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Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



Cover Photo: At Karaweik Palace on Kandawgyi Lake, Yangon

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ASEAN

Malaysia, Vietnam may link naval bases

Malaysia is looking to boost its defence ties with Vietnam by establishing a direct link between the two countries' naval bases near the South China Sea.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said efforts to create a connection between Malaysia Maritime Region 1 Base in Kuantan and Vietnam Southern Command was discussed with his Vietnamese counterpart, General Phung Quang Thanh, on November 1. Hishammuddin said the establishment of this link would enable the two countries to contact each other should any problems occur at sea during an operation.

"I have also conveyed our intention for Malaysia and Vietnam to cooperate to make the ASEAN Defence Industry Collaboration a reality."

Hishammuddin is in Hanoi for a working visit after a three-day working visit to China. It is his first visit to Vietnam since assuming the portfolio as defence minister in May.¹

ICJ backs Cambodia's claim to Preah Vihear temple promontory

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) on November 11 unanimously confirmed Phnom Penh's sovereignty over the entire

disputed promontory bearing the Preah Vihear temple on the Thai-Cambodia border.

The United Nations' highest court said it should correspond with the natural promontory, and that the border line did not have to follow the watershed, as Thailand has argued.

The ICJ also reiterated the 1962 provision that obliged Thailand to withdraw all security troops from the temple's vicinity.

However, the court rejected Cambodia's claim that it was also awarded a nearby hill by the 1962 ICJ ruling that was being interpreted from the judgment. Known as Pheu Makheu in Thailand and Phnum Trap in Cambodia, the hill falls under the disputed 4.6 square kilometre area.

The decision was welcomed in Cambodia, which claims the 4.6 sq. km area around the temple is needed to access the World Heritage Site.

Virachai Plasai, Thai ambassador to the Hague and leader of the legal team, said Cambodia had only won a small piece of the 4.6-kilometre disputed territory. "We are still calculating the exact amount," he said.

The "small area" mentioned by the court needed to be further interpreted, he said.

Mr Virachai suggested both countries cooperate in taking care of the Preah Vihear temple World Heritage Site.²

ASEAN begins talks on better economic integration

ASEAN member states, including Malaysia,

¹ 'Malaysia, Vietnam may link naval bases', *New Straits Times*, November 3 (<http://www.nst.com.my/nation/general/malaysia-vietnam-may-link-naval-bases-1.390605>)

² 'ICJ backs Cambodia's claim to Preah Vihear temple promontory', *Bangkok Post*, November 11 (<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/379288/icj-backs-cambodia-claim-to-preah-vihear-temple-promontory>)

have started discussions on the next level of the region's economic integration beyond 2015, said Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Mohd Yassin.

He said ASEAN's economic integration would continue to be deepened to facilitate trade investment flows within the region.

"In addition, work is in progress to upgrade the ASEAN-China free trade agreement and ASEAN will commence negotiations with Hong Kong on a free trade agreement in early 2014," said Muhyiddin in his keynote address at the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) Forum in Kuala Lumpur on November 19.

Muhyiddin said all the initiatives aim to create a conducive and integrated market for the business community.

As of 2012, ASEAN's consumer market stood at US\$2.31 trillion (RM7.16 trillion).³

ASEAN members propose setting up of mineral database system

The 13th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Minerals (ASOMM) will be held in Bali from November 26 to 27, which will focus on discussing the development of the mineral database system in Southeast Asian countries.

"The development of a mineral database is one of the topics that will be discussed at the ASOMM, besides an improvement

in human resources and the use of minerals for sustainable development in ASEAN," the Head of the Geological Board at the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry Sukyar, stated on November 26.

Sukyar, who is also Chairman of the 13th ASOMM, expressed hope that the mineral database could be launched during the fourth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Minerals (AMMIN), which is also being held in Bali from November 28 to 29.⁴

Fourth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge Opening On Dec 11

The Fourth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge linking Chiang Khong district of Thailand's northern Chiang Rai Province with Laos' Bokeo Province capital Huay Xai will open for cross-border public transport on December 11.

Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn will preside over the official opening ceremony of the bridge that cost more than 12 billion baht (US\$371.32 million) and three years to build, Thai News Agency (TNA) reported.

The bridge is part of the shortest R3A regional land route connecting Thai border areas with those of China through neighbouring Laos.

Chiang Khong customs officials led a team of workers to clean up and decorate its border checkpoint on December 6 in preparation for the bridge's opening ceremony the following week.

Thai customs officials said border trade through the Fourth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge is expected to reach least 17 billion baht

³ 'Asean begins talks on better economic integration', *The Malaysian Insider*, November 19 (<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/business/article/asean-begin-talks-on-better-economic-integration2>)

⁴ 'ASEAN members propose setting up of mineral database system', *Antaraneews.com*, November 26 (<http://www.antaraneews.com/en/news/91585/asean-members-propose-setting-up-of-mineral-database-system>)

(US\$526.04 million) by 2015 when the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is also established.

Border trade value through the Chiang Khong customs checkpoint stood at 12.5 billion baht (US\$386.84 million) and is likely to exceed 13.6 billion baht (US\$420.89 million) this year.⁵

Japan-ASEAN draft implies China's new ADIZ is a security threat

Japan and ASEAN will express their concern in a joint statement that any abuse of power in international civil aviation could pose a security "threat," a Japan-ASEAN diplomatic source said on December 5, in an implicit reference to China's new air defence zone.

At a time tensions remain high after China set up last month the controversial air defense identification zone, a draft of the statement shows Japan and ASEAN are mulling underscoring the importance of "freedom of overflight" over the high seas, the source said.

The statement, designed to reaffirm the common positions of Japan and ASEAN in regional and global challenges, including maritime security, will be issued at a special Japan-ASEAN summit in Tokyo the following week.

The draft statement, however, does not single out China but the wording clearly has Beijing in mind, according to the

source.⁶

ASEAN and United States commit to stepping up cooperation

ASEAN and the United States are celebrating the 36th anniversary of their strategic partnership and have committed to advancing their level of cooperation.

ASEAN's Deputy Secretary General for Political-Security Community Nyan Lynn said during a breakfast reception on December 6 that the commitments made towards advancing cooperation had been indicated through the success of the first ASEAN-US Summit held in October.

"We have had many achievements during the 36 years cooperation and the success of the first ASEAN-US Summit demonstrated our equal and sustainable partnership," said Lynn.⁷

ASEAN-India

Suresh Reddy to be first Indian envoy to ASEAN

India has dragged its feet for long about appointing a full-time envoy for ASEAN. In fact, it had become a symbol for India's "non-presence" in a region that has climbed to the top of the charts in terms of both security and economic importance.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh finally set this right when he was in Brunei recently for the East Asia Summit (EAS). Observing Indo-

⁵ 'Fourth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge Opening On Dec 11', *Bernama*, December 6 (<http://www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v7/wn/newsworld.php?id=998968>)

⁶ 'Japan-ASEAN draft implies China's new ADIZ is a security threat', *The Japan Times*, December 6 (<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/12/06/national/japan-asean-draft-implies-chinas-new-adiz-is-a-security-threat/#.UrF4WtJ9RXM>)

⁷ 'ASEAN and United States commit to stepping up cooperation', *Antara News*, December 7 (<http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/91737/asean-and-united-states-commit-to-stepping-up-cooperation-d>)

ASEAN ties were on the “threshold of the third decade” of engagement, Singh said, “in keeping with our substantial achievements, the recent elevation of our ties to a strategic partnership and the rich potential of our cooperation, I feel it would be appropriate for me to take this opportunity to announce that India will soon set up a separate mission to the ASEAN in Jakarta with a full-time resident ambassador.”

South Block has moved fast. India is prepared to announce the name of Suresh Reddy as the first Indian ambassador to ASEAN. Reddy is currently ambassador in Iraq and has been credited with turning around the Indo-Iraqi ties. The Indian mission would be based out of Jakarta, which houses the ASEAN secretariat.⁸

India, Vietnam sign pact on transfer of sentenced prisoners

India and Vietnam on November 1 signed a treaty for transfer of sentenced prisoners languishing in jails in the two countries. Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde and Vietnam Minister of Public Security Tran Dai Quang signed the agreement on transfer of sentenced prisoners at a function in New Delhi.

The pact will help Indian prisoners imprisoned in Vietnam or vice-versa to be near their families for serving remaining part of their sentence. This would facilitate the process of their social

rehabilitation.

India has so far signed such agreements with United Kingdom, Mauritius, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Egypt, France, Bangladesh, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sri Lanka, UAE, Maldives, Thailand, Turkey, Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel and Russia.

Negotiations have also been concluded with Canada, Hong Kong, Brazil and Spain, an official statement said.

These treaties have helped in repatriation of 43 Indian prisoners from Sri Lanka, Mauritius and UK. Similarly, seven prisoners of UK and France were repatriated to their respective countries.⁹

Myanmar, India sign MoU on information technology

India and Myanmar have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on strengthening skills in the Information Technology sector in Myanmar.

Advanced Science and Technology Department Director General U kyawSwa Soe and Indian Ambassador to Myanmar Gautama Mukhopadhyaya signed the MoU recently. The MoU was signed between both the countries for strengthening India-Myanmar Centre for enhancement of Information Technology Skills (IMCEITS).

The MoU is aimed at conducting more training courses at IMCEITS, turning the centre into an Authorised Training Centre for Development of Advanced Computing-CDAC in India to be able to present internationally recognised joint certificates to trainees and making

⁸ ‘Suresh Reddy to be first Indian envoy to Asean’, *The Times of India*, October 29, 2013 (http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-10-29/india/43494568_1_full-time-resident-ambassador-asean-secretariat-east-asia-summit)

⁹ ‘India, Vietnam sign pact on transfer of sentenced prisoners’, *Business Standard*, November 1 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/india-vietnam-sign-pact-on-transfer-of-sentenced-prisoners-113110100617_1.html)

contributions to the development of ICT sector in Myanmar.¹⁰

Vietnam, India hold eighth strategic defence dialogue

The eighth round of Vietnam-India strategic national defence dialogue was convened in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh city on November 8. The meeting was co-chaired by Vietnam's deputy defence minister Nguyen Chi Vinh and Indian deputy defence minister Radha Krishna Mathur.

Addressing the meeting, Nguyen said that Vietnam-India relations have developed finely and the two sides shared both strategic benefits and challenges to secure national security, Xinhua reported citing state-run Vietnam News Agency.

The eighth Vietnam-India strategic defence dialogue will strengthen defence cooperation, peace and friendship between the two countries. It will benefit both the sides, Nguyen said.

The defence dialogues between the two countries so far have contributed positively to developing bilateral defence cooperation, said India's Mathur. Vietnam and India shared many similarities, enjoy many mutual benefits, as well as face common challenges, he added.¹¹

Indian travellers would like one visa for travel to ASEAN region: Survey

Indian travelers want a single visa for travel to more than one country in the ASEAN region, something akin to the Schengen visa which holds for 26 countries in the European Union, reveals a survey conducted by a global travel search portal, Skyscanner.

The survey reveals that 89% Indian travellers out of the 1,000 surveyed want a common visa for the ASEAN countries. Most travellers, according to the survey also said that their holiday choices are influenced to a great extent by the visa requirements made by different countries. The survey stated that 2 out of 5 travellers in the 55+ years age-group said that their choice of holiday destination was independent of the visa issues.

"If visas were not an issue, the most popular holiday destination that Indians were predisposed to travelling to was the U.S. with 240 travellers voting in favour of it, followed by the UK, Singapore and Switzerland which received 120, 70 and 60 votes respectively. When asked if they had ever had their visas rejected, 20% of the travellers surveyed agreed to having faced this disappointment." the survey states.¹²

India pledges to back Vietnam in defence

Vietnam and India's defence leaders have pledged to maintain mutual support in national defence to consolidate the strategic partnership between the two countries.

¹⁰ 'Myanmar ,India sign MoU on information technology', *The Economic Times*, November 4 (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-11-04/news/43658843_1_indian-ambassador-mou-ict-sector)

¹¹ 'Vietnam, India hold eighth strategic defence dialogue', *Business Standard*, November 8 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/vietnam-india-hold-eighth-strategic-defence-dialogue-113110800655_1.html)

¹² 'Indian travelers would like one visa for travel to ASEAN region: Survey', *Times of India*, November 10 (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Indian-travelers-would-like-one-visa-for-travel-to-ASEAN-region-Survey/articleshow/25533607.cms>)

India's Defence Secretary Radha Krishna Mathur told Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper on the sidelines of a dialogue in Ho Chi Minh City on November 8 that he has reached major agreements with Nguyen Chi Vinh, vice-Minister of Defence, over the dealings with security challenges for Vietnam as well as India.

Vietnam's challenges are security at sea and that should be solved via dialogues and other peaceful measures according to international laws, Mathur said.

Vinh said Vietnam and India's partnership could boost peace and stability in the region.¹³

India eyeing economic corridor with Mekong

As part of India's Look-East Policy and its economic integration with ASEAN, the government is promoting India-Mekong economic cooperation. Both sides are also planning a Mekong-India economic corridor, which will form an integral part of India-ASEAN connectivity.

For long, India has been promoting the Mekong-Ganga cooperation initiative, which includes India, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Initially, this was part of BIMSTEC.

India is preparing to sign the much-awaited free trade agreement on services and investment with ASEAN in December. This would pave the way for an India-ASEAN comprehensive economic partnership agreement.

The Mekong-India economic corridor will be a network of land and sea infrastructure. Currently, the proposal is being studied by the Ministry of External Affairs. The corridor envisages the linking of vibrant emerging economies in the ASEAN region with India.¹⁴

India, Vietnam ink eight agreements

India and Vietnam on November 20 inked eight agreements, including one for oil and gas exploration in the seas off Vietnam that includes the South China Sea as visiting Vietnamese leader Nguyen Phu Trong and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held talks in New Delhi.

Nguyen Phu Trong is the general secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

The eight agreements as well as a \$100-million line of credit to Vietnam for defence purchases is a major step forward in India's "Look East Policy".

Manmohan Singh "reaffirmed that Vietnam was a pillar of India's 'Look East Policy', which was supported by the general secretary. They envisaged a more active role for India in the regional and international arena," a joint statement said.

Outlining their strong convergence of interests in working together, Dr Singh said, "Vietnam's emergence as one of the most vibrant economies in the Asia Pacific region is greatly welcomed by India, especially because we regard Vietnam as a trusted and privileged strategic partner and an important pillar of our Look East Policy."

Boosting connectivity, both sides inked an air services agreement that would see direct flights

¹³ 'India pledges to back Vietnam in defense', *Thanh Nien*, November 11 (<http://www.thanhniennews.com/index/pages/20131110-india-vietnam.aspx>)

¹⁴ 'India eyeing economic corridor with Mekong', *Business Standard*, November 18 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-eyeing-economic-corridor-with-mekong-113111600818_1.html)

between the two countries and also promote an international aviation system based on competition.

Both sides also inked an agreement for setting up a high-tech crime lab in Hanoi.

India is to provide a financial grant for buying technical equipment and teaching aids for the Indira Gandhi Hightech Crime Lab (IGHCL) and also depute experts to Vietnam.

The MoU “consolidates the cooperation between the two countries in the field of crime investigation, counter terrorism and other transnational organised crime, and other relevant areas”.

The MoU between Vietnam Oil and Gas Group and ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) provides for joint exploration, development and production of petroleum resources between the two countries for new investments by OVL in oil and gas blocks in Vietnam for oil and gas exploration and production.¹⁵

Vietnam offers India seven oil blocks for offshore exploration

India has been offered seven oil blocks for offshore exploration on the South China Sea by Vietnam, a move that could pit New Delhi’s commercial interests against China’s territorial interests in the sea.

On November 20—the last day of his state visit to India—Nguyen Phu Trong, general secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, signed eight

agreements with India covering education, defence and energy. In a significant agreement between Petrovietnam and OVL, the two countries are set for deeper cooperation in development of petroleum. OVL is given new blocks for oil and gas, while PetroVietnam has been invited to participate in open blocks in India and third countries.

The MoU will last for three years, but the terms of the agreement are not yet available. But sources said Vietnam is clearly looking at production-sharing agreements with OVL in these new blocks. When India wanted to abandon oil block 128 off Vietnam in the South China Sea last year because there’s really no oil there, Hanoi asked New Delhi to stay back until 2014. This was at a time when China was flexing its muscles over Beijing’s claims in the South China Sea.

Vietnam has emerged as a lynchpin for India’s own outreach into Asia-Pacific, with the two countries ramping up the scale and nature of their relationship. OVL already has commercial production on its Block 6.1 starting 2003.

But Blocks 127 and 128, both of which fall within China’s claim line, has been found to be technologically non-feasible for extracting resources. India gave up Block 127 in 2011, but Vietnam asked India to stay on until 2014. OVL will then have to give it up and probably attract a small penalty.¹⁶

Myanmar team in Imphal on educational exposure trip

A 17-member team of students from Monywa Institute of Economics, Myanmar visited the

¹⁵ ‘India, Vietnam ink eight agreements’, *NDTV*, November 21 (<http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/india-vietnam-ink-eight-agreements-448791>)

¹⁶ ‘Vietnam offers India seven oil blocks for offshore exploration’, *Times of India*, November 20 (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Vietnam-offers-India-seven-oil-blocks-for-offshore-exploration/articleshow/26111093.cms>)

Babina Diagnostics Centre located at Porompat in Imphal on November 20.

The Myanmar team is currently on a 15-day long educational exposure programme conducted by Manipur University, which began on 15th of this month.

The team was led by Associate Professor Dr Daw Win Thida and Lecturer Daw Moe Moe Khaing while Professor Ch Ibohal of Manipur Institute of Management Studies (MIMS) guided the visiting Myanmar teachers and students.

Welcoming the team, Managing Director of Babina Group of Industries Dr Th Dhabali highlighted the state-of-the-art healthcare facilities offered by Babina Diagnostics Centre.

Traditional shawls were presented to the Myanmar faculties as a token of appreciation on the occasion.¹⁷

Vietnam seeks investments from Indian industry

Vietnam on November 22 sought investments from Indian industry in areas such as oil & gas, technology and infrastructure, saying that trade between the two nations could go up to \$7 billion by 2015.

Vietnam's Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong said in Mumbai that his country offers good opportunities to investors, and the

bilateral ties were growing fast with focus on economic, trade and investment cooperation.

"Bilateral ties have been developing in a fruitful way and are now increasing both in width and depth as economic, trade and investment cooperation is gaining the attention of both the governments," Trong told a business gathering organised by the industry bodies.

The Vietnamese leader is at the last leg of his four-day visit to the country to strengthen bilateral and strategic partnerships and cooperation. Earlier in the week, he was in the Capital.

Presenting Vietnam as a good investment destination, he invited Indian investments in IT, technology, agriculture, infrastructure, oil and gas among others.

The two-way trade has grown by an average 12 per cent in recent years to \$3.94 billion in 2012, Trong said, adding that "it is possible that the trade turnover could touch \$7 billion by 2015. It has been agreed by both the sides to work towards scaling it up \$15 billion by 2020".

In terms of investment from here, Trong said "up to June 2013, India has invested in 74 projects worth over \$2.5 billion".

Trong described the MoU between the Tatas and MOIT of Vietnam for setting up the Long Phu II Thermal Power Plant at an investment of \$1.8 billion in Vietnam as the "biggest" investment by an Indian company there.

"This is the biggest Indian investment project in Vietnam and symbolises the vibrant economic and investment cooperation between the two nations," he said.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'Myanmar team in city on educational exposure trip', *E-Pao*, November 20 (<http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=27..211113.nov13>)

¹⁸ 'Vietnam seeks investments from Indian industry', *The Economic Times*, November 22 (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-11-22/news/44366135_1_investment-bilateral-ties-south-vietnam)

Singapore think tank and Brookings India signs MoU

The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) has signed an MoU with Brookings India, one of South Asia's leading think tanks.

The MOU, signed at the South Asian Diaspora Convention, would have ISAS and Brookings India work collaboratively on areas such as international trade and economics, India-China comparative studies, international relations and India's energy security options.

These initiatives would include faculty exchanges in various fields, said ISAS, a Singapore think tank in the National University of Singapore.

The two organisations would also work together on bilateral seminars, symposiums and panel discussions on regional and global issues of mutual interest.¹⁹

India's Myanmar envoy bats for reciprocal flight service

Noting that the Tuliha Airport is officially in the international aviation map with the maiden landing of the Golden Myanmar flight from Mandalay recently, Indian Ambassador to Myanmar Gautam Mukhopadhyay expressed that it is right time for the Indian Airlines to chart out a plan for direct flight operation from Imphal to Mandalay as reciprocal gesture.

Speaking to The Sangai Express at Tuliha Airport on November 24, Gautam Mukhopadhyay also exuded confidence that the next few months would certainly see various positive development in the aviation sector in the region.

In addition to the need for minute study on whether there should be regular commercial flight service between Imphal and Mandalay the perspective of adding other routes should not be overlooked, mooted the Indian envoy adding that the quantum of demand from both sides is another important factor for sustaining the international flight service.

Even though the Ambassador expressed satisfaction on the successful maiden international flight from Mandalay to Tuliha he, however, stated that for the state's only airport to become a favourable destination from Mandalay there is still need for infrastructure improvement.²⁰

BSF to patrol Indo-Myanmar border

The Border Security Force is all set to guard the 1624 km Indo-Myanmar border, replacing Assam Rifles, a senior BSF officer said on December 2.

"We have got orders from the Centre. From now on the BSF will guard the Indo-Myanmar border. The Assam Rifles has been doing this job till now," said B D Sharma, ADG (East).

However, BSF needs to raise 41 battalions to guard the Indo-Myanmar border.

"After the official procedures are complete, we

¹⁹ 'Singapore think tank and Brookings India signs MoU', *Business Standard*, November 22 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/singapore-think-tank-and-brookings-india-signs-mou-113112200269_1.html)

²⁰ 'India's Myanmar envoy bats for reciprocal flight service', *The Sangai Express*, November 24 (<http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/tseitm-32799-indias-myanmar-envoy-bats-for-reciprocal-flight-service/>)

will send 14-15 battalions to the Indo-Myanmar border. Then within the next few years we will raise the numbers. This entire exercise will take at least 3-5 years,” DIG (Operations) BSF Ajit Tete told PTI.

According to another officer, the BSF has to create all infrastructure there from proper border roads to BOPs.

“Proper border roads, BOPs, barracks and other amenities have to be constructed there,” an officer said.

Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur are the four northeastern states which share the 1624 km long border with Myanmar.²¹

India-ASEAN trade pact on services unlikely during WTO meet

India and ASEAN nations are unlikely to sign the free trade agreement on services and investments on the sidelines of the WTO ministerial meet in Bali as some members of the 10-nation economic bloc have raised concerns on certain issues.

Some ASEAN members like Thailand are not agreed on a few issues of the agreement, sources have said.

“It (the pact) is unlikely to be signed here,” said a source.

In October, a joint statement—issued after a meeting of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh—had said the

agreement would be signed on the sidelines of the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali, Indonesia.²²

Myanmar delegation visits Manipur to strengthen cultural ties

India’s Look East policy has brought cheer to its northeastern states, as trade and cultural ties with neighbouring countries are getting stronger.

Recently, a delegation from Myanmar visited Imphal to strengthen bilateral cultural relations.

On November 21, the first international flight from Myanmar landed at Tulihal International Airport in Imphal. The Golden Myanmar Airlines aircraft arrived with over 100 passengers to take part in the annual Sangai Festival.

The delegation, including the Chief Minister of Mandalay region, U Ye Mint, Chief Minister of Sagaing Region, U Thar Aye, several Meitei Diaspora and media persons were warmly received by Manipur Chief Minister O. Ibobi Singh.

“This is a very very historic moment. Manipur is witnessing the first international flight here. We have over 100 visitors from neighbouring Myanmar. Businessmen and ministers are coming down. I think the bilateral trade between Manipur and Myanmar is going to increase manifold,” said James Khangembam, an entrepreneur from Manipur.²³

²¹ ‘BSF to patrol Indo-Myanmar border’, *The Economic Times*, December 2 (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-12-02/news/44657470_1_bsf-indo-myanmar-border-bops)

²² ‘India-Asean trade pact on services unlikely during WTO meet’, *The Economic Times*, December 2 (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-12-02/news/44657706_1_asean-members-trade-pact-services-and-investments)

²³ ‘Myanmar delegation visits Manipur to strengthen cultural ties’, *Business Standard*, December 4 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/myanmar-delegation-visits-manipur-to-strengthen-cultural-ties-113120400565_1.html)

India-Myanmar relations rooted in history: President Pranab

Termining relations between India and Myanmar as being rooted in history, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee on December 5 said it is in the mutual interest of both the countries to strengthen these ties.

“Both countries have shared close cultural, religious, business and trade relations. It is in their mutual interest to strengthen these ties,” he told a 23-member parliamentary delegation from Myanmar.

Mukherjee said both the parliaments (of India and Myanmar) have a big role in steering and supporting cooperation for the mutual benefit of the people. “India stands ready to support Myanmar’s efforts in whichever way it can,” he added.

The delegation was led by U Khin Aung Myint, speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw or the upper house of the Myanmar parliament.²⁴

Myanmar asks India to stop ICP construction

Myanmar has appealed to the Government of India to stop construction of the Integrated Check Post (ICP) being constructed at Moreh in line with India’s Look East Policy.

A team of Myanmar officials attempted to submit a memorandum when a team of Indian officials led by MHA Joint Secretary Shambhu Singh conducted a spot assessment of the disputed border

area on December 7 but the Myanmar team were not allowed to submit any memorandum for their approach was not formal.

Lt Col Toon Win Oong of Myanmar 87 Light Infantry Regiment on December 8 approached the CO of 9 Assam Rifles and submitted a memorandum appealing to stop construction work of the ICP.

Ground work and other works for construction of the ICP near Moreh Gate No 1 was halted as the Myanmar authority contended that the said area is a part of Myanmar.

But the construction work resumed after Moreh SDPO Balram intervened.

The memorandum received contended that the area where the ICP is being constructed belongs to the territory of Myanmar. Acknowledging India’s claim that the same area belongs to India, the memorandum maintained that the area is a disputed site.

It urged the Government of India to halt the construction work until the matter is settled by a joint team of the two neighbouring countries.²⁵

Myanmar, Indian army officers discuss military ties

The Myanmar Army’s commander-in-chief Vice Senior General Soe Win and Indian Army’s Eastern Command Chief Lt.Gen. Dalbir Singh discussed issues concerning security and enhancing of military ties between the two neighbours on December 10.

Gen Soe Win, on a visit to the Eastern Command headquarters in Fort William in

²⁴ ‘India-Myanmar relations rooted in history: President Pranab’, *Zee News*, December 5 (http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/india-myanmar-relations-rooted-in-history-president-pranab_894643.html)

²⁵ ‘Myanmar asks India to stop ICP construction’, *E Pao*, December 8 (<http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=6..091213.dec13>)

Kolkata, also discussed other aspects of mutual interest between the two countries, according to a defence ministry spokesman.

General Win, accompanied by his wife, is on a six-day visit to India starting December 10. He left for New Delhi in the evening.²⁶

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Brunei sends first relief team to Typhoon worst-hit Tacloban, Philippines

Brunei has rendered further aid to the Philippines by sending its first relief team of personnel to typhoon-ravaged Tacloban to provide assistance at the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA) in distributing food and water to disaster victims, government sources said on November 21. The relief team left the country Wednesday onboard Royal Brunei Armed Forces' aircraft, CN235 and will remain in the affected area for a week.

Shabandi Hj Abdul Halim, head of the relief team, in an interview said "We will be staying in a makeshift camp for at least a week to provide assistance to the AHA Centre. If required, we may stay longer."

Brunei has also airlifted humanitarian aid weighing 1,375 kilograms including water

and food on the flight.

A communications officer at the AHA Centre lauded Brunei's swift response in sending relief goods and supporting ASEAN operations. In fact, among the very first ASEAN responders to the affected area were two members from the ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team in Brunei.²⁷

CAMBODIA

Cambodian Opposition Lifts Conditions on Talks with Ruling Party

Cambodia's opposition said on October 30 it is prepared to hold talks with Prime Minister Hun Sen's party without any preconditions in a fresh bid to end a political deadlock three months after disputed national elections.

The move signaled a shift by the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), which days earlier had said it would not hold talks with the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) until its three key demands, including the establishment of a committee to investigate election irregularities, were met.

The other conditions were seeking the resignation of all members of the National Election Committee (NEC), which oversees the country's polls, and the implementation of recommendations from UN experts and NGOs on electoral and other reforms.

The three issues will remain part of any future negotiations, CNRP Deputy President Kem Sokha told reporters.²⁸

²⁶ 'Myanmar, Indian army officers discuss military ties', *The Economic Times*, December 10 (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-12-10/news/45035483_1_military-ties-myanmar-army-indian-army-officers)

²⁷ 'Brunei sends first relief team to Typhoon worst-hit Tacloban, Philippines', *Xinhua.net*, November 21 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-11/21/c_132905922.htm)

²⁸ 'Cambodian Opposition Lifts Conditions on Talks with Ruling Party', *Radio Free Asia*, October 31 (<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/talks-10312013180011.html>)

As Trial Ends, KR Defendants Defiant to the Very Last

Nuon Chea, one of the chief ideologues of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, proclaimed his innocence and was defiant to the end as the trial against him and his co-accused, Khieu Samphan, wrapped up at the Khmer Rouge tribunal on October 31.

Nearing the end of their trial, both men refused to testify further after claiming that it had been an unfair process carried out only to find them guilty, regardless of the facts they said would prove otherwise. October 31 gave them a final chance to state their cases and cast light on their roles in the regime that ruled for three years, eight months and 20 days—during which time about 1.7 million people died.

The defence team for Khieu Samphan complained of translation issues throughout the trial, which he said “underscored the difficulties we faced.” Nuon Chea’s international counsel, Victor Koppe, said his team is now keen to have the second “mini-trial,” otherwise known as Case 002/02, heard as soon as possible in order to put “under serious scrutiny” further charges of genocide against their client.

Court officials will meet for three days in December to discuss the possibility of opening this second trial.

A verdict in Case 002/1 is expected next year.²⁹

Cambodian PM seeks Japan’s help in electoral reform

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said on November 16 that the country has sought Japan’s help in electoral reform.

“I asked Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe to consider sending experts to join electoral reform in the future,” he told a joint press briefing after meeting with Abe at the Peace Palace. “Japan is the first country that Cambodia requested because we think that Japan is very mature in democracy and has much experience on election issues,” he said.

In a joint statement after the meeting, Hun Sen reiterated his resolve to make every effort to strengthen democratic institutions through electoral reform.

Abe expressed expectation that the post-election situation in Cambodia would be normalised expeditiously through dialogue and cooperation among the parties concerned and nation building would be advanced on the basis of national reconciliation.³⁰

IMF chief hails Cambodia’s robust economic growth

Visiting Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Christine Lagarde on December 2 praised Cambodia for high economic growth and pledged continued support for the country’s financial reform.

Lagarde made the remarks during a one-hour meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen at the capital’s Peace Palace, Eang Sphallet, personal spokesman for the premier,

²⁹ ‘As Trial Ends, KR Defendants Defiant to the Very Last’, *The Cambodia Daily*, November 1 (<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/featured-stories/as-trial-ends-kr-defendants-defiant-to-the-very-last-46446/>)

³⁰ ‘Cambodian PM seeks Japan’s help in electoral reform’, *Global Times*, November 17 (<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/825409.shtml#.Up2E59J9RXM>)

told reporters after the meeting.

Lagarde arrived here on the previous day for a two-day visit. During her stay, she will pay a courtesy call on King Norodom Sihamoni, and hold talks with Deputy Prime Minister Keat Chhon and Finance Minister Aun Porn Moniroth.

She will also meet with think-tank representatives, women leaders, business people, and civil society organisation representatives.³¹

Cambodia bans march to celebrate International Human Rights Day

The Cambodian interior ministry has allowed the opposition party to hold a rally in the capital Phnom Penh, but banned its march to mark the International Human Rights Day.

“The ministry of interior allows the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) to gather at the Freedom Park in the morning December 10, with the participants below 10,000, the maximum capacity of the park,” said a letter signed by Interior Minister Sar Kheng on December 8. “March is banned, but the party can assign 10 representatives to deliver their petition to the National Assembly,” it said.

The ministry of interior called on all participants to cooperate with the authorities to celebrate the day peacefully, reports Xinhua.

The CNRP announced it would stage mass rallies in both Phnom Penh and the tourist city of Siem Reap.

“We plan to get together 20,000 people in Phnom Penh, and at least 10,000 participants in Siem Reap city,” said CNRP spokesman Yem Ponharith. He said the upcoming rallies aim to demand greater respect for human rights, and greater access to social justice.

The opposition party has launched several mass rallies in Phnom Penh after July’s disputed election.

Yem Ponharith said from December 15 onwards, the party will hold mass protests in Phnom Penh every Sunday to demand probe into the allegations of serious fraud, and irregularities during the elections that handed victory to Prime Minister Hun Sen’s ruling party.³²

INDONESIA

Indonesia demands Australian ambassador explain reports of spying from embassy in Jakarta

Indonesia’s foreign ministry has called in Australia’s ambassador and issued a “strong demand” that he immediately explain the news that the Australian embassy in Jakarta was used as a post to spy on Indonesia.

“If news that Australia conducts clandestine surveillance activities through its embassy in Jakarta is true, such activities are highly unacceptable”. In a statement issued late on

³¹ ‘IMF chief hails Cambodia’s robust economic growth’, *Global Post*, December 2 (<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/xinhua-news-agency/131202/imf-chief-hails-cambodias-robust-economic-growth>)

³² ‘Cambodia bans march to celebrate International Human Rights Day’, *Business Standard*, December 8 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/cambodia-bans-march-to-celebrate-international-human-rights-day-113120800629_1.html)

October 31, the foreign ministry “strongly demands clarification and an explanation” of the revelations published by Fairfax Media.

But Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa will not take the meeting—he is in Perth attending a conference with his Australian counterpart Julie Bishop.

A departmental spokesman said ambassador Greg Moriarty would meet a “senior official” instead.³³

Indonesia contradicts Abbott on boat deal

A senior Indonesian official has directly contradicted the Abbott government by insisting that a deal to swap refugees is on the table as a way of breaking the impasse over asylum-seeker boats.

Dewi Fortuna Anwar, an adviser to Indonesia’s Vice-President, repeated her claims on Tuesday afternoon that a deal was being discussed in which Jakarta would allow asylum seekers stopped at sea to be returned to Indonesia if Australia matched that by taking an equal number of proven refugees.

Her emphatic reiteration that there was a proposal being considered came after Prime Minister Tony Abbott and his Immigration Minister Scott Morrison both hosed down the possibility of such a deal.³⁴

Indonesia recalls ambassador to Australia over spying claim

Indonesia has recalled its ambassador to Australia amid fury in Jakarta over revelations that Australian spies tried to tap the phones of the Indonesian President and his wife.

The position of the Australian ambassador, Greg Moriarty, and diplomatic staff in Jakarta will also be “reviewed” as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ordered his own security agency to investigate the revelations.

Mr Moriarty was called in to Indonesia’s foreign affairs department on November 18 to answer questions. Jakarta’s review would include all co-operation between the two countries, an Indonesian government statement released on the same night said.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Tony Abbott declined to comment on the ambassador’s recall.³⁵

Indonesia halts military cooperation with Australia

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on November 20 said Indonesia has temporarily halted its military and intelligence cooperation with Australia over the latter’s wiretapping of Indonesian leaders.

Besides notifying people that Indonesia has submitted its official query to Australia about the wiretapping issue, President Yudhoyono ordered a stop to several forms of joint military drills with Australia in all forces that include

³³ ‘Indonesia demands Australian ambassador explain reports of spying from embassy in Jakarta’, *Brisbane Times*, October 31 (<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/indonesia-demands-australian-ambassador-explain-reports-of-spying-from-embassy-in-jakarta-20131101-2wmfe.html>)

³⁴ ‘Indonesia contradicts Abbott on boat deal’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 13 (<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/indonesia-contradicts-abbott-on-boat-deal-20131112-2xem5.html>)

the navy, the army and the air force, Xinhua reported.³⁵

The president also ordered a stop to intelligence information sharing with Australia.

“I have ordered to temporarily stop the coordinated military operation aimed at intercepting people smuggling on waters. We cannot proceed on those activities if our troops are being tapped as well as us,” the president told a press conference held at the presidential palace in Jakarta.³⁶

Indonesia, Australia take steps to calm spy row

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said on November 26 that Australia’s leader had made “important” commitments aimed at ending a row over spying but warned much more work was needed before ties returned to normal.

But even as tensions calmed with Canberra, they threatened to escalate elsewhere, with Yudhoyono saying his government would summon the South Korean and Singaporean envoys over new espionage claims.

Allegations that Australian spies tried to listen to the phones of Yudhoyono, his wife and his ministers in 2009 surfaced last week and sparked a diplomatic crisis.

Jakarta reacted furiously, ending cooperation on military exercises and in

the key area of people-smuggling and recalling its ambassador from Australia.

Indonesia was further infuriated by Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s failure to apologise or offer what it saw as a clear explanation.

But on November 26 Yudhoyono struck a conciliatory tone after receiving a letter from Abbott aimed at calming the row with a key ally and trading partner.³⁷

Indonesia Seeks Explanation Over Tapping Allegations

Indonesia has sought answers from Singapore and South Korea over media reports alleging that they helped the United States and Australia gather intelligence on countries in the Southeast Asian region—just as Australia says it is determined to rebuild trust with Indonesia over the allegations.

The spying allegations are based on media reports, citing leaks by former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, that an intelligence alliance known as the “Five Eyes”—which includes the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia and New Zealand—intercepted data and monitored top-level politicians’ phones across Asia.

Singapore has dismissed the allegations as “groundless,” while South Korea’s ambassador to Indonesia has neither confirmed nor denied the accusations, Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa told reporters gathered

³⁵ ‘Indonesia recalls ambassador to Australia over spying claim’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 18 (<http://www.smh.com.au/world/indonesia-recalls-ambassador-to-australia-over-spying-claim-20131118-2xrem.html>)

³⁶ ‘Indonesia halts military cooperation with Australia’, *Business Standard*, November 20 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/indonesia-halts-military-cooperation-with-australia-113112000504_1.html)

³⁷ ‘Indonesia, Australia take steps to calm spy row’, *Channel News Asia*, November 26 (<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-australia-take/900740.html>)

outside the parliament building in Jakarta on November 28.³⁸

LAOS

Construction in Laos to start soon: Ratch

Ratchaburi Electricity Generating Holding expects construction on the 410-megawatt Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy hydropower plant in Laos to commence by the end of this year, as a prime contractor and financing are now in place.

The developer and operator of the Bt32-billion project is Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy Power Co (PNPC), a 25:26:25:24 joint venture of Ratch, SK Engineering and Construction, Korea Western Power, and Lao Holding State Enterprise.

Ratch chief executive officer Pongdith Potchana said yesterday that construction would take about five years, so the plant will start commercial operations in 2018.

About 370 megawatts or 90 per cent of the generating capacity will be distributed to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand under a 27-year power purchase agreement. The rest will be fed into Laos's electricity grid.³⁹

Laos to reduce possible impact of AEC integration on domestic goods prices

The Lao government is taking steps to reduce negative impact on domestic goods prices ahead of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) integration in 2015.

The implementation of the AEC will challenge the currently controlled price of goods as foreign goods begin to enter the Lao market without any customs or tax fees, said Lao Ministry of Industry and Commerce's Domestic Trade Department Director General Leuam Nhongvongsithi, according to state-run daily Vientiane Times, on December 4.

Once foreign products enter the Lao market under an AEC framework, the price of Lao products will fluctuate with inflation and local supply and demand, Nhongvongsithi said. A priority of the Domestic Trade Department will be to ensure that food prices remain stable as the quantity of imports is expected to exceed the quantity produced domestically.⁴⁰

Working Group on Laos Hydropower Sustainability Launched

The private sector lending arm of the World Bank says it has teamed up with business groups to ensure that hydropower projects are developed and operated in a sustainable way in Laos, which has come under fire from green groups for building dams with little regard for the environment.

³⁸ 'Indonesia Seeks Explanation Over Tapping Allegations', *The Wall Street Journal*, November 29 (<http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2013/11/29/indonesia-seeks-explanation-over-tapping-allegations-australia-to-strengthen-ties/>)

³⁹ 'Construction in Laos to start soon: Ratch', *The Nation*, December 3 (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/Construction-in-Laos-to-start-soon-Ratch-30221167.html>)

⁴⁰ 'Laos to reduce possible impact of AEC integration on domestic goods prices', *Global Post*, December 4 (<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/xinhua-news-agency/131204/laos-reduce-possible-impact-aec-integration-domestic-goods-p>)

Under the new partnership, and over the course of the next year, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Lao National Chamber of Commerce will host a series of seminars to introduce hydropower companies to sustainability standards, tools, and best practices in a bid to get dam-builders to adopt them.

The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding the previous week in Vientiane to launch the Hydropower Developers Working Group in a ceremony attended by representatives from the government, hydropower developers, and business and development partners.

The IFC, which is a member of the World Bank Group, said in a statement that the collaboration is aimed at providing a “dialogue platform” between the business community and the government in Laos, which has more than 70 dams planned on its rivers.

“By sharing our expertise on environmental and social best practices with the local hydropower companies, we want to improve the sustainability standards in the sector as a whole and increase the share of new hydropower projects that follow good international industry practices,” said Ian Crosby, IFC’s Sustainable Business Advisory Manager for East Asia and the Pacific.⁴¹

MALAYSIA

Malaysia summons US, Australia missions over spy row

Malaysia summoned the heads of the US and Australian missions in protest at spying allegations, its foreign minister said on November 2, as a row over a vast US-led surveillance network deepened in Asia.

China and Indonesia have already demanded explanations from Australia over reports that Canberra’s missions were being used to monitor phone calls and collect data as part of American surveillance.

The dispute erupted in the region following a story in the Sydney Morning Herald, which reported a top-secret map leaked by fugitive intelligence analyst Edward Snowden that showed 90 US surveillance facilities at diplomatic missions worldwide—including in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said his country had on the previous day summoned the US and Australian mission heads to “hand over a protest note in response to the alleged spying activities carried out by the two embassies in Kuala Lumpur”.⁴²

Malaysia’s economy on track to hit full-year growth target this year: Wahid Omar

The Malaysian economy is on track to achieve the full-year growth target of between 4.5 per cent and 5.0 per cent this year and the country

⁴¹ ‘Working Group on Laos Hydropower Sustainability Launched’, *Radio Free Asia*, December 9 (<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/hydropower-12092013183721.html>)

⁴² ‘Malaysia summons US, Australia missions over spy row’, *Channel News Asia*, November 2 (<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/malaysia-summons-us/871748.html>)

is very unlikely to get into a twin deficit situation, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Abdul Wahid Omar.

"We are pleased Malaysia's economy has been doing very well. In the third quarter we grew (our economy) by five per cent year on-year, compared to the first quarter's 4.1 per cent and second quarter's 4.4 per cent."

"With that performance we are very much on track to achieve our full-year growth target of between 4.5 per cent to 5.0 per cent this year," he said at the Malaysia Business Forum in Singapore on November 20.

He said Malaysia is committed to reducing its budget deficit to 3.5 per cent of GDP in 2014 and maintaining the government's debt level.⁴³

Malaysia to ease visa curbs for Indian, Chinese tourists

The Malaysian government has decided to relax visa restrictions for Indian and Chinese tourists in conjunction with Visit Malaysia Year 2014, a government official said on December 10.

Home minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi told reporters that Indian and Chinese tourists would be granted the visa-on-arrival (VoA) facility, but only for those who enter Malaysia through a third country, reports Xinhua.

Currently, India and China passport holders are required to apply for a visa before travelling to Malaysia.

Malaysia had scrapped the VoA facility offered to visitors from eight countries in 2010, including China and India, due to its abuse.

It is reported that thousands of tourists have abused their VoA by overstaying. The VoA facility was introduced in 2006 in conjunction with Visit Malaysia Year 2007.

According to the immigration division, 39,000 Indian nationals and 6,000 Chinese citizens have overstayed in Malaysia.⁴⁴

MYANMAR

Most people in Myanmar want constitution amendment: Poll

Myanmar's opposition party, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, held a regionwide constitutional public opinion poll in Yangon on November 10 in the form of a mass rally, with 99.9 percent of the participants agreeing to the amendment of the existing 2008 Constitution.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) told the public gathering that it will submit the opinions to the parliament's Constitutional Review Joint Committee by the end of December for further review, Xinhua reported.

The NLD itself also formed a constitution amendment committee, saying that constitution amendments are necessary as rule of law, internal peace and genuine democracy

⁴³ 'Malaysia's economy on track to hit full-year growth target this year: Wahid Omar', *New Straits Times*, November 20 (<http://www.nst.com.my/latest/malaysia-s-economy-on-track-to-hit-full-year-growth-target-this-year-wahid-omar-1.406931>)

⁴⁴ 'Malaysia to ease visa curbs for Indian, Chinese tourists', *Times of India*, December 10 (http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-12-10/india/45033273_1_chinese-tourists-visa-restrictions-visa-curbs)

building are depending upon it.

The committee found that the present constitution includes provisions which are not in line with democratic standards and which would harm the 2015 general elections from being free and fair.

Myanmar has seen three constitutions with the first in 1947 drawn before it regained independence from the British colonialists.

The second was in 1974 when it was drawn to meet the then socialist system, allowing the existence of only a single political party, and the third was in 2008 when it was drafted to meet the transition of the military rule to civilian rule.⁴⁵

Students from Myanmar to hone skills at IIM-Bangalore

Twenty students from the University of Mandalay in Myanmar will be hosted by the Centre for Public Policy at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, from November 18 to November 29, 2013.

They have come to take back some new ideas on doing business. Their training includes pedagogy relating to various aspects of entrepreneurship, management of small and medium enterprises, sustaining and expanding the financial and human resources of an enterprise, both in the national and in the global context.

The visit, which for many will be their first to the country, will be packed with lectures and field tours to Narayana Hrudayalaya, Safal, Akshaya Patra Foundation, etc.⁴⁶

Myanmar, EU sign package of accords on cooperation

Myanmar and the European Union (EU) on November 15 signed a package of accords on cooperation at their Task Force's first plenary session in Nay Pyi Taw, state radio and TV reported.

The accords include holding of policy-related discussions on small and medium enterprises, and raw materials; cooperation in long-term development of tourism industry, joint statement on EU's provision of aid for development, cooperation between European investment bank and Myanmar and cooperation in agriculture.

The signing took place after Myanmar President U Thein Sein addressed the opening of the plenary session, which was divided into three sessions, task force economic session, inter-parliamentary session and task force political session.

The EU-Myanmar Task Force was established in March.⁴⁷

UN to Myanmar: Make Rohingya Muslims citizens

The General Assembly's human rights committee on November 19 passed a resolution

⁴⁵ 'Most people in Myanmar want constitution amendment: Poll', *Business Standard*, November 11 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/most-people-in-myanmar-want-constitution-amendment-poll-113111100729_1.html)

⁴⁶ 'Students from Myanmar to hone skills at IIM-Bangalore', *Times of India*, November 14 (http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-11-14/news/44073475_1_hone-skills-myanmar-public-policy)

⁴⁷ 'Myanmar, EU sign package of accords on cooperation', *Global Times*, November 15 (<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/825217.shtml#.Up2EktJ9RXM>)

urging Myanmar to give the stateless Rohingya minority equal access to citizenship and to crack down on Buddhist violence against them and other Muslims.

The resolution passed the committee by consensus, meaning under General Assembly rules the body will unanimously pass it later this year.

Myanmar emerged from a half-century of military rule in 2011, but its transition to democracy has been marred by sectarian violence that has left more than 240 people dead and sent another 240,000 fleeing their homes, most of them Rohingya.

The General Assembly resolution welcomed a statement by Myanmar's president that "no prisoners of conscience will remain in prison by the end of the year." Myanmar released 69 political prisoners the previous week.⁴⁸

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi meets Australian PM

Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi met with Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott on November 28 as she travels the country seeking backing for changes to Myanmar's constitution, which currently prevents her from becoming president.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate met with Abbott and later spoke to journalists about

her fight for fair elections. "We are just starting out on the road to democracy. We are not there yet, as some people seem to assume," she said. "Without amendments to the constitution, we can never become a truly democratic society."

The military regime that governed until 2011 shut Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy party out of politics, but last year she and several dozen party members won parliamentary seats.⁴⁹

Myanmar starts biggest SEZ project

Myanmar began implementing the first phase of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) project, the country's largest SEZ of its kind of international standard, on the outskirts of Yangon.

The first phase of the project covers 400 hectares out of the overall 2,400 hectares.

The Thilawa SEZ is jointly developed by Myanmar and Japan. Two Myanmar companies and two Japanese companies have established a joint venture under the name of Myanmar-Japan Thilawa Development Co Ltd in Tokyo to operate the project, reported Xinhua.

The company's share ratio is 51 percent by Myanmar and 49 percent by Japan.

The project includes factories, high-tech industry, textile, labour intensive industry and manufacturing industry.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ 'UN to Myanmar: Make Rohingya Muslims citizens', *Business Standard*, November 19 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/un-to-myanmar-make-rohingya-muslims-citizens-113111901324_1.html)

⁴⁹ 'Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi meets Australian PM', *The New Zealand Herald*, November 28 (http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=11163827)

⁵⁰ 'Myanmar starts biggest SEZ project', *Business Standard*, December 10 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/myanmar-starts-biggest-sez-project-113121000261_1.html)

THE PHILIPPINES

One of world's strongest storms slams Philippines

One of the strongest storms on record has killed more than 100 people and injured another 100 in the central Philippines as it wiped away buildings and levelled seaside homes before sweeping west toward Vietnam on November 9, still packing destructive winds.

Capt. John Andrews, deputy director general of the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines, said he had received "reliable information" from his staff describing the death and destruction Typhoon Haiyan wreaked in Tacloban city on Leyte Island, where the storm made landfall on November 8. He told The Associated Press that more than 100 bodies were lying in the streets and another 100 were injured.

The Philippines, which is hit by about 20 typhoons and storms a year, has in recent years become more serious about preparations to reduce deaths. Public service announcements are frequent, as are warnings by the president and high-ranking officials that are regularly carried on radio and TV and social networking sites.

President Benigno Aquino III assured the public of war-like preparations, with three C-130 air force cargo planes and 32

military helicopters and planes on standby, along with 20 navy ships.⁵¹

Philippines typhoon toll crosses 4,000 mark

Death toll from typhoon Haiyan (local name Yolanda) breached the 4,000 level, the Philippine disaster agency said on November 20.

National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) Executive Director Eduardo del Rosario said that 4,011 people perished due to the super typhoon that struck the country on November 8.

The number of people reported injured rose to 18,557, while 1,602 people were still missing, he said.

The cost of damage to properties was estimated at 12 billion pesos (\$275 million).

Some 2.15 million families or nearly 10 million people were affected in 10,718 villages in 44 provinces. Of the affected population, 4.4 million were displaced and being served inside and outside the evacuation centres.

Of the total cost of damage, Del Rosario said 1.79 billion pesos (\$41 million) came from infrastructure and 10.45 billion pesos (\$239.6 million) from agriculture in seven regions of the country.

The government and non-government organisations have extended 387 million pesos worth of relief assistance to the affected families.⁵²

⁵¹ 'One of world's strongest storms slams Philippines', *CBS*, November 9 (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/one-of-worlds-strongest-storms-slams-philippines/>)

⁵² 'Philippines typhoon toll crosses 4,000 mark', *Business Standard*, November 20 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/philippines-typhoon-toll-crosses-4-000-mark-113112000083_1.html)

Philippines says China carrier in S.China Sea raises tension

The Philippines said on November 27 the imminent arrival of China's sole aircraft carrier in the disputed South China Sea for the first time for a training mission would raise tension.

The carrier Liaoning left port from the northern city of Qingdao accompanied by two destroyers and two frigates on the previous day. While in the South China Sea, it will carry out tests and drills, according to China's military.

China says the mission is routine.⁵³

SINGAPORE

Singapore Airlines launches special passes for Indian flyers

Singapore Airlines on November 7 announced the introduction of special passes for Indian customers to enable them avail fares for flights to US, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China.

Called the 'Asia AirPass' exclusively launched for Indian customers, it would enable travellers from here flying long-haul beyond Singapore to Hong Kong, China, Japan, US, Australia and New Zealand to "avail of special add-on fares between Singapore and destinations within North Asia and South-East Asia for a maximum of four sectors," an airline statement said.

These passes would be on sale till March 31 next year and bookings can be made from SIA offices in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Coimbatore, Delhi, Kochi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Thiruvananthapuram and Visakhapatnam and travel agents.⁵⁴

Singapore's financial sector stable, but risks remain: IMF

Singapore's regulation and supervision of its financial sector has been assessed as among the best in the world by the International Monetary Fund.

Banks in Singapore cleared IMF's stress tests under the IMF's financial stability assessment programme (FSAP)—meaning they are resilient to adverse global economic scenarios. However, the IMF also highlighted some risks, including rising credit growth.

Singapore's financial sector is significantly larger than its economy. Local and foreign banks hold assets worth S\$2.1 trillion (US\$1.7 trillion), six times of its GDP. The banks make up the bulk of Singapore's financial sector, which also include insurance companies, and the securities market.⁵⁵

Singapore moots Asia-centric international commercial court

Singapore on December 3 said it plans to launch an international commercial court that will aid in settling an increasing number of cross-border disputes as Asia's economies boom. The Ministry of Law said in a statement the proposed Singapore International Commercial Court

⁵³ 'Philippines says China carrier in S.China Sea raises tension', *Reuters*, November 27 (<http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/11/27/philippines-china-idINDEE9AQ05E20131127>)

⁵⁴ 'Singapore Airlines' launches special passes for Indian flyers', *The Financial Express*, November 7 (<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/Singapore-Airlines—launches-special-passes-for-Indian-flyers/1192054>)

⁵⁵ 'Singapore's financial sector stable, but risks remain: IMF', *Channel News Asia*, November 14 (<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/singapore/singapore-s-financial/886994.html>)

(SICC) will leverage on robust cross-border investment and trade in Asia, where gross domestic product is expected to triple over the current decade to \$34.9 trillion in 2020.

“Against this backdrop, the number and complexity of cross-border disputes is expected to increase, enabling the legal services sector in the Asia Pacific to grow significantly,” the ministry said. It said the SICC will build on Singapore’s reputation as a leading destination for international arbitration, which allows for disputes to be resolved by third-party arbitrators outside of court.⁵⁶

Singapore’s ‘Little India’ hit by rare outbreak of rioting, 27 arrested

A crowd of around 400 people set fire to vehicles and clashed with police in ‘Little India’, the Indian district of Singapore, late on December 8 after a man was hit and killed by a bus, the first major riot in the city-state for more than 40 years.

Police said they had arrested 27 suspects after the riot, which started after a private bus hit and killed a 33-year-old Indian national in the Little India area.

The riot is likely to fuel concerns about discontent among low-paid foreign workers. Last year, Singapore saw its biggest outbreak of labour unrest in years when around 170 bus drivers from mainland China went on strike illegally.

Several videos posted online showed a crowd of people smashing the windscreen

of the bus while the victim remained trapped under the vehicle.

Police said the 27 arrested were of South Asian origin and that they expected to make more arrests in coming days. About 300 officers were sent on to the streets to quell the riot.

A statement by the Civil Defence Force (CDF), which oversees ambulances and fire fighting, said rescuers trying to remove the body had “projectiles” thrown at them when they arrived on the scene.

Footage showed police cars being flipped over and several vehicles on fire. The CDF said an ambulance, three police cars and a motorbike were burnt.

The Singapore Police Force said the violence started following the bus accident.⁵⁷

THAILAND

Thai senate rejects disputed amnesty bill

Thailand’s senate has unanimously rejected a contentious political amnesty bill, the deputy speaker said, as tens of thousands of anti-government protesters massed on Bangkok’s streets. “This house rejects this bill for consideration,” Surachai Lengboonlertcha said, adding all of the 141 senators present voted against the legislation, which critics say was aimed at helping divisive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra return to Thailand from self-exile.

The decision kicks the bill, which has provoked nearly a fortnight of protest on the capital’s streets, back to the lower house, where under

⁵⁶ ‘Singapore moots Asia-centric international commercial court’, *The Economic Times*, December 3 (<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/singapore-moots-asia-centric-international-commercial-court/articleshow/26781706.cms>)

⁵⁷ ‘Singapore’s ‘Little India’ hit by rare outbreak of rioting, 27 arrested’, *Reuters*, December 9 (<http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/12/09/singapore-riot-idINDEE9B707120131209>)

pressure Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra—Thaksin’s sister—has already vowed to kill it.

The opposition Democrat Party has harnessed the growing anti-government sentiment. It was holding an anti-amnesty rally on November 11—before the expected vote by the senate—which it said could draw tens of thousands to the city’s political centre, heightening fears of clashes with police.

A Democrat lawmaker Akanat Promphan said the protesters would give the government a “deadline” of 6pm (11:00GMT) to kill the bill before taking further—as yet unspecified—actions. Thousands of police were deployed across Bangkok to keep the peace, including nearly 7,000 officers around the parliament and the prime minister’s office.

Since it was passed by the lower house on November 1, the bill has set off daily demonstrations and raised fears of reviving political turmoil that has convulsed the country since Thaksin was toppled by a coup in 2006.⁵⁸

Thailand and Bhutan to boost bilateral trade and investment

During his first official visit to Thailand the Bhutanese prime minister Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay looks to enhance the bilateral relations as well as human resource development. Thailand and Bhutan’s diplomatic relations have been

continuing for 24 years, since November 14, 1989.

Yingluck Shinawatra assured him that Thailand is ready to assist Bhutan in all areas.

According to the Thai government’s web site, in 2012 trade between the two countries was to the tune of US\$15.5 million.⁵⁹

Thailand rocked by anti-govt protests

Beleaguered Thai PM Yingluck Shinawatra on November 25 declared emergency in the capital after antigovernment demonstrators stormed the compounds of two key ministries, dramatically escalating their protests aimed at toppling her regime.

“While the government will enforce the laws it will not use force against the people,” PM Yingluck said as she invoked the Internal Security Act in the entire capital and surrounding areas. “The government would like to ask people not to join illegal protests and to respect the law,” she said.

The move came after hundreds of anti-government protesters stormed into the finance ministry compound and later forced their way into the foreign ministry building. Both the compounds were apparently left unguarded. The anti-government protesters broke down the gates to the foreign ministry and after occupying an area of the compound they asked civil servants to leave and not to return to work on the following day, an official said.

“On [November 26] we will seize all ministries to show to the Thaksin system that they have

⁵⁸ ‘Thai senate rejects disputed amnesty bill’, *Al Jazeera*, November 11 (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2013/11/thai-senate-rejects-disputed-amnesty-bill-2013111163039304410.html>)

⁵⁹ ‘Thailand and Bhutan to boost bilateral trade and investment’, *The Nation*, November 14 (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/Thailand-and-Bhutan-to-boost-bilateral-trade-and-i-30219604.html>)

no legitimacy to run the country,” said Suthep Thaugsuban, a former opposition MP. “It was a peaceful seizure by the people,” Suthep told a press conference from the finance ministry.

Earlier, protesters chanting “Thaksin get out, army come in”, called for the intervention of the military in a country that has seen 18 actual or attempted coups since it became a constitutional monarchy in 1932. Thailand’s Opposition Democrat party leader and former PM Abhisit Vejjajiva urged Yingluck and the ruling Pheu Thai Party to take responsibility for the protests.⁶⁰

Yingluck rejects ultimatum to step down amid fresh clashes

Thailand’s embattled Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra on December 2 rejected as unconstitutional the demand for her resignation by the opposition whose supporters clashed with the security forces to press for her ouster.

With the opposition giving her two day’s ultimatum to step down and hand over power to an unelected “People’s Council”, Yingluck told a televised press conference that, “I would like everybody to join in finding a solution but I can’t find one under the legal framework and the constitution.”

Ms. Yingluck said the call by anti-government protest leader and former

Democrat Party MP Suthep Thaugsuban, to return the ruling mandate and set up a people’s council was impossible under the Constitution.

Police fired rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannon against hundreds of rock-throwing protesters as they tried to force their way into the Government House and the Metropolitan Police Bureau for a second day, in their bid to topple Ms. Yingluck, who took over power in 2011.

“I will not pose a condition. If I am able to do anything to return peace, I’ll be willing to do it but it must done under the provision of the Constitution,” she said.

“Please understand me. I don’t know which law under the constitution’s framework I should invoke to implement the call (of people’s council),” Ms. Yingluck said.

Mr. Suthep, during a meeting with Ms. Yingluck in the presence of army, navy and air force commanders the previous night, asked her to resign within the next “two days”.

The protesters allege that Thaksin runs the government from Dubai, where he is staying under a self-imposed exile, and accuse the current administration of using populist policies that are hurting Thailand’s economy to remain in power.

Four people have died and more than 100 injured in the anti-government protests in Thailand’s worst political turmoil since the 2010 rallies that ended in violence.⁶¹

⁶⁰ ‘Thailand rocked by anti-govt protests’, *Times of India*, November 26 (http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-11-26/rest-of-world/44486147_1_pm-yingluck-protests-suthep-thaugsuban)

⁶¹ ‘Yingluck rejects ultimatum to step down amid fresh clashes’, *The Hindu*, December 2 (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/thailand-braces-for-more-violence/article5413298.ece>)

Thailand protests: Temporary truce on eve of King's birthday

Thailand's anti-government protesters and security forces on December 4 observed a temporary truce as the nation prepared to mark the birthday of the revered king, after police stepped back in a dramatic move to calm violent clashes.

Demonstrators joined Bangkok authorities to clean up the area around Democracy Monument, where tens of thousands have camped out in more than a month of rallies against the embattled government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.

The area is a focus for the celebrations on December 5 for the 86th birthday of King Bhumibol Adulyadej—a date normally observed in a spirit of calm and reverence for the ageing monarch.

Some debris has been cleared at battle-scarred areas around key government buildings which saw ugly clashes with police earlier in the week.⁶²

China, Thailand hold antiterrorism training

Chinese and Thai special forces will hold joint anti-terrorism training from December 8 to 21 in Thailand, said a statement from China's Defense Ministry on December 8.

The drill, code-named "Strike-2013", is the fourth time for armies of the two

countries to hold such anti-terror training since 2007.

"The drill is aimed to deepen pragmatic cooperation and increase mutual trust and friendship between the two militaries," said the statement.

The two armies will also explore new ways of joint implementation of anti-terror action through the training, according to the statement.⁶³

Thailand PM Yingluck Shinawatra calls snap election, protesters press on

Thailand Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra dissolved parliament on December 9 and called a snap election, but anti-government protest leaders pressed ahead with mass demonstrations seeking to install an unelected body to run the country.

About 100,000 protesters marched through Bangkok, extending a rally that descended into violence before pausing late in the previous week to honour the King's birthday. Blowing whistles, they vowed to oust Yingluck and eradicate the influence of her self-exiled brother, former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

"At this stage, when there are many people opposed to the government from many groups, the best way is to give back the power to the Thai people and hold an election. So the Thai people will decide," Yingluck said in a televised address as the protests resumed across Bangkok.⁶⁴

⁶² 'Thailand protests: Temporary truce on eve of King's birthday', *Straits Times*, December 4 (<http://www.straitstimes.com/the-big-story/turmoil-thailand/story/thailand-protests-temporary-truce-eve-kings-birthday-20131204>)

⁶³ 'China, Thailand hold antiterrorism training', *People's Daily*, December 9 (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90786/8478456.html>)

⁶⁴ 'Thailand PM Yingluck Shinawatra calls snap election, protesters press on', *The Economic Times*, December 9 (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-12-09/news/44990509_1_pavin-chachavalpongpun-snap-election-election-commission)

VIETNAM

Vietnam's Nuclear Energy Plan Likely Part of Russia Talks

Russian President Vladimir Putin begins an energy-heavy visit to Vietnam in mid-November, putting into the spotlight the energy plans of the Southeast Asia country— including its ambitious goal of building 13 nuclear reactors.

Several energy deals will likely be signed during Mr. Putin's visit, in which he will meet with Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang and other officials. These deals would include those between Petrovietnam and Rosneft to jointly explore offshore oil in Russia and Vietnam, and a memorandum of understanding under which Rosneft would provide crude oil to Petrovietnam over the next three years.

But Vietnam is also working with Russian utility and energy company Rosatom to help it build its first nuclear power plant, the Ninh Thuan 1, as it charts a future in which nuclear will provide 6.6% of the country's energy needs by 2030. Vietnam needs expertise, not only to build but to run what Vietnam hopes will eventually be eight nuclear plants.

Russia has a lead in staking claim to what may become one of the world's largest new nuclear markets, having already agreed to extend an \$8 billion loan to

Vietnam. Japan and South Korea have also signalled interest, as has the United States.⁶⁵

Vietnam wins seat in UN Human Rights Council

On November 12, Vietnam was elected to become one of the 14 new council members for the 2014-2016 tenure. It received 184 votes out of a total of 192, the highest number of votes among the candidates.

In an interview granted to the Vietnam News Agency, Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh said that running for a seat in the UNHRC was an important step for Vietnam in its road to achieving the foreign policy goal of being a friend, a reliable partner and a responsible member of the international community as well as promoting active international integration.

"This determination reflects the Vietnamese Party and State's view of human rights as a common aspiration of human beings as well as their consistent policy of respecting and ensuring human rights, and enhancing international cooperation in this field," he noted.

According to Minh, Vietnam's election to the UNHRC with the highest vote is of great significance. It shows the international community's acknowledgement and appreciation of Vietnam's policies and achievements in its comprehensive renewal process, including the building of a state of law that offers a better guarantee of citizens' rights.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ 'Vietnam's Nuclear Energy Plan Likely Part of Russia Talks', *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6 (<http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2013/11/06/vietnams-nuclear-energy-plan-likely-part-of-russia-talks/>)

⁶⁶ 'Vietnam wins seat in UN Human Rights Council', *Vietnam.net*, November 13 (<http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/89070/vietnam-wins-seat-in-un-human-rights-council.html>)

Vietnam appreciates India's role in South China Sea

Vietnam has appreciated India's "constructive role" in the disputed South China Sea region notwithstanding China's objections to Indian involvement in that area.

General Secretary of Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong, who will arrive in New Delhi on a four-day trip starting November 19, also stressed the need for a long-term settlement of the vexed issue on the basis of international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which has been opposed by China.

The Vietnamese leader, who will be visiting India on the invitation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, will hold talks with the top leadership on key bilateral and regional issues which may include the South China Sea territorial dispute between China and its neighbours.⁶⁷

Vietnam, Australia hold strategic defence dialogue

Vietnam and Australia have conducted their second defence dialogue with a view to further strengthening the strategic partnership and share their views on regional and international issue of mutual concern.

The event was co-chaired on November 18 by Deputy Defence Minister Nguyen Chi Vinh and First Assistant Secretary of

International Policy of the Australian Department of Defence, Neil Orme.

Both sides expressed their delight at positive developments in bilateral cooperation in diplomacy, defence, economics, trade, investment, education and training especially at a time when they are actively celebrating 40 years of diplomatic ties (1973-2013).

Two-way trade turnover reached US\$3.55 billion in the first ninth months of 2013, 10 percent higher than last year's same period.⁶⁸

Vietnam amends Constitution

Vietnam's National Assembly on November 28 passed an amendment to the country's Constitution, but critics said that despite calls for reform little has changed.

The revision retains the wording of the original constitution, adopted in 1992 that affirms the leading role of the Communist Party.

"There is no essential change [but] there are a few setbacks compared with the 1992 constitution," economist Nguyen Quang A said.

The amendment states that land rights can be revoked for socio-economic projects and the armed forces must be loyal to the party, he said.

State companies, once the cornerstone of the socialist-oriented market economy, have fallen from grace. Riddled by mismanagement and corruption, the sector has racked up debts of 60 billion dollars, equivalent to half of annual gross domestic product.

The amendment was passed by all attending

⁶⁷ 'Vietnam appreciates India's role in South China Sea', *Business Standard*, November 18 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/vietnam-appreciates-india-s-role-in-south-china-sea-113111800606_1.html)

⁶⁸ 'Vietnam, Australia hold strategic defence dialogue', *Vietnam.net*, November 19 (<http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/89488/vietnam-australia-hold-strategic-defence-dialogue.html>)

delegates at the assembly, newspaper Tuoi Tre reported.⁶⁹

AUSTRALIA

India-Australia talks on civil nuclear deal on November 25

Less than four months after being voted to power, the Tony Abbott-led Australian government is seeking to advance its strategic partnership with India, with the two sides set to hold a third round of negotiations on the civil nuclear deal in Delhi on November 25.

The decision to hold the talks was taken at a meeting between foreign minister Salman Khurshid and his Australian counterpart Julie Bishop in Perth on October 31.

The two ministers reaffirmed the commitment of both countries to finalise the civil nuclear cooperation agreement to enable export of Australian uranium to India, according to an Australian foreign ministry statement. Abbott had met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Brunei on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in October and the duo had decided to push forward their growing strategic partnership in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific regions. It was the first meeting between the two. Abbott is personally committed toward an early conclusion of a nuclear deal with India,

officials said.

Australia has the world's largest uranium reserves (31% of the global total) and the delay in the decision to supply uranium had cooled Delhi's ties with Canberra.⁷⁰

Australia to assist Myanmar in reform process

Australia has vowed to assist Myanmar in its political reform process and a wide range of sectors, including education and health, media reported on November 6.

It was pledged by visiting Governor-General of Commonwealth of Australia Quentin Bryce when she met Myanmar President U Thein Sein in Nay Pyi Taw the previous day, reported Xinhua.

Quentin offered to provide scholarships to outstanding Myanmar university students, technical assistance for capacity building of lectures, teaching aid in basic education schools, access to modern teaching methods, construction of schools in rural and border areas in the country.

Quentin also pledged Australia's assistance for Myanmar's maternal and child welfare undertakings and farm sector development, encouraging big investment by Australian entrepreneurs.⁷¹

Australian envoy to inaugurate Australia-India partnership on Trauma Care

Australian High Commissioner to India, Patrick Suckling, will inaugurate the Australia-India

⁶⁹ 'Vietnam amends Constitution', *The Hindu*, November 28 (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/vietnam-amends-constitution/article5400497.ece>)

⁷⁰ 'India-Australia talks on civil nuclear deal on November 25', *The Economic Times*, November 2 (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-11-02/news/43611480_1_australian-uranium-nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty-indian-ocean)

⁷¹ 'Australia to assist Myanmar in reform process', *Business Standard*, November 6 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/australia-to-assist-myanmar-in-reform-process-113110600148_1.html)

Trauma Systems Collaboration at the Jawaharlal Auditorium, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on November 8.

It coincides with the inaugural ceremony of the International Conference of the Indian Society for Trauma and Acute Care (ISTAC)—"TRAUMA 2013".

At the event, AIIMS will sign an MoU with the National Trauma Research Institute, Melbourne, and launch the Australia-India Trauma Systems Collaboration (AITSC) website.

AITSC is a Grand Challenge project supported by the Australia India Strategic Research Fund (AISRF). The project 'Reducing the burden of Injury in India and Australia through development and piloting of improved systems of care' will run for three years.

This collaboration will help India and Australia develop world-class trauma care for those who need it most, such as people badly injured in road traffic accidents.⁷²

Australia, India to share technological innovation

Thirty researchers, academicians and scientists from Australia's top universities will visit six Indian metropolitan cities and interact with companies to encourage sharing of technological innovation between the two countries, officials said on November 11.

"The Australian Innovation Showcase" was launched in New Delhi on the same day by the Australian High Commissioner to India, Patrick Suckling.

The initiative will include workshops and seminars in New Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Pune between Australian researchers and Indian companies. The event will conclude Dec 4.

"This is an opportunity to show that Australia is a perfect partner for India when it comes to cutting edge research," said Suckling at the launch.⁷³

Australia supports NSG membership for India

Australia on November 18 announced support for India's membership in the elite Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and termed as "priority process" the ongoing civil nuclear talks between the two countries, which will hold the next round of negotiations on November 26 and 27.

External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid held talks with his Australian counterpart Julie Bishop on ways to enhance cooperation in key areas of civil nuclear ties, anti- terrorism, security and defence among other strategic sectors.

Later at a joint press conference with Khurshid, Bishop announced that, "Australian government has decided that we will support India's membership of the NSG and I informed Foreign Minister Khurshid tonight about the Australian decision....". "It is appropriate given India's strategic importance in the region and

⁷² 'Australian envoy to inaugurate Australia-India partnership on Trauma Care', *Business Standard*, November 6 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/australian-envoy-to-inaugurate-australia-india-partnership-on-trauma-care-113110601142_1.html)

⁷³ 'Australia, India to share technological innovation', *Business Standard*, November 11, 2013 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/australia-india-to-share-technological-innovation-113111100888_1.html)

globally and India's record of non-proliferation."⁷⁴

Repeal of Australia's carbon tax moves closer

A bill to abolish an Australian carbon tax designed to combat climate change cleared parliament's lower house on November 21 with the new conservative government saying "it doesn't work".

Scrapping the divisive tax was a central election promise for Prime Minister Tony Abbott who argued that the cost of the levy was passed on to consumers, resulting in higher utility bills and day-to-day costs.

The tax charges the country's biggest polluters for their emissions at a fixed price and was due to transition to an emissions trading scheme.

"We will be repealing the carbon tax, firstly, because it doesn't work, secondly, because it destroys our competitiveness and, thirdly, because we gave our word," Environment Minister Greg Hunt said.

The government claims that removal of the tax would strengthen the economy of Australia, which is among the world's worst per capita polluters due to its reliance on coal-fired power and mining exports.

Abbott instead favours a "direct action" plan that includes an incentive fund to pay companies to increase their energy

efficiency, a controversial sequestration of carbon in soil scheme, and the planting of 20 million trees.

Labor opposition climate change spokesman Mark Butler called it a "very sad day for the Lower House of the Parliament".

"There was a great opportunity here for us to find a middle ground," he said.⁷⁵

Australia summons Chinese ambassador over airspace announcement

Australia summoned China's ambassador to express concern over its imposition of an "Air Defence Identification Zone" over the East China Sea, the foreign minister said on November 26, decrying the move as unhelpful in a region beset by tension.

"The timing and the manner of China's announcement are unhelpful in light of current regional tensions, and will not contribute to regional stability," Julie Bishop said in a statement.

"The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade had on the previous day called in China's ambassador to convey the Australian Government's concerns and to seek an explanation of China's intentions."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said the ambassador "fully expounded upon China's considerations and aims in setting up the East China Sea Air Defence Inspection Zone, and expounded upon our position and viewpoints".⁷⁶

⁷⁴ 'Australia supports NSG membership for India', *Business Standard*, November 18 (http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/australia-supports-nsg-membership-for-india-113111800951_1.html)

⁷⁵ 'Repeal of Australia's carbon tax moves closer', *Zee News*, November 21 (http://zeenews.india.com/news/eco-news/repeal-of-australia-s-carbon-tax-moves-closer_891498.html)

⁷⁶ 'Australia summons Chinese ambassador over airspace announcement', *Reuters*, November 26 (<http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/11/26/china-japan-airspace-australia-idINDEE9AP05M20131126>)

FIJI

Fiji PM to quit the military

Fiji's Prime Minister Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama has confirmed he will resign as military commander before he forms a new political party to contest the 2014 General Election.

Speaking in the iTaukei language to members of the Serua Provincial Council in Navua on October 30, Commodore Bainimarama said age was catching up and resigning from the military's top post was being considered.

He said the commander's role would be given to someone else who would carry on the work of leading the military. He added he would then be free to focus on the setting up of his own political party for the next election scheduled for September.⁷⁷

Bid to reinstate Fiji to Commonwealth

Senior Commonwealth figures have launched a bid to reinstate Fiji as a member of the group of nations by mid-2014.

Commonwealth Games Federation president Prince Tunku Imran of Malaysia raised the issue at a sports breakfast attended by Prime Minister Tony Abbott and other leaders in Colombo on the sidelines of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Fiji was suspended from the Commonwealth in 2009 after 2006 coup leader Commodore Frank Bainimarama failed to meet a deadline to return it to democracy.

Fiji is excluded from all Commonwealth meetings and from the Commonwealth Games and other sporting events and misses out on most forms of Commonwealth assistance.

However, elections have been scheduled for September 2014.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ 'Fiji PM to quit the military', *Islands Business*, November (<http://www.islandsbusiness.com/news/fiji/3434/fiji-pm-to-quit-the-military/>)

⁷⁸ 'Bid to reinstate Fiji to Commonwealth', *SBS*, November 16 (<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/11/16/bid-reinstate-fiji-commonwealth>)

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.

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