks-tripled-after-trump-jerusalem-recognition-shin-bet-stats-show/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=aaca979360-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_01\\_11&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-aaca979360-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/terror-attacks-tripled-after-trump-jerusalem-recognition-shin-bet-stats-show/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=aaca979360-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_01_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-aaca979360-55556173) accessed on January 15, 2018

<sup>76</sup> Judah Ari Gross, "IDF destroys Hamas attack tunnel that penetrated Israel and Egypt", *The Times of Israel*, January 14, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-it-destroyed-a-hamas-attack-tunnel-in-southern-gaza/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=894c3d6430-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_01\\_14&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-894c3d6430-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-it-destroyed-a-hamas-attack-tunnel-in-southern-gaza/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=894c3d6430-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_01_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-894c3d6430-55556173) accessed on January 15, 2018

<sup>77</sup> Raphael Ahren, "Spotlight on trade, Chabad and Bollywood as PM heads to India", *The Times of Israel*, January 11, 2018, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/trade-chabad-and-bollywood-to-take-center-stage-as-netanyahu-heads-to-india/?utm\\_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm\\_campaign=3d3d7038c3-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_01\\_14\\_Weekly&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_adb46cec92-3d3d7038c3-55556173](https://www.timesofisrael.com/trade-chabad-and-bollywood-to-take-center-stage-as-netanyahu-heads-to-india/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=3d3d7038c3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_01_14_Weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-3d3d7038c3-55556173) accessed on January 15, 2018

## International Economic Issues

(Dr. Arundhati Sharma)

- **World Bank expects India to grow fastest in FY19**

According to the World Bank forecast released on January 10, 2018, global growth will increase slightly to 3.1% in 2018 from 3% in 2017 as the recovery in investment, manufacturing, and trade continues, and as commodity-exporting developing economies benefit from firming commodity prices. Recognising India as an economy with “enormous growth potential” because of ambitious reforms by the government, the growth of India is forecast to recover to 7.3% in FY19 and 7.5% in the next two fiscals each. The World Bank expects current year growth at 6.7% which is higher than government’s official estimate of 6.5%. Strong private consumption and services are expected to continue to support economic activity. High growth will be supported with private investment expected to revive as the corporate sector adjusts to the GST; infrastructure spending increases, partly to improve public services and internet connectivity; and private sector balance sheet weaknesses are mitigated with the help of the efforts of the government and the Reserve Bank of India.<sup>78</sup>

- **WTO: Support grows for India in solar tiff with US**

The European Union, Canada, Brazil, China, and Japan supported India on January 12, 2018, in the solar panel dispute with the US at the World Trade Organization (WTO). According to these countries, Washington’s demand for trade retaliatory measures against India is unjustified. In the face of sharp differences, the matter was referred to arbitration.

At a meeting of the WTO’s dispute settlement body (DSB) on January 12, the US and India clashed over Washington’s decision to seek trade retaliatory measures without establishing that New Delhi failed to remove local content requirements for manufacturing solar cells and solar modules by the 14 December deadline.

India, which lost the dispute in 2016, had agreed to remove all the inconsistent measures for implementing the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission, under which government imposed local content requirements for manufacturing solar modules and solar cells. On 19 December, the US sought permission from the WTO for imposing trade retaliatory measures against India because of New Delhi’s

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<sup>78</sup> “World Bank expects India to grow fastest in FY19”, Economic Times, January 11, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/world-bank-expects-india-to-grow-fastest-in-fy19/articleshow/62450170.cms> (accessed on January 15, 2018); World Bank, “Global Economic Prospects: Broad-based Upturn, but for how Long?”, January 2018, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/01/09/global-economy-to-edge-up-to-3-1-percent-in-2018-but-future-potential-growth-a-concern> (accessed on January 15, 2018).

failure to comply with the DSB's recommendations in the dispute. The US did not provide any evidence to prove its claim that India failed to implement the trade body's recommendations. Normally, a complainant is required to prove whether the erring member failed to bring its measures in compliance with the WTO rules under Article 21.5 of the dispute settlement understanding before seeking retaliation.

In a sharp response on 3 January, India said the US's request is "vague" and "invalid" since India "has ceased to impose any measures found inconsistent with the recommendations and rulings of the DSB."<sup>79</sup>

- **India a top borrower from China-sponsored AIIB in 2017**

India has emerged as a top borrower from the China-sponsored Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with USD 1.5 billion worth of loans last year and USD three billion more in the pipeline. Next to India, Indonesia has emerged as the second largest borrower with about USD 600 million loans. The pipeline for lending for India by the 84-member bank this year included USD 3.5 billion worth of projects including Mumbai Metro, Andhra Pradesh new capital Amaravati's development and irrigation network in West Bengal. Borrowing from AIIB is preferred by a number of countries as it charges about one to 1.5 per cent interest with long term repayment including five-year grace period.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Times of Central Asia, "Tajikistan and Uzbekistan agree on visa-free regime," 12 January 2018, [https://timesca.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=19186:tajikistan-and-uzbekistan-agree-on-visa-free-regime&catid=24:news&Itemid=407](https://timesca.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19186:tajikistan-and-uzbekistan-agree-on-visa-free-regime&catid=24:news&Itemid=407)

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<sup>79</sup> D. Ravi Kanth, "WTO: Support grows for India in solar tiff with US", *Livemint*, January 15, 2018, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/mSx6CQUqgyY6Y3h4N0bDXM/WTO-Support-grows-for-India-in-solar-tiff-with-US.html> (accessed on January 15, 2018)

<sup>80</sup> "India a top borrower from China-sponsored AIIB in 2017", *The Economic Times*, January 11, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/india-a-top-borrower-from-china-sponsored-aiib-in-2017/printarticle/62461954.cms> (accessed on January 15, 2018)

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<sup>2</sup> Kamila Aliyeva, “Uzbekistan, Tajikistan to introduce visa-free regime soon,” 12 January 2017, <https://www.azernews.az/region/125406.html>