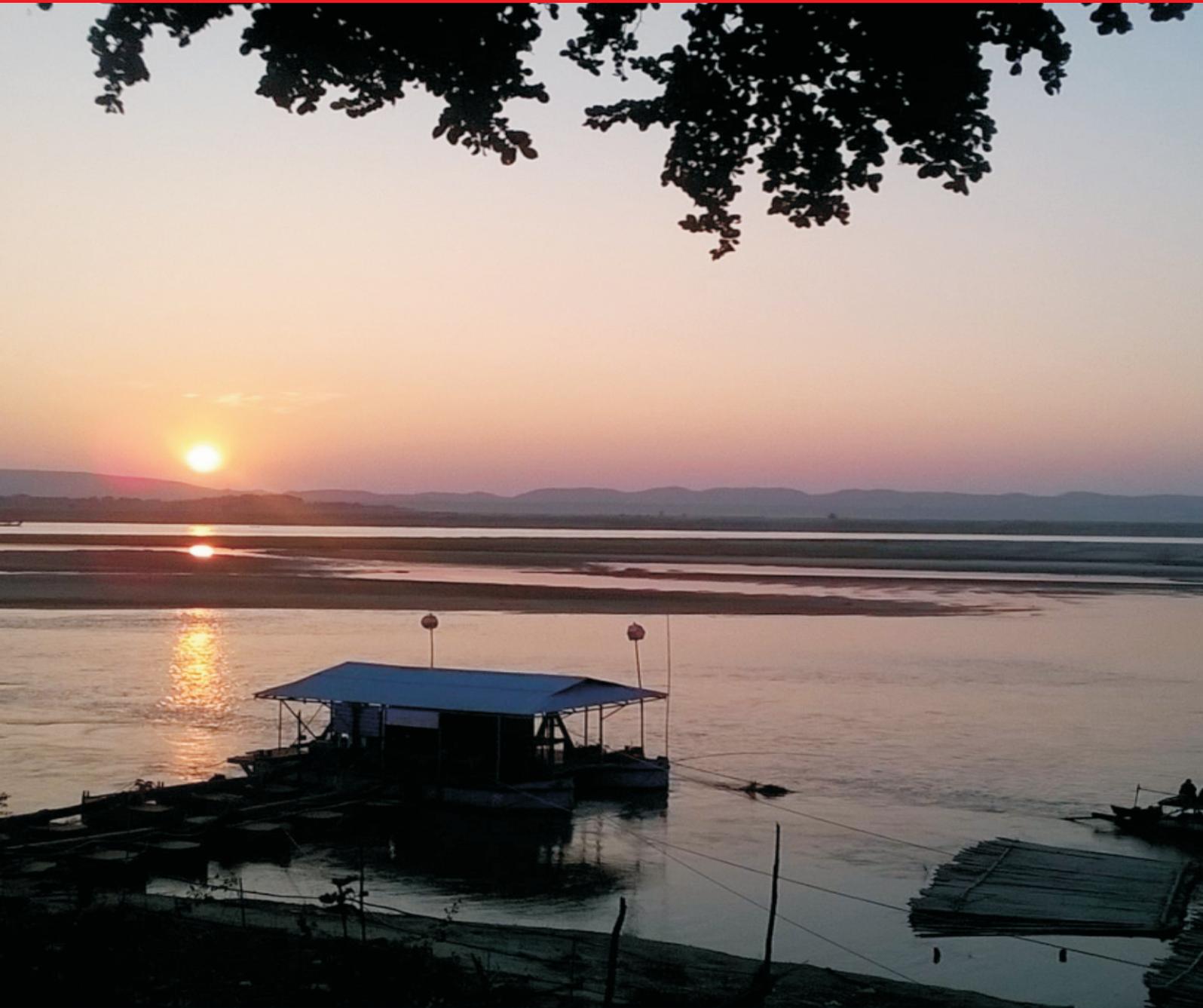


Vol 4 No 6 November-December 2015

INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



Irawaddy River, Mandalay

Photo Courtesy : Sanket S Kulkarni & Dr Hippu S K Nathan

*Southeast Asia & Oceania
Centre
Bimonthly Newsletter*



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Editor's Note

The November-December Issue of *Insight Southeast Asia* offers a wide range of news on defence, security and political affairs as they happened in the region. The 27th ASEAN Summit, conducted in Kuala Lumpur in November, gets prioritised in this issue. Economy too takes precedence in this issue as ASEAN has finalised its integration process and hence, it has covered a couple of news on economic cooperation between ASEAN countries and extra regional powers as well as within ASEAN member nations.

With that, we hope to receive your suggestion, feedback and comments on *Insight Southeast Asia*.

Thank you,

Dr. Sampa Kundu

Kadloor Savitri, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding - UN Engagement in Cambodia

Pentagon Press, New Delhi (2014), Pp 243, Price Rs 995



Niranjjan Chandrashekhar Oak

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'Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding – UN Engagement in Cambodia' by Kadloor Savitri is successful in highlighting centrality of the United Nations (UN) in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Cambodia. The well structured book has not only chronicled important events during the Cambodian crisis but also given insight into internal power struggle, superpower rivalry, their quest for influence in the Indo-china region and regional clash of interests. The book is a scholarly attempt to evaluate United Nation's role in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding missions. The book will particularly be helpful to the scholars and researchers interested in the study of United Nations.

In the beginning, the book has theoretically discussed the terms 'conflict' and 'conflict resolution' and strived to understand various attributes associated with them. In doing so, the author has tried to identify the source of the conflict in Cambodia. "The Cambodian conflict situation embodied ideology, deep class inequalities, and a struggle for power among various groups, as combined sources of conflict" (p 23). Later the author

has dwelt upon the UN charter framework for conflict resolution where she has elaborately explained the charter provisions and evolution of procedures and practices of pacific settlement of disputes over time. She has attempted to convince readers that as far as possible UN tries to resolve dispute amicably and uses force only as a last resort. She has praised UN for being able to control the disputes within manageable levels, but at the same time has also pointed out a major limitation of the UN. "Some questions referred to the UN have remained on the agenda for long and continue to remain...The organization has become a dumping bin or depository of world's lost causes" (p 65).

After analyzing the terms which form the title of the book, the author has got down to explain the Cambodian crisis (1979 onwards) in great detail. She has captured a panoramic view of the crisis where her frame has picked up even the minutest detail. She has looked at the Cambodian crisis from three different but interconnected angles; viz.; Cambodia as an international problem, Cambodia as a regional issue and Cambodia as a domestic concern. This holistic approach has made the Cambodian case study comprehensive.

The author appears to repose supreme faith in the UN system. "All other avenues of collective

endeavor by the major powers did not break the intransigence of the warring factions. It was then that every major player looked towards UN as the most acceptable broker of the peace" (p 130) or "The Cambodian conflict situation, more specifically, highlighted the centrality of United Nations in conflict resolution at both negotiation and its eventual implementation stages" (p 202). But her faith in the UN as a saviour in resolving Cambodian crisis seems misplaced as various external factors played a decisive role in conflict resolution. "Much of the outcome has depended on the external events, such as, Gorbachev's efforts to improve relations with China and the United States, Tiananmen event in China, Indonesia's fears of a modernized China and above all, the reluctance of the US to involve in any problem relating to Indochina region" (p 117). End of the cold war was the single biggest factor that proved to be instrumental in resolving Cambodian crisis. It was not mere coincidence that "the United Nations began to take active interest in the Cambodian problem from September 1989" (p 125). Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then United Nations Secretary-General, mentions this fact in the report titled "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping" written for United Nations in 1992. "The United Nations was rendered powerless to deal with many of these crises because of the vetoes – 279 of them – cast in the Security Council, which were vivid expression of

the divisions of that period"¹. Even regional initiatives by ASEAN, which according to the author played a crucial role to resolve the crisis, came to fruition only after 1989.

The author writes, "...a large number of conflicts in the post-Cold War era are intrastate conflicts...The situation becomes more complex in situations where intrastate conflicts are aggravated by the external support to one or more warring factions...Such conflicts are intra-state conflicts epitomized by competing, proxy inter-state interests. This change in the nature of conflicts has posed several challenges to the United Nations" (p 41). However it is an open secret that in most of the cases, some or the other major power that enjoys veto in the Security Council lend the "external support". Therefore it is difficult to understand why the author wants to give an impression that the challenge to UN is coming from outside when it is clearly emanating from within the core of UN. Even in the case of Cambodia, it was super power rivalry that kept the UN at bay until 1979 (p 205). China, United States and Soviet Union gave clandestine support to different warring factions, thus aggravating the problem. In spite of this the author has refrained from criticizing permanent five of the Security Council or the structure of UNSC during the entire course of the book.

United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) has been presented as an innovative concept in the book which played a big role in the process of peacebuilding in Cambodia. It was successful to an extent. UNTAC was more of a conflict management mission rather than a peacebuilding mission.

¹ "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping", Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992, available at <http://www.un-documents.net/a47-277.htm>

The author has made some nuanced observations while critically examining UNTAC. "UNTAC's problems arose from the fact that Cambodia lacked a strong state" (p 206). "Democratization efforts of UNTAC could not check the conflict because they were not anchored in Cambodia's socio-political traditions...UNTAC was caught between a liberal mandate and a non-liberal situation on ground" (p 140). It is ironical that while UNTAC's Human Rights Component was widely praised for promoting basic human rights and laying foundations of a civil society, the same UN voted for genocidal Pol Pot regime confirming its seat at United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1979 (p 92).

The last section of the book has dealt with a general overview and critical assessment of the UN role in resolving Cambodian crisis. It has brought forth certain shortcomings during the UN engagement in Cambodia which can be avoided in the future UN missions.

Today, the world has become a turbulent place. Terrorism has acquired new

dynamics and, refugee crisis has worsened by the day. Non-traditional security threats and non state actors have added an additional dimension to 21st century conflicts. The recent United Nations report of Secretary General titled "The future of United Nations peace operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations" says it all. "Labels assigned to conflict, such as "internal", "inter-State", "regional", "ethnic" or "sectarian", have become increasingly irrelevant as transnational forces of violent extremism and organized crime build on and abet local rivalries. Environmental degradation and resource deprivation are not contained by borders. Exclusion at home is driving tension abroad..."² Therefore collective efforts from international community are required to deal with this situation. Theoretically UN is best placed to provide solutions to the problems. UN needs to come up with some innovative and out-of-the box solutions. The book underlines the fact that if the UN adapts according to changing times and if major powers of the Security Council have a will; it is not very difficult for the UN to face 21st century threats.

² "The future of United Nations peace operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations", Report of the Secretary-General in 2015, available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_682.pdf, 2015, at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-india-indonesia-sign-two-mous-on-energy-culture-to-expand-defence-cooperation-2141220>

Southeast Asia

ASEAN

27th ASEAN Summit

On November 21, 2015, the 27th Summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This year, the theme of the ASEAN Summit was 'Our People, Our Community, Our Vision'. The ASEAN leaders signed ten documents during the Summit and those are as follows;

- 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community
- Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together
- ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
- Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Ageing: Empowering Older Persons in ASEAN
- ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change 2015
- Regional Framework and Action Plan to Implement the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection
- Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education
- Regional Plan of Actions on Elimination of Violence Against Women
- Regional Plan of Actions on

Elimination of Violence Against Children

- Declaration on ASEAN Post-2015 Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Agenda.

It was decided that the ASEAN Community would be established on December 31, 2015 which would include ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). They also adopted ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, comprising the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the ASEAN Political-Security Blueprint Community 2025, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025. Followed by the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), the ASEAN Leaders reaffirmed their commitment towards expanding the programme to cover the period from 2016 to 2015 and decided that ASEAN would work together with other regional organisations like the Greater Mekong Sub-Region and various development partners of ASEAN. The 27th ASEAN Summit was coincided with various other events including the 18th ASEAN Plus Three Summit, 3rd ASEAN-US Summit- ASEAN US Strategic partnership, 10th East Asia Summit, 7th ASEAN-UN Summit, 18th ASEAN-Japan Summit, 13th ASEAN-India Summit, 18th ASEAN China Summit and so on.¹

Joint declaration scrapped at defence forum Amid S. China Sea row

Defence ministers from 18 Asia-Pacific countries cancelled a signing ceremony for a joint declaration that was supposed to be issued at the end of their two-day biannual ASEAN

¹ "Chairman's Statement of the 27th ASEAN Summit", *ASEAN.org*, at <http://www.asean.org/news/item/27th-asean-summit-kuala-lumpur-malaysia-18-22-november-2015>, Accessed on December 15, 2015.

Defence Ministers Plus (ADMM-Plus) meeting on November 4. The 18 ministers met in Subang on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur and were expected to adopt the “Kuala Lumpur Joint Declaration”. No official reason was given for the last minute cancelation.² According to the U.S. official, China opposed mention of its construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea in the joint statement, but “a number of ASEAN countries felt that (it) was inappropriate” to exclude any mention of it in the official statement.³ The ADMM-Plus groups the 10 countries of Southeast Asia and eight other countries – Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

Emergency hotline set up for ASEAN Defence Ministers

Malaysian defence minister Hishammuddin Hussein said on November 3 after the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) Retreat that a hotline had been set up for ASEAN defence ministers to promote rapid response cooperation in times of emergency. The ministers witnessed a signing ceremony for the Direct Communication Link (DCL) initiative.⁴

Malaysia calls on ASEAN to stay united over rising South China Sea tensions, resolves to do utmost to counter IS threat

Malaysian Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein on November 3 called on his counterparts from Southeast Asia to stay united as one in dealing with superpowers like US and China. As defence ministers from 10 ASEAN member countries gathered for an annual retreat ahead of meetings on November 4 with their dialogue partners, China and US, Malaysia’s defence minister emphasised the importance of ASEAN’s role in the region’s peace and security. “Our paramount concern is the security, stability and peace in the region,” said Hishammuddin. “How we engage major powers as a bloc, that’s very important. Individually we may not have much impact but I personally believe as chair of ADMM together 10 nations engaging major powers could make a difference.” Malaysia said that it remained hopeful for an amicable solution to diffuse rising geo-political tensions in the key waterway that’s been described as a lifeline of the ASEAN economic community.⁵ Meanwhile, on terrorism he said that ASEAN would do whatever it took to counter the Islamic State (IS) threat. “Our united stance as well as our strong condemnation against IS and similar organisations demonstrate the gravity and urgency of this problem.

² “ASEAN Scraps Joint Defence Statement Amid Naval Spat”, *CNBC*, November 4, 2015, at <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/11/04/no-ASEAN-joint-defense-statement-as-us-china-fight-over-south-chinasea.html>

³ Prashanth Parameswaran, “China Blocked ASEAN Defence Meeting Pact Amid South China Sea Fears: US Official”, *The Diplomat*, November 4, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/china-blocked-asia-defense-meeting-pact-amid-south-china-sea-fears-us-official/>

⁴ “Emergency hotline set up for Asean defence ministers”, *The Straits Times*, November 3, 2015, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/emergency-hotline-set-up-for-ASEAN-defence-ministers>

⁵ Melissa Goh, “Malaysia calls on ASEAN to stay united over rising South China Sea tensions”, *Channel NewsAsia*, November 3, 2015, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/malaysia-calls-on-ASEAN/2236246.html>

It sends a clear signal that we take the issue of terrorism seriously and will do whatever it takes to counter these threats together, as a resolute front.”⁶

ASEAN leaders raise concerns about South China Sea island-building as China tries to keep it off the table

Despite China’s best efforts to avoid the South China Sea issue, Southeast Asian leaders raised their concerns over the maritime dispute on November 21. Speaking at a summit between China and the Association of South East Asian Countries (ASEAN), Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said that Beijing’s ties with the 10-nation grouping had improved steadily over the past year. “China has always made relations with ASEAN a priority,” Li said. The annual summits, which involve ASEAN and powers including the United States, China and Japan, had been used as a platform to raise the issue with China. But Beijing had disregarded ASEAN’s role in resolving the territorial disputes and preferred to deal with claimants bilaterally. Much to Beijing’s chagrin, the leaders had expressed concerns in joint statements at the end of the event for many years.

Speaking at the ASEAN opening ceremony, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak urged “all parties” to exercise self-restraint and to avoid escalating

tension in the South China Sea, without naming the countries.⁷

China, ASEAN seal deal to upgrade bilateral free trade pact

China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) sealed a deal on November 22 to upgrade their free trade area (FTA), injecting fresh impetus into regional economic cooperation. A protocol that pronounced the full conclusion of China-ASEAN negotiations on upgrading their FTA was signed at a ceremony in the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in the presence of visiting Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and leaders of the 10-member ASEAN. The upgrade of the FTA, China’s first with foreign trading partners, was nailed down after only four rounds of talks that officially started in August 2014, in a sign of the common aspiration and practical need of both sides to deepen and expand cooperation in trade and economy. Covering a wide range of areas including goods, services, investment, and economic and technological cooperation, the upgrade would provide fresh momentum for economic development of both China and ASEAN.⁸

Pakistan’s new envoy to ASEAN

H.E. Mohammad Aqil Nadeem assumed duty as the Ambassador of Pakistan to ASEAN and during presentation of his credentials to Secretary General Le Luong Minh, he said that Pakistan is committed to work closely with

⁶ Razak Ahmad and Jastin Ahmad Tarmizi, “Hisham: Asean will do utmost to counter IS threat”, *The Star Online*, November 3, 2015, at <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/11/03/ASEAN-hisham-is-counter/>

⁷ Kristine Kwok, “Asean leaders raise concerns about South China Sea island-building as China tries to keep it off the table”, *South China Morning Post*, November 22, 2015, at <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/1881636/ASEAN-leaders-raise-concern-about-south-china-sea-island?page=all>

⁸ “China, ASEAN seals deal to upgrade bilateral FTA”, *English.news.cn*, November 23, 2015, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/23/c_134842731.htm

ASEAN. Ambassador Nadeem informed the secretary general about the trade flows between individual ASEAN countries and Pakistan. In 2016, the 6th ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee meeting would be organised to discuss issues of further bilateral cooperation. They also discussed issues which are of common concerns to both sides.⁹

ASEAN-SCO ties

Secretary General of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), H.E. Dmitry Mezentsev and a high level delegation from the regional organisation met Secretary General Minh on December 2 in Jakarta. Both leaders conveyed their commitment towards strengthening cooperation at the secretariat to secretariat level. Both sides discussed common issues like terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration etc. Secretary General Mezentsev invited Le Luong Minh to attend some of the future SCO meetings and forums.¹⁰

ARF Workshop on Space Security

China, Laos, Russia and US jointly hosted the 3rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Workshop on Space Security in Beijing on November 30. This was the first

international workshop on space security held in China under the aegis of ARF and China considered it important as it wants to pursue a significant role in the global governance of space security. National space policies, legal tools to control arms use, latest technologies and trust building were issues discussed in the two-day workshop. Near-about 20 countries, regional and international organisations and think-tanks participated in the workshop.¹¹

Disaster Management within ASEAN;

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen requested the ASEAN members to work together in the time of natural disasters and emergencies so that the people living along the borders can be rescued through a coordinated action. He made this call during the ASEAN ministerial meeting for disaster management at Phnom Penh. Cambodia's opposition party, Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) supported this request and mentioned that as Cambodia lacks human and capital resources, it should have collaboration in case an emergency needs to be handled efficiently.¹²

Negotiations on RCEP

ASEAN trade ministers met at the side-line of World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Nairobi and instructed their officials to take steps that would ensure fruitful negotiations in

⁹ "Pakistan to Strengthen Ties with ASEAN", ASEAN web, at http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/pakistan-to-strengthen-ties-with-asean?category_id=27, accessed on December 21, 2015.

¹⁰ "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to Strengthen Ties with ASEAN", ASEAN Web, at http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/shanghai-cooperation-organisation-to-strengthen-ties-with-asean?category_id=27, accessed on December 21, 2015.

¹¹ "Third ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Space Security Inaugurated in Beijing", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, November 30, 2015, at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1320457.shtml, accessed on December 22, 2015.

¹² Hul Reaksmey, "Hun Sen Calls for ASEAN Cooperation in times of Disaster", Voice of America, Phnom Penh, December 16, 2015, at <http://www.voacambodia.com/content/hun-sen-calls-for-asean-cooperation-in-times-of-disaster/3105429.html>, accessed on December 21, 2015.

the next round of meeting of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), to be held in Brunei in mid-February, 2016. It would help them to conclude the agreement within 2016 deadline. Malaysia's International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed chaired the meeting. He said,

"It was also agreed that all member states will support Iman Pambagyo, the trade negotiating committee chair and RCEP coordinator for Asean. If need be, our officials will meet before the upcoming round of negotiations in Brunei.."¹³

The final round of RCEP negotiation will take place in Laos in September 2016.

ASEAN-India

Govt to sign motor transport pact with Myanmar, Thailand

India was set to sign a motor transport agreement with Myanmar and Thailand for seamless movement of cargo among these countries in 2016. "The agreement, the protocol for which was being finalised, would be signed by the last week of March or the first week of April 2016," Union Road Transport and Highways Secretary Vijay Chibber said after flagging off the trial-run of a cargo vehicle under the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) sub-regional initiative for uninterrupted cargo movement. The agreement was

earlier scheduled to be signed by December 2015. "The delay is owing to elections in Myanmar which we have been told will take three months to be completed," Chibber said. Once the election process in Myanmar is over, the landmark agreement among the three countries would be signed, he said. The agreement would be signed in Myanmar, Chibber said, adding "there is growing convergence among all these countries for opening up roads to every country's benefit."

The signing of the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) agreement on the lines of the BBIN initiative, which would open seamless movement of cargo, passenger and private vehicles would give a huge boost to economic activities among these countries in the region.¹⁴

INS Sahyadri in Philippines

Indian Naval Ship Sahyadri, which was on operational deployment to South China Sea and North West Pacific region, entered Manila on November 1 for extensive interactions with the Philippine Navy. The indigenously-built Shivalik Class multi-role stealth frigate was likely to be in Manila till November 4. The visit was aimed at strengthening bilateral ties and enhancing interoperability between the navies of the two countries. During the stay in harbour, various activities aimed at enhancing cooperation between the two navies were planned. The activities included official calls on local naval and civilian dignitaries, reception on board INS Sahyadri, visits to the ship by the local populace, guided tours for Indian Naval personnel and professional interaction between the personnel

¹³ Mergawati Zulfakar, "Asean wants a RCEP trade deal by the 2016 deadline", The Star Online, December 17, 2015, at <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/12/17/asean-wants-a-rcep-trade-deal-by-the-2016-deadline/>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

¹⁴ "Govt to sign motor transport pact with Myanmar, Thailand", *Business Standard*, November 1, 2015, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/govt-to-sign-motor-transport-pact-with-myanmar-thailand-115110100428_1.html

of both navies. On departure, the ship was planned to exercise with Philippine Navy ships for improving interoperability in communication as well as search and rescue procedures.¹⁵

Echoing Modi-Obama agreement, Parrikar calls for freedom of navigation in South China Sea

Days after the US sent its warship in the South China Sea flagging its concerns about the Chinese reclamation activities in the region, India on November 4 called for an early resolution of the problem. Batting for freedom of navigation, Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar expressed hope for a “peaceful resolution of the dispute”. Addressing the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meet (ADMM) + in Malaysia, Parrikar also stressed that ASEAN was central to India’s ‘Act East Policy’. “India hopes that all parties to the disputes in the South China Sea region will abide by the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, ensure its effective implementation, and work together to ensure a peaceful resolution of disputes. We also hope that the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea would be concluded at an early date by consensus,” Parrikar said. Stating that maritime security was a common challenge, he said that the situation in the South China Sea and recent developments there had attracted concern. “This is natural since

freedom of navigation in international waters, the right of passage and overflight, unimpeded commerce and access to resources in accordance with recognised principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, are of concern to all of us”.¹⁶

PM Modi calls for enhancing counter-terror cooperation with ASEAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 21 called for enhancing cooperation with ASEAN to tackle the major global challenge of terrorism and underlined the need for settling territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea through peaceful means. He suggested evolving specific plans for cooperation with the 10-member grouping in key areas of maritime security, counter-piracy and humanitarian and disaster relief. “Terrorism has emerged as a major global challenge that affects us all here. We have excellent bilateral cooperation with ASEAN members. And, we should see how we can enhance our cooperation at the regional and international level, including through support for adoption of Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism”, Modi said in his opening remarks at the ASEAN-India Summit in Kuala Lumpur. Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed a one billion USD line of credit to promote projects that was to support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN. “We also propose to commit a Line of Credit of 1 billion US dollars to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN,” he said.¹⁷ Terming

¹⁵ “INS Sahyadri in Philippines”, *The Hindu*, November 2, 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/ins-sahyadri-in-philippines/article7832239.ece>

¹⁶ “India calls for early conclusion of S China Sea code of conduct”, *The Indian Express*, November 5, 2015, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-calls-for-early-conclusion-of-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct/>

¹⁷ Jaishree Balasubramanian, “PM proposes USD 1bn line of credit for connectivity with ASEAN”, *indiatoday.in*, November 21, 2015, at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/pm-proposes-usd-1bn-line-of-credit-for-connectivity-with-ASEAN/1/528458.html>

connectivity as the pathway to shared prosperity, he said that the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project was making good progress and should be completed by 2018.

“As our rapidly transforming region navigates its way through uncertain times to a peaceful and prosperous future, we look forward to ASEAN leading the way in defining the regional architecture,” said Modi. Referring to the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, he said, “India shares with ASEAN a commitment to freedom of navigation, over flight and unimpeded commerce, in accordance with accepted principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Territorial disputes must be settled through peaceful means.” Modi said India hoped that all parties to the disputes in the South China Sea would abide by the guidelines on the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and redouble efforts for early adoption of a Code of Conduct on the basis of consensus.¹⁸

RCEP talks - India submits first round of offers on goods

India submitted its first round of detailed offers to dismantle tariffs on goods as part of the ambitious Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) being negotiated between 16 countries. The move came ahead of the India-ASEAN

Summit, where discussions on fast-tracking the negotiations were likely to take place. Once created, the RCEP — which includes India, China, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the 10 ASEAN countries — would be one of the largest free trade bloc (including goods, services and investment) in the world with 45 per cent of the world population and over \$21 trillion of gross domestic product. New Delhi and Indonesia were the only two that had not submitted their offers at the Busan meet in October. Consequently, they were also not allowed to look at the offers made by others. “We can now access the offers made by other countries and make requests for improvements wherever we find them lagging,” the official said. The broad contours of the first round of offers were concurred upon in September, when India and China agreed to eliminate tariffs on 42.5 per cent of items traded between the two. India proposed the same for Australia and New Zealand, who were ready to reduce tariffs on 62.5 per cent and 80 per cent of items from India, respectively. New Delhi agreed to eliminate tariffs on 80 per cent items for the ASEAN compared to 74 per cent agreed to under the India-ASEAN free trade agreement. ASEAN countries were ready to reciprocate. The next round of negotiations was likely in February, when the existing offers and the scope to improve them would be discussed.¹⁹

Secretary General visited India

Secretary General of ASEAN, Mr. Le Luong Minh visited India between December 10 and December 13 on the invitation of EAM, Mrs.

¹⁸ “PM Modi calls for enhancing counter-terror cooperation with ASEAN”, *The Indian Express*, November 21, 2015, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/pm-modi-calls-for-enhancing-counter-terror-cooperation-with-ASEAN/>

¹⁹ Amiti Sen, “RCEP talks: India submits first round of offers on goods”, *The Hindu*, November 19, 2015, at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/rcep-talks-india-submits-first-round-of-offers-on-goods/article7896740.ece>

Sushma Swaraj. The foreign minister of India spoke about maritime cooperation, connectivity, cyber security and innovation as potential areas of cooperation between both sides. H.E. Le Luong Minh mentioned that India and ASEAN need to gear up their relationship in an order that India can contribute towards ASEAN vision of 2025 by implementing the ASEAN-India Plan of Action 2016-2020. The secretary general also met representatives from several business chambers in Delhi and delivered a speech at the ASEAN-India Center (AIC) on ASEAN-India partnership.²⁰

ISRO launched Singaporean Satellites

India on December 16 successfully put six Singapore satellites into orbit after a perfect launch of its polar rocket in its landmark 50th space mission that also gave a boost to its space business. The 400 kg satellite, named as TeLEOS I, was launched on Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). The mission is named as PSLV -C29. TeLEOS was joined by five other smaller satellites from Singapore. These make ISRO's count of foreign satellites to 57.²¹

The Singaporean satellites that would help the city-state gather information on disaster monitoring and urban planning were launched by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s workhorse Polar

Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C29) coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Singapore and India in 2015. ISRO also scored a splendid hat-trick of exclusive commercial launches this year after the July and September missions when it launched 11 satellites, including those of United States and United Kingdom. In a textbook launch, PSLV C-29 blasted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), about 110 km from Chennai, at 6 pm and released the six satellites one by one into a 550 km circular orbit, completing the exercise about 21 minutes later. After the rocket soared into clear evening sky at the end of the 59-hour countdown, the four stages of PSLV performed as programmed, releasing the satellites in orbit much to the jubilation of ISRO scientists at the mission control centre. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated ISRO scientists for the successful launch, saying it was a "momentous feat". "Our scientists at @isro accomplish another momentous feat. Congrats to them on PSLV-C29 successfully launching 6 Singapore satellites," he tweeted. This was the 32nd flight for the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) which once again proved its reliability as the workhorse rocket for ISRO, recording its 31st consecutive success.²²

India, Indonesia sign two MoUs on energy, culture; to expand defence cooperation

India and Indonesia on November 2 signed agreements in the fields of renewable energy and

²⁰ "Secretary General of ASEAN Visits India", ASEAN web, at http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/secretary-general-of-asean-visits-india?category_id=27, accessed on December 21, 2015.

²¹ "ISRO launches six Singaporean satellites", The Indian Express, December 17, 2015, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/isro-launches-six-singaporean-satellites/>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

²² "India launches six Singapore satellites onboard PSLV-C29", *The Hindu*, December 16, 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-launches-six-singapore-satellites-onboard-pslvc29/article7996872.ece>

culture and discussed possibilities of expanding cooperation in counter-terrorism and defence. Vice President Hamid Ansari, who met his Indonesian counterpart Jusuf Kalla, said that ways to diversify and increase bilateral trade as well to encourage investments in each other's country through private sectors were also discussed. "We have also discussed possibilities of expanding our cooperation in defence and counter-terrorism through intensification of our existing mechanisms," Ansari said. The Vice President, who was in Jakarta on the invitation of Kalla, said that the two countries shared similar positions on several global and regional issues including climate change, maritime security and freedom of seas in the South China Sea.²³ Ansari also emphasized, that as a maritime neighbour and a strategic partner, with a number of cultural similarities, including its own multicultural and multi-linguistic character, India had traditionally enjoyed close relations with Indonesia.

On the economic side, he said that there existed about \$20 billion trade between the two nations and India's investments in Indonesia had been increasing.²⁴ He also thanked Indonesia for supporting India in organising 'Sahabat India - The Festival of India in Indonesia' earlier this year.

India, Singapore ink 10 pacts to boost strategic ties

India and Singapore on November 24 elevated their ties to the 'strategic partnership' level and signed bilateral agreements for enhanced defence cooperation and in areas like cyber security; shipping and civil aviation after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong. Modi also met Singapore President Tony Tan Keng and was accorded a ceremonial welcome at Istana, the official residence and office of the President. The ten pacts signed by the two sides included a joint declaration by the two Prime Ministers on a strategic partnership. "India and Singapore elevate their bilateral relations to a strategic partnership to deepen and broaden engagement in existing areas of cooperation and catalyse new ones ranging from political, defence and security cooperation to economic, cultural and people-to-people contact. The strategic partnership is also a framework to contribute to greater regional stability and growth," the joint declaration said.

The other pacts included an agreement between the two countries on enhanced defence cooperation, which provided for defence ministers' dialogue, joint exercises between armed forces, cooperation between defence industries to identify areas of co-production and co-development.²⁵ The two sides also signed an agreement on the extension of loan of artefacts to the Asian Civilisations Museum of Singapore

²³ "India, Indonesia sign two MoUs on energy, culture; to expand defence cooperation", *dna*, November 2, 2015, at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-india-indonesia-sign-two-mous-on-energy-culture-to-expand-defence-cooperation-2141220>

²⁴ "VP Ansari in Jakarta as India seeks deportation of Chhota Rajan", *The Jakarta Post*, November 2, 2015, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/11/02/vp-ansari-jakarta-india-seeks-deportation-chhota-rajan.html>

²⁵ "India, Singapore Lift Ties To Strategic Partnership, Ink 10 Pacts", *Businessworld*, November 24, 2015, at <http://www.businessworld.in/article/India-Singapore-Lift-Ties-To-Strategic-Partnership-Ink-10-Pacts/24-11-2015-88623/>

and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), the Indian IT department and Singapore Computer Emergency Response Team (SingCERT), Singapore's Cyber Security Agency on security cooperation.²⁶

Northeast India- Act East Policy

India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway from March 2016:

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway would be operationalized from March 2016, announced the Union Minister for Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari. To mark the event a car rally would be organised on the same day. This Trilateral Highway, envisioned long way, has been delayed for several factors and now is expected to be completed by early next year. This would enhance connectivity between Northeast India vis-à-vis India and Southeast Asia. It would also help in enhancing trade and business ties between the local people and benefit them in terms of economic opportunities.²⁷

India to upgrade bridges on trilateral highway in Myanmar

Road transportation between India and Myanmar got a boost on December 30

when the cabinet approved the construction of 69 bridges including approach roads on the Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa (TKK) road section of the trilateral highway in Myanmar. The strategic link between India and Myanmar, built with assistance of India, will facilitate trans-border movement between India and Myanmar. A cabinet press release said that the construction would result in all-weather usability to the TTK road section, which was also part of the route for the proposed Imphal-Mandalay bus service. "It will improve connectivity between India and Myanmar and facilitate movement of goods and traffic," the release said. India and Myanmar had agreed to take up construction of bridges in the Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa (TKK) road section of the trilateral highway at request of Myanmar in 2012. The Myanmar government started work on constructing two bridges, on its own, as those bridges needed urgent attention, and the remaining 69 bridges will be undertaken with the Indian government's assistance. The project will be closely monitored by the Indian embassy in Yangon and the Ministry of External Affairs. The project is scheduled to be completed by mid-2019.²⁸

Ban on NSCN-K:

As the Government of India has decided to ban the militant outfit, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K), experts from the region came up with various opinions about it. The NSCN-K operates from Myanmar and New Delhi has asked for Myanmar military's help in curbing the cross-border militancy.

²⁶ "Modi meets Singapore PM, Prez; pacts inked on defence ties", *Business Standard*, November 24, 2015, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/modi-meets-singapore-pm-prez-pacts-inked-on-defence-ties-115112400192_1.html

²⁷ "India-Myanmar Road Pact in March to Boost Economy", *Northeast Today*, December 3, 2015 at <http://www.northeasttoday.in/india-myanmar-road-pact-in-march-to-boost-economy/> accessed on December 15, 2015

²⁸ "India to upgrade bridges on trilateral highway in Myanmar", *Mizzima*, December 31, 2015, at <http://mizzima.com/business-domestic/india-upgrade-bridges-trilateral-highway-myanmar>

However, according to the experts from the region, banning the outfit may not serve everybody's interests as the problem is closely associated with the question of identity, autonomy and economic opportunities. The NSCN-IM started its journey in late 1980s and till now, it has caused deaths of many civilians and soldiers. For instance, in June 2015, it attacked a military convoy in Chandel district in Manipur and 18 soldiers were brought to death by them.²⁹

Cultural Club to boost Act East Policy

Assam's Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has announced that the Sukapha Samannay Kshetra will be transformed into an effervescent cultural club which will enhance India's Act East Policy by nurturing ties with Southeast Asia. It will demonstrate cultural similarities between Northeast India and Southeast Asia as well as the cultural heritage enjoyed by Northeastern states to rest of India, mentioned in an official statement released by the Chief Minister's office. Sukapha was a king who was admired for his promotion of diversified culture in the region.³⁰

Brunei

Brunei, US launch military exercise

On November 2, Brunei and United States

began an annual military exercise with an opening ceremony at Muara Naval Base in the Southeast Asian state. The 21st iteration of the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Brunei exercise was designed to address shared maritime security priorities, develop relationships, and enhance cooperation between the two navies. It was part of a series of bilateral naval exercises conducted by the U.S. Navy with partners involving nine countries in South and Southeast Asia – Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. Brunei was one of the original CARAT partners and had been part of the exercise series since it was started back in 1995. According to a statement by the U.S. Navy, CARAT Brunei 2015 would continue through November 11 and would involve over 500 U.S. military members alongside counterparts from the Royal Brunei Armed Forces along with key U.S. assets. It would feature ten days of shore-based and at-sea training events as well as professional symposia to share best practices in various areas including maritime security and military medicine. There would also be hands-on training at sea in combined operations, naval gunnery, search and rescue, and maritime interdiction.³¹

Brunei, Singapore navies conclude bilateral flagship naval exercise

The Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and Royal Brunei Navy (RBN) concluded their bilateral flagship naval exercise, Exercise

²⁹ "Experts Give Mixed Response on NSCN-K Ban", *Northeast Today*, November 23, 2015, at <http://www.northeasttoday.in/experts-give-mixed-response-on-nscn-k-ban/>, accessed on December 15, 2015.

³⁰ "Sukapha Kshetra to be hub of culture, research", *The Assam Tribune*, December 3, 2015, at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec0415/at053>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

³¹ Prashanth Parameswaran, "US, Brunei Launch Military Exercise", *The Diplomat*, November 4, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/us-brunei-launch-military-exercise/>

Pelican, on November 27. Hosted by the RSN, the exercise involved command teams from the RSN's Formidable-class frigate RSS Stalwart and Victory-class missile corvette RSS Valiant, as well as the RBN's Darussalam-class patrol vessels KDB Darussalam and KDB Darulehsan. A series of tactical discussions and simulation exercises in naval warfare were also conducted. Personnel from both navies also engaged in professional sharing to deepen operational knowledge in areas such as naval aviation and naval patrols. Noting the important role Exercise Pelican plays in strengthening bilateral relations with the RBN, RSN Fleet Commander Rear-Admiral (RADM) Lew Chuen Hong said: "Over the years, we have built great friendships and deepened interoperability, and the exercise remains a key platform to enhance relations between the RSN and RBN. I am confident that we will continue this close friendship and deepen our cooperation across the maritime domain."³²

Cambodia

Sam Rainsy delayed his return to Cambodia to avoid arrest

Opposition leader Sam Rainsy, who is facing an arrest warrant against him in Cambodia, has decided to cancel his return

to the country which was a shock to his followers. Sam Rainsy was accused of a defamation case by a CPP leader and Rainsy's close associates mentioned that he has postponed his arrival to Cambodia to avoid escalation of violence by the government. The party in government, CPP, may use violence on Rainsy's return to the country and may delay the upcoming elections in 2016 and 2017 citing escalation of tensions in the country. However, many Rainsy's followers were shocked as the leader did not return to Phnom Penh on his scheduled date and said that Rainsy cannot be compared with Daw Aung saan Suu Kyi of Myanmar who was never afraid of facing arrest in the wake of her pro-democracy movements in the country.³³

Russian PM visited Cambodia

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev visited Cambodia for the purpose of some official meetings as well as sightseeing and his tour to the country started on November 23. The government of Cambodia deployed more than ten thousand police personnel to protect the Russian leader. Medvedev visited Angkor Wat temples on the very first day of his visit to Cambodia. Later on, PM Medvedev met his Cambodian counter-part Hun Sen and oversaw the signing of several agreements between two countries. Hun Sen's CPP and Medvedev's United Russia signed a pact to foster closer ties between two parties.³⁴

³² "Singapore, Brunei navies conclude bilateral flagship naval exercise", *Channel NewsAsia*, November 27, 2015, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-brunei-navies/2299504.html>

³³ "Rainsy Cancels Return to Phnom Penh", *The Cambodia Daily*, November 17, 2015, at <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/rainsy-cancels-return-to-phnom-penh-100503/>, accessed on December 15, 2015.

³⁴ "Security Beefed Up for Russia's Medvedev During 4-Day Visit", *Mech Dara, The Cambodia Daily*, November 23, 2015, at <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/security-beefed-up-for-russias-medvedev-during-4-day-visit-101155/>, accessed on December 15, 2015.

Hun Sen visited Thailand

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen visited Thailand after a period of 12 years and hence, the visit may bring in a thaw in their edgy relationship. Both sides signed several agreements during this visit and one of them was on labour mobility and employment which demonstrates the significant role played by the Cambodian workers in Thai economy. Border disputes on Preah Vihear temple along Thai-Cambodia border often upset both authorities and therefore, bilateral ties at the level of economy seem important to strengthen their relationship.³⁵

East Timor

Philippines backs Timor Leste bid for ASEAN membership

Foreign Affairs Secretary of the Philippines on December 17 reaffirmed the Philippines' support for Timor Leste's application to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the regional bloc's 11th member state. Del Rosario conveyed the country's support during a bilateral meeting in Manila with his counterpart, Timor Leste Foreign Minister Hernani Coelho Da Silva. Timor Leste, also known as East Timor, gained its independence from Indonesia in May 20, 2002. Before Indonesia took over, East Timor was a colony of Portugal for

centuries until November 1975. "Timor Leste belongs to Southeast Asia and should be granted its rightful place within the ASEAN community," Mr Del Rosario told Mr Coelho. Timor Leste had long sought for ASEAN membership, but the bloc's members, who decide by consensus, had failed over the years to reach an agreement on whether or not it could accommodate the request. Mr Del Rosario and Mr Coelho also discussed enhancing cooperation in the areas of defense, economic relations, education, health, and technical/capacity building. They also tackled the strong people-to-people linkages between Manila and Dili and vowed to continue their efforts to deepen their relations through an existing policy consultations mechanism. The first meeting was held in Manila in 2014. "The policy consultations will continue to serve as a vehicle to facilitate matters of mutual interest in the years to come," Mr Del Rosario said. Mr Del Rosario encouraged Mr Coelho to continue sending Timor-Leste diplomats to the Philippines to participate in training courses offered by the country's Foreign Service Institute. The Secretary hoped that the training program would significantly contribute to the professional development of the East Timor diplomats and forge greater bond between their two governments.³⁶

Indonesia

Australia, Indonesia launch naval exercise

Australia and Indonesia began four days of naval exercises on November 9. Exercise New Horizon

³⁵ Ron Corben, "Thailand Cambodia Strengthen Ties", Voice of America, December 20, 2015, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/thailand-cambodia-strengthening-ties/3110777.html>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

³⁶ "PHL backs Timor Leste bid for ASEAN membership", *GMA News Online*, December 17, 2015, at <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/548276/news/nation/phl-backs-timor-leste-bid-for-asean-membership>

was regarded as the most important naval exercise between the two countries. Both navies would take part in various activities both at sea and ashore, including exercises in the areas of anti-air warfare, anti-submarine warfare, tactical maneuvering, replenishments at sea and communications. It would also include a helicopter exercise to highlight bilateral cooperation between the Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN).

The focus of the activities would be on military operations other than war (MOOTW), consisting of a harbour phase, sea phase and post-exercise phase. The sea phase would be held in the waters around the Java Sea and the harbour phase would take place in the Navy's Eastern Fleet Command. Helicopters, marine patrol aircraft and ships would be involved.³⁷

Japan, Indonesia agree on defence technology transfer talks

Japan and Indonesia agreed on December 17 to begin talks on the transfer of defence technology to Jakarta and to help reduce tensions in the South China Sea. The agreement, made during discussions between the defence and foreign ministers of the two countries, came as they expanded traditionally strong commercial and business ties to the field of defence and security. "We agreed to start negotiation on the transfer of defence technology, which is a great achievement in ongoing

efforts to boost defense cooperation", said Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani. "I stressed the importance of cooperation in maritime security," Nakatani added, saying that Japan's military, known as the Self-Defense Forces, will next year join a multilateral maritime drill led by Indonesia. The agreement comes as tensions mount over competing maritime claims in the South China Sea involving China and some of Indonesia's partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations including the Philippines and Vietnam. Indonesian officials, meanwhile, hailed the accord with Japan and called on all claimants in the South China Sea to work to lower regional temperatures.

"We agreed to enhance stability in the South China Sea," Indonesian foreign minister Retno Marsudi said. Indonesian defense chief Ryamizard Ryacudu emphasised the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation both at sea and in the air and called for joint exercises with countries, including China, in the South China Sea. The Thursday gathering was Japan's first so-called 2+2 meeting involving foreign and defence chiefs from an ASEAN country.³⁸

Speaker of the Parliament accused in corruption

Setya Novanto, Indonesian Parliament's Speaker and a Golkar leader, has been accused of having involvement in an unfair method of giving government contracts to the mining-giant Freeport- McMoRan's Indonesian unit. Novanto's conversation with Freeport

³⁷ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Australia, Indonesia Launch Naval Exercise", *The Diplomat*, November 10, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/australia-indonesia-launch-naval-exercise/>

³⁸ "Japan, Indonesia agree on defense technology transfer talks", *Japan Today*, December 18, 2015, at <http://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/japan-indonesia-agree-on-defense-technology-transfer-talks>

Indonesia's chief executive officer Maroef Sjamsoeddin was recorded and on hearing that, Jusuf Kalla, the Vice-President of Indonesia, called him to step down from his position as the Speaker of the Parliament. Both Kalla and Novanto belong to the Golkar party. Kalla mentioned that maintaining ethics is important in creating trust and transparency in the government's activities. Novanto denied all charges and at present the ethics committee of the Parliament is investigating the manner.³⁹

Laos

Vietnam, Laos reinforce cooperation in border security

High-ranking officers from the border guard forces of Vietnam and Laos held their 12th annual talks in Vientiane, Laos, on November 10 to seek promoted coordination to protect shared border areas. The two sides agreed that the special solidarity, friendship and comprehensive cooperation between the two parties, states, armies and people had been growing. The border guard forces had been supporting each other in implementing assigned political tasks and firmly protecting sovereignty and border

security in the respective countries, contributing to strengthening Vietnam-Laos solidarity and friendship. The officers spoke highly of the implementation of the contents agreed during their 11th annual talks on October 30, 2014 in Vietnam's central Da Nang city, which focused on measures to ensure security, political stability and social order, as well as on the fight against crimes, especially drug crime, smuggling, trade fraud in border areas, and in the issue of preventing illegal immigration.⁴⁰

China, Laos sign railway deal

China and Laos signed an intergovernmental railway cooperation agreement in Beijing on November 13, planning to introduce a modern rail line in Laos in 2020. Xu Shaoshi, head of National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, signed the document with Somsavat Lengsavad, deputy prime minister of Laos, at a ceremony at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse. The two countries agreed to use Chinese technology and equipment to build a 418-km line that would connect Kunming, capital of southwestern China's Yunnan province, with the Lao capital city of Vientiane, according to the agreement.

Once it is operational, this line will become Laos' longest and fastest railway. Currently, the Southeast Asian nation has only one railway, which was opened in 2009 and links Vientiane with Thailand's Nong Khai.⁴¹

³⁹ Chris Brummit and Reika Rahadiana, "Secret Recording Threatens Future of Jokowi Political Opponent", Bloomberg, December 7, 2015, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-06/indonesian-mining-graft-scandal-puts-house-speaker-under-a-cloud>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

⁴⁰ "Vietnam, Laos reinforce cooperation in border security", *vietnamnet*, November 11, 2015, at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/146037/vietnam-laos-reinforce-cooperation-in-border-security.html>

⁴¹ "China, Laos sign railway deal", *China Daily*, November 14, 2015, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2015-11/14/content_22456633.htm

Chinese, Laos leaders mark successful launch of communication satellite

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Lao counterpart, Choummaly Sayasone, sent each other congratulatory messages on November 21 to mark the successful launch of a Lao communication satellite with a Chinese carrier rocket. The satellite, Lao Sat-1, was launched at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in southwest China's Sichuan Province. Hailing the Lao Sat-1 project as "a significant manifestation of China-Laos comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership under new circumstances", Xi said that it ushered in a new paradigm of cooperation between developing countries in the field of astronautics, and would promote economic development, improve the people's livelihood and facilitate social progress in Laos. Xi said that the Chinese side was willing to work with the Lao side to enhance bilateral exchange and cooperation in all fields, promote in an in-depth way the China-Laos comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership based on the high-degree mutual trust, mutual assistance and mutual benefit, and build an unbreakable community of common destiny between the two countries, in the interest of the two countries and the two peoples, and in making positive contributions to regional peace, stability and prosperity. In his congratulatory message, Choummaly said that LaoSat-1 would provide Lao and foreign customers with satellite communication information

and technology services, and would definitely make important contribution to economic and social development in Laos. In 2010, Laos signed an agreement with China Great Wall Industry Corporation on the launch of LaoSat 1. The satellite was launched on a Chinese CZ-3B booster.⁴²

Malaysia

Malaysia detains 8 for alleged links with terror groups

Eight militants, including two civil servants, had been detained in Malaysia for their alleged links to terror groups like the Islamic State. Malaysian Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar said that the suspects aged between 22 and 36, all Malaysian nationals, were detained in simultaneous swoops in the three states by the Special Branch Counter Terrorism Division late in October. "Six of the suspects are believed to be members of Tandzim Al-Qaeda while the other two have links to the Islamic State (IS)," Khalid said. He said that the two of the suspects, both aged 28, were civil servants. "We believe these two are members of IS, belonging to the same cell as the two civil servants detained in August. This particular cell is responsible for spreading IS ideology among their colleagues at this government department," he said. The other six men were suspected members of Tandzim Al-Qaeda, also known as Al-Qaeda in the Malay Archipelago. Khalid said that the two of the suspects, aged 24 and 33, were previously detained in Lebanon on October 18, 2012, for trying to smuggle themselves into Syria to join the terror group.⁴³

⁴² "Chinese, Laos leaders mark successful launch of communication satellite", Xinhuanet, November 21, 2015, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/21/c_134839635.htm

⁴³ "Malaysia Detains 8 for Alleged Links With Terror Groups", *NDTV*, November 2, 2015, at <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/malaysia-detains-8-for-alleged-links-with-terror-groups-1239052>

Xi pledges “priority” to ties with Malaysia in China’s neighbourhood diplomacy

Chinese President Xi Jinping met Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak in Manila on November 17 and pledged that China would continue to consider bilateral ties with Malaysia as one of its priorities in neighbourhood diplomacy. “China and Malaysia are good neighbours and friends that trust and respect each other,” Xi said during the meeting on the sidelines of the 23rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders’ Meeting. Xi said that China stood ready to work with Malaysia to enrich the content of their partnership and boost practical cooperation to benefit the two peoples. “The two sides can work harder to dock their development strategies,” Xi said, suggesting that the two sides take the building of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road as a new integrating point to enhance cooperation on trade, inter-connectivity and infrastructure. Echoing Xi on the positive development of bilateral relations, PM Najib said that the Malaysia-China ties were at the best period of development in history. He highlighted the high degree of mutual trust and friendly sentiment between the two countries. Najib said that China’s work to deepen reform in an all-round way generated more opportunities for the two countries to boost cooperation, and Malaysia would like to deepen cooperation on finance, infrastructure and

inter-connectivity with China, adding that Malaysia supported the Belt and Road initiative.⁴⁴

Li Keqiang met Malaysian PM

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met Malaysian PM Najib Razak after the 27th ASEAN Summit. Both leaders met in Putrajaya, the official capital of Malaysia. The Chinese premier mentioned that China will buy more Malaysian government bonds and a 50 billion yuan quota will be given to Malaysia so that it can invest the money in China’s stock market. China and Malaysia signed eight memorandums of understanding on various areas including education, culture, defence and financial cooperation. \$10 billion infrastructure loan will be provided to Southeast Asia by China in an effort to strengthen its influence on the region. Besides, 20 million Australian dollars will be given to Malaysia by China which will be used in the search and rescue operation of MH 370.⁴⁵

Palm Oil Council

Indonesia and Malaysia have signed an agreement to form a palm oil council with countries that are rich in palm oil production and are involved in palm oil trade. Rizal Ramli, Indonesia’s resources minister, mentioned that it would be beneficial for countries involved in palm oil trading as falling prices and unsustainable farming practices are harming the production. Malaysia and Indonesia produce 85% of world’s total palm oil. Other palm oil producing countries such as Brazil, Columbia, Thailand, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Papua New

⁴⁴ “Xi pledges “priority” to ties with Malaysia in China’s neighborhood diplomacy”, *Xinhuanet*, November 17, 2015, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/17/c_134826574.htm

⁴⁵ “China, Malaysia boost business ties on Li visit to KL”, *Channel News Asia*, November 23, 2015, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/china-malaysia-boost/2286268.html>, accessed on December 15, 2015.

Guinea, Philippines, Uganda will be brought under the council very soon. The OPEC like council would work to evolve a sustainable farming practice and would also work on managing the price of the palm oil.⁴⁶

Security Council Bill harmful for Malaysia's democracy:

Malaysia's prime minister's Department Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim has proposed to introduce a national security bill which will enable the National Security Council to command power over the military and impose strict policing on areas labelled as 'security area' for six months. Malaysia's former Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said that this would toughen dictatorship in the country. The NSC and the armed forces will enjoy right to arrest or detain anybody in the 'security area' on the basis of suspicion.⁴⁷

EU Resolution against Malaysia's Human Rights situation

The European Union has passed a resolution against the human rights situation in Malaysia, condemning the country for its proposed National Security Bill. It also urged that Malaysia should release all political prisoners, withdraw the anti-sodomy law and protect the rights of the LGBT people. Malaysia's foreign

ministry mentioned in a statement that Malaysia would engage with the EU in the next possible opportunity. The statement added that Malaysia respects human rights and it emphasise on duties and responsibilities that come with freedom.⁴⁸

Myanmar

Myanmar's Suu Kyi says will be above president in new government

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi on November 5 said that she would be "above the president" if her party wins a historic election on November 8, defying a constitutional ban on becoming president herself. Suu Kyi's remarks could complicate her already fraught relations with Myanmar's military, which drafted the 2008 constitution to preserve its power and effectively exclude her from leading the country. Her National League for Democracy (NLD) was the frontrunner in the first general election since a semi-civilian government took power in 2011 after nearly 50 years of military dictatorship. "If we win, and the NLD forms a government, I will be above the president. It's a very simple message," a relaxed and smiling Suu Kyi said. She added that the constitution said nothing about somebody being above the president. The constitution however states that the president "takes precedence over all other persons" in Myanmar. Suu Kyi said the NLD had already chosen someone who was prepared to

⁴⁶ "Indonesia, Malaysia form OPEC-like palm oil council", The Times of India, November 21, 2015, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/international-business/Indonesia-Malaysia-form-OPEC-like-palm-oil-council/articleshow/49873481.cms>, accessed on December 15, 2015.

⁴⁷ "Dr M: Security Council Bill would steer Malaysia towards dictatorship", Ida Lim, Malay Mail Online, December 2, 2015, at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dr-m-security-council-bill-would-steer-malaysia-towards-dictatorship>, accessed on December 15, 2015.

⁴⁸ Sumisha Naidu, "EU resolution on Malaysia's human rights issues 'unfortunate, hasty'", Channel News Asia, December 20, 2015, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/eu-resolution-on-malaysia/2363728.html>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

act as president, but would not say who it was.⁴⁹

Suu Kyi's party wins historic majority in Myanmar polls

Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party on November 13 secured a historic majority in Myanmar's parliament, making it possible for them to form the Southeast Asian country's first truly civilian government in more than half-a-century. The Election Commission said that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won 21 additional seats pushing it over the threshold of 329 seats needed for a majority in the 664—member two—house Parliament. The party with a combined parliamentary majority could be able to select the next president, who could then name a Cabinet and form a new government.

Suu Kyi's victory had been widely expected, but few anticipated a landslide of such dramatic proportions. The results had shown a resounding rejection of military rule in Myanmar, which had been under army control for half a century. In comparison, the ruling pro—military Union Solidarity and Development Party had won 40 seats, according to the results till November 13 afternoon. While an NLD majority assured it of being able to elect the president, Suu Kyi remained barred from the highest office by a constitutional

provision inserted by the military before it transferred power to Thein Sein's quasi—civilian government in 2011. Suu Kyi had declared, however, that she would become the country's de facto leader, acting "above the president" if her party formed the next government, and that the new president would be a figurehead.⁵⁰

Myanmar opposition leader meets President

Daw Aung Saan Suu Kyi met President Thein Sein after November polls in the country in which her party, National League for Democracy (NLD) won 80% seats. President Thein Sein pledged to transfer power to the winning team in a peaceful manner. President's spokesman, U Ye Htut said that since 1948, there has not been any transfer of power to the winning party in the country; hence, President Thein Sein wants to create a new tradition. After the landslide victory in the election, Suu Kyi wanted to meet President Thein Sein, Commander-in-Chief, Min Aung Hlaing and Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann to discuss issues like national reconciliation and implementation of the poll results.⁵¹

Meeting on Dawei Deep Sea Project and SEZ

Representatives from Thailand, Japan and Myanmar met with each other in Bangkok to further discuss about the Special Economic Zone (SEZ), to be developed in Dawei, Myanmar. Each of these three partners will contribute 6 million baht for development of the port and the SEZ in Myanmar. Myanmar and Thailand jointly

⁴⁹ Andrew R.C. Marshall and Timothy McLaughlin, "Myanmar's Suu Kyi says will be above president in new government", *Reuters*, November 5, 2015, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/05/us-myanmar-election-idUSKCNOSU0AR20151105#O51ZrYht8JyAmeCU.97>

⁵⁰ "Suu Kyi's party wins historic majority in Myanmar polls", *The Hindu*, November 13, 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/suu-kyis-party-wins-historic-majority-in-myanmar-polls/article7872421.ece>

⁵¹ "President Pledges Peaceful Handover of power to Opposition", *Frontier Myanmar*, December 2, 2015, at <http://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/president-pledges-peaceful-handover-power-opposition>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

started the project with MoUs signed in 2008 and 2012 and Japan was involved since early this year.⁵²

Philippines

China, Philippines won't tackle sea dispute at APEC

The foreign ministers of the Philippines and China agreed in talks on November 10 in Manila not to actively take up the thorny West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) issue at a regional summit to be held in the Philippine capital on November 18-19. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario agreed that since the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit was an economic forum, it wouldn't be a proper venue to discuss political, security issues. But hoping to move the two countries' relations forward, Mr Wang and Mr del Rosario agreed to resume "foreign ministry consultations" on issues regarding cultural exchanges, education, consular and tourism, among others.⁵³

Philippines, Australia sign declaration on 'comprehensive partnership'

Philippines President Benigno Aquino III on November 18 signed a comprehensive partnership with Australia in a bid to strengthen the relationship of the two

countries. "The Declaration acknowledges the increasing breadth and depth of our relations, which sets the tone, pace, and direction of our relationship in the years ahead," he said. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull was in Manila to attend Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. President Aquino said that he and PM Turnbull discussed how the two countries could improve bilateral relations and engagement on regional and international issues. "We reaffirmed the importance of engagement and cooperation in the political, defence and security, law enforcement, and counter-terrorism fields, among others," he said. "We also exchanged views on regional security challenges, including maritime security, and, with this, committed to continue our bilateral consultations on how to address them". Australia was among the countries that had been helping the Philippines modernize its military. It recently donated two landing craft heavy vessels to the Philippine Navy. Aquino also thanked Australia for the growing bilateral trade between the two countries, as well as the latter's support for public-private partnership (PPP) programs. Turnbull said that the Philippines and Australia were "very, very good friends" and that their relationship was "deepened further" through the signed agreements. He also lauded the government for pushing for the rule in the region. At the end of his speech, Turnbull said that it was important for both businesses and governments to be "agile".⁵⁴

⁵² "Japan's participation in Thai-Myanmar Dawei economic zone to boost confidence in project", The Japan Times, December 15, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/15/business/japans-participation-thai-myanmar-dawei-economic-zone-boost-confidence-project/#.VnKirU-YGVp>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

⁵³ "China, Philippines won't tackle sea dispute at APEC", *abs-cbn news*, November 10, 2015, at <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/focus/11/10/15/china-philippines-wont-tackle-sea-dispute-at-apec>

⁵⁴ Kristine Sabillo, "PH, Australia sign declaration on 'comprehensive partnership'", *Inquirer.net*, November 18, 2015, at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/131638/ph-australia-sign-declaration-on-comprehensive-partnership>

Japan, Philippines strike broad accord on defence equipment transfer

Japan and the Philippines on November 19 broadly agreed on a pact for the transfer of defence equipment and technology, as they stepped up their cooperation over China's muscle-flexing in regional waters. The deal was struck between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Philippine President Benigno Aquino after they finished attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum summit in Manila. "We have taken a significant step forward in enhancing our defence and security relations by agreeing in principle (on the accord)", Aquino said. "We are hopeful that we can conclude and sign this agreement sooner rather than later". It was Japan's first such agreement with another Asian country, and was a sign that Tokyo recognized the importance of beefing up the maritime capacity of the Philippines, the most vocal opponent of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. If the pact was signed, it would allow Japan to provide Self-Defence Forces equipment to the Philippines. Abe said that there had been a request from Aquino for the provision of large patrol vessels to the Philippine Coast Guard and that Japan would consider the specifics of the matter. The Philippines could be the fifth country for Japan to have such an accord on the transfer of defence equipment and technology with, following the United States, Britain, Australia and

France.⁵⁵

Philippines make last minute decision to join China led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

After months of holding out, the Philippines on December 30 said that it would join the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank before a year-end deadline for founding members. The Philippines said its indicative paid-in capital would be \$196 million, payable over five years. The Philippines is among several countries involved in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. "The Philippines stands to gain from signing on as a founding member," Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima said in the statement. "We can look forward to deepening our country's technical expertise in infrastructure as we expand bankable projects." The AIIB will hold its opening ceremony in Beijing on January 16-18. Members have until December 2016 to complete domestic approval processes and pay the initial tranche of their paid-in capital. The Philippines will join countries such as Australia, Germany, Singapore, South Korea and the U.K. in signing the AIIB's founding articles. In all, 57 nations are prospective founding members. The U.S. and Japan are notably absent.⁵⁶

Manila-PNG Direct Flight

Philippines Airlines has started a direct flight connecting Manila and Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The thrice-a-week flight will be a part of Philippines Airline's expansion plan in the Pacific. Besides trade and tourism, this connectivity will enable the Filipino working

⁵⁵ "Japan, Philippines strike broad accord for defence equipment transfer", *The Japan Times*, November 20, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/20/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-philippines-strike-broad-accord-defence-equipment-transfer/#.Vm5t7tJ97IU>

⁵⁶ Sharon Chen, "Philippines Makes Last-Minute Decision to Join China-Led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank", *Bloomberg Business*, December 30, 2015, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-30/philippines-makes-last-minute-decision-to-join-china-led-aiib>

professionals in PNG to visit their homeland with ease. Around 30,000 Filipinos are working in PNG. Besides, it will give PNGians an opportunity to connect with rest of the world through Manila.⁵⁷

Singapore

Singapore, China ink slew of pacts to bolster bilateral ties

Putting their new pledge to build an all-round partnership into action, Singapore and China inked several crucial pacts and agreed to explore several areas of cooperation to create opportunities for their people and businesses. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong met visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping on November 7. Both witnessed the signing of two agreements to launch talks for the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA) upgrade, and to start a new government-led project in south-western Chongqing city. PM Lee said that he had a fruitful meeting with Mr Xi, whose two-day state visit “further deepened the bilateral relationship”. Six agreements on areas such as education cooperation, urban management and collaboration between the two Customs authorities were also inked. A key highlight of Mr Xi’s visit to mark 25 years of diplomatic relations

was the setting up of an “All-Round Cooperative Partnership Progressing with the Times”. Both sides also agreed to strengthen consultation and cooperation on regional and global issues, and also on issues of common interest through mechanisms such as the United Nations, World Trade Organisation and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.⁵⁸

Singapore and Thailand navies conduct bilateral naval exercise

The Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) participated in a bilateral naval exercise, named Exercise Singsiam, from November 2-12. Exercise Singsiam, a biennial exercise was first held in 1981. Following a shore planning phase at Changi Naval Base in Singapore, the two navies conducted a sea phase in the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea. Exercise Singsiam, the 18th in its series, had expanded in scope and complexity over the years to include anti-air and anti-submarine warfare serials. The exercise underscored the close and long-standing defence ties between Singapore and Thailand, and had enhanced mutual understanding and interoperability between the two navies.⁵⁹

Thailand

Survey poll favours Thai Junta

In December 2015, the National Statistics Office released a poll result in which around 2700 Thai

⁵⁷ “Philippines Airline begins Manila - Port Moresby flights today”, Papua New Guinea Today, December 17, 2015, at <http://news.pngfacts.com/2015/12/philippines-airline-begins-manila-port.html>, accessed on December 23, 2015.

⁵⁸ Kor Kian Beng, “Spore, China ink slew of pacts to bolster bilateral ties”, *The Straits Times*, November 8, 2015, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/spore-china-ink-slew-of-pacts-to-bolster-bilateral-ties>

⁵⁹ “Singapore and Thailand Navies Conduct Bilateral Naval Exercise”, Official Release, Singapore Government, November 10, 2015, at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/im indef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2015/nov/10nov15_nr1.html#.V12WY9IrLIU

nationals were questioned about the performance of the Thai Junta and it showed 99% of the people are happy with the government and governance of the military rulers in the country. In May 2014, the Thai military ousted the government of Yingluck Shinawatra and since then, they have been ruling the country, banned political gatherings, imposed several restrictions on the media and postponed national level elections to 2017. The Junta leader Prayuth Chan-o-Cha who has taken over as the prime minister, is meeting the people and trying to boost the morale of the country. Though the survey poll result was helpful for the government, the people are raising questions about price rise and lack of human rights in the country. The Junta has introduced one programme, called Attitude Adjustment where a person can be detained for hours or days and be scolded for criticising the government.⁶⁰

Further Immunity to the Military in the Proposed Constitution

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-Cha, in his capacity of the chair of the ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) wrote a recommendation letter to the Constitution Drafting Committee saying that one clause needs to be added in the proposed Constitution to give exemption to the military from giving any explanation for the use of force in 'good

faith' to protect national interests and security. Human Rights Watch's Asia Director, Brad Adams said that this would work as immunity to the military and they would use it as a license to kill. Given the authoritarian nature of Thai military and their record of human rights abuses since 1970s, Adam's apprehensions sound logical.⁶¹

Vietnam

President Xi Jinping called on China and Vietnam to increase military and maritime cooperation

President Xi Jinping called on China and Vietnam to increase military and maritime cooperation during his visit to Vietnam on November 4 and stressed the proper settlement of territorial disputes amid friction in the South China Sea. Xi, the first Chinese president to visit Hanoi in 10 years said that he hoped for a higher-level partnership with Vietnam and pledged to support the rule of its Communist Party as he received a 21-gun salute at the Presidential Palace. In his talks with Vietnam's Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong, Xi vowed to support Vietnam on the socialist path of development. Trong told Xi that the two countries should not allow territorial disputes to affect their relations, and neither should increase tensions or militarisation of the South China Sea. The two nations signed a series of agreements after the talks between Xi and Trong including the one on the navigation of vessels

⁶⁰ Oliver Holmes, "Thailand's junta releases poll showing 99.3% of citizens happy with its performance", The Guardian, December 23, 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/23/thailands-junta-releases-poll-showing-993-of-citizens-happy-with-its-performance>, accessed on January 29, 2016.

⁶¹ "Thailand: Constitution to Give Soldiers 'License to Kill'", Human Rights Watch, November 24, 2015, at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/24/thailand-constitution-give-soldiers-license-kill>, accessed on January 29, 2016.

in the Ka Long River, which connects Guangxi in China to QuangNinh in Vietnam.⁶²

Japan donates 2 more patrol boats to Vietnam amid South China Sea tensions

Japan delivered to Vietnam two ships that would be refurbished into patrol boats in disputed waters of the South China Sea. The ships, which arrived on November 3 in the port city of Da Nang, were the second delivery of a 2014 deal for Tokyo to provide Vietnam with six used fishing vessels that would be converted into patrol ships for Vietnam's coast guard and fisheries ministry. Japan had also agreed to provide equipment and technical advice. In September, the two sides signed a separate deal for Tokyo to provide even more vessels in the future. The Japanese ships followed a U.S. pledge to provide at least five refurbished fast patrol ships to improve Vietnam's Coast Guard.⁶³

China-Vietnam to preserve peace in South China Sea

Vietnam and China had a "tight friendship" and "need to cooperate with each other in a complicated world", President Xi told Vietnam's National Assembly on November 6. In a speech aimed at mending strained relations, the Chinese president added that the two

neighbours should be able to survive any "disruptions" in their friendship. Xi's comments alluded to China and Vietnam's competing claims for territory in the South China Sea, which came to a head in 2014 when Beijing parked an oil rig in waters off the Vietnamese coast. Xi promised that Beijing wouldn't seek to impose its influence all over the region. "China rejects that a country should seek hegemony once it grows strong," he said, adding that China would "deepen mutually beneficial cooperation" with neighbouring countries. During Xi's two-day visit to Vietnam, 12 agreements were signed on cultural exchanges, tourist development, construction loans for highway and rail projects, and aid from Beijing to support education and healthcare initiatives.⁶⁴

Vietnam, Russia to boost cooperation in military techniques

The 17th conference of the Vietnam-Russia Intergovernmental Committee for Military Technical Cooperation took place in Ho Chi Minh City on November 13. The event was presided over by Deputy Defence Minister Senior Lieutenant General Truong Quang Khanh, Head of the Vietnamese sub-committee; and Director of Russia's Federal Service for Military Technical Cooperation A.V. Fomin, Head of the Russian sub-committee. At the event, the two sides reviewed the results of their technical military cooperation since the 16th meeting in 2013, and voiced pleasure at the

⁶² Minnie Chan and Chung Hoang, "Seven suggestions from Xi: Chinese leader calls on Vietnam to boost military and maritime ties among raft of proposals", *South China Morning Post*, November 5, 2015, at <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1876130/chinas-president-xi-jinping-calls-vietnam-boost>

⁶³ Tra Mi, "Japan Donates 2 More Patrol Boats to Vietnam Amid S. China Sea Tensions", *Voice of America*, November 3, 2015, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/japan-donates-patrol-boats-to-vietnam-south-china-sea-tensions/3035300.html>

⁶⁴ <http://www.msn.com/en-za/news/other/china-vietnam-to-preserve-peace-in-south-china-sea/ar-CC1sEj>

development of the comprehensive bilateral relations, including military techniques, in line with the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership. They reached consensus on prioritized areas of their mutual interests and affirmed that their military technical cooperation plays an important role in further deepening the relations between their armies and people.⁶⁵

Vietnam, New Zealand advance with comprehensive partnership

Vietnam and New Zealand agreed to develop their comprehensive partnership both in scale and in depth towards a strategic partnership. The consensus was reached during talks between Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and his visiting New Zealand counterpart John Key in Hanoi on November 15. Priority would be given to strengthening political ties, increasing the exchange of delegations at all levels and optimising the operation of bilateral mechanisms for co-operation in all aspects. The Vietnamese PM hailed the significance of PM John Key's visit, especially at a time when the two countries were celebrating the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties (1975-2015). The leaders also stressed the effectiveness of bilateral co-operation mechanisms, as seen in the progress in affiliation in all fields from economy, trade and investment to national defence and security, education-training and science-technology. New Zealand pledged to

continue providing development assistance for Vietnam, particularly in agriculture, knowledge and skills and natural disaster risk management. The two sides also discussed measures to boost their partnership in national defence and security, including increasing delegation exchanges, and information and experience sharing in search and rescue operations and UN peace-keeping missions. They reiterated the importance of ensuring peace, stability, security, safety and freedom of maritime and aviation in the East Sea (South China Sea) as well as settling disputes at sea in line with international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The two leaders also agreed on the urgency of the building of a Code of Conduct (COC) in the East Sea. Following their talks, the two PM's witnessed the signing of co-operation agreements in civil aviation and health care and a plan on strategic cooperation in education.⁶⁶

Vietnam, Philippines boost ties as South China Sea Feuds Fester

Vietnam and The Philippines signed a strategic partnership on November 17 deepening security ties in the face of Beijing's increased assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea. Philippine leader Benigno Aquino and Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang expressed concern over tensions in the strategic sea which Hanoi calls the East Sea home to some of the world's most important shipping lanes. "Mr President (Aquino) and I shared our concerns over the recent developments in the East Sea, or the South China Sea, affecting trust, peace, security and stability in the region," Sang

⁶⁵ "Vietnam, Russia to boost cooperation in military techniques", *People's Army Newspaper*, November 14, 2015, at <http://en.qdnd.vn/defence-cooperation/vietnam-russia-to-boost-cooperation-in-military-techniques/387921.html>

⁶⁶ "Viet Nam, New Zealand advance with comprehensive partnership", *Viet Nam News*, November 16, 2015, at <http://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/278566/viet-nam-new-zealand-advance-with-comprehensive-partnership.html>

said. He added that the pact marked a “new era for cooperation” between the two countries. Aquino said the deal would “deepen our cooperation, particularly in the areas of economic, agricultural, defence and maritime engagement areas that are truly vital to the strategic interests of both our nations.”⁶⁷

EU-Vietnam inked Free Trade deal

European Union and Vietnam have signed a free trade agreement to remove barriers that exist in the two-way trade between the 28-nations European nations and Vietnam, one of the world’s last fewest communist countries. The trade deal came after two years of profound negotiations and both sides expressed satisfaction as trade between EU and Vietnam has seen a three-time upsurge in the last ten years. For EU, this deal is the second in line in the region as in 2014 they concluded one similar agreement with Singapore. Right now, Malaysia and Thailand are in the queue.⁶⁸

Australia

Indian cabinet approves India-Australia Civil Nuclear Deal

The union cabinet on December 30 ratified the India-Australian civil nuclear cooperation agreement that came into force in November. It has further eased the supply of imported uranium for India’s

nuclear power plants. “The civil nuclear cooperation agreement with Australia was brought into force on November 13 along with the administrative arrangement for implementing the agreement,” a cabinet communique said. “The fuel supply arrangements with Australia will bolster energy security by supporting the expansion of nuclear power in India,” it said. Both countries began talks on the nuclear cooperation agreement in 2012 after Australia lifted its ban on selling uranium to India. Australia ranks third in terms of production of uranium, while it does not operate nuclear power plants in the country. India currently has nuclear energy agreements with 11 countries and has signed long-term agreements for supply of uranium from Kazakhstan and Canada.⁶⁹

India, Australia finalize nuclear deal

India and Australia finalized their nuclear deal, which will make it possible for India to source uranium from Australia. After the first meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the new Australian PM Malcolm Turnbull in Antalya, Turkey on November 15, on the sidelines of the G-20 summit, the two countries announced the exchange of instruments of ratification. MEA spokesperson Vikas Swarup tweeted, “With the completion of procedures, including the administrative arrangements, the India-Australia civil nuclear agreement will enter into force.” The Australian parliament ratified the India-Australia nuclear agreement recently. The two governments exchanged diplomatic missives, called note verbales, on

⁶⁷ “Philippines, Vietnam Boost Ties As China Sea Feuds Fester”, *NDTV*, November 17, 2015, at <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/philippines-vietnam-boost-ties-as-china-sea-feuds-fester-1244329>

⁶⁸ “EU, Vietnam Sign Free Trade Deal”, *Yahoo News*, December 2, 2015, at <http://news.yahoo.com/eu-vietnam-sign-free-trade-deal-161256542.html>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

⁶⁹ “Cabinet Approves India-Australia Civil Nuclear Deal”, *Northeast Today*, December 31, 2015, at <http://www.northeasttoday.in/cabinet-approves-india-australia-civil-nuclear-deal/>

Friday. This exchange brings a successful conclusion to nuclear negotiations with Australia which has grown to become one of India's closest international partners especially in the area of resources. Swarup said that PM Modi thanked Turnbull and spoke of "trust and confidence in each other."⁷⁰

Australia begins naval war games with China

Australia began military exercises with China not far from the disputed artificial islands of the South China Sea. Canberra insisted that it was an invaluable chance to work alongside a regional neighbour; while analysts worry it could be used for propaganda purposes.

The "live fire" exercises were planned long ago but came at a time of rising diplomatic tensions in the South China Sea, where the Chinese had tried to further their territorial claims by building new islands. Royal Australian Navy would engage in war games alongside Chinese forces, not far from the disputed waters. On October 27, the U.S. had sent a warship through the area to assert what it called "freedom of navigation". Australian Defence Chief Air Chief Marshall Mark Binskin played down diplomatic concerns over the military exercises. "It's a chance to work with regional navies and show transparency and capability in what we do. It's what we do with a lot of regional navies. It is part of the relationship we have with

a lot of the regional navies in the development between the defence forces, and so we shouldn't make it more than what it actually is," said Binskin.⁷¹

Japan, Australia agree to strengthen nuclear disarmament cooperation

Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop agreed on November 21 to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In their meeting in Sydney, Kishida and Bishop also confirmed plans to coordinate moves over issues concerning the disputed South China Sea, where China's island-making and other activities had heightened tensions with other countries. In a joint statement, the ministers of the two countries, which lead a group of nonnuclear states called the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), renewed their determination to continue cooperation for a world free of nuclear weapons. The NPDI is a framework launched in 2010 at the initiative of Japan and Australia - both of which rely on the U.S. nuclear deterrent to protect them from potential enemy attacks.⁷²

Fiji

Fiji pulls China up on coal use

Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama appealed to China to stop using coal and use more hydroelectric and solar power. His appeal came in a speech marking 40 years of diplomatic

⁷⁰ "India announces conclusion of civil nuclear deal for buying uranium from Australia", *Firstpost*, November 16, 2015, at <http://www.firstpost.com/world/india-announces-conclusion-of-civil-nuclear-deal-for-buying-uranium-from-australia-2507772.html>

⁷¹ "Australia Begins Naval Wargames With China", *Voice of America*, November 2, 2015, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/australia-begins-naval-wargames-with-china/3032653.html>

⁷² "Japan, Australia agree to strengthen nuclear disarmament cooperation", *mainichi.jp*, November 22, 2015, at <http://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20151122/p2g/00m/Ofp/007000c>

relations between the two countries. Mr Bainimarama said that Fiji was looking to China to support Pacific island countries in their stand at climate talks in Paris. The countries were calling for emissions to be lowered to the point where global temperatures would not increase more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Mr Bainimarama further said that Fiji looked to China as a global leader and had asked it to side with Fiji in its struggle to persuade industrialised nations to drastically cut carbon emissions. His remarks came at the end of a speech which praised China as a “steadfast ally” when traditional partners ‘turned their backs” on Fiji.⁷³

Fiji swears in new president

A retired military officer and diplomat was sworn in on November 12 as Fiji's first president since the Pacific country's democracy-restoring elections in 2014. Major General Jioji Konrote's inauguration took place in a ceremony at Government House, Suva, presided over by Chief Justice Anthony Gates. “I will dedicate myself to the wellbeing of the Republic of Fiji and all Fijians, protect and promote their rights,” President Konrote said. Parliament elected Mr Konrote as president in October and he resigned as employment minister so he could take up the role. The 67-year-old had previously commanded Fiji's UN peacekeeping forces in Lebanon and served as Suva's high

commissioner to Australia from 2001-06. He replaced Epele Nailatikau, who was appointed president in 2009 while the country was under martial law following a military coup in 2006. The president's role under a constitution adopted in 2013 was essentially a ceremonial head of state, with most power resting with Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama.⁷⁴

Australian delegation to visit Pacific Islands

Steven Ciobo, Australia's International Development and the Pacific Minister, is all set to visit Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Solomon Islands aiming at strengthening Australia's relationships with these Pacific Island countries. The high-level delegation will meet government officials, private sector representatives and others to boost Australia's ties with those nations and to seek for new opportunities of aid investments. Gender equality, economic growth, climate change, private sector development, labour mobility will be other issues to be discussed.⁷⁵

New Zealand

New Zealand to work on new flag

New Zealand conducted a referendum to finalise its national flag, named as ‘Silver Fern’ (black, white and blue) against runner up ‘Silver Fern’ (red, white and blue). New Zealanders will select one between these two in a next referendum in March 2016. A Flag Consideration Panel chose six flag designs and based on the first preference

⁷³ “Fiji pulls China up on coal use”, *Radio New Zealand*, November 5, 2015, at <http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/288969/fiji-pulls-china-up-on-coal-use>

⁷⁴ “Fiji swears in new president”, *Business Standard*, November 12, 2015, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/fiji-swears-in-new-president-115111200449_1.html

⁷⁵ Nasik Swami, “Australian Delegation to Visit Fiji”, *The Fiji Times Online*, December 7, 2015, at <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=332941>, accessed on December 22, 2015.

votes, two flags were shortlisted for the referendum. The flag debate was initiated in New Zealand as a desire to change the colonial era flag was in the air. However, some survey results are still showing a keenness to retain the old flag.⁷⁶

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea, Philippines push better cooperation on trade, climate action

Papua New Guinea and the Philippines vowed to strengthen overall bilateral ties, particularly on improving trade, and cooperation in combating climate change. Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Peter O'Neill and Philippine President Benigno Aquino III discussed ways to improve 40-year friendship during a bilateral meeting in Malacanang on November 17. Palace Communications Secretary of the

Philippines Herminio Coloma Jr said that during the meeting, Aquino "expressed the wish for increased and expanded bilateral trade, noting that in December 2015, Philippine Airlines will increase its frequency to 3 flights (per) week, complementing the weekly flights of Air Niugini." Agriculture and fisheries were other key areas of cooperation between the two countries. O'Neill noted that Papua New Guinea also got a bulk of its rice supply from the Philippines, one of 3 major rice exporters to the country. The Philippines also wanted to strengthen cooperation in the areas of policy consultations, health and medical tourism, investment promotion and protection, and capacity building. For his part, O'Neill said that technology transfer and technical assistance from the Philippines would be appreciated. He also sought the Philippines' support in Papua New Guinea's chairmanship in connection with the COP 21 United Nations Conference on Climate Change.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Elle Hunt, "New Zealand Confirms alternative flag ahead of final referendum", *The Guardian*, December 15, 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/15/new-zealand-confirms-alternative-flag>, Accessed on January 29, 2016.

⁷⁷ "PH, Papua New Guinea push better cooperation on trade, climate action", *Rappler*, November 18, 2015, at <http://www.rappler.com/nation/113181-philippines-papua-new-guinea-trade-ties>

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

Contributions are invited for:

Book Review (800 words)

Commentary (900 - 1300 words)

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

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