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Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



Colonial Styled Buildings in Yangon

Photo Courtesy : Sanket S Kulkarni

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Editor's Note

The months of January and February of 2016 were eventful and experienced several changes in the political and economic arenas as Southeast Asian countries came closer to each other through the official foundation of the ASEAN Community at the end of December 2015. Given the fact that ASEAN is home to 600 million people and offers a market larger than North America and European Union, hopes and expectations are increasing every day since ASEAN is a unified community now. However, there are several limitations and constraints which need to be addressed by the regional grouping and its members in order to exploit the existing opportunities and harness new vistas of cooperation. Hopes were on the high in Myanmar too as followed by the November 2015 election Daw Aung Saan Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy occupied majority seats in the Parliament. It was a remarkable moment for Myanmar as the country had to wait for half a century to observe this change. The region also observed Lao PDR becoming the ASEAN Chair in 2016 and hosting the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat in Vientiane.

As far as the external relations of ASEAN are concerned, the region saw many important visits including the ones by the US Secretary of State John Kerry and India's Vice President Mohd. Hamid Ansari. During Mr. Kerry's visit to the region, few media professionals initiated a debate on renaming the South China Sea as the South Sea or the Southeast Asia Sea. However, neither ASEAN nor its members were vocal about it. On the other hand, Hamid Ansari spoke about rich cultural heritage and resemblances shared between India and Southeast Asia during his visit to the region. For India-ASEAN partnership, the past two months were crucial. During the eighth edition of Delhi Dialogue in February 2016, both India and ASEAN reiterated their commitment towards shared prosperity, mutual understanding and larger economic cooperation. With Japan, Australia and European Union, ASEAN's relations are improving as can be seen from the EU's permanent mission set up in the ASEAN Secretariat and the region's defence partnerships with Japan and Australia. It is important to note here that given the Chinese assertiveness in South China Sea and increasing land reclamation activities on the disputed islands of the Sea, Australia has decided to enhance its defence budget for the next decade, as mentioned in its Defence White Paper.

ISIS led terrorism is one of the primary concerns of the region now. In the mid of January, the Indonesian capital was targeted by the ISIS supporters. Besides, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesian police forces were seen arresting and deporting few hundred people to their country of origin as they were trying to escape to Syria and join the ISIS network. At the domestic level, little uproar was heard as the Malaysian Prime Minister is not free from the allegation which he is facing over his suspected connection in the 1MDB case.

This issue of *Insight Southeast Asia* has covered all these news which have some or the other impact on the region- its geo-strategy and geo-economy. Besides, the issue has a brief event report on Delhi Dialogue VIII, academic sessions of which were hosted by the IDSA. The editorial team is especially thankful to Mr. Sanket Sudhir Kulkarni, a former Visiting Fellow of IDSA for

his elaborate and analytical photo essay on his recent visit to Myanmar. Myanmar is, of course, both a landscape and seascape that is unavoidable for India's policy formulation.

With this short note, the editorial team of *Insight Southeast Asia* wants to thank its readership and will look forward to their insightful views and suggestion on the newsletter.

Thank you,

Dr. Sampa Kundu

Briefs from Delhi Dialogue VIII: Capturing Moments in Photos



The Ministerial Session Held on February 18, 2016, Image Courtesy: MEA, India

The eighth edition of Delhi Dialogue, an established 1.5 track dialogue process between India and ASEAN members, was held in Delhi from February 17-19, 2016. Delhi Dialogue (DD) VIII was initiated with a dedicated Business Session at The Oberoi, New Delhi. The Ministerial Session was held at the same venue on February 18 and Academic Sessions were organised by IDSA on the 19th.

Smt. Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister of India delivered the keynote address at the Ministerial Session. She noted that in 2017 India and ASEAN would

be celebrating the 25th anniversary of their partnership. She referred to India's 'Act East Policy' and how India is committed towards a renewed focus on ASEAN and East Asia. She recalled that since Prime Minister Modi's government came to power in May 2014, the President, Vice President and Prime Minister of India have visited 9 out of 10 ASEAN countries. The honourable EAM also spoke about the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement which would be concluded by 2017. She announced that an ASEAN Studies Centre would be set up at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.



The EAM, Smt. Sushma Swaraj delivering the Keynote Speech at the Ministerial Session of DD VIII, Image Courtesy: MEA, India



A Cultural Programme Held during the Ministerial Session of Delhi Dialogue to Showcase Indian Cultural Richness and Heritage, Image Courtesy: MEA, India

Besides EAM, India, the Ministerial Session of DD VIII was also attended by H.E. Mr. Sofian Djalil, Minister for National Development Planning and Head of National Development Planning Agency of Indonesia; H.E. U Tin Oo Lwin, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar; H.E. Mr. Virasakdi Futrakul, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand; H.E. Mr. Le Hoai Trung, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam; H.E. Mr. Somchith Inthamith, Vice Minister of Industry & Commerce of Lao PDR; H.E. Mr. Vikram Nair, Member of Parliament of Singapore and Chairman of the Singapore-India Parliamentary Friendship Group; Dr. AKP

Mochtan, Deputy Secretary General for Community & Corporate Affairs, ASEAN Secretariat; and Heads of Delegations from Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia and Brunei.

Mr. T.R. Zeliang, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Nagaland and Mr. Lal Thanhawla, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Mizoram also participated on the 18th event.

'Connectivity: Creating Pathways to a Shared Future' and 'ASEAN Economic Community and India: Integrating Regional Value Chains and Production Networks' were themes of the two panel discussions that were organised during the Ministerial Session.

The Business Session of DD VIII deliberated on

various issues including Make in India, mega trade blocs, connectivity, small and medium enterprises cooperation, various trade barriers and regional integration to



Secretary East, Mr. Anil Wadhwa Addressing the Business Session on February 17, 2016, Image Courtesy: MEA, India



Shri Jayant Prasad, Director General, IDSA Addressing the Audience of the Academic Session and Welcomed Shri Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), MEA, India, Image Courtesy: IDSA

name a few. Mr. Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), MEA, India said and PTI and The Economic Times reported,

“We need to undertake capacity building programmes, workshops and seminars that focus on the ASEAN-India FTA, Rules of Origin, services liberalization, regulatory aspects of ecommerce, elimination of non-tariff barriers, competition policy and intellectual property rights, SME cooperation and promotion”.

In the academic sessions of DD VIII, the

following issues were discussed; ASEAN and the Security of the Asia Pacific, ASEAN-India and the Ocean Economy Dynamics, Reinvigorating the Civilizational Links and Way Forward: Towards 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Relations. Distinguished speakers of the academic sessions came from different ASEAN countries as well as eminent Indian scholars participated in the deliberations. The speakers of the academic session recognised that India and ASEAN are home to around 1.8 billion people; they have a combined GDP of around \$4.7 trillion and together they are expected to



Panel Discussing about ASEAN-India and Security of the Asia-Pacific on February 19, 2016 at IDSA,

garner new ideas and launch innovative initiatives to sustain the existing strategic partnership. India's Act East Policy adds more values to it and Delhi Dialogue VIII is supposed to enhance India's relations with ASEAN.



Panel Discussing about Blue Economy on February 19, 2016 at IDSA, Image Courtesy: IDSA



Panel Deliberating on Civilizational Links between India and ASEAN on February 19, 2016 at IDSA, Image Courtesy: IDSA



Panel Deliberating on the Way Forward for India and ASEAN on February 19, 2016 at IDSA, Image Courtesy: IDSA

In conclusion, it may be said that India and ASEAN share centuries old relations with each other. In modern times, with the usage of latest technology, we can only

expect betterment of this relationship. However, there are certain limitations and constraints which may jeopardise the existing partnership and both sides need to work on them together.



The Backdrop of Delhi Dialogue VIII, Image Courtesy: IDSA

Myanmar Undergoing an Exciting Phase: An Indian Traveller's Impression



Sanket Sudhir Kulkarni

The writer is a PhD Scholar at National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore

After collecting my baggage, I joined other co-passengers to face the immigration counter at Yangon airport. Being on a research trip, I was expecting the usual grilling and curious questions from immigration officials. The grilling was particularly more intense during my previous visit to Bangladesh. For almost half an hour, the customs officials posted at the Dhaka airport had interviewed me to get a clearer understanding on the exact purpose of my visit to Bangladesh.

Now as my turn to face the immigration officials at the Yangon airport came, I got increasingly nervous. Before my turn came, I diligently took out all the permission letters and documents which would ascertain my credibility as a researcher. I prepared myself to face pretty intensive questioning from the two lady officers in charge of clearing my immigration papers. But to my utter surprise, upon presenting my passport and visa documents, the lady officer at the desk did not even bother to look

at me. She and her colleague were having a light hearted chat in their local dialect and within no time I was happily standing at the other end of the immigration counter, waiting for my other colleagues to join me.

This episode as insignificant as it may sound, nevertheless speaks volumes about Myanmar's conscious efforts to open up to the outside world.¹ It also reflects the efforts undertaken by the decision makers to make their society more liberal,² from within and outside. Barring a few exceptions, in the next few days as I travelled across three different cities namely Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw, this initial impression that I had gathered at the airport



Downtown Yangon

¹ Joshua Kurlantzick, 'The Mysterious Opening of Myanmar', *The Boston Globe*, 04th December 2011

² UNDP, 'Democratic Governance in Myanmar Current trends and implications', *United Nations Development Programme, Myanmar*, 01st December 2013



Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar with usual sight of isolated streets

increasingly got strengthened. Exception, I say here because there were a couple of encounters which still reminded us about the subtle but effective control of the military on the country. If Yangon is bubbling with confidence and excitement then in contrast Nay Pyi Taw, still reels under an air of formality and military styled discipline. If Yangon's culture

symbolises the on-going political transition, then Nay Pyi Taw in many ways is indicative of the prevailing military control over the country's political and societal affairs.

The result of the opening up is that within a short time frame, Myanmar has made immense progress. Forget about government and privately released

figures and statistics. During my interviews with multiple respondents representing Myanmar's industry, political parties, and activists etc. all exuded an air of confidence about the on-going political transition and future economic growth. Roaming across the streets of Myanmar's three important cities gives a clear indication that the country is slowly, yet steadily heading towards

a phase of rapid economic development.³ One need not to be an economist to be able to figure out the causes behind such an optimistic assumption for Myanmar. The conditions for such economic growth were already present and it becomes very apparent to the visitor during his stay. To start with, Myanmar has abundant labour force at its disposal which can contribute significantly towards rapid industrial development.⁴ During the trip, I got an impression that people in Yangon, mostly young and falling in the ideal working age group, always seemed to be in a hurry.⁵



Like on the streets of Kolkata and Dhaka, Cycle Rickshaws are a common site in Yangon too (Image Courtesy: Dr. Hippu Salk Kristle Nathan)

³ Aung Hla Tun, 'Myanmar projects economic growth of 9.3 pct for 2015-16', *Reuters*, 24th April 2015

⁴ ADB, 'Myanmar in Transition : Opportunities and Challenges', *Asian Development Bank*, August 2012

⁵ ADB report on Myanmar points to similar observations. For details See Ref No. 4

To add to this, the available labour is also hardworking and honest.

Another interesting feature with regard to labour availability that I experienced was that the Burmese society appeared to be extremely gender neutral and lets its womenfolk to be an equal contributor to economic prosperity. This is quite contrary to what a recent report in *The Guardian* notes that in Myanmar women enjoy a secondary role with respect to her male counterparts.⁶ In fact one respondent during his interview noted that the ladies in Burma are able to strike a good balance between work and family life. During my field trip, I could notice significant presence and participation of women workforce in the services and manufacturing industry. The situation was



A mosque adjacent to the Sule Pagoda in Yangon

quite similar in Nay Pyi Taw and Mandalay too. I could notice good number of women participation in the education, bureaucracy, private sector, industry etc. Within the sphere of education particularly, women students in many instances outnumbered their male counterparts. Given this trend, it could be expected that in the coming years Myanmar would also see an increasing trend of women participation in politics and critical decision making. These and other such impressions particularly reminded me of a recent lecture at Nalsar University of Law given by Mr. Mohan Guruswamy who while referring to India noted that availability of larger labour force acted as a boon for its economic development.^{7,8} He further noted that availability of such young population also had a great impact on consumption pattern within



Buildings designed in the colonial style in Yangon

⁶ Sara Perria, 'On the road with the women building Myanmar', *The Guardian*, 25th January 2016

⁷ Mohan Guruswamy, 'India: A Nation in Search of a State', Lecture given at NALSAR University of Law, 18th February 2016, Available at- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYnwthA2-3E>, (Accessed on 11/04/2016)

⁸ Anamitra Roychowdhury, C P Chandrashekhar, Jayati Ghosh, 'The 'Demographic Dividend' and Young India's Economic Future', *Economic & Political Weekly*, Volume 41, Issue No. 49, 09th December 2006, Available at- http://www.jsk.gov.in/articles/the_demographic_dividend_cp_chandrasekhar.pdf



Yangon-Nay Pyi Taw-Mandalay Highway
(Image Courtesy: Dr. Mayilvaganan)

India.⁹ In the years to come, one can expect a similar trend in Myanmar too.¹⁰

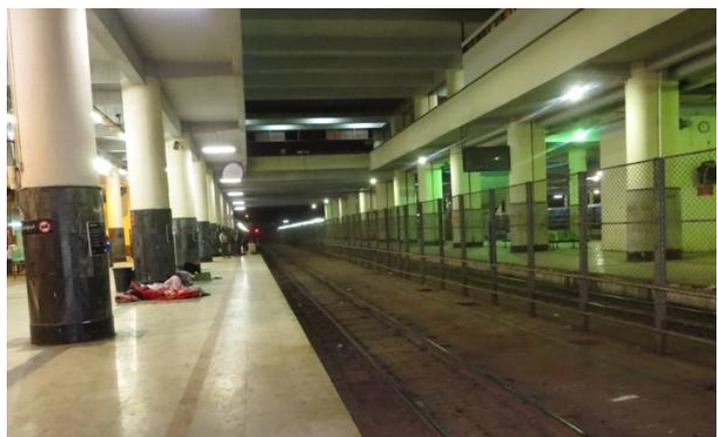
Another characteristic of the people in Myanmar is that they are hardworking, graceful and forgiving. Couple of respondents with whom I had a chance to interact had spent long years in jail. But despite such gruesome past they gave an impression that they have decided to make peace with their past. Nowhere during the interview, could I trace any element of remorse and hatred towards the military regime. They are more optimistic about their future and want to let go off the past. One respondent in fact thanked India for its consistent support for the pro-democracy groups in Myanmar in the initial years. Another example which in a small way indicates that people in Myanmar are forgiving and bury their past could be gathered from the interaction among different religious communities in Yangon. For example, quite contrary to news and media reports, I could not sense any tension throughout my stay among the Muslim and the Burmese

population. Muslims shopkeepers and street vendors freely went about with their business and interacted freely with their Buddhist brethren. Also during the days leading up to Christmas, many office employees organised Christmas celebrations in the evening hours.

To complement these inherent advantages, Myanmar needs to work on a few areas which will firmly put them on a dedicated path towards prosperity and enduring stability. Two areas which require urgent attention are physical infrastructure and development of knowledgeable human resource. For example in Yangon, the city's colonial inspired buildings as nostalgic as they may appear are nevertheless in poor shape.

Also, the highway that connects Yangon with Nay Pyi Taw and Mandalay is pretty smooth, but in many sections, I got a feeling that it could have been constructed in a better way.

These two examples are merely indicative of the larger infrastructural problems that Myanmar



An inside view of Mandalay Station
(Image Courtesy: Dr. Mayilvaganan)

⁹ See Ref No. 7

¹⁰ Linda Yueh, 'Burma: Asia's last frontier is opening up', *BBC*, 02nd Jun 2013



**A Mini train spotted at Yangon Railway station
(Image Courtesy: Dr. Hippy Salk Kristle Nathan)**

faces. For example, the railway stations that we visited in Yangon and Mandalay, apart from their colonial charm confirmed the view reflected in a report that Myanmar's railway connectivity infrastructure is not in a good shape.¹¹ It is essential for Myanmar to focus its resources on building transportation infrastructure. These will help in long term facilitation of free movement of labour and resources within different regions of Myanmar.

Other aspect which requires urgent attention is knowledge creation and an excellent human resource across different parts of Myanmar. For example, take the status of English speaking in Myanmar. Normal interaction even at the streets of Yangon proved generally difficult. According to one respondent there were very few English teaching schools in the country. Myanmar needs to consciously cultivate resources in improving the standards of English education in the country. Upon enquiring about the status of technical education in Myanmar, few respondents noted that they are looking

at outside countries to improve the level of technical education.

But there are a few bright spots too. The communication network in the country has been developed in an efficient manner. During my 8 hour journey to Mandalay even at isolated patches, I could easily access internet. Along with it quite a few respondents proudly boasted about the fact that there were no restrictions on accessing any websites hinting at the level of political freedom allowed by the transition government.



An inside view of the Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon

These are indeed challenging, but exciting times for Myanmar. I certainly felt happy to have visited it during its most crucial phase.

(Acknowledgement: The author would like to thank Dr. Mayilvaganan, Dr. Hippy Salk Kristle Nathan, Dr. Subir Rana for their guidance in writing this photo essay. Also the author would like to especially thank Dr. Mayilvaganan and Dr. Hippy Salk Kristle Nathan for permitting to use some of their photographs taken during the same trip to Myanmar.)

¹¹ KPMG, 'Infrastructure in Myanmar', 30th May 2013, Available at- <http://www.kpmg.com/mm/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/pages/infrastructure-in-myanmar.aspx>, (Accessed on 11/04/2016)

Southeast Asia

ASEAN

US-ASEAN Summit

President Barack Obama met the state leaders of ASEAN countries in the mid of February in California. The Washington Post called it as a 'Parade of Dictators' from Southeast Asia, a region holding immense geo-strategic significance. President Obama aims at getting support from the ASEAN members on US freedom of navigation theory in South China Sea, disputed and claimed by a couple of Southeast Asian countries, China and Taiwan. In fact, few months back, a US Navy Destroyer sailed through the region with active support from Manila, one of the contestants of the disputed islands. In an order that President Obama reaches his goal, the US Secretary of State John Kerry made a visit to Cambodia and Lao PDR few days back. He tried, in vain, to convince these two countries on taking a unified stand against China's assertive behaviour in South China Sea which includes the latter's massive reclamation activities. However, there are countries in the region that are aligned towards the US. Given this context, how China would react to US-ASEAN understanding is a question to be addressed in future. ¹

Thai Foreign Minister Visited ASEAN Secretariat

Thailand Foreign Affairs Minister Don Pramudwinai visited ASEAN secretariat in Jakarta and met Secretary General Le Luong Minh on February 12. In 2017, ASEAN will celebrate its 50th anniversary and both leaders stressed on the need to making ASEAN more people centric to mark that achievement. Secretary General assured the Thai minister about ASEAN's help and assistance to all member countries in their activities related to community building and economic integration. This was Pramudwinai's second official visit to Jakarta since he assumed his position in 2015.²

ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat

As the ASEAN Foreign Ministers met for the annual retreat at Vientiane, Lao PDR, concerns about 'war of words' between China and Southeast Asian countries were raised. In response, General Wang Jiaocheng of People's Liberation Army (PLA) said that he is committed to protect maritime security and ensure Beijing's rights in South China Sea. The retreat happened in the last week of February where the foreign ministers from ASEAN issued a joint communique expressing their concerns over the ongoing tension in South China Sea. Lao PDR's Foreign Minister Thongloun Sisoulith said, "The year 2016 is a deeply meaningful year, since it is the starting point of the ASEAN community and the implementation of the ASEAN community Vision 2025 and the

¹ Coco Alcuaz, "US-ASEAN Summit: Obama To Welcome Southeast Asian Leaders Amid China Challenge", International Business Times, February 14, 2016, at <http://www.ibtimes.com/us-asean-summit-obama-welcome-southeast-asian-leaders-amid-china-challenge-2304459>, accessed on February 22, 2016.

² "Thai Foreign Minister Visits ASEAN Secretariat", ASEAN, February 12, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/thai-foreign-minister-visits-asean-secretariat/>, accessed on February 23, 2016.

blueprints. We are mindful of the challenges and the opportunities ahead of us”. Besides South China Sea, the ministers also discussed about ASEAN community which was established on December 31, 2015. Following the official launch of the ASEAN Community, this retreat was the first ASEAN meeting, hosted by the current chair, Lao PDR.³

ASEAN Disaster Management

More than hundred representatives from private institutes, government agencies and international organisations met at Jakarta to discuss and implement One ASEAN vision in disaster management on February 25. Said Faisal, the Executive Director of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management (AHA Centre), said that “It’s basically how we can move faster, big enough and under the banner of ASEAN when handling disaster within the ASEAN region.” As they came out with a joint response plan, it was mentioned that it is not an attempt to homogenise but rather synchronize the different mechanisms that exist for disaster response.⁴

ASEAN Achieved the Milestone of ASEAN Community

All ten countries in ASEAN officially launched the ASEAN Community to bring closeness in the region through trade, social improvement and peace, security and stability. ASEAN is home to 625 million people and the grouping is 48 years old now. ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is intended to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers from intra-regional trade and integrate the region in a robust way. Other two pillars of the ASEAN Community are the ASEAN Political Security Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Like European Union (EU), ASEAN Community (AC) aims to build a peaceful, integrated and stable community which can face the regional challenges together. ASEAN has endorsed the Vision 2025 which would require the member countries narrowing down the gaps currently exist in the pillars of AC, reported Bangkok Post. However, achieving the goals set by the AC would be difficult and one of the major hurdles would be to maintain cooperation with the non-AC members who will not be eligible to get similar preferences when it comes to trade and commerce. Another challenge is to give similar priorities to the ASEAN Political Security Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community along with

³ Hetty Musfirah Abdul Khamid, “Strengthening ASEAN Community vision on agenda at Laos retreat”, Channel News Asia, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/strengthening-asean/2551716.html>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

“ASEAN concerned about South China Sea tensions”, BRICS Post, February 28, 2016, at <http://thebricspost.com/asean-concerned-about-south-china-sea-tensions/#.Vu-2ijGc2Vo>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

⁴ Sujadi Siswo, “ASEAN develops joint disaster response plan for better emergency aid”, Channel News Asia, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/asean-develops-joint/2548678.html>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

the AEC. Though the ASEAN governments are working towards achieving the desired goals, it may take few years' time, opined governments officials and practitioners from the region.⁵

JAIF caravan Held in Lao PDR

The second Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) Caravan was hosted by Lao PDR on January 14-15. It aimed at exploring and creating working relationships between relevant Ministries and JAIF public sector partners. Since Laos is the country chair of ASEAN now and received multiple benefits from the JAIF projects, it was only relevant to conduct the 2nd JAIF in Lao PDR. Laos has outlined eight priority areas for ASEAN as the chair including narrowing the developmental gaps, trade facilitation, enhancing connectivity, strengthening SMEs and so on. Senior level government officials, private sector representatives and other stakeholders participated in the JAIF caravan and the event was jointly organised by the Lao PDR foreign ministry and JAIF Management Team (JMT) at the ASEAN Secretariat.⁶

Tourism Promotion in ASEAN

Manila is all set to host the 35th ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF), themed, "One Community for Sustainability". The Entertainment City of Manila will be the primary place where most of the events of ATF 2016 will take place. Besides, Tourism Authority of Thailand organised ASEAN Friendship caravan in January where a group of people visited Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia and travelled back to Thailand. It was a 10 day event and the group's 3400 km long journey across the region was funded by the Toyota Motors.⁷

ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan Unveiled in Philippines

ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016-2025 (ATSP) was adopted in Philippines. ASEAN members received a total of 98 million international visitors in 2015 which was 7.3% higher than what it received in 2014. In 2015, intra-ASEAN travel accounted for almost 42% of the total international tourists received by the region. ASEAN national tourism organisations along with the four newly restructured subsidiary committees: the ASEAN Tourism Competitiveness Committee; the ASEAN Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism Committee; the ASEAN Tourism Resourcing, Monitoring

⁵ Chanthorn Kamjan & Prangthong Jitcharoenkul, "Asean bloc readies for integration", Bangkok Post, December 31, 2015, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/812284/asean-bloc-readies-for-integration>, accessed on January 26, 2016. And, "Birth of Asean Community 'a significant milestone': Singapore minister", Jakarta Post and the Strait Times, December 31, 2015, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/12/31/birth-asean-community-a-significant-milestone-singapore-minister.html>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

⁶ "Lao PDR Takes the 2nd Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund Caravan", ASEAN, January 14, 2016, at <http://www.asean.org/lao-pdr-takes-the-2nd-japan-asean-integration-fund-caravan/>, accessed on January 21, 2016.

⁷ "HCM City welcomes ASEAN Friendship Caravan", Vietnam Net, January 16, 2016 at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/travel/150167/hcm-city-welcomes-asean-friendship-caravan.html>, accessed on January 21, 2016.

and Evaluation Committee; and the ASEAN Tourism Professional Monitoring Committee will be responsible for implementation of the ATSP.⁸

EU's Permanent Mission to Jakarta

The European Union mission to ASEAN was officially inaugurated on January 26, 2016 in Jakarta signalling deep and strengthening cooperation between two sides. Francisco Fontan Pardo is the first dedicated EU Ambassador to ASEAN. ASEAN Secretary General Le Luong Minh mentioned that he is confident about growing partnership between EU and ASEAN. EU is ASEAN's second largest trading partner, its biggest provider of foreign direct investment, and the biggest donor to the ASEAN Secretariat. Connectivity, regional integration, sustainable development are some of the issues on which EU and ASEAN are working together and both sides are now trying to elevate the relationship to the level of strategic partnership. At the bilateral level, EU has free trade pacts with countries like Vietnam and Singapore and others are in the queue.⁹

ASEAN-Russia Summit to be Held in May

ASEAN leaders will meet representatives

from Russia, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) during ASEAN-Russia Summit, to be held in May 2016, in Sochi, Russia. They will discuss about wider economic partnerships among many other issues, mentioned Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on January 25. Furthermore, Mr. Lavrov said, "These issues will be included in the agenda for the upcoming Russia-ASEAN summit in Sochi in May, which will be dedicated to the 20th anniversary of our relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations."¹⁰

John Kerry's Visit to Southeast Asia

US Secretary of State John Kerry visited Lao PDR and Cambodia in an effort to unify the members of the ASEAN before they meet the US President Mr. Obama in February in Sunnylands, California. Prime Minister Hun Sen and Foreign Minister Hor Namphong met Mr. Kerry in Phnom Penh and expressed their affirmation on resolving the disputes on South China Sea islands bilaterally and not multilaterally. It again shows that China has been successful in dividing the Southeast Asian countries in matters relating to the South China Sea disputes.¹¹ Laos, the present ASEAN Chair, wants to avoid possibilities of further militarization in the region in an order that escalation of tension is avoided; on the other

⁸ Kevin Rozario, "ASEAN ministers step up united tourism strategy", TR Business, January 25, 2016, at <http://www.trbusiness.com/regional-news/asia-pacific/asean-ministers-step-up-united-tourism-strategy/100515>, accessed on February 22, 2016.

⁹ Prashanth Parameswaran, "EU Eyes Strategic Partnership With ASEAN as New Mission Officially Opens", January 28, 2016, at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/eu-eyes-strategic-partnership-with-asean-as-new-mission-officially-opens/>, accessed on February 22, 2016.

¹⁰ "Russia-ASEAN summit to include consultations with SCO, EAEU- Lavrov", Russia Beyond the Headlines, January 26, 2016, at http://rbth.com/international/2016/01/26/russia-asean-summit-to-include-consultations-with-sco-eaeu-lavrov_562351, accessed on February 22, 2016.

¹¹ David Brunnstrom and Prak Chan Thul, "Kerry fails to sway Cambodian leaders on South China Sea", Reuters, January 26, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-usa-kerry-idUSKCN0V4104>, accessed on February 22, 2016.

hand, Cambodia has always taken a softer attitude towards China regarding the territorial disputes in the region.

Proposal to Rename South China Sea

During US Secretary of State, John Kerry's East Asia visit, one idea floated in the region and that was to rename South China Sea as Southeast Asia Sea, as proposed by few Singaporean and Vietnamese institutions. The United Nations Conference on the Standardisation of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) requires a shared understanding from all relevant stakeholders before any geographic entity is renamed. It is clearly mentioned by the UNCSGN that its objective is not to settle political disputes between states on the use or non-use of particular geographical names. However, as the renaming of South China Sea is motivated by geo-political interests of the small littoral countries located in the region, it is likely that UNCSGN may not accept it. Even ASEAN countries, except Vietnam and Philippines, may object to rename South China Sea as Southeast Asia Sea, as it will signal a strong opposition to China's nine-dash line and hence, it may enrage the latter. Given the economic opportunities China is offering to ASEAN countries, the renaming of the South China Sea seems little difficult from the perspectives of Southeast Asian countries. Instead of

Southeast Asia Sea, some are therefore arguing for South Sea.¹²

ASEAN-India

Nirmala Sitharaman Expects More Trade between India and CLMV Countries

Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said at the inauguration of CLMV Business Conclave organised by CII and Ministry of Commerce and Industry on January 12 that India's trade relation with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) countries had immense potential, and "connectivity" and "economic integration" with regional value chains were crucial in this regard. "India's trade with the CLMV countries is over USD 11,000 million and there is immense potential. The tri-lateral highway, The Act East policy by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, port connectivity move in that direction", she said. Ministry of External Affairs conducted a study that pointed out that there was huge potential of about \$100 billion of additional export to the CLMV countries. She further said, "while Foreign Direct Investments were falling (globally), India had 38 per cent growth". H E Sun Chanthol, Senior Minister and Minister of Commerce of the Kingdom of Cambodia said that the trade investment between India and ASEAN countries were "crucial" since CLMV countries constitute about 32 per cent of ASEAN region. "CLMV countries and India should work together to strengthen the strategic partnership to reduce the poverty", he said.¹³

¹² Ellen Frost, "Re-Naming The Waters: 'Southeast Asia Sea' Or 'South Sea'? – Analysis", *Eurasia Review*, January 29, 2016, at <http://www.eurasiareview.com/29012016-re-naming-the-waters-southeast-asia-sea-or-south-sea-analysis/>, accessed on February 22, 2016.

¹³ "Trade between India, CLMV can be much better: Nirmala Sitharaman", *The Economic Times*, January 12, 2016, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-01-12/news/69704787_1_commerce-ministry-ASEAN-countries, accessed on April 9, 2016

India and ASEAN Arguments Over RCEP

On February 14-19, the 11th round of negotiations of the RCEP was held in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei. India's strong negotiating stance on services, especially for liberalising movement of workers, was being objected by ASEAN members but backed by Australia, which was trying to act as a mediator between the two. In Brunei, there wasn't any progress in the area of goods as initial detailed offers made by the ASEAN and Japan were for lower number of goods than they had committed to when talks started, and they were asked to rectify it. India floated a second paper on the services sector at the negotiations where it emphasised that it was important to liberalise Mode 4 as freer movement of people was essential for successfully opening up the other modes of services as well, including Mode 3 (commercial presence) and Mode 2 (consumption abroad). The ASEAN, which did not give India any concessions in easing movement of labour in the bilateral comprehensive economic cooperation agreement signed by the two earlier, was showing the same hesitancy in the RCEP negotiations. Australia, which was also bilaterally negotiating a free trade agreement with India, however, seemed to understand New Delhi's seriousness about getting a good deal in services. The next negotiating round for RCEP is in Perth, Australia, in

April, followed by one in New Zealand in June.¹⁴

Ground Satellite Station in Vietnam with Indian Help

The Vietnamese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment said that the project for "establishing stations for probe, satellite data collection and remote sensing data processing facility for ASEAN," based in Vietnam, is a project in the framework of cooperation between ASEAN and India. The construction of the satellite station will enable Vietnam to learn the techniques and experience of remote sensing from India. Vietnam will also have more data sources, strengthen close cooperation with other countries in the region, and have access to training for its human resources in this field. The project was approved with a total budget of US\$23 million taken from the ASEAN - India Cooperation Fund. India will provide the cost of construction and operation in the first five years for data acquisition and processing. India's remote sensing products will be provided for free to the ASEAN countries for five years. India already has two stations in Indonesia and Brunei. These stations will facilitate the exploration, collection of data and monitoring of environmental resources in the region.¹⁵

Military Exercise in India

For the first time ever, multinational exercise will be conducted by ground forces in India. It will have 18 ASEAN Plus nations' (including China, the US, Russia, Japan, South Korea) participation. The largest 'Multinational Field

¹⁴ Amiti Sen, "RCEP talks: ASEAN resists, Australia supports India's stand on services", *Business Line*, February 22, 2016, at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/rcep-talks-ASEAN-resists-australia-supports-indias-stand-on-services/article8268221.ece>, accessed on April 8, 2016

¹⁵ "India to set up ground satellite station in Vietnam", *Vietnamnet Bridge*, January 7, 2016, at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/149670/india-to-set-up-ground-satellite-station-in-vietnam.html>, accessed on March 16, 2016

Training Exercise (FTX)', Exercise FORCE 18, will be conducted by the Indian Army from March 2 - 8 at Pune. The theme of the exercise is Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) and Peacekeeping Operations (PKO). The essence of the exercise would be to learn and share best practices with the other armies of the world and display commitment for peace and stability in the region.¹⁶

Hamid Ansari Visited SE Asia

Vice President Hamid Ansari said on February 4 that a stronger partnership between the ASEAN countries and India would boost Asia's voice in global governance. "It is evident that a stronger ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)-India partnership would give us a stronger voice on global governance issues," Mr Ansari said while delivering a lecture on "India, Thailand and ASEAN: Contours of a Rejuvenated Relationship" at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. "ASEAN members and India have similar aspirations to have an open trading system through global organisations like the WTO. We have also shown a strong commitment, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, as we take up our own role to address issues related to climate change. India places ASEAN at the core of the Act East policy and at the centre of our dream of an Asian century," he said. The vice

president said that the three Cs of commerce, culture and connectivity define the future focus areas of cooperation between ASEAN member states and India. He spoke about 'Make in India', 'Digital India', 'Skill India' and 'Smart Cities' initiatives. Mr Ansari said that India was open to offer ASEAN its indigenously developed GPS Aided Geo Augmented Navigation (GAGAN) services, which provides advanced navigation and location assistance and information facilities. Regarding connectivity, the vice president said that special efforts were being made to develop a coherent strategy, particularly for linking ASEAN with northeast India. "This is reflected in the finalisation of negotiations on the India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicles Agreement and ASEAN-India Maritime Transport Cooperation Agreement. ASEAN-India Civil Aviation Task Force is expected to oversee optimisation of air connectivity. Other major projects on connectivity include the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport project and Rhi-Tiddim road," he mentioned.¹⁷

Sushma Swaraj Spoke About Connectivity in Delhi Dialogue

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said on February 18 that enhancing connectivity between India and Southeast Asia could be a game changer for India's northeast. "Enhancing connectivity is a strategic priority for both India and ASEAN," Ms. Sushma Swaraj said in her keynote address at the ministerial session of the Delhi Dialogue VIII. "For India's northeastern region, it can be a game changer. India has been

¹⁶ Huma Siddiqui, "ASEAN Plus nations to take part in military exercise in India", *The Financial Express*, February 29, 2016, at <http://www.financialexpress.com/article/economy/ASEAN-plus-nations-to-take-part-in-military-exercise-in-india/217246/>, accessed on April 8, 2016

¹⁷ "ASEAN-India partnership to boost Asian voice: Ansari", *The Statesman*, February 4, 2016, at <http://www.thestatesman.com/news/india/ASEAN-india-partnership-to-boost-asian-voice-ansari/121221.html>, accessed on March 16, 2016

working with ASEAN to enhance physical connectivity via our northeast as well as our eastern seaboard,” she said. Besides the existing transportation and connectivity projects, at the 13th ASEAN-India Summit in November 2015, Prime Minister Modi announced a line of credit of \$1 billion to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN. Ms. Swaraj said that through its ‘Act East Policy’, India had been giving a renewed focus to its engagement with ASEAN and other countries in the east. Describing India and ASEAN as two bright spots of optimism amidst ongoing global economic uncertainties, she said that the ASEAN Community had opened up a whole new world of opportunities for shared socio-economic growth and India would like to be part of this growth. At the Delhi Dialogue VIII, the EAM, India also spoke about issues ranging from maritime security to regional economic integration.¹⁸

India to Help Brunei in Defence

India offered the services of its retired soldiers to Brunei to augment its armed forces. Brunei, so far, has been dependent on British military support and if accepted, Indian hands could replace British forces in Brunei. On February 2, an agreement on defence cooperation was

inked between Vice-President Mohammad Hamid Ansari and senior representatives of the Sultanate. While the agreement only talked about boosting defence ties by conducting joint military exercises and bilateral cooperation through exchange of visits, experience, information, training and cooperation between the defence industries, India offered to provide the services of retired officers and soldiers, particularly of the Gurkha Regiment, to Brunei. However, no final decision was taken on the matter. Defence cooperation between India and Brunei already exists in the form of naval ship visits, training of senior military officers in staff colleges and exchange of experience. The framework agreement seeks to institutionalize this cooperation. Meanwhile, other MoUs signed during Ansari’s visit included an agreement on health cooperation that will involve exchange of doctors, other professionals and experts, besides regulation of pharmaceuticals, medical devices and cosmetics. The Vice President also talked about setting up a fertiliser plant in Brunei.¹⁹

President Mukherjee Hopeful about India-Brunei Partnership

President Pranab Mukherjee on February 22 greeted the people of Brunei on their national day and said that the country was an important partner in India’s ‘Act East’ policy’. “India and Brunei have long enjoyed close ties of friendship and I am confident that our ongoing exchanges in various spheres will enable an even closer

¹⁸ “India-ASEAN connectivity can be game changer for northeast: Sushma”, *Business Standard*, February 18, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-ASEAN-connectivity-can-be-game-changer-for-northeast-sushma-116021801181_1.html, accessed on March 10, 2016

¹⁹ Maneesh Chhibber, “India offers its retired soldiers to guard Brunei”, *The Indian Express*, February 3, 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-offers-its-retired-soldiers-to-guard-brunei/>, accessed on March 10, 2016

partnership between our two countries and elevate our relationship to greater heights in the years to come,” said the President. Mukherjee also wished the sultan for his good health and personal well-being and for the continued progress and prosperity of the people of Brunei Darussalam.²⁰

Northeast India-Act East Policy

TR Zeliang Spoke About Infrastructure Development in NE:

Nagaland’s Chief Minister TR Zeliang mentioned that construction of highways and railways within the region and linking the region with mainland India as well as with the neighboring countries are priorities of infrastructural development in Northeast India. At the inaugural session of the two-day workshop on “India-Japan partnership towards meeting the challenge of infrastructure development in India’s Northeast”, the CM also said that by doing that the isolation of the region will be eliminated and development will usher in. The workshop was held under the broader ambit of the “Tokyo Declaration for Japan-India

Special Strategic and Global Partnership”, signed by the Prime Ministers of the two countries in Tokyo in 2014. The Tokyo Declaration placed special focus on Japan’s cooperation for heightened connectivity and development in Northeast, and linking the region to other economic corridors in India and to Southeast Asia. He said, “In fact, what we need is not barbed wire fencing, but construction of roads across the border to “un-lock the land-locked areas”, and promote trade and development.”²¹

Tripura in Act East Policy:

After opening a multi-facility ‘Integrated Development Complex (IDC)’ at Srimantapur, about 60 km from Agartala, aiming at facilitation of smooth passage of citizens between India and Bangladesh and expand border trade with the neighbouring nation, Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Minister for Commerce, said that Tripura would be a gateway for India’s enhanced connectivity with South-East Asia and play a noteworthy role in improving relations with Bangladesh. She said that for land-locked Northeast, access to Chittagong Port is essential. The Feni in Sabroom subdivision of South Tripura district was also laid to facilitate border trade between India and Bangladesh. Chittagong port is near about 75 km from the Feni Bridge by surface transport.²²

²⁰ “Brunei important partner in ‘Act East’ policy: President Pranab”, *newsx*, February 22, 2016, at <http://www.newsx.com/world/21408-brunei-important-partner-in-act-east-policy-president-pranab>, accessed on April 8, 2016

²¹ “Roads and Railways should be first priority for Northeast: TR”, *The Morung Express*, January 20, 2016, at <http://morungexpress.com/roads-and-railways-should-be-first-priority-for-northeast-tr/>, accessed on April 5, 2016.

²² “Tripura to be gateway of India’s corridor with South-East Asia: Nirmala Sitharaman”, *The Economic Times*, January 6, 2016, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-01-06/news/69564110_1_chittagong-port-river-feni-border-trade, accessed on April 5, 2016.

Myanmar Locals Can Get Medical Treatment in Indian Side Border Hospitals:

Following the overhauling of hospitals in Manipur's border districts of Chandel, Churachandpur and Ukhrul, people are helping the locals as well as the poor Myanmarese living along neglected border areas. Police these days do not arrest Myanmarese nationals who come to the border hospitals for treatment. In the past, some of them were arrested and sent to jail. Okram Ibomcha, the director of the health department of Manipur, is now working towards reorienting the border hospitals and supervising the presence of doctors and paramedics in these remote areas where there were no accommodation and basic amenities available in hospitals. Lack of water, power, and other basic facilities are common problems in remote Northeastern parts. Until the recent past, the people from remote areas used to get medical help from the military hospitals run by the Assam Rifles. Nowadays, motorbikes are used to provide medical care in areas where jeeps cannot go.²³

Indian Ambassador Identified the Gaps in Indo-Myanmar Bilateral Relations

India's Ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Gautam Mukhopadhyay identified gap in information, lack of banking facilities, absence of regular air connectivity and India's legacy of disengagement with

Myanmar during the Junta era that hold India back from becoming a prosperous investor country for the latter. He mentioned about these issues in an interview to Mr. Soe Myint. Additionally, he said, India is not China's competitor in Myanmar and both countries share cordial relations with each other. The Indian Ambassador also praised Myanmar for holding a fair and dignified election in the last few days of 2015.²⁴

Brunei

Vice President of India Talks about Hydrocarbon Potential

India's Vice President Hamid Ansari on February 3 delivered a speech at the University of Brunei on the topic 'India-Brunei: Partners in Peace and Prosperity'. He said that as India embarked on a sustained high growth trajectory, its increasing energy requirements offered Brunei an opportunity to enhance export of hydrocarbons to New Delhi. Mr. Ansari further added, "The growing Indian economy also provides us with an opportunity to move beyond the typical energy seller-buyer relationship. There is tremendous potential to diversify and do value-addition in the hydrocarbon export chain. He appreciated the support extended by Brunei in making India a full dialogue partner of ASEAN. India's North-Eastern region is the land-bridge to the ASEAN, he said. India is working on drafting the ASEAN-India Plan of Action for the period of 2016-2021, to translate

²³ "Manipur: Border hospitals provide aid to Myanmarese", The Northeast Today, at <http://thenortheasttoday.com/manipur-border-hospitals-provide-aid-to-myanmarese/>, accessed on April 5, 2016.

²⁴ "Indian ambassador talks trade, connectivity, and the 'dignity' of the Myanmar election", Mizzima, January 26, 2016, at <http://mizzima.com/news-opinion/indian-ambassador-talks-trade-connectivity-and-%E2%80%98dignity%E2%80%99-myanmar-election>, accessed on February 22, 2016.

the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership Vision into concrete action for greater progress and prosperity.²⁵

Cambodia

Dual Citizenship Banned for Cambodian Political Leaders

Holders of dual citizenship will no longer be able to pursue political career in Cambodia, mentioned Prime Minister Hun Sen. This law is already functional for the National Election Committee; but now will be implemented for the presidents of the political parties as well. He said. “The president and members of the National Election Committee must hold only Khmer nationality, so [we] must eliminate this for political parties as well”. This will enable the legal authorities in Cambodia to desist a political leader from fleeing from the country after committing any offence and seeking shelter in other country. Currently, Sam Rainsy, the opposition leader, is abroad as he wants to avoid legal charges against him in Cambodia. This context helps one to understand why PM Hun Sen wants extension of the law for the presidents of the political parties. Since Prince Norodom Ranariddh, many political leaders in Cambodia hold dual citizenships

which help them to get shelter in another country in case they face any legal hassles in Cambodia. Hun Sen, who is the prime minister of Cambodia for more than three decades, wants to bring an end to this custom. Hun Sen is criticised for being undemocratic and authoritative by the human rights watchers.²⁶

Hun Sen Trying to Pacify the Cambodians

The Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen will face general election in 2018; however, it seems like he has already started his election campaign. The authoritative ruler, Hun Sen, who is ‘infamous’ for human rights violation and not allowing the opposition to work effectively in the country, has been trying to garner support by increasing salary in the garment structure and by relaxing inheritance tax. In 2013 the Cambodian People’s Party, the party of PM Hun Sen won narrowly and it was the youth population who deserted him. Hence, Hun Sen is now using internet platforms to reach out to the youths of the country. However, it would be difficult for Hun Sen to win the 2018 election. The party and government forces have beaten the opposition lawmakers and attempted to violate human rights in several occasions and those memories are still prominent in the minds of the common people of Cambodia. Additionally, the victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar has also given a cause to the Cambodians to think twice before they again vote for Hun Sen.²⁷

²⁵ “Tremendous potential for India, Brunei in hydrocarbon sector” , *Business Standard*, February 3, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/tremendous-potential-for-india-brunei-in-hydrocarbon-sector-116020300181_1.html, accessed on March 18, 2016

²⁶ H. Reaksmeay, “Hun Sen Calls for Ban on Dual Citizens Leading Political Parties”, *Voice of America, Khmer*, December 28, 2015, at <http://www.voacambodia.com/content/hun-sen-calls-for-ban-on-dual-citizens-leading-political-parties/3121559.html>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

²⁷ Prak Chan Thul , “Haunted by close call, Cambodia’s long-ruling PM gears up for distant election”, *Reuters*, January 13, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics-idUSKCN0UR13420160113>, accessed on January 21, 2016.

Cambodia's PM Seeking Explanation for Charging his Country

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen apparently asked for apology or explanation from those who criticised him in 2012 for not allowing ASEAN to issue the Joint Communique. In a graduation ceremony in the country, the prime minister mentioned that he expressed his unhappiness over the questions raised on Cambodia's closeness with China in 2012. He pointed out not only Cambodia, but other ASEAN countries too have not been able to name China on paper as offender of international maritime laws. He reiterated Cambodia's stand on favouring bilateral mechanisms to resolve territorial disputes. He said that ASEAN will not resolve the South China Sea disputes.²⁸

Chinese Naval Warships Visited Cambodia

Three Chinese warships carrying about 1,000 crew members paid a visit to Sihanoukville on February 22 to take part in five days of naval exercises with the Cambodian navy. They visited Koh Tang, Koh Rong Sanloem and Koh Russei Islands. The visit was aimed at enhancing maritime security. Surprisingly, just three days before this visit, Japanese naval ships too visited Sihanoukville. The naval visits came at a particularly difficult time for Japan and China as both are seeking for

support in their expedition for control of the East Sea. Multiple Asian nations have expressed that China should not build landing strips and warship docks on disputed islands in the South China Sea, a crucial shipping route for an estimated \$5 trillion in oil and manufacturing tankers per year.²⁹

East Timor

Indonesia And East Timor Cooperation on Economic

Indonesia and East Timor on January 27 signed several cooperation agreements to strengthen bilateral relations, during the visit of Indonesian President, Joko Widodo, to East Timor. Widodo stressed on Indonesia's "commitment of being the main partner in the development of East Timor". The agreements will enhance collaboration among the countries' state-owned enterprises in oil, gas and renewable energy sector, and construction of infrastructure in East Timor where Indonesia plans to invest around \$500 million in 2016. Widodo and Araujo also pledged to speed up the demarcation of the land boundary and start negotiations to secure the maritime border. Indonesia still controls western part of the island of Timor, while East Timor gained independence in May 2002 after spending three years under United Nations administration and 24 years occupation by Jakarta that was followed by several centuries of Portuguese colonization.³⁰

²⁸ Mong Palatino, "Cambodia's Hun Sen Wants a South China Sea Apology", *The Diplomat*, February 12, 2016, at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/cambodias-hun-sen-wants-a-south-china-sea-apology/>, accessed on February 23, 2016.

²⁹ "Chinese Warships Dock in Sihanoukville", *Khmer Times*, February 22, 2016, at <http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/21723/chinese-warships-dock-in-sihanoukville/>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

³⁰ "Indonesia and East Timor strengthen economic ties", *La Prensa*, January 27, 2016, at http://www.laprensasa.com/309_america-in-english/3586559_indonesia-and-east-timor-strengthen-economic-ties.html, accessed on April 9, 2016

Indonesia

Indonesian Minister Requested ASEAN Countries for Joint Ventures in the Defence

Indonesia's Coordinating Maritime Affairs Minister Rizal Ramli invited all ASEAN countries to invest in its defence sector. He said that involving other countries in Indonesia's defence sector would strengthen the country's defence. Citing the example of Airbus's experience in Europe, he showed his willingness to encourage cooperation and increasing stakes from other ASEAN countries in the defence industry of Indonesia.³¹

ISIS Led Attack on Jakarta

Suicide bombers and assassins attacked Jakarta on January 14 and the assault was claimed by Islamic state, the first time the radical group has targeted the world's most populous Muslim nation. Seven people were killed in Jakarta despite multiple blasts and five of them were the attackers themselves. The impudence of the assault suggested a new brand of militancy in a country where low-level strikes on police are common. It took security forces about three hours to end the attack. An Indonesian and a Canadian were killed in the attack. Twenty people, including an Algerian, an Austrian, a

German and a Dutch national, were wounded. Jakarta's police chief said, "ISIS is behind this attack definitely," using a common acronym for Islamic State, and he identified an Indonesian militant, Bahrun Naim, as the man responsible for plotting it.³²

Laos

New Communist Party Chief in Lao PDR

Laos's Communist Party on January 22 chose Bounnhang Vorachit to be its new leader after a vote by a newly formed central committee that did not include the prime minister and former party chief, signaling their political exits. The outgoing party chief and president, Choummaly Sayasone, 79, who held both posts since 2006, and Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, 71, were among four serving politburo members who did not apply to join the top committee. Bounnhang was top of the list of a new 77-member central committee, which saw all 39 members who applied for re-election chosen. The prime minister and cabinet posts were not scheduled to be announced at the congress. Laos has close political ties to communist Vietnam and mirrors its political system. Communist neighbor China has been vying aggressively for influence on Laos, however, providing scholarships, aid, loans and infrastructure investment to a fledgling \$12-billion economy. Growth in Laos has been driven by investment, mining and sales abroad most of its growing hydropower output, largely to Thailand.³³

³¹ Nani Afrida, "Indonesia Invites ASEAN to Engage in Defence Industry", *The Jakarta Post*, February 9, 2016, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/02/09/indonesia-invites-asean-engage-defense-industry.html>, accessed on March 10, 2016.

³² Kanupriya Kapoor and Darren Whiteside, "Islamic State claims Jakarta attack, targets Indonesia for first time", *Reuters*, January 14, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-blast-idUSKCN0US0BS20160114>, accessed on April 12, 2016

³³ Martin Petty, "Laos picks new Communist Party chief", *Reuters*, January 22, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-laos-congress-idUSKCN0V00Q6>, accessed on April 8, 2016

Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Railway:

The 330 km high-speed railway linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore will be operational with two varieties of train services- one will be a direct service linking two capitals and the other will have transit stops in between. MyHCR Corp is responsible for developing the project and it is the project delivery vehicle accountable for the definitions of technical and commercial aspects of the project. The non-stop high-speed train will take 90 minutes to reach Singapore from Kuala Lumpur. On the other hand, the one which will be having transit stops, will take approximately two hours to reach the destination. The estimated cost for the project is RM 70 billion as of now. A request for information (RFI) exercise has already been done by Malaysia's Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) and Singapore's Land Transport Authority. Chinese, Japanese, European and South Korean companies may compete for the contract, given its high value, reported the Malaysian Insider.³⁴

Malaysian Infrastructure Federation Calls for Early ratification of TPP

The Federation of Malaysian Infrastructurers (FMM) advised the

government to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement as soon as possible, as it will enable Malaysia to save USD 1.2 billion which, otherwise, goes to tariff expenditure. The TPP will remove 85% of tariff from Malaysia's trade with its new free trade partners including the US, Canada, Mexico and Peru. The FMM said that liberalised economies like South Korea, China etc. have performed well in the global market than the closed economies. It also mentioned that Malaysia should sign/ratify FTAs which would certainly give the country additional opportunities to be at par with other strong regional economies like Singapore and Vietnam.³⁵

Malaysia Police Arrested Four Suspects

Malaysian Police have arrested four youths suspected of having links with the IS between January 11 and 15 from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The police said, one of the suspects was planning for a suicide bombing inside the country and another one is having direct connection with the funding agency of IS. Three of them were detained in Turkey while they were trying to go to Syria and join IS. They were sent back to Malaysia. Later on, the Malaysian police arrested them in Kuala Lumpur on their arrival on January 11. The arrests came to light after the explosions in Indonesia happened on January 13. As hundreds of youths from Malaysia and Indonesia have left their countries to join the IS, the state authorities have tightened their control. For instance, the Malaysian police have detained over 120 people

³⁴ "2 high-speed train services to Singapore, says operator", The Malaysian Insider, January 4, 2016, at <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/2-high-speed-train-services-to-singapore-says-operator>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

³⁵ "FMM calls for ratification of the TPPA", The Star Online, January 15, 2016, at <http://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2016/01/15/fmm-calls-for-ratification-of-the-tpa/>, accessed on January 21, 2016.

since 2014 under its terrorism laws. The most dangerous threat is posed by the returnees who have travelled through Middle East and West Asia and are well-equipped to carry out terror acts.³⁶

Mahathir Mohamad Facing Defamation Case

Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is facing defamation case for his blog post on Attorney-General Mohamed Apandi Ali in Malaysia. On February 5, the former prime minister charged the attorney general for lack of credibility as the latter refused to charge the present Prime Minister Najib Razak. Mr. Apandi refused to charge Mr. Razak over his personal deposit of RM 2.6 billion last month. Mr. Mahathir Mohamad also claimed that Najib Razak should resign from his post.³⁷

Malaysian PM Facing Criticism over Alleged Involvement in Corruption

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak is facing a lot of criticism over his alleged role in the scandal revolving around 1Malaysia Development Bhd., or 1MDB, set up by him in 2009 to augment economic growth. It was alleged that Mr. Razak has illegally received money from banks, businesses and other agencies to 1MDB just before the

2013 national election in which, his party, UMNO got a narrow victory. As the ruling party and Mr. Razak are not ready to accept the allegations, they have chosen to shut those mouths which are critical of them. Former deputy prime minister of Malaysia Mr. Muhyiddin who was also holding an important position in the party was removed from his government and party. Another journalist who published a long report on Mr. Razak's alleged involvement in the case in an open online source was summoned to the police station to face questions. Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director of Human Rights Watch mentioned, "Apparently, Najib is willing to sacrifice Malaysia's prior respect for freedom of online expression if it means he can successfully stifle critical reporting about his government's policies."³⁸

Myanmar

Woodside Discovered New Gas Reserves Offshore Myanmar

Woodside, an Australian company, discovered a new gas reserve in block AD-7 in the Bay of Bengal, 100km off northern Myanmar in a water depth of about 830m. The exact gas reserve has been found in Thalin A-1 well, in Block AD-7. Another gas reserve was found by the same company in Block A-6 (in Shwee Yee Htun-1). Woodside is partner with Korean company

³⁶ Yantoultra Ngui and Celine Fernandez, "Malaysia Arrests After Jakarta Attack Fuel Fears of Islamic State's Reach", The Wall Street Journal, January 16, 2016, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/malaysia-arrests-suspected-islamic-state-militants-1452931418>, accessed on January 22, 2016.

³⁷ "Mahathir faces criminal defamation probe over blog post on Malaysia's Attorney-General", Straits Times, February 15, 2016, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/mahathir-faces-criminal-defamation-probe-over-blog-post-on-malaysias-attorney-general>, accessed on February 23, 2016.

³⁸ Tom Wright, "Malaysia Leader Najib Razak Lashes Out Against His Critics in Party and Media", The Wall Street Journal, February 28, 2016, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/malaysia-leader-lashes-out-against-his-critics-in-party-and-media-1456500740>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

Daewoo and French Total in these two gas blocks. The company expressed its satisfaction on the new discoveries.³⁹

NLD Leaders took Seats in the Parliament

Followed by three decades of military rule, Aung San Suu Kyi 's National League for Democracy has finally been able to take a majority seat in Myanmar's Parliament and initiated the process of democratic government in the country. Hundreds of NLD leaders, many of whom were former political prisoners during *Junta* days, took their seats in the lower house of the Parliament. The party won 80% of all electable positions during a general election in November 2015. Win Myint, a close follower of Aung San Suu Kyi and an NLD MP, was sworn in as house speaker. But T Khun Myat, a member of the outgoing government's USDP party, was also elected as deputy speaker. This shows the pragmatism on part of Suu Kyi as she does not want to disassociate from the USDP and former military rulers who still enjoy one third seats in the Parliament.⁴⁰

China Faces more Criticism Over a Deep water Port

China had previously bagged a project of building a deep water port at Kyaukphyu in December 2015. However, as the local

populace in Myanmar is advocating against the project, the new government in Myanmar will have to balance between influential regional neighbour and domestic interests . The Chinese consortium's leader, Citic Group, mentioned that it had won a fair and open bid and released a detailed statement in response to questions about its project which indicated that it intended to minimise suspicions about Chinese motives in Myanmar. The company even introduced local skill development programmes for the locals in Myanmar who can be engaged in the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone. Yun Sun, an expert on Myanmar-China relations who works at the Washington, D.C. based Stimson Center mentioned that China must demonstrate some success in Myanmar after repeated failures in project implementation due to various difficulties which often include resistance from the local people due to unattended problem of displacement. NLD Economic Committee's Chairman Han Thar Myint said that while in power, the party will do whatever is good for the country and will do a case by case investigation into Chinese projects in Myanmar.⁴¹

Anti-Drug Activists Attacked

14 Members of the Pat Jasan organization, a grassroots organisation that works against drug trafficking were attacked and wounded as they were marching in Northern Myanmar to destroy some poppy cultivation. After Afghanistan,

³⁹ Peter Klinger, "Woodside makes Myanmar find", The West Australian, February 12, 2016, at <https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/wa/a/30804138/woodside-makes-second-myanmar-discovery/>, accessed on February 23, 2016.

⁴⁰ Sara Perria, Oliver Holmes, "Aung San Suu Kyi's party takes seats in historic session of Myanmar parliament", The Guardian, February 1, 2016, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/01/aung-san-suu-kyi-leads-party-into-myanmar-parliament-to-claim-power>, accessed on April 5, 2016.

⁴¹ Shibani Mahtani, "China Moves to Revive Its Sway in Myanmar", The Wall Street Journal, February 28, 2016, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-moves-to-revive-its-sway-in-myanmar-1456697644>, accessed on April 5, 2016.

Myanmar is the world's second-biggest producer of opium, which is used to make heroin and Kachin, which borders China, is one of the country's two main areas where opium grows. Pat Jason group was formed about two years ago because of growing drug abuse in the Kachin community. It faces opposition both from poor farmers who make a living from poppy cultivation and ethnic militia groups which are involved in drug trafficking.⁴²

Philippines

US-Philippines Defence Talk

US Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Ash Carter met their Filipino counterparts and discussed regional security issues. US state Department Spokesman John Kirby said,

“I can assure you that tensions in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly the South China Sea, will be on the agenda. It's a concern that we and our Philippine friends and allies share, and I suspect they'll have a pretty robust discussion about it tomorrow”

Philippines and US are security allies and do conduct regular joint exercises and patrols in the South China Sea. US military

access to Philippines, possible future arms deals and larger US agenda in the Asia-Pacific were other discussing agenda in the meeting.⁴³

Albert Del Rosario's Resignation

Philippines's Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario has resigned from his post in February 2016 due to ailments. His tenure started in 2011 and has witnessed many successes including the US-Philippines Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2014. Del Rosario has been a vocal and tireless voice against Chinese assertiveness in South China Sea and few times he has tried to convince the ASEAN partners in declaring a joint statement condemning China's action in the disputed islands. Under his leadership, Philippines has launched a case against China's actions in the West Philippine Sea in 2013. Laura del Rosario (no relation with Albert Del Rosario), the undersecretary for international economic relations 'name has been recommended by Albert Del Rosario to succeed him.⁴⁴

Enhanced Defence Cooperation between Japan and Philippines

Japan and Philippines have signed a defence accord which will allow Tokyo to supply military equipment to Philippines. Philippines' Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin mentioned that the agreement is not directed against any country but intends to reduce gaps in the underfunded Philippine military's capabilities. He further said that there has been no discussion on what

⁴² “Grassroots anti-drug activists attacked in Myanmar”, The Times of India, February 25, 2016, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/Myanmar-anti-drug-activists-attacked/articleshow/51139791.cms>, accessed on April 5, 2016.

⁴³ Nike Ching, “South China Sea Tensions Top Agenda in US-Philippines Talks”, Voice of America, January 11, 2016, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/south-china-sea-tensions-top-agenda-in-us-philippines-talks/3141108.html>, accessed on January 22, 2016.

⁴⁴ Prashanth Parameswaran , “Philippines' Top Diplomat Resigns With South China Sea Verdict Looming”, The Diplomat, February 8, 2016, at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/philippines-top-diplomat-resigns-with-south-china-sea-verdict-looming/> accessed on April 5, 2016.

defense equipment Japan will provide to Manila. But he further added that the Philippine military currently desires to bring some advancement in its intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. Both Japan and Philippines share some territorial disputes with China and both of them are increasing their defence cooperation including one joint naval rescue drills in South China Sea in 2015.⁴⁵

President's Election in Philippines

A presidential debate was held in Davao, Mindanao which was a first of its kind in 23 years. The five candidates for the upcoming presidential election in the Philippines are Grace Poe, 47, One-term senator and adopted daughter of movie royalty; **Mar Roxas, 58**, US-educated ex-banker and grandson of a 1950s president; **Jejomar Binay, 73**, Vice-president and former mayor of Makati; **Miriam Santiago, 70**, Experienced — has served in all branches of government and running alongside Bongbong Marcos, son of the late dictator and Rodrigo Duterte, a crime-busting mayor known as “Dirty Harry”. In the current scenario, it seems like Grace Poe is leading the presidential campaign as she represents a new generation; but she is facing court case against her as she is not a natural citizen of Philippines and has not spent last ten years in the country, both mandatory for running for

presidency in Philippines. Other candidates as mentioned above, do have few drawbacks as well. On February 9, the presidential campaign was launched officially. The general election will be held in May 2016. The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) planned to organise two presidential debates in the coming months – after the Mindanao debate on February 21, one in the Visayas on March 20 and the third one in Luzon on April 24. A vice-presidential debate will also be held in Manila on April 10. The current President is Benigno Aquino III, who is in power since 2010, and cannot continue in the same position for the second term, as noted in the Constitution.⁴⁶

Singapore

Vivian Balakrishnan Spoke about Cooperation to Combat Terrorism

Visiting Foreign Affairs Minister of Singapore Vivian Balakrishnan said on January 13 that it was important to continue the ongoing collaboration between Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia to counter the threat of terrorism in the region. The minister was speaking in Jakarta at the end of his two-day inaugural visit to Indonesia as Singapore's top envoy. Dr Balakrishnan had earlier called on President Joko Widodo. He also met his Indonesian counterpart, Ms Retno Marsudi, as well as Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Luhut Pandjaitan, among others on the first day of his visit. “In fact the key topics

⁴⁵ “Japan to supply Philippines with military equipment”, February 27, 2016, at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/137075/japan-to-supply-philippines-with-military-equipment>, accessed on April 5, 2016.

⁴⁶ Avantika Chilkoti, “Philippine presidential candidates lock horns in first debate”, Financial Times, February 22, 2016, at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8058d07c-d91e-11e5-a72f-1e7744c66818.html#axzz44wgh7qgu>, accessed on April 5, 2016.

that were discussed focused very much on the economy and how Singapore and Indonesia can collaborate in expanding the scope for investments (and) this builds again on a very good pre-existing track record.”⁴⁷

Madhya Pradesh and Singapore Signed MoU

Madhya Pradesh signed four Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with Singapore on January 14 including one on 1000 megawatt wind energy plant. The CM of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Shivraj Singh Chouhan, mentioned that the state had 12000 acres of land where industries could be set up. The occasion was a business seminar in the state. Other MoUs were on capacity building, urban planning and food processing.⁴⁸

ACTIP Ratified by Singapore

Singapore became the first country to ratify the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) on January 26. The Convention was signed in November 2015 at the ASEAN leaders meet. Singapore Inter-Agency Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons mentioned that it would help

Singapore curbing the menace of illegal trafficking across the region.⁴⁹

Thailand

JETRO-Thailand Cooperation in Trade and Industries

Thailand, along with Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) and other ASEAN members, is trying to initiate “Made in ASEAN” campaign for produces of ASEAN countries. Thailand’s Commerce Minister Apiradi Tantraporn said, “Under this initiative, manufacturers in Asean could make products for different brands, but those produced at joint manufacturing bases would be labelled Made in Asean for re-export in the world market”.⁵⁰ JETRO is assisting Thailand in many ways to develop its enterprises and industries under one agreement that was signed in November 2015 during the visit of Thai deputy prime minister to Japan.

Vietnam

Election in Vietnam

Vietnam’s Communist Party on January 27 re-elected its 71-year-old chief for a second term. It was an expected outcome. Nguyen Phu Trong

⁴⁷ Francis Chan, “Collaboration between Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia to counter terror threat must continue: Minister”, *The Jakarta Post*, January 13, 2016 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/01/13/collaboration-between-singapore-indonesia-malaysia-counter-terror-threat-must-contin>, accessed on April 8, 2016

⁴⁸ “Madhya Pradesh Signs Four MoUs with Singapore”, *The Economic Times*, January 14, 2016, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-01-14/news/69765589_1_mous-madhya-pradesh-skill-training, accessed on March 10, 2016.

⁴⁹ “Singapore Ratifies ASEAN Convention Against Human Trafficking”, *Channel News Asia*, January 26, 2016, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-ratifies-asean/2458606.html>, accessed on March 10, 2016.

⁵⁰ PHUSADEE ARUNMAS, “Made in Asean initiative on the cards”, *Bangkok Post*, January 29, 2016, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/business/news/843856/made-in-asean-initiative-on-the-cards>, accessed on February 22, 2016.

is the chief of a 19-member Politburo, the all-powerful body that handles the day-to-day affairs of the government and the party. In a subsequent vote, he was immediately chosen as the general-secretary, the de facto No. 1 leader of the country. Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc was also elected to the Politburo, and he was expected to become the prime minister. He will replace Nguyen Tan Dung. The third most important member elected to the Politburo was Minister of Public Security Tran Dai Quang, who will be the country's new President. The general secretary, the prime minister and the president, along with the chairman of the National Assembly, are the four key members in the collective leadership represented by the Politburo, and the 180-member Central Committee, which handles policy making in Vietnam.⁵¹

Vietnam Received Russian Made Submarine

A freighter carrying the fifth Kilo-class submarine made by Russia for Vietnam arrived at Cam Ranh gulf in Vietnam's south central coastal Khanh Hoa province, some 1,040 km south of capital Hanoi on February 2. It is able to operate at a maximum depth of 300 meters and at a speed of 20 nautical miles per hour with 52 crew members on board. The Kilo-class submarines are named after major cities and provinces of Vietnam. Earlier, the

country received four of them, namely HQ-182 Hanoi, HQ-183 Ho Chi Minh City, HQ-184 Hai Phong and HQ-185 Khanh Hoa. The four submarines were handed over to Submarine Brigade 189 under the Vietnamese Navy.⁵²

Oceania

Australia

India-Australia Signed Social Security Pact

A new social security agreement signed between India and Australia came into operation enabling people of both nations to avail retirement benefits in each other's country. The pact is likely to boost bilateral business linkages. Australian Minister for Social Services Christian Porter and Minister for Small Business and Assistant Treasurer Kelly O'Dwyer said that the Commonwealth governments wanted to make sure people who lived and worked in more than one country were not disadvantaged. The Agreement signed in November 2014 came into operation on January 1, 2016. "Australian residents living in India will be able to claim the Australian Age Pension without having to return to Australia, while Indian residents living in Australia will have access to Indian retirement pensions. It's a win-win," he said. Australia now has 30 international social security agreements around the world to support people living and working in more than one country including with countries like Austria, Belgium, Canada, Japan, Korea, Spain, Switzerland and the U.S.⁵³

⁵¹ Vijay Joshi, "Vietnam ruling party boss re-elected, cements hold on power", *The Jakarta Post*, January 27, 2016, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/01/27/vietnam-ruling-party-boss-re-elected-cements-hold-power.html>, accessed on April 8, 2016

⁵² "5th Russian-made Kilo submarine arrives in Vietnam", *ShanghaiDaily*, February 3, 2016, at http://www.shanghaidaily.com/article/article_xinhua.aspx?id=318687, accessed on March 10, 2016

⁵³ "India-Australia social pact comes into force", *The Hindu*, January 11, 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/indiaaustralia-social-pact-comes-into-force/article8092005.ece>, accessed on April 8, 2016

Australia May Send Its Own Military Satellites into Space

Unveiling a 20-year defence blueprint, Malcolm Turnbull, the Prime Minister, said that the government was increasing defence spending to strengthen the nation amidst rising tensions in the region, including China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. The Australian defence white paper laid out plans to spend £100 billion [\$AUS195 billion] over the next decade – a budget increase of £13 billion [\$AUS26 billion]. “Territorial disputes between claimants in the East China and South China Seas have created uncertainty and tension in our region,” the paper said. Mr Turnbull said that Australia needed to be prepared in case rivalries and growing military capabilities in the region were to “lead to instability and threaten Australia’s interests, whether in the South China Sea, the Korean peninsula or further afield”. “We recognise that Australia’s strategic environment is the most dynamic and challenging one that we have faced in peacetime,” he said.⁵⁴

Australian Increase in Defence

Australia would send its own satellites into space to monitor military movements in the Asia-Pacific under a bold plan being considered by the Australian Defence Force. The Defence White Paper, released by the Turnbull government, says that

access to space intelligence will become increasingly important over coming years. The paper flags that Australia will spend an extra \$3 to \$4 billion on enhanced satellite imagery capability as well as another \$2 billion on space situational awareness systems and radars out to 2039. Australia currently relies on US satellites and commercial operators for such information.⁵⁵

Fiji

Russia Transfer Weapons to Fiji

20 Russian weapon experts from the country’s military reached in Fiji followed by the arrival of 20 large containers of arms and weapons to help Fiji in transferring the same. The consignment has small arms, ammunition, military trucks and training equipment; all for Fiji’s UN Peacekeeping operations. Another source mentioned that the new arms and weapons will be used by Fijian soldiers engaged in the UN Disengagement Observer Force in Golan Heights. Initially the opposition in Fiji raised some questions over the secrecy of this weapons transfer as this was not passed through the Parliament. However, this is considered to be one of the steps taken by Fiji in consistence with its Look North Policy, adopted after the 2006 Coup. Followed by this Coup, Fiji was ‘abandoned’ by its traditional partners like Australia and New Zealand and hence, under the Look North policy, the small island nation is now

⁵⁴ Jonathan Pearlman, “Australia boosts defence spending with eye on South China Sea tensions”, *The Telegraph*, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/12172900/Australia-unveils-13bn-increase-in-defence-spending.html>, accessed on April 8, 2016

⁵⁵ Matthew Knott, “Australia considers sending its own military satellites into space”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 27, 2016, at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australia-considers-sending-its-own-military-satellites-into-space-20160227-gn55jv.html>, accessed on April 8, 2016

building closer ties with China, India and Russia.⁵⁶

Cyclone Winston Hit Fiji

Cyclone Winston has killed at least 42 people and left around 8000 people homeless in Fiji. Fijian government officials claimed that the powerful cyclone brought winds of over 320km/h (200mph), torrential rain and waves of up to 12m (40ft), destroyed many buildings in parts of the main Viti Levu and Koro islands of Fiji. Ahmad Sami, the acting head of the Red Cross's Pacific office, informed AFP news agency that the death toll numbers will continue to change with gradual access to information and better communications. India, Australia, New Zealand and European Union started helping the Pacific nation with aid.⁵⁷

New Zealand

John Key Opens Door for Asylum Seeker Children

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key had a meeting with his Australian counterpart Malcolm Turnbull and the former opened

New Zealand's door for 37 asylum seeker children, originally destined for Nauru. In 2013, Mr. John Key and former Australian PM Julia Gillard signed a deal where New Zealand promised to resettle 150 refugees each year from Nauru and Manus Island detention centers. However, successive Australian prime ministers, Tony Abbott and Turnbull have rejected the idea by saying that resettlement would encourage smuggling and criminal activities in the country. Given this context, Mr. John Key's statement is expected to make new pressure on the Australian side.⁵⁸

Papua New Guinea

PNG Soldiers Charged for Mutiny

Eleven Papua New Guinea Defence Force soldiers were charged with mutiny for allegedly refusing a directive from the military headquarters in Port Moresby. The soldiers had been deployed to Tari in Hela about 1.5 years ago and were supposed to have returned to Port Moresby earlier but they didn't. They were charged with mutiny on January 7 and appeared in the National Court in Waigani on the January 7 - 8.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "Russian experts arrive in Fiji for weapons handover", Radio New Zealand International, February 10, 2016, at <http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/296150/russian-experts-arrive-in-fiji-for-weapons-handover>, accessed on February 23, 2016.

⁵⁷ "Cyclone Winston: Fears for isolated Fiji communities as death toll jumps", BBC News, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35647854>, accessed on March 28, 2016.

⁵⁸ Fergus Hunter, "New Zealand Prime Minister John Key opens door to 37 asylum seeker children", The Sydney Morning Herald, February 15, 2016, at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/new-zealand-prime-minister-john-key-opens-door-to-37-asylum-seeker-children-20160215-gmugsb.html>, accessed on February 23, 2016.

⁵⁹ "PNG Defence Force Soldiers Charged For Mutiny", *Papua New Guinea Today*, January 3, 2016, at <http://news.pngfacts.com/2016/01/png-defence-force-soldiers-charged-for.html>, accessed on March 18, 2016

Centre Activities

1. Delhi Dialogue VIII was organised by MEA, India, in partnership with IDSA, FICCI, ICWA and various other partner organisations on February 17-19, 2016.
2. Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh contributed a chapter on 'Terrorism in Malaysia' in *Asian Strategic Review 2015*, edited by S D Muni and Vivek Chadha, published by Pentagon Press.
3. Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh reviewed *India–Myanmar Relations: Changing Contours* by Rajiv Bhatia for *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 40, Issue 1, January 2016.
4. Dr. Sampa Kundu wrote a chapter on 'Buddhist vs. Islamic Extremism in Myanmar' in *Asian Strategic Review 2015*, edited by S D Muni and Vivek Chadha, published by Pentagon Press.
5. Dr. Sampa Kundu presented her paper on China-Southeast Asia relations, written for China Year Book 2015 on February 5, 2016 at a seminar organised by the East Asia Center, IDSA.
6. Dr. Sampa Kundu spoke on India's Act East Policy at the BSF Academy, Tekanpur on January 5, 2016.
7. Dr. Sampa Kundu reviewed Bill Hayton's *The South China Sea; The Struggle for Power in Asia* in the *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol 10, No.1, January-March 2016.
8. Dr. Sampa Kundu's commentary on 'Indonesia's Terrorism Challenge' appeared on IDSA website on February 3, 2016

ABOUT US

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

Contributions are invited for:

Book Review (800 words)

Commentary (900 - 1300 words)

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

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