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Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



Angkor Wat Temple, Cambodia
Photo Courtesy : Arshi Aggarwal

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The present issue of Insight Southeast Asia carries three commentaries on issues covering the transition in Myanmar by a renowned journalist, a brief analysis of the changing geopolitics in Asia-Pacific in the context of contemporary relations between US, India and China by one of the research interns of IDSA and a piece on land rights of women in Cambodia by a Political Science faculty from Rani Durgawati University, Jabalpur.

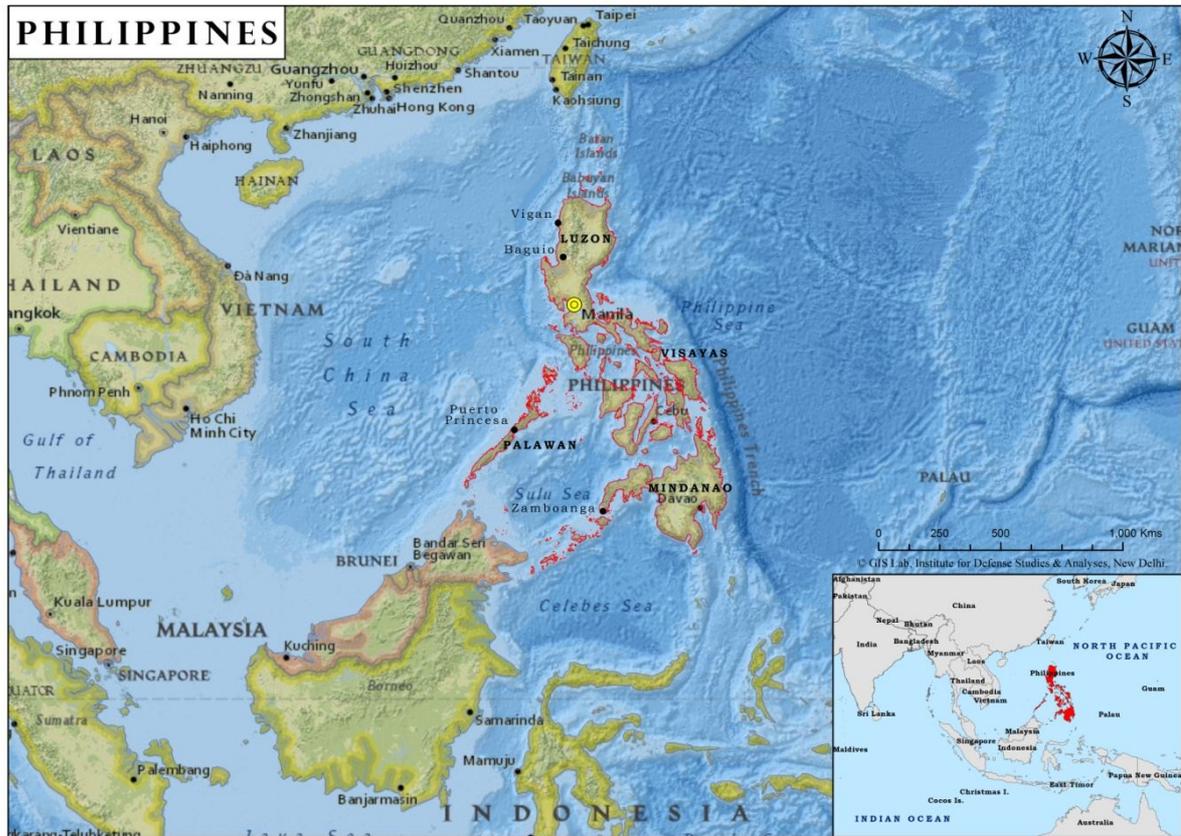
In the News Track section, besides covering ten ASEAN member states, the effort to present news reviews on Oceania countries continues in this issue. As India's Look East Policy has gained a new momentum under Act East, attempt to cover news on Northeast India's linkages with Southeast Asia continues in the similar fashion as we have done in the past few issues.

The Country Profile section of the present issue has covered Philippines.

We look forward to receive feedback and suggestions from our readers.

Sampa Kundu

PHILIPPINES



Capital: Manila

Land and Geography: The Republic of Philippines is a Southeast Asian archipelagic state situated between the South China Sea and the Philippine Sea.¹ Philippines is spread over 7,107 islands in an area of 343,448 square kilometres.² Its territory is divided in three island groups: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.³ The country shares

maritime border with Taiwan in North, Vietnam in West, Indonesia in Southwest and with island-nation Palau in East.

Population: Philippines is 12th most populous country on the earth. The various estimates for its population are: 96.7 million (UN, 2012);⁴ 107.6 million (July 2014, CIA);⁵ and 99.2 million (Philippines Govt, 2014).⁶

- ¹ Philippines Profile, The CIA World Factbook, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>, accessed on 17 February 2015.
- ² The Philippines, available at: <http://www.gov.ph/about/philippines/>, accessed on 17 February 2015.
- ³ The Philippines, available at: <http://www.gov.ph/about/philippines/>, accessed on 17 February 2015.
- ⁴ UN Data, available at: <https://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=PHILIPPINES>, accessed on 17 February 2015.
- ⁵ Philippines Profile, The CIA World Factbook, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>, accessed on 17 February 2015.
- ⁶ The Philippines, available at: <http://www.gov.ph/about/philippines/>, accessed on 17 February 2015.

Politics and Government: Philippines is a unitary presidential constitutional republic, with the president acting as both the head of state and the head of government. The country's political system recognises the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers.⁷ The legislative power is vested in the Kongreso or Congress that consists of two houses, namely Senado or Senate – composed of 24 seats and Kapulungan Ng NgaKinatawan or the House of Representatives - composed of 230 representatives of all districts and 57 sectoral party-list members representing special minorities.⁸ The executive branch consists of the president and the vice president who are elected by direct popular vote to serve a term of six years.⁹ The president has the authority to appoint his Cabinet. The current president of Philippines is Benigno Aquino III.

Religious and Ethnic Composition: Philippines is one of the only two Asian Catholic Christian-majority countries, other being East Timor. However, the country's constitution separates the state from the Church and allows religious

freedom for everyone. According to the 2000 census, 82.9 per cent Filipino are Catholic and 5 per cent follow Islam, while the rest either follow other forms of Christianity or other religions.¹⁰ The Southern Philippines faces Muslim insurgency as the armed rebel groups demand the creation of an autonomous Islamic state within Philippines. Ethnically, the majority of the country's population is descended from the Malayo-Polynesian ethnic group. The official languages are Filipino and English.

Economy: According to the World Bank, Philippines is a rapidly growing market with sound economic policies and highly-skilled workforce. Since 2002, the country has maintained an average growth rate of 5 per cent, considerably higher than previous decades. In spite of global uncertainties and a string of natural calamities in 2013, the country was able to secure 7.2 per cent growth in GDP.¹¹ The Asian Development Bank calculations project a 6.4 per cent GDP growth for Philippines in 2015.¹² The major trade exports of the country are electronic products, woodcrafts and furniture, chemicals, and machinery and transport equipment.¹³ While the country's top trading partners are Japan, United States and China, Singapore ranks highest in the trading partner list among

⁷ The Philippines, available at: <http://www.gov.ph/about/philippines/>, accessed on 17 February 2015.

⁸ Philippines Profile, The CIA World Factbook, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>, accessed on 17 February 2015.

⁹ The Philippines, available at: <http://www.gov.ph/about/philippines/>, accessed on 17 February 2015.

¹⁰ Philippines Profile, The CIA World Factbook, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>, accessed on 17 February 2015.

¹¹ World Bank Data, available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/philippines/overview>, accessed on 17 February 2015.

¹² Asian Development Bank, available at: <http://www.adb.org/countries/philippines/economy>, accessed on: 19 February 2015.

¹³ Foreign Trade Statistics of the Philippines: 2013, Philippines Statistics Authority, available at: <http://census.gov.ph/content/foreign-trade-statistics-philippines-2013>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

the ASEAN member countries.¹⁴ In 2013, Philippines exported total goods worth \$4.142 billion, while imports payment was \$4.236 billion.¹⁵

Major Economic Indicators¹⁶

GDP (million current US\$)	250182 (2012)
GDP per capita (current US\$)	2587.0 (2012)
Employment in industrial sector (per cent of employed)	15.4 (2012)
Employment in agricultural sector (per cent of employed)	32.2 (2012)
Tourist arrival at the national border (000)	4273 (2012)
Energy production, primary (000 mt oil equivalent)	9101 (2010)
Export (million US\$)	51995.2 (2012)
Major Export Partners	Japan, United States, China
Major Import Partners	United States, China, Japan

Defence: The *SandatahangLakas ng Pilipinas* Armed Forces of Philippines (AFP) is composed of the Philippine Army, Philippine Navy, Philippine Air Force and the Philippine Marine Corp.¹⁷ The AFP is headed by a Chief of Staff, who normally holds the rank of General or Admiral. The Chief of Staff works under the direct instructions of Secretary of National Defense, and the President of the Country who acts as the Commander-in-Chief of the AFP.¹⁸ The military in Philippines recruits on a voluntary basis. It has a mandate to guard the country against external and internal threats, provide for

the welfare of its soldiers and veterans and support social and economic development of the nation.¹⁹

Foreign Relations: Philippines maintains close ties with its neighbouring countries in Asia and is a founding member of ASEAN. Although a member of Non-Aligned movement, the country is prone to incline towards United States in the foreign policy matters. Philippines also relies considerably on US for the defence support.²⁰ In recent times, China has also become an important trading and development assistance source. An established Chinese-Filipino community in the nation has further helped in creating a

¹⁴ UN Data, available at: <https://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=PHILIPPINES>, accessed on 19February, 2015.

¹⁵ Foreign Trade Statistics of the Philippines: 2013, Philippines Statistics Authority, available at: <http://census.gov.ph/content/foreign-trade-statistics-philippines-2013>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

¹⁶ UN Data, available at: <https://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=PHILIPPINES>, accessed on 19February, 2015.

¹⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, GlobalSecurity.org, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/philippines/afp.htm>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

¹⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, GlobalSecurity.org, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/philippines/afp.htm>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

¹⁹ Department of National Defense, available at: <http://www.dnd.gov.ph/transparency/about-dnd/mandate-mission-vision.html>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

²⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, GlobalSecurity.org, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/philippines/afp.htm>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

conducive environment for healthy relations. However the two countries continue to struggle over the territorial disputes over the Spratly Islands.²¹ South China Sea has been a constant annoying factor between China and Philippines. The country also has close bilateral and multilateral relations with Japan. Philippines signed its first bilateral free trade agreement in 2006 with Japan under the Japan Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) and also extends preferential rates under ASEAN plus three.²² Strategically, Japan and Philippines have mutual interest in counter-balancing Chinese power in the region. In 2013, Japan announced that it would donate 10 ships valued \$11 million to Philippines Coast Guard. The country is also an active member in the United Nations. Filipino armed forces have served in various UN peacekeeping missions, including Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Relations with India: India established its diplomatic ties with Philippines in 1949, shortly after both countries got independence. The relationship is a cordial one, however it remains largely unexplored. In the recent years, India's greater engagement in the Southeast Asia

under 'Look/Act East Policy' and ASEAN-India commitments have improved its ties with the nation. India's Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh visited Philippines in 2007, which was reciprocated by Philippines with the visit of then President Gloria Arroyo.²³ Presidents of India R. Venkatraman (1991) and Abdul Kalam (2006), several cabinet ministers and other political dignitaries have also paid official visits to the archipelagic nation.²⁴

Since 2012, the two countries have increased their foreign policy and security cooperation by holding regular Tier I and Tier II dialogues in Delhi and Manila. Indian navy and coast guard ships regularly visit the Philippines. In 2013 and 2014 *IN* ships *Sahyadri*, *Satpura*, *Ranvijay*, *Shakti* and *Kirch* made ports calls at Manila.²⁵ The officers of the armed forces of both countries participate in various specialised training courses in each other's countries. The bilateral trade between the two nations, however, is still muted and uneven. The approximate value of the trade between two countries is only \$1.6 billion.²⁶ The figure is likely to get a push from the ASEAN-India free trade agreement, signed recently.

In 2013, the Government of India sent an Indian air force flight with relief materials for the victims of typhoon *Haiyan*, which struck Philippines on November 7-8.²⁷

²¹ Philippines - Foreign Relations, GlobalSecurity.org, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/philippines/forrel.htm>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

²² Philippines - Foreign Relations, GlobalSecurity.org, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/philippines/forrel.htm>, accessed on 19 February 2015.

²³ India-Philippines Relations, Ministry of External Affairs India, available at: http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Philippines__December_2013_.pdf, accessed on 23 February 2015.

²⁴ India-Philippines Relations, Ministry of External Affairs India, available at: http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Philippines__December_2013_.pdf, accessed on 23 February 2015.

²⁵ Port Call of INS Sahyadri at Manila, Embassy of India, Manila, available at: http://www.indembassymanila.in/newsImage/1419417311_1880_Press%20Release%20on%20INS%20Sahyadri.pdf, accessed on 23 February 2015.

²⁶ India-Philippines Relations, Ministry of External Affairs India, available at: http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Philippines__December_2013_.pdf, accessed on 23 February 2015.

²⁷ India-Philippines Relations, Ministry of External Affairs India, available at: http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Philippines__December_2013_.pdf, accessed on 23 February 2015.

Year-End Review of Myanmar



Mahendra Ved

Mr. Mahendra Ved is a multi-media journalist, writer and columnist, associated with several reputed newspapers. His monograph "India and Southeast Asia: Shedding Years of Mutual Neglect" was published in 2012.

Ever since Myanmar's quasi-military government embarked on a series of political reforms, piloting the country towards a liberal democracy after half-a-century of military rule, it is gradually reaching out to the world. And the world is re-connecting with enthusiasm laced with caution.

Along with political reforms, Myanmar is moving towards a mixed economy and as yet partially successful reconciliation. Strife among ethnic groups continues. Resolving age-old and complex differences among the tribes and between the Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, by any yardstick, is time consuming and requires sincere efforts.

Its most famous pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi is free and leading a political party, National League for Democracy (NLD) that was illegal till recently. A National Human Rights Commission is in place. Despite a general amnesty, some political prisoners remain behind bars.

Press censorship is relaxed and media is making its presence along with the non-government organizations (NGOs). Myanmar remains among the worst offenders when it comes to imprisoning journalists, standing fourth from the top with ten scribes behind bars. The government continues to use British-era laws like the Official Secrets Act to rein in the media.

But it is now possible to protest, unlike before. Journalists have questioned the government's move to decide/nominate who should be on their union bodies and who should contest elections. New labour laws allow formation of trade unions and right to strike.

The change is gradual, but it is there. The Second Rangoon Literary Festival on January 17-19, 2015 showcased Nobel Laureates and their works, theme being "Literature for Peace." After a nearly 20 year hiatus, the Myanmar National sports tournament took place in December in Naypyitaw.

In a country closed to the world for long, internet revolution is sweeping, giving an opportunity to homegrown apps as well as big brands like Google and Facebook. In a move recorded by Myanmar Times on December 15, 2014, Google Translate added "Burmese" to its portfolio, enabling the easy online translation of Myanmar language into other tongues and back.

Myanmar has a lot to catch up. It is currently one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. With a population of 51.4 million, it has a per capita gross domestic product of \$1,105, and one of the region's highest poverty rates. Among the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Myanmar has the lowest life expectancy (65 years) and the second-highest rate of infant mortality (40 per 1,000 births) and child mortality (51 per 1,000 live births) for children below 5 years old.

And yet, Ulrich Zachau, World Bank Country Director for Southeast Asia, declares that Myanmar is on its way to ending poverty.

Writing in *Nikkie Asian Review* (December 18, 2014), he notes that “Myanmar’s economy is projected to expand by more than eight percent over the next year, the highest growth rate in Southeast Asia. As it rejoins the global economy after decades of isolation, Myanmar now has the opportunity to lift its poorest people out of poverty, raising families’ incomes and building a country with better lives and shared prosperity for all.”

The World Bank’s new report “Ending Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity in a Time of Transition” identifies higher farm productivity and incomes, universal access to essential services — such as education, health, electricity, communications — and an improved investment climate for private sector value and job creation as stepping stones out of poverty and for boosting shared prosperity in poor farming villages across Myanmar.

The report highlights four pre-requisites for success: the completion of Myanmar’s transition from conflict to peace; social inclusion of all people living in Myanmar, including rights and basic services for ethnic and religious minorities; macroeconomic stability; and the continued opening of markets and transparent governance. These are all essential foundations for attracting investment, for building physical and human capital, and for raising opportunities and incomes among the poor.

The most important outcome of these reforms, howsoever tentative, is evident from Myanmar getting fully into the ASEAN groove. As its chair, it hosted the summit conference of the regional grouping that was attended by not just the ASEAN heads of governments, but also other global players.

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the 40 world leaders who met Myanmar’s President U Thein Sein. “We talked about strengthening ties in fields of culture, commerce and enhancing connectivity,” said Modi after the meeting. He also made a strong pitch to enhance regional connectivity at the one-day 12th annual ASEAN-India summit that preceded the ASEAN summit.

Many of India-sponsored, or India-financed projects committed earlier have not taken off or been slow in completing in Myanmar. But Modi’s presence and his government’s “Look East, Act East” policy, a seeming improvement of his predecessors’ Look East Policy (LEP), prompted observations about Myanmar, in a radical departure from its foreign policy, deepening its ties with India to reduce its dependence on China.

Myanmar’s diplomatic shift away from Beijing toward New Delhi “could change the region’s geopolitical balance. It comes at a time when many nations grapple with the challenge of dealing with an increasingly powerful and outwardly assertive China,” *Asian Nikkie Review* noted (November 30, 2014) in a piece by its staff writer, Motokazu Matsui.

One of the projects Modi discussed with President Thein Sein on November 11, 2014 was laying a road to connect Imphal in India’s eastern-most state of Manipur with Mandalay, in central Myanmar.

The two countries agreed in 1993 to build a cross-border road, but the plan failed to materialize as Myanmar, battered by Western economic sanctions, was unable to develop its side of the road network. Seeking to revive and implement the old plan, Myanmar has apparently asked India to help finance the road project. This move reflects a major shift in Myanmar’s diplomatic strategy.

Myanmar is to restart exports to India of rice, its main agricultural product, for the first time

in four years. Myanmar hopes that the proposed expansion of cross-border transport links will help ramp up its trade.

Modi and Thein Sein also discussed the river port being built in Sittwe in western Myanmar. Indian companies are involved in the construction of the port, which is due to be completed next spring. The port will create a new distribution network connecting Myanmar with northeastern parts of India via the Kaladan River, which forms part of the border between the two countries.

After taking office in spring 2011, Thein Sein launched reforms to push the country toward democracy and recast the government's foreign policy to wean the country away from China. In 2012, he froze a dam development by Chinese businesses. In early 2014, he also scrapped a project for a railway linking Myanmar and China.

Myanmar's diplomatic readjustment has been accelerated by China's assertive actions over territorial claims against some ASEAN nations in the South China Sea, the newspaper noted.

Such assessment apart, a bit of background is needed to put the India-Myanmar relations in perspective. India has interacted with Myanmar even when the world had shunned it and had imposed severe economic sanctions. This was not easy and India earned the odium for it. Yet, it set the pace by getting the erstwhile military junta headed by Gen. Than Shwe to consider reforms and release Aung San Suu Kyi then under house arrest for several years. Then Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam paid the first visit by a head of a democratic nation in years in 2006.

The world community responded to

Myanmar only after Gen. Than Shwe stepped aside and facilitated reforms in 2008. The process was extremely slow, beginning only after the 2011 elections. The visit of then United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in December 2011 was the first by a US Secretary of State in more than fifty years. She met Thein Sein, as well as Aung San Suu Kyi. Then British Prime Minister Tony Blair followed in October 2012.

The flow of foreign dignitaries, as also foreign interest and investment has since picked up pace. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Myanmar President Thein Sein exchanged memorandums of understanding on the sidelines of the November 2014 ASEAN Summit on Japanese assistance in infrastructure construction.

US President Barack Obama was at the ASEAN Summit in November 2014. After meeting President Thein Sein and Suu Kyi, the latter for the third time since 2012, Obama urged Myanmar to amend the nation's military-drafted Constitution, which effectively bars the country's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi from running for president.

The US announced lifting of sanctions in May 2013 and the European Union in August that year. Both have been gradual and piecemeal. In August 2014, US backed Myanmar Reforms, when Secretary of State John Kerry did not speak of any resumption of sanctions.

The European Union (EU) has been working somewhat ahead of the US. As of July 2013, Myanmar-made products receive preferential market access to the EU, meaning lower tariffs, but often the quality of these goods is not high enough to meet European standards.

The European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar officially opened on December 12, providing a forum for EU businesses to engage with their Myanmar counterparts and

government officials. The trade between the 28-member bloc and Myanmar reached 570 million euros (US\$710 million) in 2013, a 44 percent increase on the year previous.

The two markets complement each other well, with Myanmar specialising in goods that are in demand in Europe such as resources, while the EU can support Myanmar through its technology, know-how and equipment, according to EU ambassador to Myanmar Roland Kobia. As can be expected in dealing with a poor nation, the EU had a trade surplus of 122 million euros with Myanmar in 2013. Having opened the market, the EU is readying to offer technical assistance.

A total of 36 countries provide preferential market access to Myanmar, allowing most products in duty-free, though the US and Turkey are currently two of the larger exceptions.

To EU, Myanmar provides the cheap labour market. Much of Myanmar's exports to the EU come from foreign-owned garment factories that have set up shop in the country. Much of the inputs for the factories, such as textiles and machinery, are sourced from outside of Myanmar, meaning the country doesn't receive the entire benefit of selling these products abroad.

However, Myanmar is able to claim more revenue from other sectors like rice and beans, where most of the value is added locally, though these products have been slower gaining market share in Europe.

The European Chamber has been set up by a consortium led by the French Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It will receive 2.7 million euros in seed money from the EU, though it is expected to eventually become self-sufficient

without the need for EU funds.

Myanmar has meanwhile gained increasing support from the ASEAN community. In December 2014, it became the last nation within the grouping to join as full member and shareholder of the Regional Infrastructure Fund, a move that would help it immensely to become part of the growing regional infrastructural and economic links. "It [Burma] will be able to access funding from AIF for infrastructure projects, that will be how Myanmar benefits," said Jin W. Cyhn, the principal economist of the Southeast Asia department of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which administers the fund, was quoted in *The Irrawaddy Magazine* of December 19, 2014.

The cumulative effect of these developments can be felt in the interest shown by foreign investors. *Nikkie Asian Review* in its November 13, 2014 report said that 25 companies from Japan, the US, China, and six other countries and regions have signed deals, taking half of the lots at the Myanmar Japan Thilawa Development, the public-private joint venture developing the park. businesses see Myanmar as a promising production site, thanks to its low labor costs. The facility could rev up manufacturing in the Southeast Asian nation once completed.

Foreign manufacturers were previously reluctant to move into Myanmar. Basic services like power and water were inadequate, and Western powers banned imports of goods from Myanmar or imposed high tariffs to punish the military government. But most of the sanctions have since been dropped as the nation has democratized. And Myanmar is rushing to build infrastructure, with plans to increase the domestic electricity supply eightfold by 2030.

Procuring parts and materials is a major issue for companies building plants in Myanmar. Japanese instant-noodle manufacturer Acecook plans to bring online a factory with an annual capacity of more than 10 million units in 2016.

It has searched for local flour producers, but only two have been found and that their packaging is subpar.

Myanmar has started to develop industrial parks in the footsteps of the Thilawa project underway outside Yangon, its first modern industrial park that is designated as a special economic zone.

Here, again, investors from different countries have taken the plunge. The Goldenberg group of Japan, which molds plastic parts, has secured a roughly 40-hectare plot in the southern city of Bago. It began operating the site as an industrial park mainly for small and midsize Japanese businesses.

In the port city of Dawei, in the southeast, Myanmar is joining with Thailand to develop an economic zone. Plans call for building an industrial park complete with a deep-sea port and power plant on a 20,000-hectare plot, roughly eight times the area of the Thilawa industrial park.

A special economic zone is also planned for KyaukPhyu on the west coast. Preparations are underway to select the main developer, with an eye on breaking ground in 2015. Positioned as the starting point of an oil and natural gas pipeline to China, foreign companies are expected to build petrochemical plants there.

Myanmar is rich in natural resources, most of which are lying unexplored. It plans to release another 15 oil exploration blocks by the end of 2015 to international investors, on top of the 40 blocks that have been awarded to the likes of Total, Shell and Chevron.

Malaysia's state-owned energy firm Petronas is looking at new opportunities

in Myanmar as part of a regional push. The firm has won four onshore blocks and intends to participate in future bidding rounds for offshore blocks, according to a report by Channel News Asia dated October 16, 2014.

Thanks to political instability of the past in Myanmar, the movement had been slow. Petronas first signed a production sharing contract for the offshore Yetagun gas field project in 1990, with production starting in 2003. The company was awarded rights to explore and produce another four onshore blocks in 2012 and 2014.

There is a beeline to enter Myanmar's oil and gas market as it continues to liberalise. This sector has attracted the second largest foreign investments in Myanmar, amounting to over US\$15 billion as of August 2014. That contributes to about 30 percent of Myanmar's total foreign investments. The plan now is to pump the money back into the economy. Like its neighbor Bangladesh, Myanmar too says it will first focus its policy on servicing the domestic market, rather than exports.

This pace of all round development with the world community taking keen interest can continue only if there is political stability. Provisions of the constitution require the general election to take place by the end of 2015 so that the government led by the new president will be installed in spring 2016.

Much would depend upon how the nation will stay the course, facilitating greater democratization, smoothing conflict among different regions and different tribes. It will depend, mainly, on how the present leadership under President Thein Sein maintains the pace of political reforms and if the results favour, facilitate the return of Aung San Suu Kyi at the helm of the nation's affairs.

US, India and China: Pawns to Geopolitical Changes



Aakriti Sethi

Ms. Aakriti Sethi is a research intern at the North America Centre, IDSA. Her primary research areas include US foreign and domestic policies.

The importance of symbolisms in politics is profound, having the ability to sabotage, reinstate or reboot relations. The recent visit of American President Barack Obama to India acts as a perfect semiotic for the larger picture of the Indo-US ties and its probable future. Within seven months since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office, the two countries have been enjoying warmer relations, which was more or less absent in the latter half of PM Manmohan Singh's tenure. Last year, PM Modi's elaborate five day trip to America from September 26 to September 30, 2014 saw the reception of the PM nothing less than an A-list celebrity. The trip saw the leaders discuss matters on defence ties, economic relations, energy, counterterrorism etc. The proactive personality of PM Modi was highly welcomed and respected by the White House. The trip got thumbs up from policy pundits and media for generating a new renewed atmosphere of Indo-US bonhomie. By inviting President Obama to the 66th Republic Day Parade, PM Modi bestowed one of the greatest honours to the US President (only enjoyed by close allies of India), rode the current wave of

propinquity and took the relations to the next level. The ongoing solidarity in the Indo-US relationship automatically leads one to the larger question of where exactly India stands in the US 'Pivot to Asia' or the 'Rebalancing Asia' doctrine of the Obama administration.

The Season of Effervescence

US President Barack Obama came for a three day visit to New Delhi from January 25 to January 27, 2015, with a colossal entourage of US Secret Service personnel, key members of his administration, congressmen and top corporate bosses. Apart from attending the Republic Day celebrations, the visit produced some worthwhile results. The cunctation period in the Indo-US nuclear deal was finally over when the authorities declared a 'breakthrough' in the negotiations. While there was no immediate details on how the impasse had been broken, India will set up an insurance pool led by General Insurance Co and four other insurance companies of a total amount of 750 crore rupees to indemnify companies that build reactors in the country against liabilities in case of a nuclear accident.¹ The remaining of the 750 crore rupees of the total 1500 crore rupees to offset liabilities will be provided by the government of India. This arrangement would eventually

¹ Obama in India: 10 major takeaways for India and US from American President's visit, The Economic Times, January 27, 2015, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-27/news/58508482_1_pm-narendra-modi-india-visit-new-initiatives, accessed on February 10, 2015.

acknowledge the US concern over clause 17 of the Indian Liability Act.² Apart from the nuclear deal, the two sides discussed numerous economic possibilities that could eventually take shape. Obama announced \$4 billion of new initiatives to boost trade/ investment ties with an aim to create jobs in India via Exim Bank and OPTIC. A new source of financing for social development ventures with an Indian Diaspora Investment Initiative was also discussed.³ On defence matters, the two nations renewed the Defence Framework agreement for 10 more years. The Defence Technology and Trade Initiative operationalized with the focus on co-development and coproduction in India for India and global market with the aim to boost Modi's 'Make in India' campaign.⁴ With the recent development of US-China climate agreement, President Obama tried to take ahead this optimistic momentum in climate negotiations by extending his support to India's energy needs and aimed at increasing the share of renewables in India's energy basket. Furthermore, one of the major points of concern between India-US relations has been the matter of H-1B visa, on which the Obama administration during the visit assured New Delhi on finding a possible positive development in the coming future. PM Modi's plan of fostering many smart cities

in India was also taken ahead with agreements on developing Allahabad, Ajmer and Visakhapatnam. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed by the representatives of United States Trade and Development Agency and the respective Chief Secretaries of State governments of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh in the presence of Union Development Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu.⁵

With India's recent entry in the rare group of countries who have successfully sent an operational spacecraft orbiting mars, US-India relations also saw the space dimension being an important point of discussion. The leaders took note of the US-India Space cooperation, including the first face-to-face meeting of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)-National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Mars Working Group from 29-31 January 2015 in Bangalore, in which the two sides considered opportunities for enhanced cooperation in Mars exploration, including potential coordinated observations and analysis between ISRO'S Mars Orbiter Mission and NASA'S Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution Mission (MAVEN).⁶ In conjunction with the growing threat of terrorist activities around the globe, the two sides also discussed ways to take ahead collective joint counterterrorism efforts. The leaders reaffirmed the need for joint and concerted efforts to disrupt entities such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba,

² Ibid

³ 15 things that India achieved due to Obama's Visit, The Times of India, January 28, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/15-things-that-India-achieved-due-to-Obamas-visit/articleshow/46037486.cms>, accessed on February 10, 2015.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ India, US sign three MoUs on smart cities, The Hindu, January 25, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-us-sign-three-mous-on-smart-cities/article6821106.ece>, accessed on February 10, 2015.

⁶ Indo-US Joint Statement after Obama-Modi talks, The Hindu, January 25, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/indous-joint-statement-after-us-president-barack-obama-and-prime-minister-narendra-modi-talks/article6821279.ece>, accessed on February 18, 2015.

Jaish-e-Mohammad, D company and the Haqqani Network, and agreed to continue ongoing efforts through the Homeland Security Dialogue as well as the next round of the US-India Joint Working Group on counterterrorism in late 2015 to develop actionable elements of the bilateral engagement.⁷ Furthermore, US and India took their relationship to the next level by announcing a hotline to be established between the two leaders and their national security advisors.⁸

Apart from the vast media attention the visit got for its every detail, the Obama-Modi meet has become fundamental for many reasons. The two meetings both the leaders had in a span of few months, lays the graph of US-India relations on a rise again. The change in power in New Delhi is a major factor for this newfound vigour in the relationship. PM Modi's extensive attention towards shaping India's global policy has been one of the remarkable shifts seen since he took the position. Moving beyond the Khobragade incident and the US visa ban controversy, PM Modi has tried to approach US from a fresh start, with Washington DC dually acknowledging and reciprocating the Indian efforts. On the economic front, India has a huge market to offer to the American corporations, which not only serves the Indian purpose but also helps

in the reviving of the dwindling American economy. Not to mention, the changing geopolitical equations of power has also been one of the reasons for the two countries to move beyond the baggage of past and focus more on the points of convergence.

Dragon Puzzle?

The 'Rise of China' has become an accepted reality in the world of international relations. This development has been one of the primary reasons for the evolving and interceded world affairs. The 'China Factor' in the US-India equation lingers prominently amongst many important aspects. When President Obama and PM Modi sat down to talk during the recent visit, the first 45 minutes were dominated by just one topic: China.⁹ Even though the former Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta famously referred to India as a 'lynchpin' for US strategy in Asia, India has tried to stay away from being part of the US 'rebalancing' efforts in the Asia Pacific. A January 2012 document published by the US Department of Defence titled 'Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defence' saw a special mention about US-India ties. The document specifically stated US intentions of 'investing in a long term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region'.¹⁰ Surprisingly, the document nowhere mentioned America's important allies in Asia

⁷ Ibid

⁸ NazneenKarmali, President Obama and Indian Prime Minister Modi Seal Nuke Ties with Bear Hugs, Forbes, January 26, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/naazneenkarmali/2015/01/26/president-obama-and-indian-prime-minister-modi-seal-nuke-ties-with-bear-hugs/>, accessed on February 18, 2015.

⁹ Peter Baker and Gardiner Harris, US and India Share Sense of Unease over China, The New York Times, January 26, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/27/world/us-and-india-share-sense-of-unease-over-china.html>, accessed on February 23, 2015.

¹⁰ Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense, US Department of Defense, January 2012, http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf, accessed on February 20, 2015

Pacific like Japan, Australia or South Korea, throwing light on the volume of importance US associates with India for its Pivot to Asia Strategy. Since the inception of the 'Asia Pivot Strategy' or the 'Rebalancing Strategy', Chinese have viewed this initiative as nothing but a way to 'contain' China's rise in the region and in the world. The central military components of the pivot include a shift in US military assets to the region, the extension of US defence ties, an increase in US defence exports and foreign military training programs, more frequent US warship visits and the expansion of joint military exercises.¹¹ Apart from the US naval deployments, the territorial dispute in the Asia Pacific region has also been an important driving force for the steady Chinese military modernization. Delhi like the rest of the Asian capitals is willing to believe that the rise of China will most likely be peaceful or betting that small nations can socialize a rising giant. Asia is scrambling to cope with the evolving dynamics between Beijing and Washington DC.¹²

In May 2015, PM Modi will visit China, which can act as a real report card for assessing the present and a probable

future of the relation. President Xi Jinping's visit to India in 2014 was dwarfed due to the border incursions by People's Liberation Army (PLA), reminding of the pertinent thorn of border dispute present in the Sino-India ties. The recent visit of PM Modi to Arunachal Pradesh saw an official protest by China. Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin stated "The Indian side's insistence on arranging activities by leaders in the disputed region infringes on China's territorial sovereignty and interests, magnifies the dispute on the border issue, and violates the consensus to appropriately handle the border issue."¹³ The tensions in Sino-India relations is not only limited to the matters of border. The China-Pakistan axis has always made India uncomfortable. Immediately after Obama's attendance at India's Republic Day Parade, the news of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan and attending the March 23 National Day Military Parade came out.¹⁴ Even though the media later reported that President Jinping would not be attending the National Day Military Parade, the top Chinese official will visit Islamabad in few weeks.¹⁵

Throughout the three day visit of Obama, Beijing kept a close watch on the growing proximity between the two nations. According to Professor Wang Yewei of the School of International Relations at Renmin University, ".....from a US

¹¹ Vince Scappatura, The US "Pivot to Asia", the China Specter and the Australian-American Alliance, *The Asia Pacific Journal*, v.11, n. 3, (Asia Pacific Journal: US)

¹² C Raja Mohan, China's Rise, America's Pivot, and India's Asian ambiguity, *India 2012 Seminar*, January 2013, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2013/641.htm>, accessed on February 23, 2014.

¹³ China Protests at Modi's visit to disputed Arunachal Pradesh, Reuters, Shanghai, February 21, 2015, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/02/21/china-india-territory-idINKBN0LO1LA20150221>, accessed on February 23, 2015.

¹⁴ Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Pakistan this year, *Hindustan Times*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/its-official-xi-to-visit-pakistan-this-year/article1-1315228.aspx>, accessed on February 23, 2015.

¹⁵ Chinese President Xi Jinping Unlikely to Participate in Pakistan National Day Parade, *NDTV*, February 16, 2015, <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/chinese-president-xi-jinping-unlikely-to-participate-in-pakistan-national-day-parade-740105>, accessed on February 23, 2015.

point of view India is the key for America's so called 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' aimed at containing China besides balancing Beijing's Silk Road push into the Indian Ocean".¹⁶ An op-ed titled 'India, China mustn't fall into trap of rivalry set by the West' by Wen Dao, in Global Times (China) stated "A zero-sum game is not what China and India are asking for, but under Western influence, India is sliding into it".¹⁷ With a rising India being friendly with all the major powers in the world, especially the US, China is curious to see how New Delhi intends to balance its ties with Washington DC and Beijing, without sending wrong signals to either of the dominating powers.

Future of Equations

Since the time Narendra Modi has taken over the Prime Minister's Office, a brand-new wave of economic vitality has been noticed in India's global approach. With one of the primary agenda of revamping India's economic outlook, the new PM has managed to foster closer ties with many top leaders of the world. In a span of 9 months, the PM has met leaders from Japan, China, US, Russia, Brazil, UK, South Africa etc. to name a few. The active foreign policy demonstrated by India points towards its eagerness to contribute more and to be a significant stakeholder in international decision making. Even though India's 'Look East Policy' was

fostered in the 1990s, it has managed to evolve in a much more robust policy of 'Act East' under PM Modi's leadership. Unveiling the 'Act East Policy' at the last ASEAN summit in 2014, PM Modi officially signalled towards the region being one of his top priorities. This policy has been welcomed by the US, which has always wanted greater Indian role in the Asia Pacific region. Beneath the surface of the Obama-Modi personal relationship, are the shifting tectonic plates of geopolitics. With the expansion of Chinese power into the Indian Ocean, American and Indian interests in the region are gradually converging.¹⁸ In this atmosphere of favourable Indo-US ties, dexterous leadership on both the sides is acting as an ideal catalyst for a probable promising partnership.

On the other hand, Sino-India relations have also been exemplary in its own way. Even though the two nations have serious border disputes, they have tried to focus the momentum of the relationship on the economic possibilities. With the new Indian government having a greater appetite for large scale development, the upcoming Modi-Xi summit could be primarily business and trade driven. True, India is enjoying a new chapter in the Indo-US ties, but it is also gradually heading towards a new phase in the Sino-India ties. India and China are part of the BRICS nations. The recent establishment of the BRICS Development Bank, finalized in the last BRICS summit at Brazil, throws light on the possibilities of a world order run by the emerging economies, challenging the West run

¹⁶ Obama's India visit aimed at containing China: Report, The Times Of India, January 25, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Obamas-India-visit-aimed-at-containing-China-Report/articleshow/46010664.cms>, accessed on February 23, 2015.

¹⁷ Wen Dao, India, China mustn't fall into trap of rivalry set by the West, Global Times, January 26, 2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/903927.shtml>, accessed on February 23, 2015.

¹⁸ Ellen Barry, Obama and India's Premier See Mutual Benefit in Breaking the Ice, The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/23/world/asia/obama-and-modi-see-mutual-benefit-in-breaking-more-ice.html?_r=1&gwh=91506288A9BB33D1FDB297742FE3AAEA&gwt=pay, accessed on February 26, 2015.

world affairs. Furthermore, China's invitation to India for joining the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), from a China point of view can be seen to advocate India, so that the latter reviews its Western orientation mind-set.¹⁹ In a time where US-China relations will be the defining relationship in shaping of this century, PM Modi and his foreign policy administration has a tough task of balancing equations with these two nations. Some would might even contemplate India being the key global 'swing state'- considering a China-India axis would tilt the balance of Power against America in contrast a US-India

partnership would make it more difficult for China to challenge American leadership.²⁰

The 'Asia Pivot Strategy' would be one of the diplomatic legacies left by the Obama administration, but with the US elections coming in 2016, it will be intriguing to see what changes in the US foreign policy would be made under the new US President. Nevertheless, the US-China competition and cooperation dilemma will be the core challenge of the future administration. Whereas it seems likely that the Indo-US ties under the next administration would go steady, but it will be up to the new President to not let the newfound partnership hit a diplomatic stagnation.

¹⁹ Jagannath P Panda, Beijing's APEC Call on India: A new twist in India-China Power Politics?, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, August 5, 2014, http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/BeijingsAPECCallonIndia_jppanda-050714.html, accessed on February 26, 2015.

²⁰ Daniel Twining, When Obama Meets Modi: The Superpower and the Global Swing State, Foreign Policy, September 28, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/28/when-obama-meets-modi-the-superpower-and-the-global-swing-state/> accessed on February 26, 2014.

Land Right of Women in Cambodia and the problems of Joint Ownership



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Land is one of the most important assets for the people, especially for women. According to USAID, land is a particularly critical resource for women as it provides support to them when the household breaks down, for example, in the case of male migration, war, abandonment, divorce, polygamous relationships, illnesses such as HIV/AIDS or death. Furthermore, land ownership enhances women's social status and decision-making role within the household. Yet, in many societies, women do not have the right to inherit and own land (RDI Report 2009; FAO 2010; OECD 2012).

Cambodia proved to be an exception to this type of gender discrimination. In Cambodia, women historically enjoyed right to own land, right to inheritance and right to divorce. The 'legal absence' of men had no effect on this right. As mentioned by Kusakabe et al. (2005: WS91), "in case of spouse's death, the land will belong to the widow(er). Even if she/he gets remarried, the new wife/husband is not entitled to land". According to the Cambodian Constitution, all Cambodians, women and men equally, have the right to own property and ownership of land must be protected by law. The most relevant laws and regulations relating to land tenure and land use are the land law of 2001 and 1999. As a signatory of the

Convention of Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Cambodia observes the land rights of women. The Article 15 (section 2) of CEDAW(1979) states that State Parties shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property. As Grover states out, this would imply equality in inheritance rights (Grover 2009). Women are to have the same rights in marriage as their spouses with respect to ownership, management, enjoyment and the disposal of property (Art. 16 CEDAW).

The most recent law that governs the land policy in Cambodia, the Land Law of 2001, has further changed the customary practice of land ownership in the country. At present, according to the legal provisions of the Land Law of 2001, the land is registered in both husband's and wife's name and the couple is assigned the "joint ownership" of the land and property. This new law has its impact on the lives of millions of women in Cambodia in various ways. According to the new law, legally the land should be divided equally between the couple. The Land Law of 2001 and its provision of joint ownership have enlarged the number of women who own land in the present day Cambodia. In 2005, 60 per cent of women in Cambodia had their own land or owned them jointly with their spouse. In the same year, 14 per cent of women inherited agricultural land (Ministry of Women Affairs 2008). Further, 69 per cent of women owned their house jointly or alone and 21 per cent of

women owned jewellery on their own, in 2005 (Ministry of Women Affairs 2008). According to statistics, 1 million land titles have been issued through systematic registration until 2009 to women and men, of which 20 per cent of these titles are done in the wife's name and 70 per cent consist of joint titles.

However, there is another aspect of this change. The lack of data and a missing "registration culture", unregistered marriage, and non-transparent subsequent land transactions prevent the monitoring and evaluation of gender equality in land administration (Thiel 2010). According to Thiel (2010), the problem with the joint ownership of land arises particularly in the event of separation, divorce, abandonment, multiple marriage relationships (polygamy) or death of the husband. In an interview, a Cambodian woman described the problem of joint ownership with her separated husband, "They told me the land was registered in a way that it only belongs to me and my children. I provided the land registration officers with a letter from the commune council that confirmed the separation. Now I am finding out the land has been registered as joint property with my husband. I don't understand this. He left me 15 years ago." (Mehrak Mehrvar research cited in Mu Sochua 2011: 10).

Additionally, there are many limitations to women's right to land in the country. Women in Cambodia have limited right to sell their land as the customary practices and the subordinate status of women in family does not allow this despite the legal provisions. The new law has further aggravated this issue as a property jointly owned with her husband puts another shackle on her hands in making a decision over the property. Only 65 per cent of the

14 per cent women who own land on their own can decide to sell their land without permission of family members. Women enjoy greater freedom in case of jewellery as 82 per cent of those who own jewellery can decide to sell it on their will (Ministry of Women Affairs 2008). Another problem with women's inheritance to land and property is the complexity of the system of joint ownership and registration introduced in 1990s and the 2001 Law. The Land law, family law, Civil Code or the Constitutional provisions may simply be unknown to the majority of women population due to their lack of education and the complexities related to these laws, or the legal system can be de facto out of reach for many (Thiel 2010). Although Cambodia has made achievements in increasing the enrolment of girls by 97 percent in 2014 and increasing women literacy rate, the drop-out rate of girls is much higher than boys and beyond the lower secondary level, girl's access to education is very limited. Mu Sochua, while demanding greater control of women on her land and for removing the discrepancies created by the joint ownership of land in Cambodia stated,

"Land is security. Land is rootedness and stability. Land is a source of income from cash crops, rental or outright sale. Land can further serve as collateral for credit, which can be used for consumption or investment purposes. Land means social mobility and recognition. And yet despite this dependence, there are many obstacles preventing Cambodian women from benefitting and protecting their interests in the land they work upon." (Mu Sochua in CALD Bali Conference, 4-7 November 2011).

Though, women in Cambodia have customary and legal right to own and inherit property, they have less control on the decisions related to that property, along with less understanding of the legal provisions and land laws. There also exist many discrepancies in the old and new legal

provisions to this regard that complicate the issue further. All these problems related to the land rights of women put them in a throbbing and contemptuous condition. They remain dependent on the decisions and understandings of the other family members, mainly men.

Moreover, the existing discrepancy in the laws related to women's right to land is a reflection of the social and political status of women in Cambodia. Though, there have been improvements in the educational status of women, and their political participation, Cambodia remains

a largely hierarchical society where gender relation dominates, giving men higher place than women. The social and cultural system of country denies women equal right and project them as 'weaker sex' and hierarchically lower to men. The role of women in Cambodian society is emphasised as a "loyal and trustworthy assistant" (Ladgerwood, 1994: 125) who support their husbands and at the same time are obedient to them. As a result, women in Cambodia are still facing physical and structural insecurity and the demand for equality is still ringing in the air with little achievement.

ASEAN

ASEAN hosts a wide range of defence meets in January and February

The ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) hosted a range of defence meetings in the recent past, specifically in the months of January and February. The ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Working Group (ADSOM WG) was hosted in Johor Bahru in Malaysia from January 21 to 22, 2015 following which the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Plus Working Group (ADSOM-Plus WG) was hosted in the same venue from January 23 to 24, 2015.¹ According to sources available, naval and defence cooperation during humanitarian disasters topped the priority list of issues discussed during the meeting.² The ADSOM WG meeting was chaired by Dr Jafri Abdul Jalil, Undersecretary of Policy and Strategic Planning Division at Malaysia's Ministry

of Defence.³ The ADSOM WG appreciated the efforts in the "Establishment of a Direct Communications Link (DCL) in the ADMM Process" in an attempt to provide secure and effective communication to prevent the escalation of maritime disputes in the ASEAN region. The meeting welcomed the outcome of "First Technical Workshop on Establishing a DCL in the ADMM Process"⁴ and also acknowledged the progress made in the "First Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting on the Establishment of a DCL in the ADMM Process"⁵, which was held in Brunei in 2014.

In the ADSOM Plus WG Meeting on January 23 and January 24, briefing was done on the progress and achievements of the ADMM-Plus platform, most importantly, the six Experts' Working Groups (EWGs) – EWG on Counter Terrorism, EWG on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, EWG on Humanitarian Mine Action, EWG on Maritime Security, EWG on Military Medicine, and EWG on Peacekeeping Operations.⁶ In the month of February, starting from February 2 to February

¹ For general information related to the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Working Group (ADSOM WG) and ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Plus Working Group (ADSOM-Plus WG), please look at: <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/category/asean-defence-ministers-meeting-admm>, Accessed on 26 January 2015 ; ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting(ADMM)," February 15th 2015, Available on: <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/category/asean-defence-ministers-meeting-admm>, Accessed on 25 February 2015; ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting(ADMM)," February 15th 2015, Available on: <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/category/asean-defence-ministers-meeting-admm>, Accessed on 25 February 2015

² The Star online, "ASEAN Defence Ministers to begin talks," January 20th 2015, Available on: <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/01/20/Asean-defence-ministers-to-begin-talks/>, Accessed on 26 January 2015

³ The Brunei Times, "ASEAN Defence Officials regional cooperation meet concluded," January 27th 2015, Available on: <http://m.bt.com.bn/news-national/2015/01/27/asean-defence-officials-regional-cooperation-meet-concluded>, Accessed on 27 January 2015

⁴ The Brunei Times, "ASEAN Defence Officials regional cooperation meet concluded," January 27th 2015, Available on: <http://m.bt.com.bn/news-national/2015/01/27/asean-defence-officials-regional-cooperation-meet-concluded>, Accessed on 27 January 2015

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Pacific Sentinel, "Brunei: ASEAN Defense Senior Officials' Meeting Working Group Plus", January 31st 2015, Available on: <http://pacificsentinel.blogspot.in/2015/01/brunei-asean-defense-senior-officials.html>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

6, the Initial Planning Conference (IPC) for ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Maritime Security and Counter Terrorism (MS & CT) Exercise was conducted by Brunei.⁷

Following this, the ADSOM (ASEAN Senior Defence Officials meeting) and ADSOM plus was held in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia from February 11 to February 14.⁸ The meeting was conducted in preparation of 9th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) which would take place in March. At the ADSOM Meeting, the process of using military ties in ASEAN for humanitarian and disaster relief, cooperation between Defence and civil society organizations in non-traditional security, ASEAN Defence industry cooperation and logistics support framework, new initiatives in the ADMM (ASEAN Defence Ministers meeting) and ADMM+ frameworks as Malaysia's concept paper on ASEAN standby military group among other important issues were discussed.⁹

ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat happens in Malaysia

ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat) happened in Malaysia at Kota Kinabalu on January 27 and January 28, the first meeting of foreign ministers of ASEAN to happen under Malaysia's chairmanship for ASEAN in the year 2015.¹⁰ The meeting involved the participation of the Secretary General of ASEAN and senior officials from ASEAN secretariat and foreign ministries of member states.¹¹ The Retreat gave the opportunity to foreign ministers to discuss ASEAN Community building in 2015 and ASEAN's Post-2015 vision, apart from providing the platform to discuss regional and international issues of concern to ASEAN.¹²

ASEAN looking to establish Peacekeeping Force

Defence Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin has proposed that Malaysia as the Chair of ASEAN in 2015 would look forward to establish an ASEAN Peacekeeping Force for safeguarding the region from security threats. In his address to the Ministry of Defence of

⁷ ASEAN Secretariat, "Current Calendar Year", February 15th 2015, Available on: <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/events/current-calendar-year.html>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

⁸ ASEAN Secretariat, "Current Calendar Year", February 15th 2015, Available on: <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/events/current-calendar-year.html>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

⁹ Vietnam Breaking News, "ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' meeting opens", February 15th 2015, Available on: <http://www.vietnambreakingnews.com/2015/02/asean-defence-senior-officials-meeting-opens/>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, "MFA Press Statement: ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, 27 to 28 January 2015", 26th January 2015, Available on: http://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/media_centre/press_room/pr/2015/201501/press_20150126_2.html, Accessed on 26 January 2015; For more information of Malaysia's chairmanship of ASEAN, please see at: <http://www.asean.org/asean/asean-chair>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, "ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia 27-28 January 2015", January 26th 2015, Available on: http://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/press-release/-/asset_publisher/t3pS/content/asean-foreign-ministers%E2%80%99-retreat-kota-kinabalu-sabah-malaysia-27-28-january-2015-pemukiman-menteri-menteri-luar-negeri-asean-kota-kinabalu-sabah-malaysia-27-28-januari-2015?redirect=%2Fweb%2Fguest%2Fpress-release, Accessed on 27 February 2015

¹² Ibid.

Malaysia, he said, "I am visiting every ASEAN country and one of the things which will be discussed is the forming of this peacekeeping force".¹³ It is noteworthy that Hishammuddin has expressed his concerns to establish the Peacekeeping Force to safeguard the region from security threats including those from IS (Islamic State).¹⁴

ASEAN exploring possibilities a common time zone

During the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat) at Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Malaysia's Sabah state in Borneo Island in Malaysia on January 28, the issue of a common time zone for ASEAN was brought up during discussions between the foreign ministers of ASEAN. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Foreign Minister of Malaysia Anifah Aman said, "With ASEAN forming an integrated and cohesive community by the end of this year, we believe that a common time zone for ASEAN capitals is an idea worth considering".¹⁵ In his press

statement, he pointed to the benefits of a common time zone, including enhancement of business and banking linkages and airline operations. Foreign minister of Singapore said, "ASEAN today is the seventh largest economy in the world with 600 million people, (with a) GDP of more than two trillion dollars and anything that helps businesses integrate, move goods, services, work with each other seamlessly, will help the man in the street".¹⁶ The region currently has four time zones.

ASEAN-INDIA

Plan of Action (PoA) to decide future course of cooperation between India and ASEAN:

On December 9, Joint secretary at ASEAN Multilateral Division of MEA said that the future agenda of ASEAN-India cooperation would be based on Plan of Action (PoA) 2016-2021 that would implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity.¹⁷ The honourable joint secretary was speaking at Kolkata Dialogue on Look East to Act East: New Frontiers in Trade, Investment and Business Cooperation organised by the Indian Chamber

¹³ The Star Online, "Hisham: Malaysia looking to establish ASEAN Peacekeeping Force", February 18th 2015, Available on :(<http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/02/18/Hisham-on-Asean-peacekeeping-force/>), Accessed on 27 February 2015

¹⁴ The Star Online, "Hisham: Malaysia looking to establish ASEAN Peacekeeping Force", February 18th 2015, Available on :(<http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/02/18/Hisham-on-Asean-peacekeeping-force/>), Accessed on 27 February 2015

¹⁵ Bangkok Post, "ASEAN ponders common time zone," January 28th 2015, Available on:<http://www2.bangkokpost.com/business/news/461189/asean-ministers-ponder-common-time-zone>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ ASEAN.org, "Plan of Action To Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (2010-2015)" Available on : (<http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/india/item/plan-of-action-to-implement-the-asean-india-partnership-for-peace-progress-and-shared-prosperity-2010-2015>), Accessed on 12 January 2015; For more information on Plan of Action(2016-2021), please see "Chairman's statement of the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar", November 12th 2014, Available on: (<http://www.mea.gov.in/aseanindia/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/22565/Chairmans+statement+of+the+12th+ASEANIndia+Summit+in+Nay+Pyi+Taw+Myanmar>), Accessed on 12 January 2015

of Commerce.¹⁸ She also stated, "Future of India's Act East approach will also rest on the strong bilateral ties that we enjoy with most countries of the region. These relationships are largely 'sans irritants'. Our strategic partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia will further complement our strategic partnership with ASEAN".¹⁹

Run up event of ASEAN-India cooperation on Food Security, Agriculture Technology and Food Engineering for Delhi Dialogue VII 2015 held in Mumbai

Recently a run-up event to Delhi dialogue was organized in Mumbai, where Secretary (East) of MEA (Ministry of External Affairs), Anil Wadhwa referred to the collaboration between India and ASEAN on sectors of agriculture and forestry and said that the sector formed an important part of the collaborative agenda.²⁰ The Secretary delivered the keynote address at the inaugural session of the conference ASEAN-India Cooperation in Food Security, Agriculture Technology & Food Engineering, Run-up Event for Delhi Dialogue VII 2015. The Secretary further added that during the last ASEAN-India summit in November 2014, the president of Myanmar floated

the idea of a regional food mechanism.

Northeast India-Look East Policy

India's Connectivity Projects with Myanmar and Thailand Getting Delayed:

India has extended the deadline for its connectivity projects (Kaladan Multimodal Transit and Transport Project and India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway) with Myanmar and Thailand to 2019. It is argued that this delay may create more obstacles in India's Acting East policy. On the trilateral highway, Thailand has already completed his part, Myanmar is also working on its part and India is yet to complete its 30 km stretch of road. Lack of coordination and shortages in budget are reasons behind the delays on India's part, as it was reported.²¹

This news came few days after India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the First Vice-President of Myanmar Sai Mauk Kham in New Delhi in the last week of January and both sides reassured each other of boosting bilateral ties in areas like education, transport and connectivity and trade. Mr. Kham also visited Bodh Gaya and Mr. Modi mentioned that the civilizational links between these two countries is noteworthy and should be maintained and

¹⁸ The Economic Times, "Plan of Action to decide agenda of ASEAN-India cooperation: MEA official," January 9th 2015, Available on: (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-09/news/57883631_1_act-east-economic-cooperation-asean-india-cooperation), Accessed on 12 January 2015

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ministry of External Affairs press releases, "India and ASEAN to work together to realize potentials in agri and food sector," 12th February 2015, Available on: <http://mea.gov.in/aseanindia/press-releases.htm?dtl/22575/India+and+ASEAN+to+work+together+to+realize+potentials+in+Agri+and+Food+Sector>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

²¹ India lags behind in implementing connectivity projects with ASEAN, Philstar.com, February 15, 2015, available on <http://www.philstar.com/world/2015/02/15/1424034/india-lags-behind-implementing-connectivity-projects-asean>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

preserved. Both sides also talked about cross-border insurgency curbing development in the borders of India and Myanmar.²²

Joint Survey on Bus Service between India and Myanmar:

An Indo-Myanmar joint team has started surveying the 579 km long route between Imphal and Mandalay before initiating the regular bus service between these two cities. The Indian team had Ministry of External Affairs Under Secretary Mini Kumam, two Superintending Engineers from Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, one Superintending Engineer from PWD Road and Bridge Division and deputy director of Transport Department. On the other hand, the team from Myanmar had Superintending Engineer of Public Works, Ministry of Construction, of the Sagaing Region; Ministry of Construction, Deputy Commissioner, Tamu Region; officials of Myanmar Traffic Police Force and Ministry of Rail Transport. They are expected to survey the road and submit their report to the governments. Based on this survey, an MoU will be signed between India and Myanmar to inaugurate the bus service between Imphal and Mandalay. The draft MoU says, the passengers with valid travel documents and passports will be given 28 days visa-on-arrival at Tamu and Moreh

checkpoints by the immigration officials.²³

BRUNEI

British Army to be Stationed in Brunei for another Five Years:

British Prime Minister David Cameron extended a deal with the Sultan of Brunei saying that the British Armed Forces will be stationed in Brunei for a period of another five-year. Both leaders met at Chequers in the mid of February 2015. Britain has stationed a Gurkha Regiment in Brunei since 1962 and at present around 2000 armed personnel is stationed there. The British garrison in Brunei now includes a resident infantry battalion - currently the First Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles, Training Team Brunei to provide training to members of the British Armed Forces and a small number of British loan service personnel who serve with the Bruneian Armed Forces. It was mentioned that the stay in Brunei helps the British Army in adjusting in extreme weather conditions.²⁴

Cambodia

30 Years of PM Hun Sen:

In 2015, Prime Minister Hun Sen will complete his 30 years as the premier of Cambodia. He first came to power at the age of 33 and the last 30 years of his reign is memorable for his dictatorship, human rights violation, intimidation of opponents and violence.

²² 'Act East' policy: India to boost connectivity with Myanmar, SME Times, 22 January 2015, available at <http://www.smetimes.in/smetimes/news/top-stories/2015/Jan/22/india-myanmar-to-boost-connectivity29888.html>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

²³ Indo-Myanmar joint survey on Imphal-Mandalay bus service commences, Zee News, January 12, 2015, at http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/indo-myanmar-joint-survey-on-imphal-mandalay-bus-service-commences_1528653.html, accessed on January 20, 2015.

²⁴ Cameron in deal to extend British troops' stay in Brunei, The Telegraph (UK), 16 February 2015, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/11416872/Cameron-in-deal-to-extend-British-troops-stay-in-Brunei.html>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

However, PM Hun Sen is in no mood of accepting his shortcomings; rather, he feels proud of himself as he believes that he has restored peace and security in a Cambodia which was devastated by the Khmer Rouge. Few historians and analysts agree with him on this point including David Chandler of Monash University, Australia. On the other hand, the Asia director at Human Rights Watch, Brad Adams said, "After 30 years of experience there is no reason to believe that Hun Sen will wake up one day and decide to govern Cambodia in a more open, inclusive, tolerant, and rights-respecting manner".²⁵

EAST TIMOR

East Timor PM Xanana Gusmao resigns, new Prime Minister appointed

On 9th February, Xanana Gusmao, who has served as both president and prime minister of East Timor ever since the independence of the country in 2002 from occupation of Indonesia has submitted his

resignation to the president of East Timor, Taur Matan Rauk.²⁶ He was one who had a succession from being a rebel fighter in the independence movement to a national hero.²⁷ The Government of East Timor said in its press release, "The president of the republic accepted the proposal of CNRT, the most voted party at the last legislative elections, which nominated Dr Rui Maria Araujo for the post as prime minister".²⁸ According to analysts, Xanana Gusmao who first became prime minister in 2007 would maintain certain influence in the government, but it could not be specified what role might be played by him.²⁹ Damien Kingsbury, an expert on East Timor from Deakin University of Australia said, "He's a unifying figure ... His appointment as prime minister means the government will be a government of national unity".³⁰ It needs to be noted that Xanana Gusmao signalled over the past year about his imminent plans for resignation, but he waited to ensure a smooth transition and the cabinet reshuffle was aimed at replacing ministers from Gusmao's coalition who have been accused of corruption.³¹

²⁵ Hun Sen, Cambodia's prime minister, marks 30 years of hardline rule, The Guardian, 14 January 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/14/hun-sen-cambodias-prime-minister-marks-30-years-of-hardline-rule>, accessed on 19 march 2015.

²⁶ The Economic Times, "East Timor president Tatar MatanRauk accepts resistance hero PM Gusmao's resignation," February 9th 2015, Available on: http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-09/news/58967449_1_new-government-resignation-xanana-gusmao, Accessed on 9 February 2015

²⁷ DeutscheWelle, "East Timor's Gusmao makes way for younger generation," February 10th 2015, Available on: <http://www.dw.de/east-timors-gusmao-makes-way-for-younger-generation/a-18247119>, Accessed on 27 February 2015

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Reuters, "East Timor President picks former health minister Araujo as new PM", 10th February 2015, Available on: <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKBN0LE15J20150210?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>, Accessed on 28 February 2015

³⁰ Radio Australia, "East Timor President picks former health minister Rui Araujo to replace XananaGusmao as prime minister," 11th February 2015, Available on: <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2015-02-11/east-timor-president-picks-former-health-minister-rui-araujo-to-replace-xanana-gusmao-as-prime-minis/1414087>, Accessed on 28 February 2015

³¹ UCA News.com, "Timor Leste President accepts resistance hero PM'S resignation," February 9th 2015, Available on: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/timor-leste-president-accepts-resistance-hero-pms-resignation/72956>, Accessed on 28 February 2015

INDONESIA

President Joko Widodo makes inaugural trip to Malaysia, Brunei and Philippines

President Joko Widodo of Indonesia made his 3 nation trip to Malaysia, Brunei and Philippines. It was his inaugural trip to Malaysia and the issues that were supposed to be discussed during his state visit to Malaysia were treatment of migrant workers and maritime and land borders and detention of Malaysian people by Indonesian Navy on charges of illegal fishing.³² After his meeting in Malaysia, he warmly appreciated the gesture shown to him by government of Malaysia and their people. Ambassador of Indonesia to Malaysia, Herman Prayitno commented, "(President Jokowi's) state visit is a success. The president is very satisfied. (The Malaysian) hospitality is very good".³³ Currently, Malaysia is one of Indonesia's biggest trading partners, with trade worth more than US\$20 billion.³⁴ Following his visit to Malaysia, he visited Brunei Darussalam and President Widodo said,

"I'm sure there are many investment opportunities in both directions that are mutually beneficial to our countries".³⁵ On 8th February, the president started his first time ever visit to Philippines for three days. The Philippines Government said in their official statement, "In the spirit of ASEAN solidarity, it is tradition on the part of a new head of state to immediately conduct introductory visits to fellow ASEAN Member States."³⁶ On his meeting with President Aquino, he is expected to discuss mutual concern, including migrant workers issues, maritime cooperation, defense, trade and investment, and people-to-people exchanges, among others.³⁷ It is noteworthy that President JokoWidodo said during his visit to Brunei, "Until now, bilateral relations with Brunei have been the most stable".³⁸ He was awarded the Brunei's highest honorary title, the Most Esteemed Family Order Laila Utama, by Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.³⁹

Indonesia Foreign Ministry releases annual press statement

On 8th January, Foreign Ministry of Indonesia released its annual statement and made important points about its foreign policy under new government. Minister of Foreign affairs

³² Channel NewsAsia, "Indonesian president to make maiden visit to Malaysia", February 4th 2015, Available on: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesian-president-to-1637330.html>, Accessed on 6 February 2015

³³ The Malaysian Insider, "Jokowi happy with Malaysian visit, says envoy-Bernama," February 7th 2015, Available on: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/jokowi-happy-with-malaysian-visit-says-indonesian-envoy-bernama>, Accessed on 8 February 2015

³⁴ Myanmar international.tv, "Indonesian president to make maiden visit to Malaysia," February 5th 2015, Available on: <http://www.myanmarinternational.tv/news/indonesian-president-make-maiden-visit-malaysia>, Accessed on 28 February 2015

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Philippine Information Agency "Indonesian president JokoWidodo to undertake state visit to PH", February 8th 2015, Available on <http://news.pia.gov.ph/article/view/1781423302051/indonesian-president-joko-widodo-to-undertake-state-visit-to-ph> Accessed on 11 February 2015

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Jakarta Globe, "Jokowi awarded highest Brunei honor on state visit," 8th February 2015, Available on: <http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/president-joko-widodo-awarded-honorary-title-brunei/>, Accessed on 28 February 2015

³⁹ Ibid.

Retno LP Marsudi said, "According to the vision and mission of President Jokowi, Indonesia's foreign policy in the next five years will be based on these priorities".⁴⁰ Foreign Minister mentioned Indonesia's diplomacy in the next five years will focus on maintaining sovereignty, enhancing the protection of its citizens, and intensifying economic diplomacy.⁴¹ It was also noted, "Terrorist threats such as the rise of ISIS and Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) are highly dangerous and a cause for concern to the world".⁴² The statement also said, "In its bilateral relations with friendly countries, Indonesia has so far established 18 strategic or comprehensive partnerships".⁴³ The statement also noted Indonesia's support for the people of Palestine and also talked about the country's role in regional fora, "Indonesia is actively involved as a member of the Southwest Pacific Dialogue (SWPD), as well as an observer in the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), and the Pacific Islands Development Forum Summit (PIDF)".⁴⁴

Defence minister of Indonesia makes introductory visit to Singapore

Indonesian Defence Minister General

(Retired) Ryamizard Ryacudu, visited Singapore for an introductory visit from January 28 to January 30. A joint press statement released by the Singapore Defence Ministry said both ministers reaffirmed the long-standing cooperation and the statement released said, "To further strengthen bilateral defence ties, Mr Ng and Gen (Retd) Ryamizard agreed on four new initiatives:

- Step up collaboration and practical cooperation through existing links between both Armed Forces in common security concerns, such as maritime security and anti-piracy, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
- Increase bilateral interactions between officials in the defence ministries and military officers through joint training and course participation in each other's institutions.
- Conduct regular dialogues between senior officials in the defence ministries on regional and strategic issues of mutual interest to both countries.
- Explore new initiatives built on military-to-military joint interactions, which have brought much benefit to both TNI and SAF".⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Antara News.com, "Indonesia to focus on sovereignty, citizens' safety, economic diplomacy," 8th January 2015, Available on: (<http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/97260/indonesia-to-focus-on-sovereignty-citizens-safety-economic-diplomacy>), Accessed on January 14th 2015

⁴¹ Antara News.com, "Indonesia condemns attack on Charlie Hebdo's office in Paris," 8th January 2015, Available on: (<http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/97261/indonesia-condemns-attack-on-charlie-hebdos-office-in-paris>) Accessed on January 14th 2015

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Embassy of Indonesia in Ottawa, Canada, "Annual Press Statement 2015 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Indonesia," Available on: <http://www.indonesia-ottawa.org/2015/01/annual-press-statement-2015-of-the-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-indonesia/>, Accessed on 1 March 2015

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Channel NewsAsia, "More collaboration, interaction between defence forces of Singapore and Indonesia", January 30th 2015, Available on: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/more-collaboration/1626208.html>, Accessed on 28 February 2015

Laos

Controversy over Don Sahong Dam Continues:

The Joint Committee of the Mekong River Commission in one of their meetings at Lao PDR mentioned that the riparian neighbours of Laos have not been able to reach to a consensus regarding the Don Sahong Dam. However, Laos representative said that the prior consultation has been done. Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam are however not convinced with the process and they want further extension of time to complete the process. Global environmentalist group, International Rivers, mentioned that the claims by Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam are just and Lao PDR should postpone the construction of the dam.⁴⁶

Malaysia

Anwar Ibrahim Sent to Jail for Five Years:

Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's five year jail term has again raised questions over Najib Rajak's tolerance. Since 2013, at least 44 people have been charged or investigated under the colonial-era Sedition Act. Critics are arguing that Anwar Ibrahim's jail sentence has given the Malaysians another chance

to question the transparency of their judiciary system. In 2013, Najib's coalition party barely managed to come back to form the government; however, even after that, the present government is not rectifying their attitude.⁴⁷

Freedom Comes With Responsibility, says Malaysian PM:

In an order that religious sensitivity is maintained throughout the world, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak has suggested that freedom should come with a responsibility and no one can be offensive to other religions. He said these in a gathering organised by the Malaysian Youth Council. He said, "If Islam has its religious sensitivities, so do other faiths like Christians, Hindus and Buddhists". He further mentioned that Malaysia has to show sensitivity to all religions so that peace and harmony in the country can be maintained.⁴⁸

Myanmar

UN Concerned about Rohingyas in Myanmar:

The United Nations General Assembly has passed a resolution expressing deep concern over the fate of the lakhs of Rohingyas living in Myanmar as the government has denied their citizenship repeatedly. Since June 2012, around 280 Rohingyas have been killed in sectarian violence that took place in the country sporadically. Recently the Myanmar government has claimed that the Rohingyas

⁴⁶ Mekong River Commission to Consider Lao Don Sahong Dam at Ministerial Level, Radio Free Asia, 28 January 2015, available on <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/mrc-01282015155925.html>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

⁴⁷ Malaysia's Politics of Intolerance, Bloomberg View, February 10, 2015, available at <http://www.bloombergvew.com/articles/2015-02-10/malaysian-opposition-needs-to-regroup-to-fight-najib>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

⁴⁸ No such thing as absolute freedom, says Najib, by, Eileen NG, The Malaysian Insider, January 17, 2015, at <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/no-such-thing-as-absolute-freedom-says-najib>, accessed on January 20, 2015.

need to identify themselves as Bengali. The UNGA has requested that the group should be identified as Rohingyas and not as Bengali. The UNGA also requested the government to stop 'arbitrary arrest and detention, forced displacement, rape and other forms of sexual violence' of the Rohingyas. It is argued that after a bright start of reforms in 2011, Myanmar has now slowed down the democratisation to some extent and the plight of the Rohingyas is adding to the problem.⁴⁹

Buddhist Monks against UN Envoy in Myanmar:

More than three hundred monks protested against Ms. Yanghee Lee, UN human rights envoy for Myanmar, who had requested the government of Myanmar and Rakhine state to be tolerant towards the Rohingya Muslims in the country. Wirathu, the leader of the Committee for the Protection of Nationality and Religion (*Mabatha*), mentioned that UN calls regarding religious tolerance towards the Rohingyas are against Myanmar's sovereignty and that's why they launched the protest. Wirathu, a hardliner monk, believes in Buddhist nationalism. The protesters also demanded that the 1982 citizenship law should be in place in the country so that the Rohingyas can be

identified as non-Myanmarese people. Before Lee's visit to Myanmar, UN had passed a resolution urging Myanmar identify the Rohingyas as citizens.⁵⁰

Myanmar not Ready for AEC by 2015:

Analysts say that Myanmar is not ready for the ASEAN single business market by the end of 2015. Its lack of infrastructure may create several problems and it may be difficult for the country to benefit from the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), at least, initially. It was apprehended that besides Myanmar, three more countries in the grouping will be unable to join the force of AEC. In the World Economic Forum held in Davos, few were however optimistic about AEC and its implementation by 2015. Thailand's deputy prime minister was one of them.⁵¹

China-Myanmar Pipeline Inaugurated:

China and Myanmar have opened a direct pipeline (771 km.) for a trial operation which will reduce China's dependence on oil import via Malacca Straits and South China Sea and can by-pass countries like Brunei, Vietnam, Philippines and Malaysia, countries having territorial disputes with China. The project, initiated in 2010, was a joint venture between China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE).⁵²

⁴⁹ UN Urges Myanmar to Give Rohingya 'Full Citizenship', Voice of America, December 30, 2015, available at <http://www.voanews.com/content/un-urges-myanmar-to-give-rohingya-full-citizenship/2578599.html>, accessed on January 14, 2015.

⁵⁰ Monks Protest UN Call for Rights for Myanmar's Muslim Minority, Radio Free Asia, January 16, 2015, at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/monks-protest-against-un-01162015165811.html>, accessed on January 20, 2015.

⁵¹ Burma 'Not Ready' for Asean Single Market by End of 2015, The Irrawaddy, January 27, 2015, available at <http://www.irrawaddy.org/business/burma-ready-asean-single-market-end-2015.html>, accessed on February 4, 2015.

⁵² Shuan Sim, China-Myanmar Crude Oil Pipeline Opens For Test Runs, International Business Times, January 28, 2015, available at <http://www.ibtimes.com/china-myanmar-crude-oil-pipeline-opens-test-runs-1797942>, accessed on February 5, 2015.

Friendship Bridge between Laos and Myanmar:

Myanmar and Laos have intensified efforts to build a friendship bridge over Mekong River to connect Tachileik, Shan State in Myanmar with Laungnamtha province of Laos. The iron bridge will be a two-lane motorway. In July 2011 the plan was mooted during Laotian prime minister's visit to Myanmar and in February 2013 the construction work began. Laos and Myanmar share 230 km of border and their diplomatic relations started in 1995. However, compared to other neighbours, bilateral trade between Laos and Myanmar is not significant and it is expected that the new friendship bridge will enhance their bilateral relationship.⁵³

PHILIPPINES

Philippines mourns high casualties of commandos in combat with rebels

On 25th January, the elite commandos of Philippines National Police suffered heavy casualties while conducting anti-terror raids at Tukanalipao in Mamasapano Township. The available sources have said

while conducting the anti-terror raids, the government did not notify the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the main Muslim insurgent group in the region, which signed a peace deal⁵⁴ with the government in March and has had a relatively successful ceasefire agreement with government troops and the rebels inflicted heavy casualties during the encounter.⁵⁵ Till date, more than 25 bodies of the slain commandos were recovered by Philippines Government in collaboration with locals.

Philippines seeks strategic alliance with Vietnam

Foreign secretary of Philippines, Albert Del Rosario and Foreign minister of Vietnam Pham Binh Minh met each other at Manila. Following the meeting, the foreign secretary of Philippines said that Philippines and Vietnam would consider a strategic partnership between them soon.⁵⁶ He said to the press, "It is important because we share common concerns in this region especially when it comes to the South China Sea issue".⁵⁷ After the meeting happened, the spokesperson of Foreign Ministry of Philippines said the bilateral talks focused on the issues of mutual concern and singled out the South China Sea issue, a territorial dispute involving several countries in the region.⁵⁸

⁵³ Myanmar, Laos to speed up building friendship bridge , Global Times, February 1, 2015, available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/905157.shtml>, accessed on February 5, 2015.

⁵⁴ The Star.com, "Philippines sign peace deals with Muslim rebels: No more war-Enough!", March 27th 2014, Available on: http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2014/03/27/philippines_signs_peace_deal_with_muslim_rebels_no_more_war_enough.html, Accessed on 11 February 2015

⁵⁵ The Star.com, "Philippine forces retrieve commandos' bodies at rebel base", January 25th 2014, Available on: <http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2015/01/26/philippine-forces-retrieve-commandos-bodies-at-rebel-base.html>, Accessed on 27 January 2015

⁵⁶ Channel Newsasia "Philippines, Vietnam mull alliance in face of rising china", February 3rd 2015, Available on: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/philippines-vietnam-mull/1634984.html> , Accessed on 9 February 2015

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Jakarta Post, "Philippines, Vietnam mull alliance in face of rising China", February 3rd 2015, Available on: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/02/03/philippines-vietnam-mull-alliance-face-rising-china.html>, Accessed on 9 February 2015; BBC News, "Q & A: South China Sea dispute," May 8th 2014, Available on: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>, Accessed on 9 February 2015

Philippines to buy C-130 Transport planes from US Navy

Philippines has decided to buy C-130 Transport planes from US Navy after signing a pact.⁵⁹

Colonel Restituto Padilla, a spokesman for the Armed Forces of the Philippines quoted, "The United States is helping us pay for these two aircraft".⁶⁰ As per the report, the acquisition would increase PAF's inventory of C-130s to a total of 5. It has been reported that US has been trying to develop security capabilities since long and in 2014 Washington allocated military assistance funds of \$50 million to the Philippines which apart from the C-130s, were used to install weapons on two frigates, also acquired from the US coast guard⁶¹.

SINGAPORE

New Cyber Security Agency in Singapore:

From April 1, a new cyber security agency will replace the existing Singapore Infocomm Technology Security Authority

(SITSA) and take over activities of the ICT regulator, Infocomm Development Authority (IDA). The new set up will be called as Cyber Security Agency (CSA). CSA will not only develop the government's cyber security capabilities but will also enhance local IT security systems. Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister in charge of cyber security will give leadership to CSA while David Koh, deputy secretary for technology at the Ministry of Defence will be the chief executive of the CSA.⁶²

THAILAND

Thailand agrees to boost military ties with China

Defence minister of China, Chang Wangquan visited Thailand from February 5 to February 7. During his visit, Thailand and China mutually agreed to strengthen military ties through joint training, technology sharing and discounted arms sales.⁶³ The military ties would encompass intelligence sharing and fighting transnational crime. The Defence minister of Thailand said, "China will not intervene in Thailand's politics but will give political support and help maintain relationships at all levels. This is China's policy".⁶⁴ It remains important to be noticed that

⁵⁹ Reuters, "Philippines to buy two C130 transport planes from U.S. Navy," January 9th 2015, Available on: (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/09/us-philippines-usa-idUSKBN0K114G20150109>) Accessed on 14 January 2015

⁶⁰ DEFENSEWORLD.NET, "Philippines to Buy C130 Transport Planes from US Navy," Available on: (http://www.defenseworld.net/news/11879/Philippines_To_Buy_C130_Transport_Planes_From_US_Navy#.VLkN33nnMh8), Accessed on 14 January 2015

⁶¹ The Economic Times, "Philippines to buy two C 130 Transport planes from US Navy", January 9th 2015, Available on: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/philippines-to-buy-two-c130-transport-planes-from-us-navy/articleshow/45824407.cms>, Accessed on 11 January 2015

⁶² Eileen Yu, New government agency to oversee Singapore's cybersecurity operations, ZDNET, January 27, 2015, available at <http://www.zdnet.com/article/new-government-agency-to-oversee-singapores-cybersecurity-operations/>, accessed on February 5, 2015.

⁶³ Bangkok Post, "Thailand, China bolster military ties as US Relations splinter", February 6th 2015, Available on: <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/468332/thailand-china-bolster-military-ties-as-us-relations-splinter> Accessed on 11 February 2015

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the defence minister also said, "We agreed to increase joint military exercises between Thailand's air force and China's air force and to increase overall military cooperation over the next three to five years".⁶⁵

Thailand hosts Cobra Gold 2015 military exercise

The Army of Thailand hosted Cobra Gold 2015 military exercise last week which witnessed international participation. During the concluding ceremony which was held in Army Base in Lop Buri, in the district of Chai Badan, the Thai Defence Forces Chief Gen Worapong Sanganetra said he was satisfied with the 'Cobra Gold 2015' joint military exercise as it met the programme's planned expectations, and that every other participating country was also satisfied.⁶⁶ About 10,600 soldiers from seven countries including the United States, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and Thailand participated in the exercise.⁶⁷ Six countries including Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei and Pakistan sent observers while personnel from China and India also joined the drills involving providing humanitarian and disaster assistance.⁶⁸

Impeachment hearing begins against 38 former Thai senators

Thailand's military appointed assembly started impeachment motion against 38 former senators of Yingluck Shinawatra government after indicting 250 of the former parliamentarians. The move was seen as an attempt to sideline the Puea Thai part of the former Prime Minister who was deposed in a military coup.⁶⁹ The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) on Tuesday appointed by the military indicted 250 former lawmakers over the tabling of a Bill in 2013 to change the half-appointed Senate to a fully elected one. The aforesaid change was declared unconstitutional by the charter court in November 2013 and critics argued the previous system protected the interests of the ruling elite at the expense of the electorate.⁷⁰

Vietnam

China's President Met Vietnam's Communist Party's General Secretary:

China's President Xi Jinping said that China treasures the traditional friendship it shares with Vietnam, however, the regional tension on South China Sea needs to be handled carefully. Xi met Nguyen Phu Trong, general secretary of

⁶⁵ Reuters, "Thailand boosts military ties with China amid US spat", February 6th 2015, Available on: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/06/us-thailand-china-idUSKBNOLAOLD20150206> Accessed on 11 February 2015

⁶⁶ Pattaya Mail, " 'Cobra Gold' 2015 joint military exercise ends", February 21st 2015, Available on: <http://www.pattayamail.com/news/cobra-gold-2015-joint-military-exercise-ends-45175> , Accessed on 27 February 2015

⁶⁷ Chiangrai Times, "Cobra Gold 2015 Joint Military Exercises end in Lop Buri", February 21st 2015, Available on: <http://www.chiangraitimes.com/cobra-gold-2015-joint-military-exercises-end-in-lop-buri.html> , Accessed on 25 February 2015

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jakarta Post, "Impeachment hearing begins against 38 former Thai senators", February 26th 2015, Available on: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/02/26/impeachment-hearing-begins-against-38-former-thai-senators.html> Accessed on 27 February 2015

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Vietnam's ruling Communist Party early this year and mentioned, "China's party and government have long set great store on China and Vietnam's traditional friendship, and ... are willing to promote the healthy development of ties". In a telephonic conversation, earlier to this meeting, Xi said that mutual political trust, economic cooperation and resolving the territorial disputes over the islands of South China Sea are important for both the countries.⁷¹

OCEANIA

AUSTRALIA

Australia visited by Chairman of NATO military committee

Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, General Knud Bartels visited Australia from February 15th to February 18th on a three day state visit. He thanked Australia for its contribution to military operations of NATO and discussed future avenues of Australia-NATO military operation. During his visit, he met Air

Chief Marshal Mark Binskin, Chief of the Australian Defence Force and Mr. Dennis Richardson, the Secretary of Defence of Australia and said in his statement, "for substantial and practical cooperation, to learn from each other, share best practices and develop common standards because NATO and Australia have a strong partnership and are committed to enhancing their abilities of working together in order to better tackle future global challenges".⁷²

Australia looks to expand military role in Iraq in partnership with New Zealand

It has been reported recently that Australia was looking to expand military role in Iraq in partnership with New Zealand. Even though the final announcement did not come till then in this regard, but an announcement during Prime Minister Abbott's visit to New Zealand would be expected.⁷³ Initial reports suggested that Australia would send 200 more troops to Iraq as a part of joint training mission with New Zealand even though the final announcement on this regard was not made by the government.⁷⁴ During his visit to New Zealand in the last week of February, Prime Minister Abbott said his government considered a joint training mission in Iraq with New Zealand to help Iraqi security forces fight ISIS.⁷⁵ It needs to be noted here that

⁷¹ China's Xi says treasures friendship with Vietnam, despite dispute, Reuters, 11 February 2015, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/11/us-china-vietnam-idUSKBN0LF18Y20150211>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

⁷² NATO News, "Chairman of NATO Military Committee visits Australia to discuss Maritime Security, the Resolute Support Mission In Afghanistan and Global Threats", February 19th 2015, Available on: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_117502.htm Accessed on 27 February 2015

⁷³ SBS.com.au, "Australia set to expand military role in Iraq", February 26th 2015, Available on: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/02/26/australia-set-expand-military-role-iraq> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ TVNZ One News, "Tony Abbott praises John Key for joining fight against 'death cult' ", February 28th 2015, Available on: <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/tony-abbott-praises-john-key-joining-fight-against-death-cult-6244028> Accessed on 28 February 2015

Australia has already sent a Special Forces team of 200 to train and advise the Iraqi military.⁷⁶

Australia dismisses report of unilateral invasion of Iraq

Australian PM Tony Abbott dismissed a recent media report that he considered a unilateral invasion of Iraq with 3500 troops to safeguard Australia against the threats posed by ISIS. In a report by the newspaper 'The Weekend Australian' titled "Tony Abbott sought military advice on go it alone invasion of Iraq" it was claimed that Abbott planned a unilateral invasion of Iraq. Mr Abbott said that the newspaper did not attempt to contact either his office or Chief of the Defence Force (CDF). It was also reported that the Prime Minister took forward his plan to the top defence planners of Australia. Contradicting the claims made by the newspaper, the Secretary of Defence Department of Australia Dennis Richardson and the Chief of Defence Force (CDF) Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin said that they had no knowledge of any plan regarding unilateral invasion. The Defence Secretary said, "The report that the PM wanted to send 3,500 troops to Iraq to combat [IS] has no basis in fact.

Indeed the PM has never raised such a proposition formally or informally, directly or indirectly.⁷⁷

FIJI

Fijian minister leads high level delegation to UAE (United Arab Emirates)

Minister of Fiji for Immigration, National Security and Defence, Timoci Lesi Natuva led a delegation to United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the 2015 International Defence Exhibition and the Gulf Defence Conference.⁷⁸ He was accompanied by senior officials of Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and ambassador of Fiji to UAE, Amb. Robin Nair. At a reception at his official residence in UAE, the Ambassador of Fiji to UAE said, "Our military policy is also an extension of our foreign policy. It builds on the contribution of our much-acclaimed military contribution to global peace and security under the United Nations Charter. UAE is now one of our military partners as well as a partner in other spheres of international relations and also in providing bilateral assistance for our development".⁷⁹ During the visit, the RFMF delegation hold talks with UAE Armed Forces under a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between RFMF and UAE Defence Forces.

⁷⁶ Radio New Zealand, "Australia to send more troops to Iraq-report", February 25th 2015, Available on: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/world/267034/australia-to-send-more-troops-to-iraq-report> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁷⁷ Yahoo News, "Top military planners dismiss reports Tony Abbott suggested unilateral invasion of ground troops to Iraq", February 22nd 2015, Available on: <https://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/26392352/top-military-planners-dismiss-report-tony-abbott-suggested-unilateral-invasion-of-ground-troops-to-iraq/> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁷⁸ For information on International Defence Exhibition(IDEX) in UAE 2015, please see: <http://www.idexuae.ae/>

⁷⁹ The Jet, "Fijian minister leads delegation to global defence meet", February 27th 2015, Available on: <http://thejetnewspaper.com/2015/02/27/fijian-minister-leads-delegation-to-global-defence-meet/> Accessed on 28 February 2015

Foreign minister of Fiji attends meeting of Foreign Ministers of Melanesia Spearhead Group (MSG) in Vanuatu

In January, Foreign minister of Fiji Minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, attended MSG (Melanesia Spearhead Group)⁸⁰ in Vanuatu. He was joined by Minister Milner Tozaka from Solomon Islands, Minister Sato Kilman from Vanuatu and PNG's High Commissioner to the Solomon Islands H.E Fred Yakasa who attended on behalf of his country's foreign minister. Minister Kubuabola expressed the genuine interests of Fiji in MSG and discussed the MSG'S annual budget and work program for the year 2015.⁸¹

Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) commander visits United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

The Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Brigadier-General Mosese Tikoitoga, and his military delegation arrived at the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) after attending the International Defence

Exhibition (IDEX) in UAE as invited guests of UAE government. In Lebanon, the Brigadier met the troops from Fiji who were part of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) at UN Camp 2-45.⁸²

NEW ZEALAND

Prime Minister of New Zealand confirms deployment of troops in Iraq

Prime Minister of New Zealand John Key has confirmed troop deployment of New Zealand

in Iraq by saying that a total of 143 defence personnel of New Zealand would go to Iraq for a non-combat mission lasting upto two years.⁸³ Mr Key has also said that a joint mission of 400 troops from New Zealand and Australia would likely to back the Iraqi security forces in their combat against ISIS which would include 143 troops from New Zealand.⁸⁴ Key has said that the troops from New Zealand would train the Iraqi Security forces at Taji Military complex in north of Baghdad regarding which an opposition leader Andrew Little voiced his concerns, compelling the Prime Minister to acknowledge the risk for his troops.⁸⁵ New Zealand has

⁸⁰ For information on Melanesia Spearhead Group(MSG), please see at: <http://www.msgsec.info/>

⁸¹ The Republic of Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs media release, "Minister Kubuabola attends Foreign Ministers Meeting in Villa", January 23rd 2015, Available on: <http://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/media-resources/media-release/795-minister-kubuabola-attends-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-villab> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁸² Fiji Sun online, "Now Tikoitoga, team at UNIFIL", February 28th 2015, Available on: <http://fijisun.com.fj/2015/02/28/now-tikoitoga-team-at-unifil/> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁸³ KESQ.com, "NZ sends troops to fight ISIS in iraq", February 23rd 2015, Available on: <http://www.kesq.com/news/new-zealand-confirms-iraq-troop-deployment/31438872> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁸⁴ SBS.com.au, "Australia set to expand military role in Iraq", February 26th 2015, Available on: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/02/26/australia-set-expand-military-role-iraq> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁸⁵ KESQ.com, "NZ sends troops to fight ISIS in iraq", February 23rd 2015, Available on: <http://www.kesq.com/news/new-zealand-confirms-iraq-troop-deployment/31438872> Accessed on 28 February 2015; SBS.com.au, "Australia set to expand military role in Iraq", February 26th 2015, Available on: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/02/26/australia-set-expand-military-role-iraq> Accessed on 28 February 2015.

become the latest nation to join the military coalition.⁸⁶

New Zealand troop personnel can opt out of Iraq

Few days after confirmation of a total of 143 troop's deployment by New Zealand in Iraq, a source from the New Zealand Defence Force said that troops would be given the chance to withdraw from the

controversial deployment in Iraq.⁸⁷ The Spokesman said, "Personnel may at times indicate personal or other circumstances that could impact on their ability to deploy. As has been the case with most employers, NZDF has become increasingly aware of the effect of individual personal circumstances on the performance and overall wellbeing of its people".⁸⁸

⁸⁶ CNN, "New Zealand 'stands up for what is right' with ISIS deployment," February 25th 2015, Available on: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/23/asia/new-zealand-troops-iraq/> Accessed on 28 February 2015

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

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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