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Looking Eastwards From New Delhi

Wat Traimit, Bangkok

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CENTRE ACTIVITIES FOR JANUARY TO FEBRUARY 2017

Editor's Note

The new year heralds some changes in the region. In 2017 Philippines chairs ASEAN even as it has a newly elected President. It is also a year of anniversaries for ASEAN, including 25 years of ASEAN-India partnership. This will be followed next year, in 2018 with Australia hosting an ASEAN Special Summit.

But, for the time being it is Chinese influence which appears to prevail. It is Chinese influence which seemed to be behind Cambodia's suspension of its exercises with the US and Australia respectively. China has been asserting its presence in the region with its submarines visiting Malaysia. Moreover, Thailand has committed to buy Chinese submarines and tanks. The Philippines warned that any construction by China on Scarborough Shoal, (claimed by the Philippines) would be a game changer in China-Philippine relationship.

Indonesia's revival of military ties with Australia under President Joko Widodo, on the one hand and with Japan on the other would auger well for cooperation in the Indian Ocean. This is paralleled by Indonesia's military cooperation with India (upgradation of joint Army exercise called Garuda Shakti).

The first two months of 2017 thus have posed fresh challenges and opportunities for the region and India. This newsletter tries to capture some of the highlights for our readers.

Udai Bhanu Singh

Southeast Asia

ASEAN

Philippines to chair Asean

Members of Asean gathered in the Philippines on January 15, 2017 for the opening ceremony in the southern Mindanao region, which is the hometown of Rodrigo Duterte, new Chairman of the group and the President of Philippines¹. Attendees included leaders from Asean nations and partners like the United States, China, Japan and South Korea. Philippines received the chairmanship from Laos and has chaired Asean thrice over the past 40 years. President Duterte had accepted the Asean chairmanship last year and stated that the Philippines was ready and willing to steer and guide the association.

In his chairmanship President Duterte would prioritize regional stability and maritime security. “In our work, we will be guided by the following priorities: We will place our peoples at the core; work for regional peace and stability; pursue maritime security and cooperation; advance inclusive innovation-led growth; strengthen Asean resiliency; and promote Asean as a model of regionalism and as a global player,” he said. The theme for his chairmanship is “Partnering for change, Engaging the World.”

Six priorities for growth

The Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a press release that the Philippines, as Asean chair for 2017, had announced the priorities it had initiated at the Asean Foreign Ministers’ Retreat on February 21. The six priorities include striving for a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN; peace and stability in the region; maritime security and cooperation; inclusive, innovation-led growth; ASEAN’s resiliency; and Asean as a model of regionalism and a global player².

The ministers deliberated on the way forward for ASEAN’s community building- including the implementation of the Asean community vision 2025. They also focused upon strengthening of external relations and maintaining a centrality of Asean in the evolving regional architecture. They further emphasized the importance of continuing to promote initiatives that directly benefit the people of ASEAN. These include the need to redouble efforts to increase intra-regional trade and further strengthen mechanisms for extending consular assistance to Asean nationals consistent with ASEAN’s goal for deeper regional integration, and the usefulness of tapping Asean think tanks to assist in charting the direction of the regional bloc.

The Asean ministers “emphasised the importance of continuing to promote initiatives that directly benefit the people of ASEAN, including the need to redouble efforts to increase intra-regional trade and further strengthen mechanisms for extending consular assistance to Asean nationals consistent with ASEAN’s

¹ Philippines takes Asean helm at Summit, Hader Glang, January 1, 2017, Anadolu Agency, at <http://aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/philippines-takes-ASEAN-helm-at-summit/727785>

² Asean meet sets out 6 priorities for growth, January 25, 2017, at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/business/aec/30307173>

goal for deeper regional integration, and the usefulness of tapping Asean think tanks to assist in charting the future direction of ASEAN,” according to the statement by the Philippines after the retreat.

They also discussed organizing summits to mark the 25th anniversary of cooperation between Asean and India, and the 40th anniversary of relations and cooperation between Asean and the United States, Canada and the European Union.

ASEAN’s ‘grave concern’ over Beijing’s sea militarization

Philippine Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr on February 21, 2017 said that the foreign ministers of the Asean nations have expressed grave concerns about China’s militarization of the disputed waters of the South China Sea. This led China to come to its defences. Referring to Yasay’s remarks Chinese Foreign ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang claimed on February 23 that China finds these comments to be baffling and regrettable.

He further added that these are mere opinions by Mr. Yasay and not the whole Asean membership. He illustrated that President Rodrigo Duterte’s visit to China in 2016 had boosted ties between the two nations. Thus the claims made by Yasay deviate from the consensus of the two leaders and go against the current trend of China-Philippine relations. He also believes that Yasay’s claims ran counter to the shared desire of regional countries

to maintain peace and stability of the South China Sea and the promotion of regional cooperation.

We hope that Mr Yasay can follow the consensus reached by the two leaders and the shared desire of regional countries, exercise prudence, and make concrete efforts to uphold China-Philippines relations and regional peace and stability,” the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said.

Code of Conduct in South China Sea

The South China Sea region has contesting claimants which include Asean members- Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam whose claims in the South China Sea overlap those of China – an Asean dialogue partner. Amid lingering tensions and tussles, the Asean and China have been holding discussions to create some form of a legally binding code of conduct³.

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs spokesman Charles Jose stated on February 19, that Asean and China were committed to come up with a framework for the code of conduct by mid-2017.

He further stated that while the discussions on the code of conduct have been occurring for the past ten years there was fresh momentum now to move forward. Getting the framework ready for the code of conduct would by itself be a significant step in the codification and finalization of the same.

The aim of a codified agreement over the rules of conduct among the nations is to ensure peace and stability in the South China Sea region. It would be a binding agreement which would make the nations be held accountable for any

³ ASEAN, China ‘working very hard’ for sea pact – PH, PaternoEsmasquel II, February 20, 2017, at <http://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/161968-ASEAN-china-code-conduct-sea-philippines>

excesses or misconduct and would lay down a framework on how to manage disputes and overlapping claims.

Australia to host Asean special summit in 2018

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said on February 23, that Australia is scheduled to host the Asean-Australia Special Summit in March 2018. This would be the first time that Australia gets to host an Asean summit. The statement noted that the summit would be a historical opportunity for Australia to strengthen their strategic partnership with Asean⁴.

Two major side- events would also be conducted. A Business Summit, which would bring leaders of SMEs together along with a Counter- terrorism Conference, which would catalyse global and regional action to combat terrorism.

ASEAN-India

Celebrating 25 years of Asean-India Sectoral partnership

During the 4th Asean Summit at Singapore on January 28, 1992 a decision was made to establish a Sectoral Dialogue Partnership between Asean and India. 2017 marks the 25th anniversary of the same. To commemorate the occasion messages were exchanged between the

chairman of the Asean group President Duterte of Philippines and Prime Minister Narendra Modi⁵.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his congratulations by articulating that India and Asean are both contributors to regional growth and stability. He further observed that India's 'Act East Policy' is an epitome of the importance India attaches to its strategic partnership with ASEAN; He reaffirmed India's desire to deepen its engagement with ASEAN, "so that it may scale new heights and constitute a defining partnership of our times."

President Duterte also praised the groundbreaking initiatives taken by India across the political-security, economic and socio-cultural pillars of the ASEAN-India strategic partnership for mutual benefit. Both Asean and India believe that the two should work together in the pursuit of a rules based regional architecture which is open, inclusive, balanced and suitable.

The Minister of External affairs VK Singh addressed the second edition of Asean-India Cultural and Civilisational links in Jakarta and said that to mark the 25th anniversary of the partnership a series of events, summits and conferences have been planned, including a commemorative foreign minister's meeting, a commemorative summit, a youth summit, business events, policy seminars, Asean-India Cultural festivals etc would be held.

⁴ Australia to host ASEAN special summit in 2018, February 24, 2017, Vietnam net, at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/173303/australia-to-host-asean-special-summit-in-2018.html>

⁵ Asean-India celebrate 25 years of Sectoral Dialogue Partnership, Business standard, January 28, 2017, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/asean-india-celebrate-25-years-of-sectoral-dialogue-partnership-117012800292_1.html

Asean-India Counter radicalization conference

According to news sources India plans on hosting a counter radicalization conference with Asean, sometime in October 2017⁶. The aim of the conference would be to provide a platform for countries to learn from each other's experiences and best practices on promoting deradicalisation amid the onslaught from extremist ideologies, growing terrorism and looming threat from ISIS and other extreme radical religious outfits. Malaysia and Indonesia are among the countries working on this aspect, and India wants to gain from their expertise.

According to one official, "There is a need to facilitate regular exchange of religious scholars and intellectuals, and to organise conferences and seminars to promote values of peace, tolerance, inclusiveness and welfare that are inherent in all religions."

Northeast India- Act East Policy

Assam is the Centre between India and Asean relations

The Assam state governor Banwarilal Purohit made a statement on January 26,

during the unfurling of the national flag in Guwahati, that the state of Assam should no longer be considered the frontier of India but as a centre point of co-operation between India and Asean⁷.

He further discussed plans of a global investment summit that the Assam state government would be organizing along with the central government in November this year. An exclusive skill city is also being established in Assam with the support of the Singapore government which would help advance and enhance the skills and capacities of the youth of the state.

Energy ties with the East

In order to develop India's landlocked states; Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to expand India's ties with its eastern neighbours like Myanmar⁸. On February 20th the Indian Oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan began a scouting trip to discover opportunities in oil refining and products retailing. He is also expected to discuss the potential for laying gas and fuel pipelines to link the north eastern states with Myanmar.

Brunei

The next Asean Secretary-General is set to be from Brunei Darussalam in 2018. Its importance was especially highlighted by the Ryu Jeong-Hyun – the Director General of the South Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau at the

⁶ India plans to host counter- radicalization conference with ASEAN, The Indian Express, February 11, 2017, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-plans-to-host-counter-radicalisation-conference-with-asean-4518638/>

⁷ Assam not frontier, but centre of India and Asean: Governor Purohit, Samudra Gupta Kashyap, The Indian Express, January 26, 2017, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/assam-not-frontier-but-centre-of-india-and-asean-governor-purohit/>

⁸ India looks to expand energy ties with Myanmar, Reuters, The Times of India, February 20, 2017, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/india-looks-to-expand-energy-ties-with-myanmar/articleshow/57253876.cms>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea⁹ The newly opened chancery of the embassy of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the 30th anniversary of the ASEAN-ROK in 2019 emphasise the importance that this appointment holds for the Republic of Korea. The trade between the ROK and Brunei has increased eight-fold to \$1.2 billion since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The ROK also seeks better partner for energy cooperation in Brunei due to its rich natural resources. Other than that many Korean companies have shown interest in participating in construction projects in Brunei. Tourism too has witnessed a steady increase between the two countries with 2,300 tourists from Brunei to Korea and around 8,000 tourists visiting Brunei in 2015. With more people-to-people contact, the two countries hope for a more solid foundation for better cooperation and mutual understanding amongst them.¹⁰

Cambodia

Cambodia declares staunch support for One-China

In an inauguration for a China funded Senate building, Cambodia's Senate President Samdech Say Chhum reiterated Cambodia's position on extending support for China's "One-China policy". In his

speech he said that China has been one of the core forces in ensuring the development in Asean and, to an extent, in Asia. He believes that China will continue to play a significant role in maintaining peace, stability and security in the region and the world.

Cambodia has also extended considerable support for China's One Belt One Road initiative. Both the countries foresee relations and cooperation in trade, investment, and culture being further strengthened between the two.

Suspension of 8th Angkor Sentinel exercise

Cambodia suspended its joint military exercise with the US which was supposed to be held the eighth time in a row¹¹. This has raised concerns about whether Cambodia is making a pivot to the Chinese side. The Cambodian Defense Ministry spokesperson Chuum Socheat claims it is due to the upcoming elections (in June) and more pressing security concerns such as the ongoing anti-drug campaign and public security and order during the elections. This comes in the wake of a naval drill with China in February 2016 and the Golden Dragon exercise for humanitarian aid and disaster management in December 2016. Cambodia's armed forces have benefited greatly from Chinese military training and equipment including jeeps, rocket launchers and helicopters. Moreover, Washington's uncertainty towards Asia have added doubt to how its policy towards it when Donald Trump will finally take up the Presidency.

⁹ Brunei to play guiding role in ASEAN's future, James Kon, January 11, 2017, at <http://borneobulletin.com.bn/brunei-play-guiding-role-ASEANs-future/>

¹⁰ Ukraine regards Brunei as its gateway to ASEAN, Hakim Hayat, January 15, 2017, at <http://borneobulletin.com.bn/ukraine-regards-brunei-gateway-ASEAN/>

¹¹ Cambodia suspends annual military drill with United States, Reuters, January 16, 2017, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-usa-idUSKBN1501YK>

Cancellation of Dawn Kouprey exercise with Australia

Cambodia announced the cancellation of a counter-terrorism exercise with Australia named Dawn Kouprey¹². The reasons given by the Cambodian Ministry of Defence's Department of Politics and Foreign Affairs' Sun Samnang were similar to the ones for the suspension of the US military exercise –the two upcoming elections and budget constraints. Dawn Kouprey was one of the cornerstones for the Australia-Cambodia military cooperation. Australia played a crucial role in Cambodia's post-Khmer renaissance which is why this comes as a sort of a “slap on the face” as Australian National University Strategic and Defence Studies Centre's John Blaxland describes it. Cambodia however will continue to receive tertiary education scholarships, officer training and English language courses from the Australian military. This also reflects the aggressive pivot to China that Cambodia is making especially after the Golden Dragon exercise in December 2016. John Blaxland, however, feels that such a step actually harms Cambodia's interests.

The exercise would have bolstered Cambodia's capabilities but now have been jeopardised due to political interests. Cambodia is one of China's closest allies in the Asean and this is not the first time Cambodia has taken a step in favour of China's interests. Prime Minister Hun Sen showed his loyalty in 2012, while hosting the ASEAN summit. Cambodia blocked its

neighbours on a resolution about the South China Sea dispute and the regional bloc was unable – for the first time in its history – to issue a joint communique. The fiasco was repeated at last year's Asean Summit in Laos, with the 10 nations releasing then retracting a communique. China, in return, has been quite generous pledging \$308 million in aid, erased almost \$117 million in state debt and offered nearly \$20 million in military support.

Cambodia-Thailand Security Meeting

Delegations from the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and the Royal Thai Armed Forces met to strengthen military cooperation and security along the borders. According to General Neang Phat from the Cambodian Armed Forces the meeting sought to raise measures to crack down on drug trafficking, human trafficking and other crimes, especially to maintain security and stability along the border. Defence Minister Tea Banh is set to meet with his Thai counterpart in Siem Reap for the 12th General Border Committee meeting by the end of March.

Cambodia, Russia sign extradition treaty

The Justice Ministry of Cambodia announced the signing of an extradition treaty between Russia and Cambodia. The treaty was signed when Cambodian Justice Minister was visiting Moscow in late January to meet his Russian counterpart Alexander Kononov. While the two countries have signed an agreement on criminal extradition, two more agreements regarding prisoner exchanges and mutual assistance on criminal matters are still under negotiation. This comes in the wake of two

¹² Cambodia scraps counter terrorism exercises with Australia, says its occupied with elections, Liam Cochrane, February 28, 2017, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-28/cambodia-scraps-counter-terror-exercise-with-australia/8309162>

cases of Russian fugitives fleeing to Cambodia. The Russian Supreme Court could not extradite the two due to a lack of a formal extradition agreement between the two countries. The Cambodian Centre for Human Rights in a 2012 report highlighted the dismal state of extradition laws in Cambodia using the case of pedophile Alexander Trofimov. Mr. Trofimov was allowed to remain in Cambodia despite repeated requests from Russia to extradite him on charges of sexually abusing children. He served on four years of a seventeen year sentence for abusing at least 15 girls Sihanoukville in Cambodia. Although he was deported in 2012, Cambodia's continual refusal to extradite him showed them in quite poor light.

East Timor

Maritime boundary dispute with Australia

On January 9, 2017, Australia and East Timor entered a new phase in their ongoing maritime boundary dispute with the release of a trilateral joint statement signed by both the relevant parties and the Conciliation Commission that was constituted under the UNCLOS provisions¹³. Under this arrangement both the parties and the larger international legal community will have

to cooperate and reconsider core issues underlying their disagreements. This would include issues related to maritime boundary delimitation, validity of agreements underlying the dispute, role of international law, peaceful means for settlement of disputes etc. They have both showed willingness to reach an agreement over their maritime dispute by September.

Reports from Reuters suggest that the dispute occurs over the delimitation of the border. The current boundary is aligned with Australia's continental shelf and East Timor has argued that it should lie halfway in between the two countries. The delimitation is a bone of contention to gain access to the Greater Sunrise gas and condensate fields¹⁴, which are located in the Timor Sea in both countries' waters.

Indonesia

Restoration of full military ties with Australia

After formal talks between Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and President Joko Widodo on February 26, 2017¹⁵, Australia and Indonesia agreed to full restoration of military ties, defence cooperation, training exchanges and activities.

President Widodo's visit to Australia was an effort to resolve the suspension of cooperation by the Indonesian military initiated around two months ago, because of 'insulting' teaching material found at an Australian base.

¹³ Australia, East Timor pledge to end maritime dispute, Offshore, January 25, 2017, at <http://www.offshore-mag.com/articles/2017/01/australia-east-timor-pledge-to-end-maritime-dispute.html>

¹⁴ Australia and Timor-Leste to negotiate permanent maritime boundary, Ben Doherty, January 9, 2017, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/09/australia-and-timor-leste-to-negotiate-permanent-maritime-boundary>

¹⁵ Australia- Indonesia restore defence co-operation in leaders meeting, 9 news, February 26, 2017, at, <http://www.9news.com.au/national/2017/02/26/11/55/australia-indonesia-defence-co-operation-restored-after-leaders-meet>

According to the Indonesian newspaper Kompas, the offensive material was insulting towards the five founding principles of Indonesia- Pancasila, and mocked Indonesia's ideology. On discovery of the damaging material, General Gato Nurmantyo of the Indonesian military had instructed that all military cooperation, including training with the Australian defence forces be suspended.

Widodo expressed that a robust relationship could be forged between the two countries when they both have respect for each other's territorial integrity, domestic non-interference and nurture the ability to develop a mutually beneficial partnership¹⁶. The Indonesian President also expressed willingness to see joint patrols with Australia in the South China Sea as long as they didn't inflame tensions with China. While the meeting was orchestrated primarily to address security and economic issues, talks also touched upon tourism, cyber security and social links. The both nations reiterated the belief that as maritime nations and trading nations they were natural partners with common interests.

Deepening defence ties with Japan

Indonesian president Joko Widodo and the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe re-affirmed their commitment to

cooperate on maritime security and deepen defence ties on January 15, 2017 during Abe's regional tour¹⁷. Both island nations have disputes with China over marine territory and are willing to co-operate further. The defence and foreign ministers from Japan and Indonesia will reportedly meet later this year to discuss prospects of co-operation in defence and security fields. In December 2016 Jakarta and Tokyo had unveiled an agreement aimed at strengthening Indonesia's ability to defend its vast maritime borders. Japan has further agreed to actively engage in the development of remote Indonesian islands. Both nations are willing to give maritime co-operation the highest priority and also agreed that maritime disputes needed to be addressed in accordance with the international law.

Military Co-Operation with India

According to defence sources India and Indonesia are steadily stepping up their military co-operation and have decided to conduct their first ever joint air combat exercise as well as combined efforts to increase maritime security co-operation¹⁸. The two nations are reportedly also going to upgrade their joint Army exercise called "Garuda Shakti". During the recent visit of defence secretary G Mohan Kumar to Indonesia, India also offered to train Indonesian soldiers in conducting complex submarine operations. There is also potential for exploring opportunities in the defence production sector.

¹⁶ Australia, Indonesia restore full military ties, see progress on trade, Reuters, February 25, 2017, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-indonesia-idUSKBN165021>

¹⁷ Indonesia, Japan to deepen defence ties amid China challenge, South China Morning Post, January 15, 2017, at <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2062367/indonesia-japan-deepen-defence-ties-amid-china-challenge>

¹⁸ India, Indonesia to hold first air combat exercise with an eye on China, Rajat Pandit, February 8, 2017, The Times of India, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/eye-on-china-india-indonesia-to-hold-first-air-combat-exercise/articleshow/57044771.cms>

In order to keep the Indian Ocean Region safe and secure for commercial shipping and international trade, since 2002 the two navies have been conducting co-ordinated patrols on respective sides of the international maritime boundary line twice a year.

Laos

Work for Lao-China Railway begins amidst questions

January onwards clearing work began on the \$6 billion project in the ancient Lao city of Luang Prabang¹⁹. However questions still remain regarding compensation and jobs. The land seizure for development of the project has been a constant cause of concern. The project is seen as another land grabbing scheme by the governments, adequate or no compensation has been provided to the evicted residents. This has led to major protests in Laos, China, Cambodia and Myanmar. Costing over \$5.8 billion, more than 70 percent of the investment comes from the Chinese side, which has also led to financial worries for Laos for when it may have to pay back.

Border management with Vietnam

On January 5, 2017, at the 26th annual border management meeting between

border officials from the two countries, Vietnamese and Lao border officials agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in border management²⁰.

Both sides reviewed the implementation of border delimitation agreements, and also evaluated the workings of a project on increasing and upgrading national border markers. They lauded the initial outcomes and showed willingness to cooperate further in order to institutionalize and develop border gate management mechanism and promote border trade. They also pledged to raise public awareness of legal awareness among border cadres and village communities to ensure border stability, order and development. They would reconvene at another meeting of the kind to be held in December 2017.

Laos entered into a similar arrangement with Cambodia to build their borderlines as that of peace, friendship, stability, cooperation and development along with mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity²¹.

Malaysia

Chinese Submarines visit Malaysia

In a rare public display of China's expanding undersea capabilities, and as a sign of power realignment in Southeast Asia, a Chinese diesel-electric, and attack submarine made a stopover in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia²².

¹⁹ Clearing for Lao-China Railway begins, but questions about the project still remain, January 4, 2017, at

²⁰ Vietnam, Laos to further strengthen border management, January 5 2017, RFA, at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/clearing-for-lao-china-01042017150124.html> <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/170742/vietnam-laos-to-further-strengthen-border-management.html>

²¹ Cambodia, Laos pledge to build border of peace, stability, development, Xinhua, January 25, 2017, at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1030632.shtml>

²² Chinese Submarine, 'Fighting Pirates' in Indian Ocean, shows up in Malaysia, Vishnu Som, NDTV, January 7, 2017 at <http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/chinese-submarine-fighting-pirates-in-indian-ocean-shows-up-in-malaysia-1646247>

According to the Chinese Defence Ministry the submarine made a stop at Malaysia for essential supplies and a crew resting period while returning from anti-piracy patrols off the coast of Somalia. The Indian navy rubbished these claims stating that advanced assets like submarines are hardly appropriate in tackling Somali pirates who sail in small skiffs from the Horn of Africa. The Indian navy's response comes from concerns over the Chinese using their submarines to track the movements of its own submarines and ships.

Island row with Singapore

For decades, Malaysia and Singapore have laid contesting claims of sovereignty over an island known as the Pulau Batu Puteh to the Malaysians and the Pedra Branca to Singapore. These rocky outcrops are situated 24 nautical miles off the east coast of Singapore and 7.7 nautical miles from the coast of Malaysia²³. For nearly three decades the two nations have wrangled over it. While the island is quite small in size it does have strategic importance because of its location near the straits of Malacca and the Straits of Singapore, situated on the busiest Sea lanes of communication in the world.

On February 3, 2017 Malaysia re-opened the decades old dispute and approached the International Court of Justice to overturn a 2008 ruling which had granted

Singapore sovereignty over the island. Malaysia now states that the new evidence and documentation had been discovered in British archives which could back its territorial claims.

In response the Singaporean Foreign Ministry forged a legal team to evaluate the Malaysian application to Hague.

Myanmar

U.N. Rights Envoy visits Myanmar

The U.N. human rights envoy Yanghee Lee arrived in Myanmar for a 12 day visit because of growing reports of abuse by the government security crack down on the members from the Muslim minority community- Rohingya. According to the United Nations, 35,000 civilians have fled the massacre and crossed into neighbouring Bangladesh²⁴.

Malaysia warns Myanmar

The Malaysian counter-terrorism officials believe that Myanmar faces a growing danger of attacks by supporters of the Islamic State, who are fighting to avenge the persecuted Rohingyas. The conflict in the volatile Rakhine state is under the risk of becoming a lightning rod for Islamists in a network that stretches from the Philippines to Indonesia, making it a great security concern. Malaysia which is a Muslim majority nation has along with Indonesia led initiatives in South East Asia to check the violence being perpetrated by the state of Myanmar against the Rohingya community.

²³ Malaysia reopens PedraBranca island row with Singapore after a decade, Kyodo, February 4, 2017, at <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2068096/malaysia-reopens-pedra-branca-island-row-singapore-after>

²⁴ UN Human rights envoy visits Burma as rojingya genocide concerns mount, Simone Lweis, Wa Lone, January 9, 2017, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-muslims-united-nations-human-rights-envoy-yanghee-lee-visits-burma-aung-san-suu-kyi-a7516846.html>

Advanced negotiations to build Jf-17 fighters

According to defence sources, Myanmar is undertaking advanced negotiations with Pakistan to licence-build the third generation Jf-17 fighter.²⁵ In 2015 Myanmar had purchased 16 Jf-17 multi role combat aircrafts, which are expected to get into service with the Myanmar Air Force sometime later this year. Myanmar has been making efforts to expand its local defence industry, and has started phasing out its obsolete fleet of the F-7m Airguard and the A-5C 'Fantan' combat aircraft which they had purchased from China in the 1990's.

Philippines

Stronger ties with Russia, future defence collaborations.

On January 3, 2017, The Philippine Navy welcomed two Russian warships. These were the anti-submarine destroyer Admiral Tributs along with the sea tanker Boris Butoma, both anchored at the South Harbor on Manila for a goodwill visit²⁶. In recent months the relationship between Philippines and its long term ally the United States has deteriorated, making this event a step further in the deepening of Russian-Philippine ties.

Although this isn't the first time that a Russian contingent has docked at Manila,

this is the first since President Duterte assumed office, and the first official navy-to-navy engagement. Duterte's administration has expressed a strong shift in their foreign policy away from US's sphere of influence

The Russian marines thus not only discussed tactics to combat terrorism and piracy in the region but also showed eagerness to conduct joint military exercises and drills with their counterparts.

Russia has also shown interest to supply Philippines with weapons including aircrafts and submarines. Russian ambassador Igor Anatolyevich Khovaev also stated that Russia understands the Philippines need to diversify their foreign partners. Diversification he continued means to preserve and keep old partners while getting new ones. And assured that Russia was ready to become a new reliable partner and close friend of the Philippines.

Hinting at the United States he said that they wouldn't interfere in the dynamics between Philippines and her traditional partners as long as the traditional partners respect the interests of Philippines and Russia²⁷.

U.S. delivers counter terrorism equipment

The Armed Forces of the Philippines has procured small-arms weapons from the U.S. foreign Military Sales program. The delivery included 400 M203 grenade launchers, 85 M40a5 sniper rifles and a RQ-11B Raven unmanned aerial vehicle system consisting of

²⁵ Myanmar in advanced negotiations to licence Jf-17 fighter, Anthony Davis, February 2017, at <http://www.janes.com/article/67387/myanmar-in-advanced-negotiations-to-licence-build-jf-17-fighter>

²⁶ Russian warships dock in Philippines on goodwill visit, look forward to joint drills, RT, January 4, 2017, at <https://www.rt.com/news/372611-russian-warships-visit-philippines/>

²⁷ Russia lures traditional US ally Philippines with arms and friendship, Hindustan Times, January 5, 2017, at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/russia-lures-traditional-us-ally-philippines-with-arms-and-friendship/story-mr8hAg7n9T8M9wFYMSew6J.html>

3 drones²⁸. The Raven is a hand-launched unmanned aerial vehicle that will increase the AFP's capabilities to conduct intelligence collection, mission planning, and reconnaissance operations. Philippine service members also received training in the United States on its operations and maintenance. The exchange was a result of the defence modernization efforts by the Philippines government and a special U.S. grants program which is aimed at assisting security forces conducting counter terrorism operations. The equipment is geared to protect the defence forces engaged in counter terrorism operations in the southern regions.

U.S. to upgrade and build military facilities

On January 26, 2017 the Defence Minister of Philippines stated that the United States would be upgrading and building facilities on Philippian military bases this year, as an effort to bolster an alliance with the United States. In recent times the relationship between Manila and Washington has been strained especially by President Duterte's opposition to an American presence of troops in his country. The Pentagon²⁹ approved the project as part of the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement. The EDCA is a 2014 pact that the President of Philippines has threatened to scrap repeatedly during

hostilities between the two countries. The United States has committed to build warehouses, barracks and runways in five locations while Duterte has promised to honour and uphold existing agreements with the United States.

Beijing will not alter Scarborough Shoal

According to national media, a top Philippine diplomat has stated that an initiative by China to construct on the Scarborough Shoal would be a game changer in China-Philippian relations, although Beijing has assured Manila that they wouldn't undertake any such constructions in this strategically located region of the South China Sea³⁰. In response Foreign Secretary Yasay Jr argued that such an effort would undermine the Philippine claim to the rich fishing regions. According to intelligence reports from the United States, the Chinese were poised to send dredging vessels to convert the Shoal like other submerged disputed reefs. Such actions have constantly been an alarm to rival claimants in the region and the United States. However Yasay said he doesn't expect China to undertake such a provocation.

Singapore

Renewed Bilateral Training Agreement with India

According to a statement released on January 19, 2017, India and Singapore have agreed to

²⁸ U.S. Military Delivers Counter Terrorism Equipment to the Philippine Army and Marine Corps, U.S. Embassy in Philippines, February 1, 2017, at <https://ph.usembassy.gov/us-military-delivers-counterterrorism-equipment-philippine-army-marine-corps/>

²⁹ Philippines: The Us will upgrade and build facilities on Philippine military bases this year, Manuel Mogato, Reuters, January 26, 2017, at <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-philippines-says-us-military-to-upgrade-bases-defense-deal-intact-2017-1?IR=T>

³⁰ Beijing assured Manila of no plan to alter Scarborough Shoal, Philippine's top diplomat says, Japan Times, February 24, 2017, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/02/24/asia-pacific/beijing-assured-manila-no-plan-alter-scarborough-shoal-philippines-top-diplomat-says/#.WTC3aOuGPIV>

renew a bilateral agreement which allows the Republic of Singapore Air Force to continue its joint military training with the Indian Air Force for another five years.

According to Singapore's Ministry of Defence the above agreement would facilitate the RSAF to get regular opportunities to train with the advanced Su-30 fighter aircraft of the IAF. The agreement was signed by India's defence secretary G Mohan Kumar and Singapore's Permanent Secretary for Defence Chang Yeng Kit. They also committed to strengthening bilateral defence interactions and welcomed a deeper defence cooperation which was mutually beneficial³¹.

Seized Military Vehicles Returned

Hong Kong finally agreed on January 24, 2017, to return the nine Singaporean armoured vehicles that it seized in transit. The seizure had caused a diplomatic row between Singapore and Beijing.

The nine SAF Terrex Infantry Carrier Vehicles were seized en route from Taiwan on a commercial ship, after being deployed in training exercises two months ago. The Hong Kong Customs had uncovered the vehicles in containers without the required permits. They were therefore seized and were placed at a storage place of customs in TuenMun from December 6, 2016. Singapore strongly urged authorities to release the vehicles, maintaining that the equipment

was their sovereign property and could not be legally held, confiscated or detained. The Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen maintained that the vehicles were protected by sovereign immunity and were thus immune from any measures of constraint abroad³².

On the other hand China consistently warned Singapore to follow Hong Kong laws and the one China principle which guides China's relationship with Taiwan, as its own sovereign province. Throughout the tussle, Beijing maintained that the Hong Kong customs were responsible for the detention of the vehicles and that it had nothing to do with mainland authorities. The seizure led to public uproar in Singapore while the Chinese were bristling at Singapore's perceived alignment with the U.S. against Beijing's claims in the South China Sea. Despite their misgivings the two countries went ahead with their annual high-level meeting, where Beijing refused to cover impounding of the vehicles.

The Hong Kong Commissioner of Customs on January 24 announced that the shipment of the military vehicles would be returned following the completion of investigations over the alleged breach of local laws governing the import-export and trans-shipment of strategic commodities. He also warned that the investigation may even lead to criminal prosecution; the company transporting the vehicles is also likely to face criminal charges.

Agreement on Third maritime border treaty with Indonesia

After a series of deliberations over the past three years the foreign ministries of Singapore and

³¹ India, Singapore renew bilateral air force training agreement, The Indian Express, January 19, 2017, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-singapore-renew-bilateral-air-force-training-agreement-4482053/>

³² Give us back our troop carriers, Singapore urges Hong Kong, Reuters, January 9, 2017, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-singapore-idUSKBN14ToKA?il=0>

Indonesia exchanged Instruments of Ratification for their third maritime border treaty on February 10, 2017. This treaty would soon be registered with the United Nations³³.

The treaty delimits the area between Changi in Singapore and Batam island of Indonesia- it is a 9.5 kilometre stretch of sea boundary in the eastern part of the Singapore Straits. With the successful agreement over this region, Singapore and Indonesia have managed to define almost 90 per cent of their sea boundary which stretches for a continuous 67.3 kilometers.

The completion of this agreement also kick started the Golden Jubilee celebration of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Vivian Balakrishnan stated that the agreement is a testament of the good and functional relationship between the two countries which is built on strategic trust.

Thailand

Thailand buys submarines from China

The Thai navy decommissioned its last submarine in the early 1950s. When military junta seized power in July 2014 and a \$17.3 million submarine headquarters and training center was opened on Sattahip – a naval base on the

Gulf of Thailand, it raised eyebrows. The Thai navy also has a highly trained submarine squadron that has been trained in Germany and South Korea but sadly have no vessels to operate. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha took a bold step in declaring that the National Legislative Assembly has approved to spend \$383 million on Yuan-class S26T submarines. The defence expenditure of the Thai government has also been steadily increasing to \$6.1 billion in 2017. According to the Prime Minister the submarines are not for battle, but to incite awe.

What is hard to ignore is the fact that the new submarine deal will bring Thailand on par with its neighbours Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. The deal also indicates a deepening of Sino-Thai military cooperation. Thailand had also signed a deal for 28 VT-4 battle tanks with a major Chinese arms manufacturer in May 2016.³⁴ One of the other possible reasons why Thailand is making a shift towards China is because of the US' criticism of the coup in July 2014 and the subsequent cutting off of military aid to Thailand. Moreover China provides a cheaper alternative to the US – a fact that was reiterated during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Thailand has also maintained pointedly neutral positions in controversies such as the South China Sea and the Mekong River region. In fact the Thai government has gone so far as to approve China's ambitions of economic development plans in the Mekong River basin. Thailand too serves China's interests in Southeast Asia with the Gulf of Thailand serving as a gateway to the region.

³³ Singapore and Indonesia agree on third maritime border treaty, SujadiSiswo, Asia Pacific, February 10, 2017, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/singapore-and-indonesia-agree-on-third-maritime-border-treaty-7623256>

³⁴ Thailand and China brothers in Arms, February 2, 2017 at <http://asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20170202/Politics-Economy/Thailand-and-China-Brothers-in-arms>

Cobra Gold war games launched

The United States Pacific Command opened Southeast Asia's biggest annual war games on February 14th. It will be Admiral Harris' – the most senior military officer of the US – first visit to Thailand after the 2014 coup. The Cobra Gold, which will be the 36th in a row, will involve a senior leader seminar, humanitarian civic assistance projects, as well as field training exercises.³⁵ The arrival of Admiral Harris could indicate possible normalising of relations between US and Thailand. However US' position on its policy towards Asia after Donald Trump takes up the helm of the Presidency still remains a mystery.

Thailand asks India to speed up its decision regarding the FTA

Thailand wants India to hasten the process of concluding the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries. Initially the agreement had been signed in 2004 abolishing duties on more than 80 items including food, steel and iron, jewellery, etc. However after many obstacles and neglect, negotiations began between the two countries in 2014. The new plan was to eliminate duties on up to 90 per cent of goods traded between the countries³⁶ and to expand the ambit of the agreement to the services sector as

well – an area which India has especial interest in. Nevertheless progress has been slow and Thailand Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitakhas said that an acceleration of the process is sorely required. The West is in turmoil - one of the first decisions that President Trump took after assuming power was to disassociate the US with the Trans Pacific Partnership, an ambitious free trade pact that the Obama regime had linked with 11 Pacific rim countries.³⁷ Up north in Europe affairs are in great uncertainty with the exit of Britain from the European Union. With the West embroiled in uncertainties the Asian countries have realised that the only way forward is to rely on one another, especially since their combined market size is half of that of the world. To achieve a more regional system of reliance Thailand has been trying to strengthen its relations with other Asian countries through bilateral FTAs and regional agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Vietnam

India Vietnam in advance stage talks for Akash missiles deal

According to the DRDO, India has been engaging with a number of countries for selling its indigenously developed surface-to-air Akash missiles³⁸. These developments are in line with Prime Minister Modi's efforts to establish India

³⁵ Cobra gold War games launched in Thailand as region looks for clues on Trumps policy, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/cobra-gold-war-games-launched-in-thailand-as-region-looks-for-clues-on-trumps-policy-in>

³⁶ <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/thailand-keen-to-work-with-india-on-fta/articleshow/57181786.cms>

³⁷ <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world/thailand-to-india-speed-up-decision-on-free-trade-pact/article9547331.ece>

³⁸ India says in talks with Vietnam for first missile sale, Hindustan Times, February 15, 2017, at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-says-in-talks-with-vietnam-for-first-missile-sale/story-UTN5sF3DOTgv4FOUNRLlgJ.html>

as an exporter of arms. Vietnam is an important strategic partner for India and among the top contenders for the Akash missiles sale, making this the first such Indian weapons transfer to the South East Asian country and signaling the deepening of ties.

Over the past, India has helped Vietnam with other resources like training and patrol vessels. Vietnam is known to be in the market, for a quiet military build up to increase its deterrence abilities for securing the 200 nautical miles of its Exclusive Economic Zone which overlaps with the contesting claims of an assertive China. They are working to expand their arsenal with advance missile systems, fighter jets and the kilo-class submarines that they bought from Russia.

India is also considering selling the Brahmos supersonic missile to Vietnam but needs Russia's approval to advance further. India has been engaging with Vietnam over the past few years to help consolidate and expand their defence abilities. In 2016, Prime Minister Modi announced a \$500 million credit line to Vietnam for purchasing defence equipment. This was in addition to the \$100 million given earlier for the purchase of patrol boats. The two sides have also come to agreements for collaborating to train Vietnamese air force pilots to operate the Sukhoi-30 Russian fighter planes. The fast developing relationship between New Delhi and Hanoi has drawn Beijing's attention

which is engaged in disputes with both the nations.³⁹

Defence Collaboration

Thailand: The Prime Minister of Vietnam visited Thailand on an official visit from February 21-23. The two countries pledged to boost collaboration between marine law enforcement forces and seek affiliation in fields of mutual concern such as co-operation between border management agencies, participation in UN peacekeeping activities and humanitarian mine action⁴⁰.

Both sides vowed to support each other at multilateral forums, especially within the framework of the Asean Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM+. According to the Defence Minister Ngo Xuan Lich strengthening defence cooperation with Thailand is a priority for Vietnam.

Israel : In a press release on 22nd February, 2017, the Vietnamese Ministry of Defence stated that the Israeli state owned company IMI systems has now established their foothold in Vietnam, to cater to the company's growing presence in South East Asian markets. The statement followed the commencement of fruitful talks between Lieutenant General Ngyuyen chi Vinh, Vietnam's Deputy Defence Minister and Yitzhak Aharanovich, Chairman of the IMI Systems Company. Aharanovich states that in order to contribute to the growing relationship between the two countries, the IMI is now looking to expand co-operation with Vietnam in areas of their specialization like security and defence.⁴¹

³⁹ India advances talks on Missile Sale to Vietnam despite China's caution, Sputnik News, February 15, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/asia/201702151050702514-india-vietnam-missile/>

⁴⁰ Vietnam, Thailand enhance defence partnership, Nation Multimedia, January 23, 2017, at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/breakingnews/30307060>

⁴¹ Israel's IMI Systems expands presence in Vietnam, Janes, February 24, 2017, at <http://www.janes.com/article/68221/israel-s-imi-systems-expands-presence-in-vietnam>

Russia: the Vietnamese navy officially received its sixth attack submarine from Russia on January 20, 2017. Named HQ-Ba riavung Tau⁴², the submarine is a new diesel kilo class model and is going to join the navy's five other kilo class submarines. The deal cost them 2.1 billion dollars and was ordered back in 2009. With a maximum depth of 300 meters, the HQ-187 can move silently and can stay at sea for 45 days without needing to refuel. It can sink or cripple larger vessels with its stealth and anti-ship weaponry. These new efforts and deals are seen to be in line with Vietnam's ambitious efforts to modernize their military capabilities in light of increased Chinese aggressiveness in the South China Sea.

Cyber Security MoU with India

September 3, 2016 the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) and the Cyber Security Department from Vietnam signed a Memorandum of Understanding in the field of cyber security. The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has now given ex-posto facto approval to the MoU. The aim of this agreement is to promote closer co-operation between the two nations for the efficient and timely exchange of knowledge and information, experience in detection, resolution and prevention of cyber security related incidents. Effective implementation of this

memorandum would result in mutual benefits for the two nations through institutional and capacity building projects in the field of cyber security.

Oceania

Australia

Japan and Australia witness deepening of defence ties

Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo visited Australia amid heightened tensions in the South China Sea region and with Donald Trump pledging to pull out of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has commented that Australia will continue to commit to the rule of law, free trade and open markets. Shinzo said that the increasingly uncertain geopolitical landscape has made the need for good relations between Japan and Australia more important than ever.⁴³ Both countries are looking to protect their strategic and geopolitical interests in the Asia Pacific region, more so now due to China's growing ambitions in the South and East China Sea. Following bilateral talks both countries announce the signing of an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement which will enable an increase in combined military exercises, training and peace keeping organisations. The agreement is expected to be finalised by the end of 2017.

⁴² Vietnam receives sixth submarine from Russia, German Press Agency, January 20, 2017, at <https://www.dailysabah.com/asia/2017/01/20/vietnam-receives-sixth-submarine-from-russia>

⁴³ Japan and Australia Strengthen defence ties, the Wire, at <https://thewire.in/100011/japan-australia-strengthen-defence-ties/>

Fiji

Fiji buys the Thales Bushmaster

Australian Defence Minister Marise Payne announced on February 9 that Fiji has bought 10 refurbished Thales Bushmaster protected mobility vehicles from Australia. Fiji will use these vehicles to facilitate its United Nations' Peace Keeping missions at the Golan Heights and Syria⁴⁴. The statement added that the vehicles were drawn from the Australian Defence Force's stocks and would be overhauled, refurbished and serviced to meet Fiji's requirements and ensure their effective functioning.

New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand to pursue the Trans Pacific Partnership without the US

Ever since Trump has declared to disassociate the US with the Trans Pacific Partnership, many questions have been raised regarding its future. Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo said that the TPP has no future without the US. However New Zealand and Australia seem to believe otherwise and want to pursue a "TPP minus One". They hope to keep it alive with the help of the

remaining members and are planning on meeting in the coming months to find a way forward.

Papua New Guinea

PNG army sinks foreign vessels

Colonel Ray Numa from the Papua New Guinea Defence Force confirmed that one of the three foreign fishing vessels caught in the Milne Bay waters was sunk by their naval boats⁴⁵. The vessel had been evading the navy while fishing in the waters of Papua New Guinea and was thus sunk as part of the normal procedural process. The other two boats and crewmen managed to co-operate with the authorities while the third refused to budge. This resulted in the vessel being fired upon. The fishermen and drums aboard were rescued while the vessel was left to sink.

Papua New Guinea loses UN Vote

The state of Papua New Guinea lost its UN vote because of their failure to pay the annual contributions. They would now be required to pay \$180,000 in order to regain their voting powers. The state has a financial imbalance for example the government agencies owe about \$11 million to the state owned electricity provider PNG Power⁴⁶. The suspension from UN comes at a time when Papua New Guinea is striving to become an influential international player. The financial instability,

⁴⁴ Fiji buys 10 Australian Bushmasters for UN peacekeeping missions, Gabriel Dominguez, February 3, 2017, at <http://www.janes.com/article/67701/fiji-buys-10-australian-bushmasters-for-un-peacekeeping-missions>

⁴⁵ PNG army sinks foreign vessels, January 1, 2017, One PNG, at <http://www.onepng.com/2017/01/png-army-sinks-foreign-vessels.html>

⁴⁶ Papua New guinea loses UN vote over unpaid annual contributions, eric tlozek, February 24, 2017, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-24/papua-new-guinea-loses-un-vote-over-unpaid-contributions/8298486>

economic crisis and increasing public debt has also raised questions about their competence to host the Asia-pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) forum meeting in 2018. The Australian

government has come forward to help the host by spending \$100 million for organizing the APEC meeting since it requires extensive security preparation and needs extensive logistical support.

Centre Activities for January To February 2017

- Dr. Udai Bhanu Singh wrote a commentary titled 'Indonesian President Joko Widodo's Visit to India' for 'Diplomatist' in January 2017, vol.5, No.1.
- Dr. Sampa Kundu made a presentation on 'Regional Security in Southeast Asia: Prospects and Challenges for ASEAN', at the Young Scholars Forum on Partnership, Security and Regional Frameworks in the Asia-Pacific Region, jointly organised by Japan Foundation and ICRIER on January 13, 2017 at the India Habitat Center.
- Dr. Sampa Kundu wrote a commentary titled Prime Minister Abe's Southeast Asia Tour: A Reality Check for 'The Dialogue' February 13, 2017.

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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