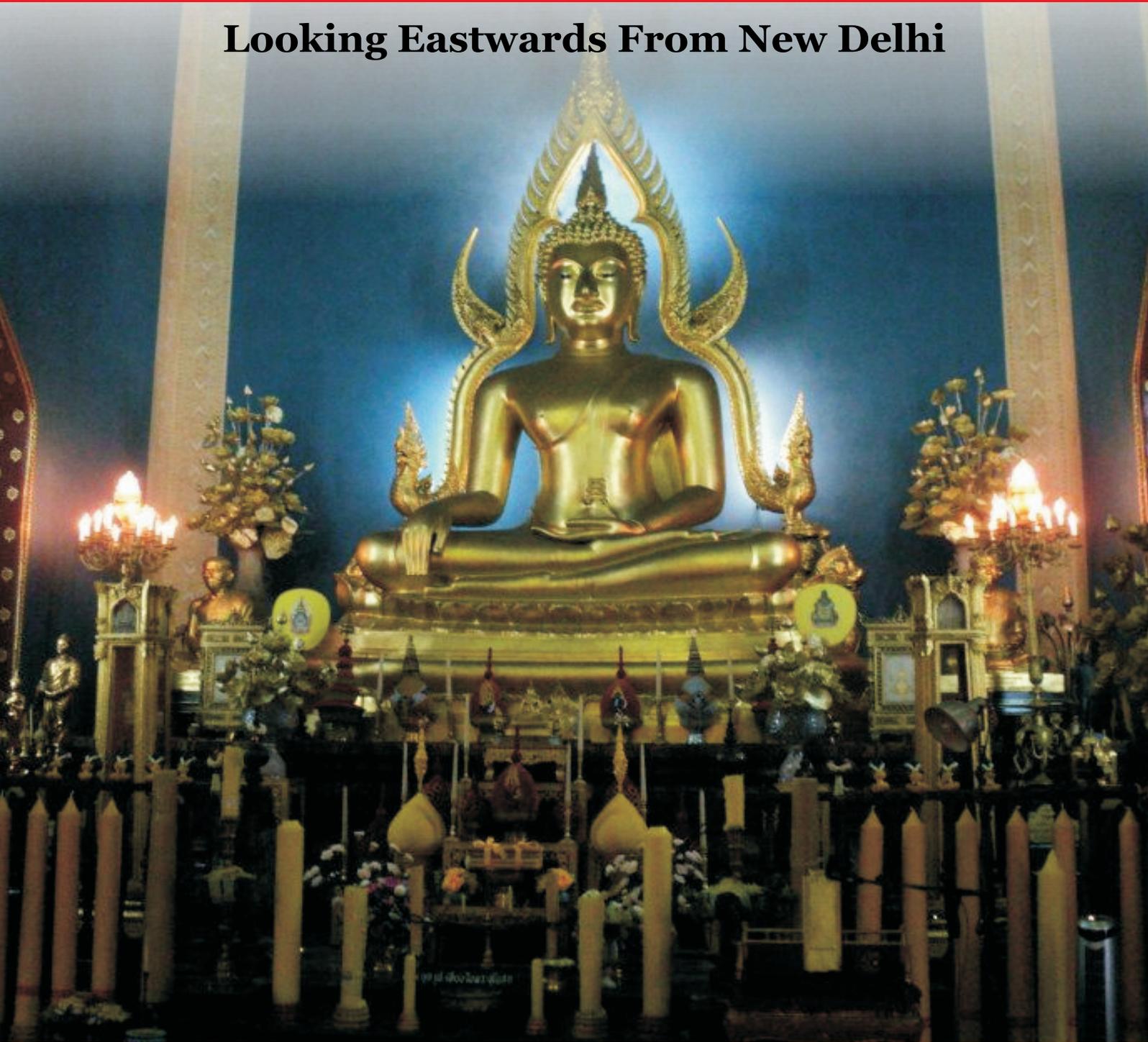


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INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



A Pagoda, Bangkok

Photo Courtesy : Sampa Kundu

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Centre Activities for September-October

MYANMAR



Source: IDSA

Capital: Nay Pyi Taw

Land and Geography: Myanmar covers an area of 676,552 square kilometres or 261,218 square miles.¹ The Ayeyarwaddy

River, Chindwin River and Sittaung River form most of the fertile flat valleys of the country. Myanmar is bordered by Bangladesh, China, Thailand, India and Laos. Its south and south-western parts are surrounded by Bay of

¹ Myanmar Profile, BBC News, available on <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-12990565>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

Bengal and Andaman Sea.

Population: 48.7 million (UN estimate of 2012)²; 64.9 million (according to IMF forecast, 2013)³; 51.4 Million (provisional result of population census 2014)⁴

Politics and Government: Myanmar is a country currently in transition towards democracy. In early 2011, President Thein Sein emerged to power followed by a nation-wide general election conducted after a hiatus of more than two decades. Prior to 2011, since 1962, Myanmar (the then Burma) was under military rulers. Myanmar has a presidential government, supported by a bicameral legislature (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw), comprised of a lower house and an upper house. The current Constitution of Myanmar was promulgated by the then Junta rulers of the country in 2008. This Constitution ensures a significant stake of the military in the government and administration of Myanmar. Myanmar is now preparing for the next general election in late 2015 and in the meantime, the government is expected to amend the Constitution and ink a nation-wide deal with the ethnic rebel leaders to ensure peace, stability and democratisation in the country. President Thein Sein has already given freedom to the media, freed thousands of political

prisoners, hundreds of child soldiers have been rescued and National League for Democracy was allowed to participate in a by-election which brought Daw Aung Saan Suu Kyi back into the national politics of the country in 2012.

Religion and Ethnic Composition: Myanmar is home to around 135 ethnic groups and some of the major races are Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Mon, Bamar, Rakhine and Shan. Near about 90% of the population profess Buddhism and rest of the population practises Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and different other religions. While Burmese is the main official language, many ethnic people use indigenous languages of their own.

Economy: According to Asian Development Bank, the economy of Myanmar is expected to grow at a rate of 7.8% in 2014 and 2015.⁵ As the new government introduced some structural reforms and welcomed Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) by updating and amending the old foreign investment law, Myanmar is now on the right track of growth backed by a flourishing tourism, production of natural gas, increasing exports and a growth in the credit system.⁶ The end of the sanctions, reforms in the banking system, attempts to make a business friendly and corruption free environment and a stable rate of Kyat to Dollar all have contributed to the economic growth in Myanmar. The FDI witnessed an increase from USD 1.9 billion in

² Myanmar Profile, BBC News, available on <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-12990565>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

³ Burma, Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, available on <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/burm.pdf>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

⁴ Myanmar Economy, Asian Development Bank, available on <http://www.adb.org/countries/myanmar/economy>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

⁵ Myanmar Economy, Asian Development Bank, available on <http://www.adb.org/countries/myanmar/economy>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

⁶ Myanmar Economy, Asian Development Bank, available on <http://www.adb.org/countries/myanmar/economy>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

2011-12 to USD 2.7 billion in 2012-13.⁷ Myanmar has applied to join the global Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative which will make the country's natural resources production industry more translucent and trustworthy.

Table 1: Trade Related Data of Myanmar

GDP (million current US\$, 2013)	56 408
Trade per capita (US\$, 2009-2011)	266
Trade to GDP ratio (2009-2011)	28.8
WTO accession	January 1, 1995
Merchandise exports, f.o.b. (million US\$)	11,233
Merchandise imports, c.i.f. (million US\$)	12,043
Share in world total exports	0.06
Share in world total imports	0.06
Exports (main destinations)	Thailand, Hong Kong, China, India, China, Singapore
Imports (Main sources)	China, Singapore, Thailand, Republic of Korea, Japan

Source: World Trade Organisation⁸

Defence: The defence system of Myanmar focuses on national sovereignty,

territorial integrity and a superior position for the armed forces in the socio-political system of the country, a legacy that comes from the history of Burma where Burma Independence Army fought against the imperialism to safeguard the nation. Myanmar Armed Forces (*Tatmadaw*) still enjoys 25% seats in the parliament under the 2008 Constitution. A significant portion of the national spending of Myanmar is being spent on the armed forces which is not a regular phenomenon in Southeast Asia. However, the Myanmar Defence Service (MDS) is not equipped efficiently and lacks modernisation in every sense. The armed forces of Myanmar are comprised of army, navy and air force.

Foreign Relations: Till very recently, Myanmar was under sanctions imposed by the US, European Union, Australia and several other countries as well as international organisations. Henceforth, with these countries, Myanmar's relations were less than cordial. However, Myanmar has never been abandoned by its neighbours in Southeast Asia, China and India. China, Singapore and Thailand share considerable economic and financial relations with Myanmar. The geographic location of Myanmar as a connecting point between India and rest of Southeast Asia as well as China and its richness in natural resources have made Myanmar a country worth watching.

In 1997 Myanmar was included in the Association of Southeast Asian Country (ASEAN), a regional grouping whose call for membership was earlier ignored by the then Burma because of the former's pro-western agenda. On the other hand, Burma chose to

⁷ Myanmar Economic Monitor, The World Bank Group, available on http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Myanmar/Myanmar_Economic_Monitor_October_2013.pdf, accessed on October 7, 2014.

⁸ Myanmar Profile, World Trade Organisation, available at <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=MM>, accessed on November 2, 2014

practise non-alignment and isolation during the Ne Win era which also coincided with the Cold War. After Myanmar's inclusion into ASEAN, some criticisms and doubts still existed because of the former's record of human rights violations and anti-democratic

government.

Since 2011, Myanmar's transition to democracy has been welcomed by most of the countries including western countries as well as its immediate neighbours. In 2014, Myanmar plays the role of the Chair for ASEAN and has been successfully hosting its annual affairs.

Box 1: Some of the Developments Taking Place in Myanmar at the Local Level: Interesting Would be to Watch Them as Myanmar Local Media Covers Them with Great Enthusiasm

1. Burma experienced a political revolution under General Aung Saan, In the new era, however, there are many Galone Oo Saw, the person who killed General Aung Saan, to jeopardise his dream
2. Millions of Myanmarese have migrated to Thailand for better options of livelihood; however, now they should come back to their own country and government should help them by returning their farmland
3. Chinese snacks are very popular and easily available; however the way they are prepared and processed is not at all healthy. Henceforth, there is a call to avoid Chinese snacks
4. Recently, the government is busy in building new infrastructural projects in and around Yangon with the help of foreign investments. For that purpose, the government is taking away lands from the common people; but these are against people's interests. In the long run, if this trend continues, Myanmar will be dependent on food (rice) imports, instead of becoming self-sufficient in food grains.

Source: New Light of Asia, a local weekly news journal published from Yangon

Relations with India: India-Myanmar relations have seen many phases since both the countries achieved independence in the late 1940s. In late 1980s and early 1990s, the relations got a major setback as India chose to criticise the Junta rulers of Myanmar because of their autocratic government and not accepting the verdict of the general election held in 1990. But, soon, India changed its policy towards Myanmar for several reasons including its urgency to ensure security for Northeast India, getting Myanmar's support in

connecting India with Southeast Asia, energy security and creating a balancing angle against China in the region.

For Myanmar, India is now a trusted friend and close neighbour. The trade between both the countries are increasing continuously. (See Table 1 for data on trade). Both have signed the border trade agreement way back in 1994 and 44 items are traded under that agreement through the Land Custom System in Moreh, Manipur. Two more border trade posts are operational between India and Myanmar in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. India and

Myanmar cooperate with each other on security issues closely in an attempt to minimise the problems of cross-border insurgency, trafficking of contraband and illegal movement. Besides, India and

Myanmar are fellow-members in BIMSTEC, MGC, BCIM and several other regional groupings. Myanmar is an observer in SAARC and India is a full-fledged partner of ASEAN.

Table 2: Trends of bilateral Border Trade between India and Myanmar

(in million US\$)

Year	Myanmar exports	Myanmar Imports	Total trade	Balance of Trade
2005-2006	11.28	4.13	15.41	7.14
2006-2007	11.02	4.75	15.77	6.27
2007-2008	10.91	3.92	14.83	6.99
2008-2009	5.49	4.43	9.82	1.05
2009-2010	7.79	5.95	13.73	1.84
2010-2011	8.30	4.50	12.80	3.80
2011-2012	8.87	6.54	15.41 ⁹	2.33
2012-2013	25.09	10.57	35.66	14.52

Source: Department of Border Trade, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar⁹

⁹ Embassy of India in Myanmar, available at http://www.indiaembassyangon.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=189&lang=en, accessed on November 2, 2014.

The Bay of Bengal: A New Locus for Strategic Competition in Asia

David Brewster*

It is possible that the Bay of Bengal may soon be joining the South China Sea as a major locus of competition between China and its neighbors. Both are the key transit zones between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and, some would argue, the pivot points for maritime security across the Indo-Pacific littoral. Like the South China Sea, the Bay of Bengal is now coming under the strategic spotlight. Indeed, this body of water is beset by a host of security problems which may even dwarf those in other regions of Asia. These include separatist insurgencies and religious violence in most of the littoral states; major concerns over the energy trading routes through the Malacca Strait; maritime boundary disputes relating to oil and gas; widespread piracy and smuggling; and many environmental security problems, not least the possible inundation of large parts of the littoral by rising sea levels. To these problems can be added strategic competition among India, China and the United States.

There are however surprisingly few attempts by strategic analysts to take a coherent view of security problems around the Bay of Bengal. Indeed, analysts rarely even see it as a “region,” usually drawing a sharp dividing line through the middle of the bay, between “South Asia” and

“Southeast Asia.” Perhaps it is now time to better understand the Bay of Bengal as a coherent strategic region within the broader framework of the Indo-Pacific.

India has long been the biggest naval power in the Bay and last year announced that it should henceforth be seen as a “net security provider” to the region. India’s National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon announced in March the establishment of a new maritime security arrangement among India and the island states of Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius. Menon also foreshadowed that the arrangement may be expanded to encompass the Bay of Bengal or that a similar arrangement could be replicated with other littoral states around the Bay. If implemented, such an arrangement would represent a major strategic development for India and for the region.

The main driver for these developments is China. India has long been anxious about a possible Chinese military strategic presence in the Bay of Bengal. Delhi fretted about the purchase of Chinese arms by Sri Lanka during its civil war. The close military links between Myanmar and China have also long worried India, including a supposed Chinese listening post on Myanmar’s Great Coco Island—which if it ever existed, is no longer there. More recently there have been concerns about Bangladesh-China military links, including the

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purchase of two Ming-class submarines by Bangladesh from China.

India has also long been building its military power in the Bay, including new naval and air facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that run north-south through the Bay. These would allow India to potentially dominate the western end of the Malacca Strait and much of the surrounding waters. The Indian Navy is also gradually being “rebalanced” towards the Bay through the expansion of its Eastern Fleet on India’s east coast—among other things, India’s new aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines will be based there. India has growing security relationships with all of its Bay of Bengal neighbors and is keen to demonstrate its credentials as a provider of public goods in such areas as maritime policing, counter-terrorism and humanitarian and disaster relief.

For years, India has hosted its premier multilateral naval exercise, *Exercise MILAN*, out of the Andaman Islands. This year’s event, held in early February, was the largest ever with 16 guest navies represented, including all the Bay of Bengal states and other navies from the Pacific to Africa. The cooperative and multilateral nature of India’s *Exercise MILAN* stands in stark contrast to a unilateral naval exercise which was conducted in late January by China in the eastern Indian Ocean—between the Indonesian island of Java and Australia’s Christmas Island.

These developing security relationships have been accompanied by an increased focus on building political and economic ties across the Bay. Recently, New Delhi has been giving renewed focus to BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for

Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), the regional grouping of Bay of Bengal states, with an emphasis on developing improved transport connectivity across the Southern Asian littoral. Some see BIMSTEC as representing an important opportunity for India to break out of the “stagnant regionalism” of the Indian subcontinent—where India is frequently constrained by its rivalry with Pakistan.

Raja Mohan, a prominent Indian strategic commentator, argues that India’s sluggishness is allowing China to seize opportunities which are enabling it to develop regional infrastructure in and around the Bay. These include the construction of road links and gas and oil pipelines that essentially extend “vertically” from southern China through Myanmar to the Bay of Bengal. According to Mohan, New Delhi’s dithering means that India risks being marginalized in the region—while India talks, China builds.

Certainly the BIMSTEC grouping has had few concrete achievements to date. This largely reflects the internal political turmoil and violent insurgencies that have kept members such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand internally focused. Plans for the development of “horizontal” road infrastructure connecting major manufacturing areas in eastern India with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and even to Vietnam have been under discussion for years. India’s Congress-led government did little to create any sense of urgency in implementing these projects.

This is not, however, just about India and China. Washington is also playing a delicate balancing act in the Bay. It wants to see a reduction in China’s relative economic influence and to encourage countries such as Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to avoid becoming too reliant on Chinese weapons or military assistance. The United States also wants to be able to counter or contain any new Chinese

maritime presence. These objectives are consistent with India's, but India is also extremely sensitive towards the military presence of *any* outsiders in the Bay. This means that Washington needs to build security relationships and capabilities in the Bay of Bengal in a manner that pays proper regard to India's perspectives. This includes avoiding or minimizing any overt US military presence that could be perceived as impinging upon India's core interests in the Bay. An understanding about respective security objectives and responsibilities in the Bay of Bengal needs to be part of a more cooperative overall strategic relationship that Washington should be seeking to develop with the new government in New Delhi.

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ASEAN

ASEAN preparing for economic integration with a vision for 2015:

ASEAN has recently taken a number of concrete steps towards economic integration with a vision for 2015. The recent months have witnessed certain important phases towards the economic integration. In the words of ASEAN, “The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) shall be the goal of regional economic integration by 2015. AEC envisages the following key characteristics: (a) a single market and production base, (b) a highly competitive economic region, (c) a region of equitable economic development, and (d) a region fully integrated into the global economy.¹

The AEC areas of cooperation include human resources development and capacity building; recognition of professional qualifications; closer consultation on macroeconomic and financial policies; trade financing measures; enhanced infrastructure and communications connectivity; development of electronic transactions through e-ASEAN; integrating industries across the region to promote regional sourcing; and enhancing private sector involvement for the building of the AEC. In short, the AEC will transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour, and

freer flow of capital.”² The ILO and the ADB has published also a joint study report “ASEAN Integration 2015: Managing integration for Shared Prosperity and Social Progress” which has been taken into consideration by the national governments in ASEAN for their future policy planning in the region. It was published in Jakarta on 20th August 2014. According to the ILO, “The new report says that that deeper regional integration holds great promise for shared prosperity. The AEC could accelerate economic growth and structural change and double productivity in some ASEAN economies, while generating 14 million additional jobs and creating new opportunities for prosperity for hundreds of millions of people”.

With a vision for ASEAN integration, governments constituting the ASEAN have presented their perspectives on different forums in the recent months and also shared their concerns, such as, the opposition by³ Philippines on the grounds of ASEAN integration impacting its agriculture and by⁴ Vietnam on the grounds of the integration impacting its unskilled labor market.

ASEAN Secretary-General optimistic about ASEAN-EU Relations

In an exclusive interview with Asia House following a private briefing to corporate members on 12 September, the Secretary-General said: “Among ASEAN countries we have a consensus and we have agreed with the EU and the EU has agreed with ASEAN that the negotiations will be resumed by the end of 2015 following the launch of the ASEAN Economic

¹ <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-economic-community> Retrieved on: 11.09.2014

² http://www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/events/WCMS_301202/lang-en/index.htm Retrieved on : 12.09.2014

³ <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/111293/asean-integration-does-not-bode-well-for-ph-agriculture-says-exec/> Retrieved on: 15.09.2014

⁴ <http://www.thanhniennews.com/society/vietnams-unskilled-workers-could-lose-big-as-asean-opens-regional-doors-30955.html> Retrieved on: 12.09.2014

Community.”⁵

The EU is ASEAN’s second largest trading partner after China, with trade between the two groupings climbing to US\$246.2 billion in 2013, up from US\$242.6 billion the previous year. ASEAN is the EU’s third largest trading partner outside Europe after the United States and China.⁽¹²⁾

ASEAN’s Secretary-General HE Le Luong Minh is hopeful that a free trade agreement between the 10-member bloc and the European Union will be negotiated soon, deepening economic and political ties between the two regions.

The EU and ASEAN launched negotiations for a free trade agreement in 2007 but they collapsed two years later, partly due to EU concerns about uneven economic development among ASEAN member states.

The EU concluded a free trade agreement with Singapore, ASEAN’s most developed economy, in 2012 and is also negotiating similar agreements with Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Despite the region’s growing importance to Western investors and exporters, there are doubts within the business community about ASEAN’s ambitions to achieve economic integration. Some investors question whether a 2015 deadline for the formation of an ASEAN Economic Community is realistic and cite barriers such as increasing nationalism in Indonesia, the bloc’s biggest member, slow progress in dismantling non-tariff barriers and China’s economic influence on key economies.

Minh, a native of Vietnam, visited Asia House on 11 September for the ASEAN Insights Conference and also addressed a private breakfast briefing exclusively for Asia House corporate members on 12 September.

The breakfast briefing, which was held under the Chatham House Rule, covered security challenges in South East Asia, the investment climate for insurance companies and law firms in ASEAN, banking regulations and investment in Myanmar.

In a separate interview after the briefing, Minh spoke about the opening up of Myanmar, which is chairing ASEAN this year for the first time since it joined the bloc in 1997.

“Since reforms were introduced leading to the lifting of most of the sanctions by Western countries, the country has been progressing very well and the process of reform and democratisation in Myanmar has been going very well,” he said. “It’s enabled Myanmar to play a very constructive and effective role in ASEAN.”

However, he said Myanmar still faced challenges and would need assistance in narrowing the gap in economic development with its ASEAN peers.

On the occasion, Minh also presented an overview of shaping the Asean Community by 2015, saying that it is on track to the deadline with over 80 per cent of the tasks completed.

ASEAN-India

President Mukherjee Focused on Vietnam and Look East Policy

During his state visit to Vietnam between September 14 and 17, President Pranab

⁵ <http://asiahouse.org/asean-secretary-general-optimistic-eu-trade-agreement/> Retrieved on: 13.09.2014

Mukherjee mentioned that Vietnam is India's 'trusted friend' and one of the major pillars in India's Look East Policy. He focused on various dimensions of linkages including institutional, infrastructural and people-to-people. Seven agreements were signed between India and Vietnam during this visit including;

Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters, MoU on \$ 100 million Line of Credit for Defence Procurement, MoU between the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the field of Animal Health, MoU between National Fisheries Development Board, Hyderabad, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of India and Directorate of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Cooperation in the Field of Setting up of Pangasius Breeding and Farming in India, MoU between the Ministry of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Youth Affairs and

Sports of the Republic of India and the Central Committee of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Cooperation in Youth Affairs, Letter of Intent between ONGC Videsh Limited, India and Vietnam Oil and Gas Group (PetroVietnam) and MoU between Jet Airways (India) and Vietnam Airlines Company Limited.⁶

Ferry Service between India and Myanmar

In the month of October a direct ferry service has been launched between Chennai and Yangon to strengthen economic ties between India and Myanmar. The state-run Shipping Corporation of India has plans to connect Colombo, Chennai, Krishnpatnam and Yangon in near future. Another plan is to initiate a Roll-on-Roll off (RORO) service in the mentioned route to transship wheeled cargo such as trucks, automobile etc.⁷

India signs new FTA with ASEAN

India opened a new chapter in its relations with ASEAN by signing a Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN in early September. This agreement is set to bring another chapter in India's relations with ASEAN since India initiated its "Look East" Policy in 1990s. India signed a free trade pact in services and investment with the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Monday in New Delhi. The accord is aimed at allowing freer movement of

⁶ Agreements/MoUs signed during the State Visit of Hon'ble President to Vietnam (15 September, 2014), Ministry of External Affairs, available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?23996/AgreementsMoUs+signed+during+the+State+Visit+of+Honble+President+to+Vietnam+15+September+2014>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

Vietnam an important pillar of India's 'Look East Policy': President Mukherjee, ANI News, September 15, 2014, available at <http://www.aninews.in/newsdetail2/story183644/vietnam-an-important-pillar-of-india-039-s-039-look-east-policy-039-president-mukherjee.html>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

⁷ India-Myanmar Ferry Service to Start Next Month: Nitin Gadkari, *The Economic Times*, September 15, 2014, available at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-09-15/news/53942901_1_ferry-service-cochin-shipyard-roro, accessed on October 30, 2014.

professionals and encouraging investment.⁸ “The agreement will help provide market access to Indian professionals in the ASEAN region including those from the IT/ITeS (information technology enabled services) sector,” a commerce department official said.

India signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in goods with the bloc in 2009. India was keen on the services deal as it did not gain much from the pact on goods due to already lower tariffs in the region.

New Delhi feels the services deal will help it reduce the trade deficit with ASEAN. Negotiations for the deal had begun in 2005.

ASEAN — comprising Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam — and India are targeting \$100 billion in trade by 2015. Nine out of 10 ASEAN countries have signed the accord, while the Philippines is expected to do so soon after completing domestic procedures.

The services pact signed with ASEAN covers issues such as transparency, domestic regulations, recognition, market access, national treatment, increasing participation of developing countries, joint committee on services, review, dispute settlement and denial of benefits, a commerce department official said.

Thailand crucial for India’s strategic ties with ASEAN

India’s ambassador to Thailand has recently made important observations on India’s strategic ties with ASEAN. India,

which signed an FTA with ASEAN in September has been taking steps to integrate with South East Asia with the newly elected government in power. In an interview to The Times of India, he has said⁹ “India’s excellent relations with Thailand are an important and integral component of our strategic partnership with ASEAN. India’s ‘Look East’ policy has been complemented by Thailand’s ‘Look West’ policy in bringing the two countries closer. We see Thailand as a bridge between India and Southeast Asia. Connectivity projects such as the Trilateral Highway through Myanmar are vital to our mutual development. In recent years, we have seen significant and broad-based progress in all areas of our cooperation with Thailand, including political, defence and security ties. Growing connectivity has increased commerce, tourism, educational and cultural ties. This, in turn, has also contributed to the deepening of engagement between India and ASEAN as a whole. Thailand is an important partner as a maritime neighbour, in promoting security, regional economic integration and the evolution of an open, balanced and inclusive regional architecture, anchored in ASEAN.” When asked about India’s relations with Thailand in the aftermath of power transition to military democracy, he said “After the military coup, India as a close and friendly neighbour, expressed the hope that Thailand would resolve its political issues and restore normalcy as soon as possible in keeping with the spirit of democracy, rule of law and will of the people of the country. At the same time, we believe that the close relationship between the two neighbouring countries requires sustained engagement. We share a long maritime boundary with Thailand and we are also

⁸ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/India-signs-free-trade-agreement-in-services-investments-with-Asean/articleshow/42050364.cms> Retrieved on: 11.09.2014

⁹ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Thailand-crucial-for-Indias-strategic-ties-with-ASEAN-Indian-Ambassador-Shringla/articleshow/44963356.cms> Retrieved on: 30.10.2014

geographically in close proximity to each other. We therefore follow a calibrated policy of constructive engagement in line with Thailand's other neighbours, including ASEAN countries.

In June, the current Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, General Thanasak Patimaprakorn, visited India as Chief of Defence Forces of Thailand and Our Hon'ble Minister of State for Home Affairs Shri Kiren Rijiju, participated in the 6th Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Bangkok. HRH Princess MahaChakri Sirindhorn visited Kolkata in July. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr. Sihasak Phuangketkeow co-chaired the bilateral Foreign Office Consultations in New Delhi with Secretary (East) in September and called on External Affairs Minister and Minister of State for External Affairs. The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) of Thailand has announced a three phase roadmap. The formation of the interim government in September 2014 was a part of the second phase of the roadmap. In this phase, a National Reform Council would offer suggestions to the Constitution Drafting Committee, which is expected to complete its draft of the permanent constitution within 10 months (by July 2015). In the third phase, NCPO has announced plans for free and fair general elections under the permanent constitution. Talking about Security and Defence collaboration, he said, "With the signing of a bilateral Extradition Treaty, Treaty on Transfer of Sentenced Persons and MoU on cooperation in the exchange of intelligence related to money laundering and financial terrorism, we have strengthened bilateral framework for legal and security cooperation with Thailand. Our leaders have reiterated their resolve

to significantly enhance bilateral cooperation in combating terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, counterfeiting and human trafficking. Our robust defence cooperation in the form of joint exercises, training, exchange of visits, joint patrolling etc. has further reinforced with recent high-level bilateral exchanges. We are closely working with Thailand to enhance anti-piracy cooperation, promote security of sea lanes and to work towards ensuring safety and security of navigation in the Indian Ocean."

Northeast India- Look East Policy

Northeast India to Import Rice from Myanmar

Government of India is preparing to import rice from Myanmar for the states in Northeast India. After the train service in various parts of Southern Assam was halted in October due to railway track conversion activities, rest of Northeast India faces a severe jolt in terms of regular transportation. Now Food Corporation of India has to ferry rice from rest of India to Northeast India via Bangladesh. All eight states of Northeast India are heavily dependent on food grains supplied from Punjab, Haryana and some other states of India. Direct import of rice from Myanmar with which four Northeastern states share international border will result in swift supply and reduced transportation cost.

Besides improved railway transportation, Northeast India is geared up for enhanced road transportation too. A special corporation may be set up to look after the road transport projects in Northeast India. The Union Minister for Transport and Highways, Mr. Nitin Gadkari announced that it will be based in Guwahati. Besides, he said, the existing transport projects will be hurried up and issues like land

acquisition and resource mobilization will be taken up to clear the projects.¹⁰

ILP Meeting in Manipur

The Joint Committee on Inner Line Permit (ILP) System met with the All Political Party ILP Committee in October in Imphal and no major outcome was evident. It was the first round of talk between the two sides. After a long wait this meeting was conducted.¹¹ It was recommended in the meeting that expert groups will be sent to Himachal Pradesh and Meghalaya where similar systems are in practice to halt migration of outsiders to the identified states. Chief Minister Ibobi Singh chaired the meeting.

NSCN's Myanmar Connection

NSCN-IM has allegedly sent one of its senior leaders, named Akhui, to Myanmar before its designated talk with the government in Delhi. Some 30 members of NSCN-IM and several cadres of the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), a Meitei outfit, are helping Akhui in this camping in Myanmar. He is a part of NSCN-IM's steering committee.¹² According to another report as Prime

Minister Narendra Modi did not meet the NSCN-IM leaders in Delhi and a home secretary level talk was supposed to be conducted between India and Myanmar in mid of October, the rebel outfit took this step in order to raise their issue with the government of Myanmar.¹³

Brunei

Brunei-Canada Cooperation in Defence Training

A Multi-Purpose Training Center (MPTC) has started functioning in Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDB)'s Rimba Digital Junction from the first week of September. The MPTC was built with Canadian help. The training center has helicopter and aircraft training facilities. A press release by the Bruneian authority mentioned, "The MPTC will now provide high-quality job opportunities for local Bruneians, and the facility will play a key role as a world-class learning and training hub for a range of industries, defense and security forces, and the wider Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) region."¹⁴

Brunei Granted Onshore Block in Myanmar

Petroleum BRUNEI and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise Private Ltd. (MOGE) have signed a

¹⁰ Special corporation for NE road projects soon : Gadkari, The Sangai Express, September 16, 2014, available at <http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/page/items/43032/special-corporation-for-ne-road-projects-soon-gadkari>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

¹¹ ILP talk ends in stalemate, The Sangai express, September 22, 2014, available at <http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/page/items/43217/ilp-talk-ends-in-stalemate>, accessed on September 23, 2014.

¹² NSCN on Myanmar Mission, The Telegraph, September 24, 2014, available at http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140924/jsp/northeast/story_18865454.jsp#.VFNWdVd5TGh, accessed on October 31, 2014.

¹³ NSCN (I-M) sends team to Myanmar, Nagaland Post, October 11, 2014, available at <http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/State/StateNews.aspx?news= TkVXUzEwMDA2ODQ5OA%3D%3D>, accessed on November 9, 2014.

¹⁴ Canada-Brunei multi-purpose training center officially opens, Xinhua News Agency and Global Post, September 8, 2014, available at <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/xinhua-news-agency/140908/canada-brunei-multi-purpose-training-center-officially-opens>, accessed on September 9, 2014.

Production Sharing Contract (PSC) which has granted Brunei an onshore block (EP-1) in Kyaukkyi-Mindo area in Magway region. The area is around two hundred and fifty kilometer north of Yangon. PetroleumBRUNEI will be responsible for all exploration activities in the block including the seismic survey, environmental studies and assessment.¹⁵

Joint Air Defence Exercise between Brunei and Singapore

A joint air defence exercise (codenamed Exercise Air Guard) was conducted for two weeks between the Royal Brunei Air Force and Republic of Singapore Air Force in October 2014. The drill was expected to mature the bilateral defence cooperation between the two countries and provide a practical training for Ground Base Air Defence operators of both sides. This year marked the 20th anniversary of the bilateral air defence exercise between Singapore and Brunei.¹⁶

Mutual Visa Exemption between Brunei and Myanmar

A mutual visa exemption treaty has been

signed between Brunei and Myanmar for visitors of short stay (upto a period of 14 days). The authorities mentioned this will serve as a useful tool to foster bilateral relations between Brunei and Myanmar as well as facilitate travelers' movements. This treaty will enable a smooth movement of the ordinary passport holders of both the countries.¹⁷

Cambodia

National Election Commission to be Reformed

The new election law was set to be finalized between the Cambodian ruling and opposition parties by the end of September 2014. The draft law will change the structure of the National Election Commission of Cambodia which is the supervisory body of national level elections in the country. On July 22, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) ended its year-long boycott of the parliament over alleged issues of election fraud by the ruling party, Cambodia People's Party (CPP). Both parties came to a conclusion that the electoral supervisory body, the National Election Commission, will be reformed.¹⁸

¹⁵ PetroleumBRUNEI Won the bid for onshore block in Myanmar, Brunei Post Online, September 17, 2014, available at <http://www.theborneopost.com/2014/09/17/petroleumbrunei-won-the-bid-for-onshore-block-in-myanmar/>, accessed on September 18, 2014. And Myanmar, Brunei Companies to Jointly Conduct Oil Exploration in Central Myanmar, Global Post, September 17, 2014, available at <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/xinhua-news-agency/140917/myanmar-brunei-companies-jointly-conduct-oil-exploration-cen>, accessed on October 18, 2014.

¹⁶ Brunei, Singapore Begin Joint Air Defence Exercise, Borneo Post, October 1, 2014, available at <http://www.theborneopost.com/2014/10/01/brunei-singapore-begin-joint-air-defence-exercise/> accessed on October 2, 2014.

Singapore and Brunei Mark 20th Anniversary of Bilateral Air Defence Exercise, Asia One Singapore, October 10, 2014, available at <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/singapore-and-brunei-mark-20th-anniversary-bilateral-air-defence-exercise>, accessed on October 11, 2014.

¹⁷ Myanmar, Brunei Bring in Mutual Visa Exemption, Mizzima, October 21, 2014, available at <http://www.mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/13974-myanmar-brunei-bring-in-mutual-visa-exemption>, accessed on October 29, 2014.

¹⁸ Cambodian Parties Expect Draft Election Law by Month's End, September 9, 2014, Radio Free Asia, available at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/draft-09082014171348.html>, accessed on September 9, 2014.

PM Hun Sen Visited China

The Prime Minister Hun Sen paid a one day visit to China in the mid of September and met the Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli. PM requested to Chinese side for the concessional loans for Cambodia's rice industry, to keep the interest rate as low as 2.5% for Chinese loans provided to the Cambodians and support the country's national defence enhancement. However, the Chinese side declined to assure for anything before proper reviewing of the proposals.¹⁹

MoU between Yunnan and Cambodia

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on media cooperation and exchanges has been signed between Yunnan Province of China and Cambodia in September 2014. This cooperation would further enhance Sino-Cambodian bilateral relation, expressed the Cambodian side. China has already initiated helping Cambodian media and information personnel by providing them training.²⁰

Refugee Deal between Cambodia and Australia

Cambodia has signed a controversial MoU with Australia on resettling an unspecified number of refugees currently living in the

South Pacific Island nation of Nauru who want to be resettled in Australia. In return, Australia will provide Cambodia with an additional 40 million dollar grant. The Cambodian government will meet the refugees in Nauru by the end of 2014 to facilitate a discussion on issues of resettlement. This resettlement will be on a voluntary basis. However, many rights groups apprehend that the refugees will be forced to immigrate to Cambodia as life in the international camp in Nauru would be difficult in the coming days.²¹ According to another source, Cambodia will not take refugees as large as 1000 in number and before any final agreement, the Cambodian officials will discuss about socio-economic development and other issues related to Cambodia to the refugees in Nauru and then only selected number of people will be resettled in Phnom Penh on a temporary basis and then in some villages as well as communes as the final arrangement. Both Cambodia and Australia are hoping to seek UNHCR's help in this entire process. On the other hand, the UNHCR seems unhappy with this arrangement of pushing refugees from one country to another.²² Australia has been criticized for sending the refugees to Cambodia which is one of the poor nations in the world and may not be able to give proper facilities to them. Usage of Cambodia as a human dumping ground is also a point raised by the people who are in opposition of this deal.²³

¹⁹ Hun Sen Back from China Nearly Empty-Handed, Hul Reaksmey, The Cambodia Daily, September 17, 2014, available at <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/hun-sen-back-from-china-nearly-empty-handed-68125/>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

²⁰ Cambodia, China's Yunnan Province ink deal on information cooperation, English people.cn, September 22, 2014, available at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/n/2014/0922/c90883-8786134.html>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

²¹ Australia Thanks Cambodia for Agreeing to Take Refugees, The Cambodia Daily, October 20, 2014, available at <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/australia-thanks-cambodia-for-controversial-refugee-deal-70302/>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

²² UN Lukewarm on Abott's Cambodia Solution, The Sydney Morning Herald, September 30, 2014, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/world/un-lukewarm-on-abbotts-cambodia-solution-20140930-10nzst.html>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

²³ Australia Confirms Australia Asylum Deal, BBC, September 25, 2014, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29357400>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

East Timor

European Union to provide Timor-Leste with 95 million euros by 2020

European External Action Service (EEAS) has long maintained a delegation in East Timor and is one of the few diplomatic missions in the country.²⁴ The European Commission's delegation to East Timor made a meaningful commitment to provide the island nation with aid. In September, The European Union will provide Timor-Leste (East Timor) with funding of 95 million euros by 2020 for rural development, good governance and to support civil society programs, the Timorese Ministry for Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

The National Indicative Programme (PIN) was signed by East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao and the European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs, in early September in Samoa, when Timor-Leste took part in the third international conference of developing small island states.

Under the 11th European Development Fund for 2014-2020 the PIN's priority sectors are to support good governance, with programs in the amount of 30 million euros, rural development, with a budget of 57 million euros and civil society, with 8 million euros.

The EU funding is intended to strengthen the economy and democracy in Timor-Leste "through greater efficiency and transparency of the services provided to

the population," the statement said. (macauhub/TL)

East Timor reaches a settlement with Australia on spying row

Australia has been reportedly spying on East Timor since past and it has created controversies more than once.²⁵ Recently, Australia and East Timor have agreed to suspend the International Court of Justice hearing into their bitter spy row as they try to "resolve [their] differences amicably". A spokesman for Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade told the ABC the parties will postpone the proceedings in the UN's highest court for an initial period of six months.

"This is a positive step, which provides an opportunity to seek to resolve our differences amicably. Australia and Timor-Leste will meet regularly to discuss these issues," the spokesman said in a statement.

They have also agreed to suspend a separate, behind-closed-doors case on the Timor Sea Treaty before the Permanent Court of Arbitration. East Timor dragged Canberra to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague to seek the return of sensitive documents seized by Australia in a raid on an East Timor lawyer's office in the capital. The documents relate to a controversial oil and gas treaty between the two countries which East Timor wants torn up.

"The ICJ decided to grant the parties' request to postpone the oral proceedings in the case," the ICJ said in a statement on Friday. Lawyers were to argue their cases at the hearing's opening, set for September 17 before the ICJ,

²⁴ <http://www.macauhub.com.mo/en/2014/09/10/european-union-to-provide-timor-leste-with-95-million-euros-by-2020/> Retrieved on: 11.09.2014

²⁵ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-06/icj-postpones-australia-etimor-spy-row-case/5724918> Retrieved on: 12.09.2014

which rules in disputes between countries. ICJ judges in an interim ruling in March ordered Canberra to stop interfering with East Timor's dealings with its lawyer and to ensure that the content of the seized documents be put under seal.

East Timor opened a case against Australia last December following a raid on the Canberra offices of Bernard Collaery, in which electronic and paper documents were seized. East Timor contended that the seizure violated its sovereignty and rights "under international and any relevant domestic law." At the heart of the David and Goliath dispute is the treaty signed in 2006 between Dili and its southern neighbour, four years after East Timor's independence from Indonesia. Australia allegedly used an aid programme as cover to bug East Timor's cabinet offices so it could listen in on discussions about the treaty.

Indonesia

Indonesia - Singapore Maritime Border Pact Signed

Indonesia and Singapore have signed a maritime border pact that relates to the delimitation of territorial seas between the two nations on its east. This treaty is poised to set a new milestone in the relationship between the two states.²⁶ On September 3, 2014, Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Singapore's Prime Minister Lee HsienLoong witnessed the signing of the Treaty between the Republic of Indonesia and the Republic of Singapore Relating to

the Delimitation of the Territorial Seas of the Two Countries in the Eastern Part of the Strait of Singapore. The pact was concluded during a state visit of Yudhoyono to Singapore. This treaty, the second one on the subject signed by the two countries during Yudhoyono's administration, establishes the maritime border in a 5.1 nautical mile section of the eastern portion of the Singapore Strait, from Changi, an area in Singapore, to Batam, an Indonesian island). The first treaty, concluded in Jakarta in 2009, covered the western part of the Strait.)

China-Indonesia Territorial Dispute: Chinese South China Sea Occupation Is a "Real Threat"

China has been in dispute with South East Asian nations regarding territorial claims for islands in South China Sea. South East Asian nations have long raised their concerns regarding China's territorial aggression.²⁷ Recently, Indonesia has labeled Chinese claims to the hotly disputed South China Sea waters as a "real threat." Vice Admiral Desi Albert Mamahit, who heads Indonesia's Sea Security Coordinating Agency, told a maritime security focus group that the waters surrounding several of the country's islands were in jeopardy from an encroaching Chinese presence." This becomes complicated as there are conflicts between fellow ASEAN member countries and China. It will be difficult to speak in one voice, although so far ASEAN solidarity has always been maintained," Desi added.

The Jakarta Post reported the maritime areas surrounding the Natuna Islands on the southern part of the Strait of Malacca technically do not lie within China's proposed territorial claims thus far, but it added China has not clarified its

²⁶ http://www.loc.gov/lawweb/servlet/lloc_news?disp3_l205404119_text Retrieved on: 15.09.2014

²⁷ <http://www.ibtimes.com/china-indonesia-territorial-dispute-chinese-south-china-sea-occupation-real-threat-1692916v> Retrieved on: 23.09.2014

position on Indonesia's exclusive economic maritime zone. The Strait of Malacca is recognized as a prime strategic location, particularly for military observance of the South China waters.

Indonesia arrests 4 Turkish men in connection with rising ISIS threat in the country

ISIS has now spread its channels of influence to South East Asia. Indonesian police recently arrested seven suspected militants, including four Turks believed to be planning to join a jihadist group in eastern Indonesia with possible links to the Islamic State group.²⁸ National police spokesman Brig. Gen. Boy Rafli Amar said that the four Turkish men were captured in ParigiMoutong town in Central Sulawesi province on their way to Poso, a neighboring mountainous district believed to be Indonesia's terrorist hotbed. Police were questioning the suspects to determine possible ties to international jihadist groups. The government of Indonesia — home to most of the up to 200 Southeast Asians believed to be fighting in Syria and Iraq — has forcefully spoken out against the Islamic State group, as have mainstream Muslim organizations in the country. But Indonesia is limited in what it can do to stop suspected militants from traveling abroad.

National Police spokesman Brig. Gen. Boy Rafli Amar said his force could only monitor Islamic State group supporters because the country lacked laws that could

allow detention without charges under legal circumstances and also banned inciting hate speech and violence. "If they have no record of terrorism activities then they can't be charged under our criminal law," he said.²⁹ The Indonesian government has outlawed the Islamic State group and ordered regional government leaders to improve coordination and cooperation with security agencies to monitor activities regarding the spread of the group's ideology. The Indonesian Ulama Council, the country's top Muslim clerical body, has declared the group to be a violent and radical movement that tarnished the image of Islam as a peaceful religion.

New Foreign policy challenges for Jokowi

Indonesia's new president, Jokowi who became the president elect on July 22, now faces tests on foreign policy front.

In an interview to Wall Street Journal, Marty Natalegawa, an ex-Foreign Minister and an Indonesian diplomat said, "What has been good enough the past 10 years, or even 20 years, may not be sufficient for our immediate future," Marty Natalegawa said of security efforts among nations in Southeast Asia. "Look at what's happening all around us now, the tensions in East Asia, China, Japan, India, the U.S., Russia. Even U.S.-Russia relations over Ukraine may have an impact in our region."³⁰

Indonesia's foreign minister said President-elect Joko Widodo will face an increasing need for regional unity on security issues as global tensions worsen and pressure grows to resolve a multinational maritime conflict with China.³¹

²⁸ http://www.taiwannews.com.tw/etn/news_content.php?id=2571358 Retrieved on: 16.09.2014

²⁹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/indonesia-has-an-isis-problem-2014-10?IR=T> Retrieved on: 8.10.2014

³⁰ <http://online.wsj.com/articles/indonesias-new-leader-to-face-foreign-policy-tests-1410211922> Retrieved on: 15.09.2014

³¹ China Willing to Work with Laos to Start Railway Deal at Earnest Date, Ecns.cn, September 25, 2014, available at <http://www.ecns.cn/voices/2014/09-25/136195.shtml>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Indonesia is a member, doesn't have the "option of denying all this and assuming that we can simply focus on our ASEAN community building," Mr. Natalegawa said in a recent interview. Prior to winning July's presidential election, Mr. Widodo had served as mayor of a midsize city and as Jakarta governor. In October, he will take the reins of Southeast Asia's largest country at a time when domestic issues, including a ballooning fuel-subsidy bill and regulatory uncertainty, are at the fore.

Mr. Widodo has said little that is specific about foreign policy but has suggested he would advance initiatives in "economic diplomacy" and maritime security and trade, among others, in the sprawling archipelago nation.

A career diplomat, Mr. Natalegawa is one of the leading contenders to direct the foreign ministry under Mr. Widodo. If he does so, he would continue a tenure marked by Indonesia's increasing profile in global affairs. He has been active in pressing into non-traditional markets of Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe and opening new embassies.

Laos

Railway Project in Cooperation with China

In an effort to enhance trade and economic

linkages and people-to-people exchange between Lao PDR and China, the latter is willing to finance a railway project which will enable Laos to become a land-linked country. Both countries are examining various issues related to the project at present.³²

Branfman Died at 72

The international aid worker, Fred Branfman, who came to Laos in 1976 and later exposed the 'secret war' conducted by the US on the country, died at the age of 72 on September 24, 2014. He told the world about the US bombings in several villages of Laos which were under the then North Vietnamese communist government that led to killing of thousands of innocent Laotians. After going back to US in 1971, he started two anti-war campaigns Project Air War and Indochina Resource Center to lobby against war financing in the US Congress. He also wrote a book, 'Voices from the Plain of Jars: Life under an Air War' where he included several interviews of the Laotians who lost their family members by the explosions conducted by the US.³³

Criticisms against Dam Projects in Laos

The controversial Don Sahong Dam has been facing criticisms from all neighbours including Cambodia where environmentalists and human rights groups are collecting public comment on the dam to be submitted to the Mekong River Commission. Even Thailand has started a similar initiative to collect public feedback and comments on Xayaburi Dam. However, despite all efforts, the construction work in Xayaburi has already been started and Don Sahong may follow

³² Fred Branfman, Who Exposed Bombing of Laos, Dies at 72, WILLIAM YARDLEY, The New York Times, October 6, 2014, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/07/us/fred-branfman-laos-activist-dies-at-72.html?_r=1, accessed on October 7, 2014.

³³ Public Discussions Planned for Controversial Laos Dam, Voice of America Khmer, October 13, 2014, available at <http://www.voacambodia.com/content/public-discussions-planned-for-controversial-laos-dam/2482174.html>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

the same path.³⁴ In Thailand, the residents of the villagers alongside Mekong River have filed a petition in the Supreme Administrative Court against a deal between Thailand and Laos which would enable the former to buy 95% of electricity produced by the Xayaburi dam project.³⁵

Malaysia

Cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia on Transboundary Haze Issue

Malaysia and Indonesia are in the process of drafting a MoU on tackling the transboundary haze issue. Both the countries will share experience, information and expertise on this issue. All ASEAN countries are now signatories to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution with Indonesia being the latest one.³⁶

Malaysia against ISIS

The Malaysian defence minister said that Malaysia is closely monitoring the actions by the western countries including the US which is trying to handle ISIS threats in West Asia and Malaysia is ready to cooperate with all neighbouring countries

like Brunei, Indonesia and Philippines to stop spreading the influence of the ISIS in the region. He further said, “We cannot work in isolation. We need to work with our friends and our neighbours as the silence from the Arab states is deafening when it comes to the issue of Isis. We do not want that to happen here.” As several Malaysians and Indonesians are allegedly joining hands with the ISIS network, such cooperation seems absolutely necessary to ensure stability in the region.³⁷

Under-water Search for MH 370: After a gap of four months the search for missing MH 370 resumed in October and this time the search operations are being carried out under the water. Two ships will look for MH 370 near the ocean floor using sonar technology. Both Australia and Malaysia are part of this search operation.³⁸

Myanmar

By-Election Cancel led in Myanmar

Myanmar Election Commission cancelled a by-election proposed to be held by the end of 2014 to fulfill 35 vacant seats in the parliament. Tin Aye, the commission’s chairman told that as Myanmar is getting ready for 2015 election and ASEAN meetings which will be held in

³⁴ Mekong Residents File a Petition aimed at Derailing Laos’ Xayaburi Dam, Bangkok post, October 15, 2014, available at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/social/437703/mekong-residents-file-petition-aimed-at-derailing-laos-xayaburi-dam>, accessed on October 16, 2014.

³⁵ Malaysia, Indonesia drafting MoU to tackle haze, says Palanivel, Malaymail Online, September 23, 2014, available at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/malaysia-indonesia-drafting-mou-to-tackle-haze-says-palanivel>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

³⁶ Elizabeth Zachariah, Malaysia ready for Isis although threat is low, says defence minister, The Malaysian Insider, October 16, 2014, available at <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/malaysia-ready-for-isis-although-threat-is-low-says-defence-minister>, accessed on November 3, 2014.

³⁷ Paul Farrell, MH370 underwater search resumes as ships scour Indian Ocean, The Guardian, October 6, 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/06/mh370-underwater-search-resumes-as-ships-scour-indian-ocean>, accessed on November 3, 2014.

³⁸ Myanmar cancels planned parliamentary by-elections, The Bellingham Herald, September 6, 2014, available at http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2014/09/06/3842213_myanmar-cancels-planned-parliamentary.html?rh=1, accessed on September 9, 2014.

November 2014, it would not conduct the by-elections. National League for Democracy leaders objected to this decision.³⁹

Commerce Attaché to US

Myanmar is preparing to send commerce attaché to US, Russia and Malaysia in an attempt to augment economic ties. So far, it has 9 commerce attaches working in Japan, China, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand etc. Myanmar is listed in the European Union's generalized system of preferences (GSP) under which least-developed countries get duty free access to the destination countries in Europe. US is yet to give any such preferences to Myanmar.⁴⁰

Security Amplified in Yangon

The Yangon Region Border Affairs and Security Ministry have declared that in the face of threats from al-Qaida, security would be tightened in Yangon, especially the religious buildings will be under intense security control. Al Qaida leader Ayman al Zawahiri announced that the terrorist outfit would have new focus on countries like India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.⁴¹

Rakhine State Action Plan

The Myanmar government is planning to adopt Rakhine State Action Plan which will be used for making shelter homes, educational and health facilities for the Rohingyas there. However, the government is urging that the Rohingyas need to confirm their origin and accept their ethnicity as Bengali. Myanmar has near-about 1.1 million Rohingyas and most of them are stateless. Many Rohingyas got displaced from their homes in 2012 and 2013 during violent riots and religious fundamentalism spearheaded by the mobs in central Myanmar as well as Rakhine state.⁴²

Suu Kyi Met President, NLD to Support Speaker Shwe Mann

Daw Aung Saan Suu Kyi met President Thein Sein, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces Min Aung Hlaing and Speaker of the Parliament Shwe Mann just two weeks before the East Asia Summit. This meeting with Daw Suu Kyi came after almost a wait of one year and critics say this type of meeting is nothing new in Myanmar before an international event. However, as Suu Kyi won't be able to contest the election even in 2015 and National League for Democracy (NLD) will support Shwe Mann's candidacy as the president, this meeting raised some hopes for the pro-democracy leaders in the country.⁴³

³⁹ Myanmar to send commercial attache to US, The Nation, September 11, 2014, available at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/aec/Myanmar-to-send-commercial-attache-to-US-30242987.html>, accessed on September 11, 2014.

⁴⁰ Myanmar tightens security in Yangon amid al Qaida's threat , September 24, 2014, Daily Times, available at <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/region/24-Sep-2014/myanmar-tightens-security-in-yangon-amid-al-qaida-s-threat>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

⁴¹ Myanmar Confirms Controversial Rohingya Plan, Aljazeera, September 30, 2014, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2014/09/myanmar-confirms-controversial-rohingya-plan-2014930193550936131.html>, accessed on October 30, 2014.

⁴² Myanmar calls meeting of political, military leaders –UPDATED, World Bulletin, October 30, 2014, available at <http://www.worldbulletin.net/world/147318/myanmar-calls-meeting-of-political-military-leaders-updated>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

⁴³ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/donaldkirk/2014/09/08/philippine-un-peacekeepers-heroes-or-cowards-for-escaping-syrian-rebels/>) Retrieved on: 11.09.2014

Philippines

Debate continues over the dramatic escape of Filipino UNDOF Peacekeepers who fled into Israel

Filipino UNDOF Peacekeepers who fled from Syria to Israel in the last week of August generated immense domestic controversy in September till their fellow UNDOF peacekeepers from Fiji were released.⁴⁴ At home, Philippine leaders have praised the refusal last week of the Filipino unit on the Golan Heights between Syria and Israel to lay down their arms as an act of heroism. Philippine leaders seem delighted with the performance of the 75 soldiers who escaped without a scratch after much criticism of the mediocrity of Philippine troops battling communist and Muslim guerrillas in their own country.

Did the top commander of what's called the UN Disengagement Observer Force greet the Philippine contingent with cheers and maybe some medals?

Not likely. Instead Lieutenant General Iqbal Singh Sangha, from the Indian army, rebuked them as "unprofessional" – even "cowardly." Their offense: they violated his order to yield to the rebels as part of a grand bargain for winning freedom for 43 Fijian army soldiers, also part of the UN force, who had given up right away to rebel demands.

The question Filipinos and others are asking is why arm military peace-keepers if they're supposed to surrender whenever

surrounded by seemingly superior forces. While UN peace-keepers are not expected to risk their lives, do they have an obligation to remain firm in the face of importunate demands simply to give up?

Those are questions that the Philippines foreign affairs secretary, Albert Del Rosario, is asking UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The foreign secretary in a letter to Ban cited rules of engagement that he said gave members of the UN force in the Golan Heights the "inherent right to defend themselves" while having "to struggle to meet the demands of the challenge" posed by the Syrian rebels.

The UN, said Del Rosario, needs to "revisit the outstanding operational and tactical issues including the UN's command and control" versus "the safety and security of peacekeepers during kidnapping and siege incidents...." At stake, he said, was "the accountability of UN peacekeeping mission leaders for decisions made during crisis operations as well as the contingency plans and procedures to address these situations."

President Aquino Meets with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso in Brussels

On the first day of his working visit to Belgium, President Benigno S. Aquino III met with his counterpart from the European Commission, President Jose Manuel Barroso at the Commission Headquarters in Brussels on September 15.⁴⁵ President Aquino expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet President Barroso especially since the Philippines and the EU are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of their

⁴⁴ <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/index.php/2013-06-27-21-50-36/dfa-releases/4080-president-aquino-meets-with-european-commission-president-jose-manuel-barroso-in-brussels>

Retrieved on: 18.09.2014

⁴⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29352920> Retrieved on: 25.09.2014

bilateral relations this year.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed a number of issues which are crucial to both countries' interests. They talked about the Philippines' compliance with the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention; efforts to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF); and the Philippine application to the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)+ Scheme.

President Barroso informed President Aquino that the EU more than doubled development cooperation funding for the Philippines for the next cycle, 2014-2020. He said that EU has allocated •325 million for this period, the focus of which would be strengthening the Philippines' rule of law through legal and judicial reform and the pursuit of inclusive growth through access to sustainable energy development and job creation in the Mindanao region.

The two leaders encouraged enhanced cooperation particularly in the many areas covered by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed by the Philippines and the EU in Phnom Penh in 2012.

The two leaders also exchanged views on regional and global issues. President Aquino sought EU's continued support for a rule-based and peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea in particular the Philippine arbitral proceedings and the expeditious conclusion of a legally binding Code of Conduct.

Islamist militants eventually release German hostages after threatening to kill them

Much to the anticipation of the international community and the government of Philippines, Islamist militants in Philippines eventually release the 2 German hostages whom they captured in April.⁴⁶

The hostages, captured by the Abu Sayyaf group in April from a yacht on the high seas, had been held on the remote island of Jolo, 600 miles (960 km) south of Manila and a hotbed of Islamist militancy in the mainly Roman Catholic nation.

2nd Philippines-Australia Strategic Dialogue Held in Manila

The 2nd Philippines-Australia Strategic Dialogue was held on 04 September 2014 at the Diamond Hotel in Manila. Jointly leading the Philippine delegation were Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Minda Calaguian-Cruz and National Defense Assistant Secretary Raymund Jose Quilop. Foreign Affairs and Trade First Assistant Secretary Allaster Cox of the South-East Asia Maritime Division and Brigadier John Mackenzie of the Department of National Defence headed the Australian delegation.⁴⁷

During the dialogue, the Philippines and Australia discussed the strategic priorities of the two countries in the defense and foreign policy realm, particularly defense cooperation on a bilateral and multilateral basis. Both sides also exchanged views on emerging regional security issues such as terrorism, human trafficking, and cybercrime.

They noted the common values that bind the two countries together, such as democracy, freedom

⁴⁶ <http://www.dfa.gov.ph/index.php/2013-06-27-21-50-36/phl-embassies-and-consulates/4005-2nd-philippines-australia-strategic-dialogue-held-in-manila> Retrieved on: 12.09.2014

⁴⁷ Singapore, France reaffirm strong bilateral defence cooperation, The Straits Times, September 7, 2014, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/singapore-france-reaffirm-strong-bilateral-defence-coope>, accessed on September 9, 2014.

of speech and rule of law, which provide the platform for a free and open dialogue and exchange of ideas.

These common values and interest also have laid down the impetus for a strong bilateral cooperation mechanism as evidenced by the holding of the strategic dialogue, the Philippines-Australia Ministerial Meeting (PAMM) in February 2014, and the upcoming Philippines-Australia Joint Defense Cooperation Consultations (JDCC) in October 2014.

Both sides reiterated their satisfaction at the current level of defense relationship between the two countries after the entry into force of the Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) in September 2012, specifically in the fields of counter-terrorism, joint military exercises, maritime security and military training.

The Australian side said that it looks forward to future participation in the Balikatan Exercises and that it is keen on supporting the modernization process of the Philippine Military through exchange of information on best practices.

Singapore

Singaporean Defence Minister Visited France

Defence minister of Singapore, Ng Eng

Hen visited France in the first week of September and met his counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian. The Joint statement issued by the both ministries said, “France and Singapore reaffirmed the excellent state of the bilateral defence relationship that has been further enhanced after the signing of the Strategic Partnership by the Prime Ministers of both countries in 2012”.⁴⁸

Cooperation with India

Singapore’s proposal to open 15 brunches by three banks in India has been accepted. Similarly State Bank of India and ICICI have been given permission to work in Singapore. All these efforts are taken under the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), signed in 2005 between India and Singapore.⁴⁹ At the private level, the Tata Sons- Singapore Airlines joint venture, Vistara is ready to start operations by October 2014. The project is waiting for the air operator permit (AOP) by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).⁵⁰

Cooperation with China

Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong visited China and met the Executive Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli to discuss matters relating to improvements of relationship between China and Singapore. Both China and Singapore are working on a government-to-government project in Nanning. This will be the third G2G project between China and Singapore. Both the leaders also discussed several issues related to

⁴⁸ Parliament: 3 Singapore banks have go-ahead to open total of 15 branches in India – See, The Straits Times, October 8, 2014, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/parliament-3-singapore-banks-have-go-ahead-open-total-15>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

⁴⁹ Ready to fly, Tata-Singapore Airlines joint venture Vistara poaches key men from IndiGo, JetLite, The Economic Times, September 8, 2014, available at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-09-08/news/53691449_1_tata-singapore-airlines-joint-venture-pee-teik-yeoh-niyant-maru, accessed on September 9, 2014.

⁵⁰ PM Shares Views on 3rd govt-to-govt project with China, Asia One Singapore, September 18, 2014, available at <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/pm-shares-views-3rd-govt-govt-project-china?page=0%2Co>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between both the countries.⁵¹ In another effort to boost economic ties with Singapore, now both the countries can directly trade with each other in Yuan and Singaporean dollar, according to China's Central Bank.⁵²

Temple built by Indian Chettians is Singapore's 67th National Monument

The Sri Thendayuthapani Temple, built in the 17th century by the Chettiar community based in Singapore, has been given the status of a national heritage monument by Singapore. The temple is popularly known as Chettiar Temple in Singapore and one of two temples built by the Chettiar communities living in Singapore. The other temple was built in the 20th century.⁵³

Thailand

Thailand takes an important step in Counter-Narcotics by forming a new centre

Thailand took an important step when one of its government agencies signed an agreement with ASEAN. The agreement is an important step in combating the threat of narcotics in the region and it is an important step in Counter-Narcotics in the region.⁵⁴

The Office of the Narcotics Control Board has integrated with ASEAN countries in launching the 'ASEAN Narcotics Cooperation Center' (ASEAN-NARCO) in order to increase efficiency in regional narcotics suppression.

The Ministry of Justice has presided over a meeting which was attended by narcotics institute chiefs from 10 ASEAN countries, along with a delegation from the ASEAN secretariat, with representatives of economic partnerships with countries including China, Japan, and Korea in order to enforce narcotics suppression in the ASEAN region. The meeting saw the official opening of the ASEAN Narcotics Cooperation Center (ASEAN-NARCO).

The Secretary General of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) said that the main reason narcotics are spread in ASEAN, is that some countries in the ASEAN region have sources of illegal narcotics production and smuggle it to other countries. The ONCB is concerned about this problem and has held discussions to suppress the problem with efficient action. The ASEAN-NARCO establishment will become the essential mechanism for connecting information to integrate drug prevention operations among ASEAN countries especially in border areas.

Bangladeshi laborers rescued in Thailand in another case of human trafficking

Thailand has long been at the centre of international security debate when it comes to

⁵¹ China to start direct trading between yuan and Singapore dollar, Business Line, October 27, 2014, available at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/international/china-to-start-direct-trading-between-yuan-and-singapore-dollar/article6537793.ece>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

⁵² Century-old Hindu temple is Singapore's 67th national monument, DNA India, October 20, 2014, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-century-old-hindu-temple-is-singapore-s-67th-national-monument-2027805>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

⁵³ (http://thainews.prd.go.th/centerweb/newsen/NewsDetail?NT01_NewsID=WNIOC5709170010001#sthash.TCa86rcA.dpuf) Retrieved on: 17.09.2014

⁵⁴ <http://www.bd24live.com/article/6605/index.html> Retrieved on: 20.10.2014

debate on human trafficking. Another worst case of human trafficking was revealed in Thailand this October when 103 Bangladeshi laborers were rescued here.⁵⁵ There is a cycle in lower Thailand – Bangladeshi with long been able to work as some sort of slave different harvesting or fishing organization. 130 Bangladeshis have been rescued last week because of the local authority.

South Asia correspondent Jonathan Head BBC visited the place in Thailand, where at the very least 130 Bangladeshi men have think of better job of showing greed. Each of them is victims of people trafficking.

Murder of 2 British nationals in Thailand causes huge controversy

Recently, the murder of two British tourists caused international controversy which resulted in a diplomatic tussle and the way the events unfolded caused huge public fury elsewhere.⁵⁶

David Miller, 24, from Jersey, and Hannah Witheridge, 23, from Great Yarmouth, were found half-naked with several deep wounds to their bodies near a beachside bungalow on the island of Koh Tao, Thai police said.

A nationwide manhunt was reportedly under way for a third British backpacker

whom police suspect of carrying out the attack before fleeing the island. A sensational turn happened in the investigation when it was announced by the when Lieutenant General Panya Mamen, police commissioner for the island of Koh Tao, told the *Bangkok Post*: “Two of the suspects raped and killed Witheridge while another one witnessed the murder.”⁵⁷

DNA samples were collected from hundreds of men in Koh Tao Island and eventually two Burmese migrant workers were arrested in connection with the murder.⁵⁸

However, as Thai authorities said they hoped the double killing last month would no longer hamper Thailand’s vital tourism industry, human rights observers said they were suspicious of confessions given apparently without the suspects having access to lawyers. Police dismissed the allegations, saying DNA evidence corroborated the confessions. A third Burmese man also detained is believed to be a witness and is under police protection, the AFP news agency said. Three other men, who were also arrested, but were released later, accused the police of using torture to extract confessions.⁵⁹ The two arrested men from Myanmar have met an attorney from Embassy of Myanmar in Thailand and denied the charges, the attorney also expressed his concerns on use of torture.⁶⁰ The Thai charge d’affaires has been summoned to the UK Foreign Office over concerns about the inquiry into the murders of

⁵⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/15/british-tourists-murdered-thailand-koh-tao> Retrieved on: 16.09.2014

⁵⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/thailand-beach-murders-hannah-witheridge-was-raped-by-two-men-before-being-killed-9765137.html> Retrieved on: 1.09.2014

⁵⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/03/burmese-men-arrested-murder-british-backpackers-thailand> Retrieved on: 5.10.2014

⁵⁸ <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/3-myanmar-workers-say-police-tortured-them-info-over-murders-2-brito> Retrieved on: 10.10.2014

⁵⁹ <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/crime/436605/myanmar-suspects-recant-confessions> Retrieved on: 12.10.2014

⁶⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-29604685> Retrieved on: 16.10.2014

two British tourists.⁶¹ British Police wanted to assist Thai authorities with investigation but the Thai president turned it down.⁶²⁶³

Thailand and UAE to sign MoU against human trafficking

Thailand now takes an important step to combat human trafficking. Thailand has long been concerned over Thai victims of human trafficking who have been trafficked to the Persian Gulf.⁶⁴ The UAE has started negotiations with Thailand to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to combat human trafficking crimes as part of the UAE's wider strategy to strengthen international cooperation against this menace.

Senior officials of both nations organised the first of a series of meetings on Monday in Abu Dhabi.

Thailand will be the third country to sign a MoU with the UAE to combat human trafficking, a senior official told *Gulf News* on Wednesday.

Vietnam

Vietnam's Prime Minister on South China Sea

Vietnamese PM Nguyen Tan Dung

mentioned that China and ASEAN must act responsibly to manage the disputes in South China Sea. In an interview to Asia News Network (ANN), the prime minister said, "ASEAN and China have agreed on the issuance of the Conduct of Parties on the South China Sea and even manifested ASEAN's six-point principles on the East Sea [South China Sea], which required all parties to abide by international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, implement the declaration on the conduct of parties [DOC] and create a code of conduct [COC]".⁶⁵

The journalists associated with ANN met in Hanoi in mid September.

Vietnam's PM in India

- Prime Minister of Vietnam, Nguyen Tan Dung visited India between October 27 and October 28. During this visit the following agreements/MoUs were signed;
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of India and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on the Establishment of Nalanda University
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of India and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for the Conservation and Restoration of the World Heritage Site of My Son, Quang Nam Province, Vietnam
- Memorandum of Understanding between

⁶¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/oct/17/uk-police-thai-murder-inquiry> Retrieved on: 20.10.2014

⁶² <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/10/15/thai-pm-slaps-down-british-offer-help-brutal-tourist-murder-case> Retrieved on: 20.10.2014

⁶³ <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/uae/government/thailand-and-uae-to-sign-mou-against-human-trafficking-1.1386554> Retrieved on: 19.09.2014

⁶⁴ Peaceful ASEAN-China dialogue needed, Jakarta Post, September 22, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/09/22/peaceful-asean-china-dialogue-needed.html>, accessed on October 31, 2014.

⁶⁵ State Visit of Prime Minister of Vietnam to India (October 27-28, 2014), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-info.htm?1/726/State+Visit+of+Prime+Minister+of+Vietnam+to+India+October+2728+2014>, accessed on November 3, 2014.

the Republic of India and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for Establishing the Centre for English Language and Information Technology Training at the Telecommunications University, Ministry of Defense, Vietnam

- Cultural Exchange Programme for 2015-17 between the Ministry of Culture, Republic of India and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
- Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation on Broadcasting between Prasar Bharti, Republic of India and the Voice of Vietnam, Socialist Republic of Vietnam for Exchange of Audio-Visual Programmes
- Heads of Agreement between ONGC Videsh Limited and PetroVietnam
- Memorandum of Understanding between ONGC and PetroVietnam

Besides his meetings with the prime minister of India and President Pranab Mukherjee, PM Nguyen Tan Dung also visited Bodh Gaya and met with the industry members from ASSOCHAM and FICCI in New Delhi. India's bilateral ties with Vietnam are growing at a rapid pace which spread from cultural cooperation to defence cooperation. For India, Vietnam is strategically important and it will be the country coordinator for India in ASEAN from 2015. In 2013-2014, bilateral trade

between India and Vietnam stood at USD 8 billion.⁶⁶

US-Vietnam Civil Nuclear Deal

A civil nuclear deal between USA and Vietnam came into force which will enable both the countries for commercial nuclear trade, research and technology exchange under the Section 123 of Atomic Energy Act. It will be helpful for the growth of Vietnamese economy and the US nuclear energy industry will be able to compete with their counterparts from Russia and Japan who have already stepped into the Vietnamese market.⁶⁷

Australia

Australia joins military coalition against ISIS

The international military coalition led by USA has found Australia as its partner in the mission in October this year.⁶⁸ In mid-September when speculations were at large, Tony Abbott announced then that some 600 personnel, including special forces troops, and eight F/A-18F Super Hornet jets would make up military contribution to international coalition." In addition, the Australian Defence Force will prepare a special operations task Group as military advisers that could assist Iraqi and other security forces that are taking the fight to the [Isis] terrorists," said Abbott. Military advice would also be provided to Kurdish Peshmerga forces in northern Iraq. ADF personnel will be based in the US headquarters "to ensure close

⁶⁶ USA-Vietnam nuclear accord takes effect, WNN, October 6, 2014, available at <http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NP-USA-Vietnam-nuclear-accord-takes-effect-06101401.html>, accessed on October 7, 2014.

⁶⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/14/tony-abbott-australia-military-force-fight-isis-death-cult> Retrieved on: 17.09.2014

⁶⁸ <http://www.news.com.au/national/australian-air-strikes-on-isis-given-go-ahead-by-tony-abbott/story-fncynjr2-1227078596151> Retrieved on: 6.10.2014

coordination” with the US and to support planning and logistics. Opposition leader Bill Shorten, the national security cabinet and full cabinet were consulted ahead of the decision. Shorten and deputy opposition leader Tanya Plibersek said, “We are also greatly heartened by the progress being made by new Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, in the formation of a unity government, which is vital to achieving a successful outcome against these terrorists.”

Abbott linked the Isis threat to a domestic security situation due to the estimated 60 Australians who are believed to have gone to fight with Isil and other groups.⁶⁹ In October, it was formally confirmed by Abbott that Australian war planes would begin conducting air strikes against the “death cult” of the Islamic State in Iraq.⁷⁰ It also happened by the first week of October that Australia had completed its first operation mission over Iraq deploying Super Hornets, a Wedgetail early warning and control aircraft, a refueller and special force members officially joining the international forces against the Islamic State.⁷¹ By mid-October, Iraq and Australia reached an agreement to allow 200 Australian special forces troops to join the fight against the Islamic State group. The unit was supposed to be in the country around a month ago but was delayed because of a legal issue between the two countries. Australia’s Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said that the final decision to

use the troops rested with the military. The country, which is one of the major supporters of the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS and began participating in bombing raids earlier this month, has committed a total of 600 troops.

Australia carries out the largest counter-terrorism raids in its history

Australia raided hundreds of Muslim homes in Sydney, the city with largest Muslim population in the nation and in Brisbane which drew furious reactions from the country’s Muslim community, but Government authorities said that it was their reaction to stop a possible beheading plot that was planned to be executed by Muslim radicals.⁷² Police carried out early morning raids in two major Australian cities, including Sydney, in a strike aimed at disrupting what they said were plans by local Islamic State supporters to behead members of the public.

Almost 900 state and national police, as well as domestic-spy-agency officers, were involved in the counterterrorism raids, to prevent what Prime Minister Tony Abbott dubbed “demonstration killings,” a reference to their intended impact of showing the reach of Islamic State beyond the Middle East).

Police called for calm after describing raids, which included predawn operations in 12 Sydney suburbs and parts of Brisbane, against people believed by authorities to be linked to an Australian said by Mr. Abbott to be close to Islamic State’s leadership in Iraq and Syria. Authorities, who provided few inside details about the alleged plot, said they had

⁶⁹ <http://www.news.com.au/world/australian-air-force-complete-first-mission-in-iraq-joining-fight-against-isis/story-fndir2ev-1227077318185> Retrieved on: 9.10.2014

⁷⁰ <http://www.ibtimes.com/australian-ground-troops-join-fight-against-isis-after-agreement-reached-iraq-1708069> Retrieved on: 23.09.2014

⁷¹ <http://online.wsj.com/articles/australia-detains-suspects-in-terrorism-probe-1411008044> Retrieved on: 20.09.2014

⁷² <http://online.wsj.com/articles/australia-urges-russia-and-china-to-support-coalition-against-islamic-state-1410871083> Retrieved on: 19.09.2014

arrested at least 15 people. One was identified as 22-year-old Omarjan Azari, who appeared in a Sydney court where prosecutors said he was part of a plot to carry out an attack “designed to shock and horrify” Australians, Mr. Azari was charged with conspiracy to prepare a terrorist attack. He didn’t apply for bail or comment on the charges during a brief appearance before a judge and was remanded until another court appearance in November.

Australia Urges Russia and China to Support Coalition against Islamic State

Australia urged Russia and China to join the international coalition for a comprehensive effort to reduce the threat of Islamic extremism posed by ISIS.

Ahead of Security Council talks on Iraq in New York to be chaired by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Ahead of Security Council talks on Iraq in New York to be chaired by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Australia’s Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said, “I hope that China and Russia will see that a prudent and proportionate role is appropriate and that our efforts will be with the consent and in full coordination with the Iraqi government,” Ms. Bishop told The Wall Street Journal in an interview.⁷³ “This is about rolling back a terrorist threat in the Middle East, so it doesn’t spread beyond Syria and

Iraq,” she said. “This is different from the last war in Iraq in that regard, and I think that both China and Russia would appreciate that.”

Though US efforts to combat ISIS have gained momentum and have received support from its allies in Middle East,⁷⁴ Russia, Syria’s top international ally, which insisted airstrikes on Syria must be coordinated with Damascus and Tehran also insisted on UN Security Council approval China hasn’t stated a specific stance on U.S. efforts to defeat Islamic State, saying only that it hoped peace could be restored “with the concerted efforts of the international community.” But China also hasn’t publicly acknowledged a proposal to participate in the U.S.-led coalition

Australia strengthens anti-terror laws, brings new legislation

Australia after raising its terror alert level in consultation with Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) and ASIO (Australian Internal Security Organisation) has introduced new anti-terror laws.⁷⁵ Tony Abbott, Australia’s prime minister, sought sweeping counter-terrorism powers when the proposals went before the Australian Senate and House of Representatives.

Apart from seeking powers on detention without charges, the government is looking forward to prohibit travel to regions where terror groups are active.⁷⁶ The Attorney General’s office issued a public statement with regards to the proposed amendment on the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Foreign Fighters) Bill

⁷³ <http://online.wsj.com/articles/us-arab-allies-launch-airstrikes-against-islamic-state-targets-in-syria-1411436642> Retrieved on: 24.09.2014

⁷⁴ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2014/09/australia-weighs-tougher-anti-terrorism-laws-201492051738956146.html> Retrieved on: 19.09.2014

⁷⁵ <http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/MediaReleases/Pages/2014/ThirdQuarter/23September2014Counter-TerrorismLegislationAmendmentForeignFightersBill.aspx> retrieved on: 25.10.2014

⁷⁶ <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/10/21/very-few-limits-in-tough-australian-anti-terror-laws/> Retrieved on: 25.10.2014

2014. It said,

“In order to tighten existing laws to combat these threats, the Bill will:

- create new offences for ‘advocating terrorism’ and for entering or remaining in a ‘declared zone’;
- broaden the criteria and streamline the process for the listing of terrorist organisations;
- extend instances in which a control order may be sought; extend the sunset provisions of the preventative detention order and control order regimes; and include a sunset clause for the ‘declared zone’ offence;
- provide certain law enforcement agencies with additional tools needed to investigate, arrest and prosecute those supporting foreign conflicts;
- limit the means of travel for foreign fighting or support for foreign fighters; and
- strengthen protections at Australia’s borders.”⁷⁷

The bill generated a lot of controversy on civil liberties and debate from various circles.⁷⁸ By the end of October, the Foreign Fighters bill was cleared in the Senate alongside another bill⁷⁹. Another related

bill National Security Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2014, which was passed in Australian Senate in early September.

Fiji

Captured Fiji Peacekeepers released by Syrian Rebels amidst speculations

UN peacekeeping troops from Fiji who were captured by Syrian rebels in August were eventually released after sensitive negotiations were successfully done.⁸⁰ The Fijian troops were captured Aug. 28, a day after militants seized control of the Syrian side of the Quneitra crossing from President Bashar Assad’s troops. The Fijians were taken hostage the same day that nearly 80 Filipino peacekeepers were trapped by Syrian opposition fighters. The Filipino peacekeepers later escaped. Later on 10th September, those Forty-five Fijian UN peacekeepers captured by an al-Qaeda-affiliated rebel group in the Syrian Golan Heights have been released, the UN said.⁸¹ A statement said they were handed over to UN Disengagement Observer Force (Undof) personnel at 14:30 (11:30 GMT).

According to the Fijian authorities, al-Nusra demanded to be taken off the UN’s list of designated terrorist organisations, wanted humanitarian aid be delivered to parts of Syria, and sought compensation for three fighters killed in a gunfight with Undof forces in the Golan Heights. Prime Minister Rear Admiral

⁷⁷ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-10-29/bishop-defends-foreign-fighters-bill-powers/5850394> Retrieved on: 31.10.2014

⁷⁸ <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/consumer-security/terror-laws-clear-senate-enabling-entire-australian-web-to-be-monitored-and-whistleblowers-to-be-jailed-20140926-10m8ih.html> Retrieved on: 28.09.2014

⁷⁹ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/fijian-un-peacekeepers-captured-in-golan-heights-released-in-syria-1.2763581> Retrieved on: 12.09.2014

⁸⁰ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29161884> Retrieved on: 12.09.2014

⁸¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-22/frank-bainimarama-sworn-in-as-fiji-prime-minister/5760948> Retrieved on: 23.09.2014

(Ret) Voreqe Bainimarama in a press briefing this morning, labelled the soldiers as heroes. He said, "These 45 men are heroes. They kept their cool and showed restraint under the most extreme circumstances imaginable. Because of their discipline, not one militant was killed and none of our soldiers were harmed. They upheld the integrity of UN peacekeeping and as a result have strengthened Fiji's reputation in the international community."

Fiji elects a new PM after successful elections

Fiji conducted its elections successfully on September 17th in presence of international observers and elected a new PM, thereby marking the transition to democracy. Former Fiji military commander and 2006 coup leader, Frank Bainimarama, has been sworn in as the Pacific nation's prime minister.

Mr Bainimarama's Fiji First Party won 59.2 per cent of the vote in last week's election.⁸² Fiji First was followed at some distance in the vote by the Social Democratic Liberal Party, with 28.2 per cent. The National Federation Party (NFP) received 5.5 per cent and Fiji Labour Party won 2.4 per cent. Leader of the NFP Biman Prasad congratulated Mr Bainimarama on his win, but said his party "will be watching the government very, very carefully".

In a speech aired by Fiji Broadcasting Corporation on Sunday, Mr Bainimarama thanked the military forces for standing by him since 2000. "I am greatly honoured

and humbled that the Fijian people put their trust in me to lead them into our new and true democracy," he said. "My absolute promise [is] that we will govern for the well being of all Fijians.

Fiji's elections office said there was a voter turnout of nearly 84 per cent in the general election. The officials said a record low of only 0.57 per cent of votes were invalid.

Fiji reinstated as a member of Commonwealth after long suspension

Fiji was suspended from Commonwealth in 2006 after the military coup.⁸³ Following the successful elections in September, Fiji has been re-admitted to the Commonwealth, eight years after the nation was first suspended following a military coup.

The organisation's London-based secretariat said the decision to reinstate the Pacific nation is in recognition of democratic elections held this month.

"The group concluded that Fiji's suspension from the Councils of the Commonwealth should be lifted in recognition of the credible elections held on 17 September 2014 and the assumption of office by a democratically elected government," the London-based Commonwealth Secretariat said.

International Sanctions against Fiji end

In end of October, Fiji had another landmark in receiving international recognition of its elections. The United States and Australia said today they were lifting sanctions against Fiji after elections in the Pacific island nation last month following eight years of military rule.

⁸² <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-27/fiji-reinstated-to-the-commonwealth-following-elections/5773330>

Retrieved on: 24.09.2014

⁸³ http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/us-australia-end-sanctions-after-fiji-elections-114103100605_1.html Retrieved on: 31.10.2014

US Ambassador Frankie Reed said that in recognition of Fiji's return to democracy, Washington was lifting restrictions on financial assistance and visas, as well as exploring fresh engagement with the country's military. "We congratulate the people of Fiji on the swearing-in of a new government and the restoration of the country's parliament," she said in a statement.⁸⁴ Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said she was committed to "normalising" relations between Canberra and Suva, which were frequently strained after military strongman Voreqe Bainimarama staged a bloodless coup in 2006. "I announce the Australian government has lifted all remaining sanctions against Fiji," she said in a statement issued shortly after she arrived in Suva for a two-day visit.

Australia's sanctions mainly consisted of visa restrictions on the regime of Bainimarama, who has successfully re-invented himself as a civilian leader and won by a landslide in elections held on September 17.

New Zealand

John Key becomes prime minister for third term

John Key has become the Prime Minister of New Zealand for the third time after his National Party has won sweeping majority in the election. Mr Key's party won 48.1 per cent of the vote, translating into 61 of 121 parliamentary seats and improving its performance from the 2011 vote.⁸⁵

The Opposition Labor Party looks like holding only 32 seats after its vote fell to 24.7 per cent. The Greens vote was down slightly to 10 per cent. One of the big winners has been Winston Peters and NZ First with 8.9 per cent of the vote. Kim Dotcom's Internet-Mana Party failed to get into the next parliament. The 61 seats make Mr Key the first New Zealand leader to be able to govern in his own right since the country introduced proportional voting in 1996.

Mr Key confirmed he would talk to the small free-market Act Party, centrist United Future, and indigenous Maori Party, who together have four seats, to rejoin the government. Opposition leader David Cunliffe conceded defeat, admitting his centre-left Labour Party could not form a government. It was the third successive election defeat for the Labour Party, whose voter support was down nearly a third from where it was 12 months ago when Mr Cunliffe replaced David Shearer as leader. He said, "I have called John Key and congratulated him and acknowledged he will continue to be prime minister of New Zealand."

New Zealand under criticism from mass surveillance claims by Snowden

Edward Snowden, the former US Intelligence Contractor of NSA has made startling revelations of US Ally New Zealand doing mass surveillance.

In an article written for The Intercept website, Mr Snowden said he routinely came across the communications of New Zealanders in his previous work for the US National Security Agency, which used a mass-surveillance tool called Xkeyscore.⁸⁶ New Zealand's spy agency,

⁸⁴ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-20/john-keys-national-party-takes-out-new-zealand-election/5758218> Retrieved on: 22.09.2014

⁸⁵ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/85158c7a-3cc8-11e4-9733-00144feabdco.html#ixzz3IAtXsdWE> Retrieved on: 17.09.2014

⁸⁶ <http://beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-wins-security-council-seat> Retrieved on: 19.10.2014

the Government Communications Security Bureau, shared the tool, which allowed granular access to communications data, he said.

Following Snowden's revelation, New Zealand's prime minister was forced on to the defensive. John Key, prime minister, denied the claims. He also released previously classified documents which he said demonstrated that the alleged spying programme by GCSB did not go ahead. "Claims have been made tonight that are simply wrong and that is because they are based on incomplete information," Mr Key said in a statement. "There is not, and never has been, mass surveillance of New Zealanders undertaken by the GCSB."

Mr Key said the GCSB undertook cyber security operations to protect the public and companies against cyber attack and it did not collect "mass metadata" of New Zealanders.

New Zealand wins Security Council seat

Now New Zealand has claimed a non – permanent rotating seat of membership in UN Security Council.⁸⁷ Prime Minister John Key has welcomed New Zealand securing a place on the United Nations Security Council for the 2015-16 term.

"New Zealand's success in gaining a place on the Security Council is a victory for the small states that make up over half the United Nations membership," Mr Key says.

"We have worked very hard on the bid for close to a decade because we believe that New Zealand can make a positive

difference to world affairs and provide a unique and independent voice at the world's top table.

"It has been more than 20 years since New Zealand was last on the Council and we are ready to contribute again.

"It was a tough campaign against Spain and Turkey, two much bigger countries and close friends.

"I would also like to acknowledge all the hard work which has gone into our campaign from across the New Zealand Government and in particular from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

"Our win proves small countries have a role to play at the UN and we are determined to represent the perspective of small states at the Security Council table.

"At the moment the Council faces a number of challenging issues. New Zealand is looking forward to serving on the Council and making a positive contribution throughout our two-year term," Mr Key says.

Israel rejects New Zealand Ambassador

In September, Israel raised a storm by rejecting New Zealand's Ambassador because he was simultaneously an appointee as an envoy to Palestinian Authority. However, New Zealand is perplexed over what it sees as a sudden change to the long-standing practice.⁸⁸

New Zealand does not have a separate embassy in Israel as well as many other countries near it. The island nation's embassy in Turkey has to handle ties with quite a number of nations, including Jordan, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Until recently it was also responsible for New Zealand's relations with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA).

⁸⁷ <http://rt.com/news/185964-israel-new-zealand-ambassador/> Retrieved on: 10.09.2014

⁸⁸ <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2014-10-24/papua-new-guinea-to-set-up-anticorruption-hotline-to-tackle-police-brutality/1382491> Retrieved on: 29.10.2014

Israel's Foreign Ministry however refused to allow New Zealand's new ambassador to the region, Jonathan Curr, to present his credentials to President Reuven Rivlin. Curr's meeting with the Israeli president was canceled after he informed the country's Foreign Ministry that he also planned to visit Ramallah for an official ceremony with PA president Mahmoud Abbas.

"A few days ago, Israel advised New Zealand that it would not accept as ambassador a person who was also a representative to the Palestinian Authority," New Zealand's Foreign Minister Murray McCully said in a statement on Monday, according to AP.

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea takes an important step to check police brutality

Papua New Guinea has long faced intense criticism for its police brutalities on civilians, to the extent of concerning the Prime Minister of the country.⁸⁹ Papua New Guinea's prime minister Peter O'Neill has announced a hotline will be set up for people to report incidents of police brutality. Prime minister Peter O'Neill's announcement comes amid a deepening split between police.

"We see it everyday in the papers about police brutality, lack of discipline in the police force, largely because of outside influence," Mr O'Neill said. "As a result of that many of the police force are now serving private interests rather than interests of the state and the people." There

will be establishment of a hotline that any (member of) public can lay their complaint, of which each will be investigated to make sure we bring discipline into the police force."

He said the hotline will be part of a new 20 to 30-person taskforce to strengthen the police force's ability to investigate itself. "One of the areas we need to strengthen is internal affairs where police discipline and issues about brutality and all the other matters need to be investigated properly and of course dealt with properly," he said. "We will be establishing a taskforce immediately ... that will investigate recent incidents that are taking place including police brutality against the public."

Policewomen from Papua New Guinea and Australia swap countries

Two female police officers working on domestic violence prevention in Papua New Guinea and Australia have swapped countries to learn about domestic violence.⁹⁰ Australian Federal Police (AFP) Officer Michelle Harris is working in Papua New Guinea, while her counterpart, Rachel Pinda, has just finished an AFP funded placement with the Northern Territory Police in Australia, working with their Sexual Offences Unit. Officer Harris said she was shocked by the extent to which domestic violence is ingrained in PNG culture.

Domestic violence in Papua New Guinea is an epidemic, with two in three women having experienced abuse, while half have experienced forced sex. Gender-based violence in Australia is nowhere near the proportions of Papua New Guinea, but still alarmingly high, with a third of women having experienced physical violence, and one fifth experiencing sexual assault.

⁸⁹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-10-16/png-and-aus-police-women-swap-countries-for-domestic-violence-p/5815184> Retrieved on: 20.10.2014

Centre Activities for September and October

1. Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh delivered a talk on "EAM Sushma Swaraj's visit to Vietnam" at the Monday Morning Meeting at IDSA on September 1, 2014
2. A Singaporean Delegation of 75 officials from the Staff College of Singapore visited IDSA and they were briefed on various regional as well as international issues concerning India and its neighbourhood and Southeast Asia by members of the IDSA faculty on September 1, 2014
3. An Indonesian delegation of 29 officials from National Resilience Institute of the Republic of Indonesia (NRI-RI) visited IDSA on October 14, 2014 and interacted with members of the IDSA faculty.
4. Dr. David Brewster delivered a talk on Bay of Bengal as a Coherent Strategic Space on October 15, 2014.

ABOUT US

The Southeast Asia and Oceania Centre focuses on policy-relevant research in respect of the ten ASEAN states, East Timor and Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand. The Centre studies India's bilateral and multilateral relations with states of the region with a view to providing contemporary relevance to India's Look East policy. It has a futuristic approach and examines the emerging trends in the regional security architecture. The Centre studies the potential for India's enhanced defence cooperation (including maritime issues) and cooperation in non-traditional security issues with the region. It examines internal developments of countries in this region, especially political transition and the role of the military, and their implications for India. The Centre seeks to promote Track-II institutional linkages with the region.

Contributions are invited for:

Book Review (800 words)

Commentary (900 - 1300 words)

Photo Essay (10-12 photographs, each with a caption,
accompanied by a 1000 words essay)

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