

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **China to construct apartments in Kabul; Investments in different aspects decrease significantly; Splinter group choose new leader; \$43mIn money spent on useless gas station; Russia sas request of military assistance is at final stage; Abdullah and Li discuss bilateral cooperation; Afghanistan to get four Mi-25 attack; Splinter group ready for peace talks.**

People's Republic of China will fund construction of 10,000 apartments in Kabul under affordable housing scheme which would be provided to government officials on long-term instalments. Minister of Urban Development Affairs and Housing said the project will be executed by Ministry of Urban Development Affairs of Afghanistan and will be the second biggest housing project in Afghanistan after the assistance of former Soviet Union. Sayed Sadat Mansour Naderi said upon the completion of this project, a high number of government officials who do not have own homes would find permanent shelters. "These residential units would be constructed in a comparatively small area and would be provided to government officials, who do not have own homes or apartments, on long-term instalments," he said. "The implementation of this project would be a big step towards the institutionalization of the concept of 'affordable housing' in Afghanistan which can solve the problem of homelessness. It is also one of the characteristics for the economic growth and to help improve the living condition of working-class people to middle-class." Naderi said more than \$100 billion have been spent in different areas in past 10 years which has not brought a direct positive change in the lives of poor people or those with no shelter "But the construction of 10,000 residential units by China is a biggest and memorable grant for the people of Afghanistan," he said.¹

Officials in Afghanistan Investments Supports Agency (AISA) have stated that investments in different aspects have been decreased in Afghanistan in past 9 months comparing to last year. Head of the following departments added that investments in all aspects specially in construction sectors has been decreased. Mohammad Qurban Haqjo head of AISA said, " 26 per cent of investments has been decreased in past 9 months comparing to last year, but in construction sector 58 per cent decreased." Head of the Afghanistan investment supports agency Mohammad Qurban Haqjo declared the main reasons are none stability of economy, and political have caused that investors flee from the country and hesitate to invest in Afghanistan. After establishing of the National unity Government there has been a lot of preparation to invest in Afghanistan but by considering the security condition the following

¹ "China to Fund Construction of 10,000 Apartments in Kabul", *Khaama Press*, November 1, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/china-to-build-10000-apartments-in-kabul-4068>

measurements weren't implemented, the question remains that when the same suitable condition comes back.²

An Afghan Taliban faction group that opposed Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour as Mullah Omar's successor has elected their new leader, who the dissident faction says, was a close aid of late supreme leader of Taliban. The splinter group announced on November 2 that Mullah Mohammad Rasool Akhund – who refused to pledge allegiance to Mansour – is their new leader, causing deep divisions in the insurgency. However there is no immediate response from the Afghan Taliban to either confirm or reject the announcement – which is believed to be the first public and official division of the group. The division emerged when the death of Mullah Omar was revealed this year in July. The news came two years late the death of Mullah Omar – which was hidden from many high-ranking Taliban members. "We tried our level best to save the Taliban movement from disintegration but after Mansoor's refusal to step down ... we finally parted ways with him and chose our own emir," *NBC News* quoted a senior member of the rival faction as saying.³

The US Department of Defence poured \$43 million into an "ill-conceived" project to build a gas station in Afghanistan — "an outrageous waste" of taxpayers' money and 140 times more than it should have cost, according to a government watchdog. Even more troubling, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report was the Defence Department couldn't even explain why the compressed natural gas filling station was so expensive. Although [the Task Force for Stability and Business Operations] achieved its immediate objective of building the CNG filling station, it apparently did so at an "exorbitant cost to U.S. taxpayers," Special Inspector General John Sopko writes in the report. "In comparison, [the inspector general] found that a CNG station in Pakistan costs no more than \$500,000 to construct. Furthermore, there is no indication [task force] considered the feasibility of achieving the station's broader objectives or considered any of the potentially considerable obstacles to the project's success before beginning construction." In his blistering letter attached to the report to Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter, Sopko adds "the Department of Defence claims that it is unable to provide an explanation for the high cost of the project or to answer any other questions concerning its planning, implementation, or outcome".⁴

Russian Federation says that the request of military assistance from Afghanistan is at final stage. "Your government had requested some military assistance free of charge... we promised to provide such types of assistance free of charge. Now it is under consideration of almost on final stage," said Russian ambassador Alexander Mantytskiy during a press conference on November 3. Mantytskiy added that Afghan forces should be supplied with equipment and training they need to defend their country. He rejected speculations that Afghanistan may become a battle ground between Russia and the United States. "There are so

² "Investments Significantly Decreased in Afghanistan", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, November 1, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=13474

³ "Taliban Splinter Group Choose Mullah Rasool as Leader", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, November 3, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=13494

⁴ "US Spent \$43m of Taxpayers' Money on Afghanistan Gas Station", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, November 3, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=13497

many speculations that Afghanistan is becoming the place of some kind of rivalry between Russian Federation, United States and Western Countries," Mantytskiy said. "It is just speculation, you should understand...we do not have any hidden goals. We do not want to fight with America for Afghanistan...We want to continue cooperation". "We are ready to resume such cooperation with western countries, so your government, you people should request western countries to look at Afghanistan not as a rival place...but to assist you ...and restart cooperation with us," he added. Russian Ambassador also said that some organizations are publishing news far from truth.⁵

Chinese Vice President, Li Yuanchao, and CEO Abdullah Abdullah held a meeting November 4 evening in Kabul to discuss bilateral cooperation aimed at further strengthening the historic diplomatic ties between the two nations. He stated without naming any country that supporting insurgency is not in the interest of any country. "It is important that all countries recognize the fact that supporting terrorism and extremism will not serve any countries [and] any nations' interests," Abdullah said. He maintained that the National Unity Government (NUG) is making all efforts to achieve a sustainable peace. "The unity government is committed to the well-being of our people [and] to making efforts towards stabilization of the country and has sincere commitments for the establishment of durable [and] dignified peace in the country," he noted. Meanwhile, Li Yuanchao praised the long-historic relations between Kabul and Beijing, which entered its 60th year. "In the past six decades since the establishment of diplomatic relations in particular in very recent history, our two countries have always shown each other mutual understanding, mutual trust and mutual support," the Chinese VP said. "We have also established strategic cooperative partnership," Li Yuanchao added, after signing three major cooperation agreements with Afghan government on security, education and reconstruction sectors.⁶

The government of India is expected to provide four Mi-25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan as the Afghan National Security Advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar is likely to visit the country on November 6. The official announcement of transfer of helicopters will possibly take place in few days. "We are going to give them the helicopters, this is a one-off arrangement," the Express quoted an Indian official as saying. Besides approaching India, Kabul had reportedly asked Russia for the same military assistance. Earlier, the United States had also purchased smaller helicopters from Russia for the Afghan Air Force but that was reportedly stopped after Moscow intervened in the Ukraine. This comes while, former President Hamid Karzai had also sought military hardware from India. However the deal did

⁵ "Russia Says Request Of Military Assistance From Afghanistan Is At Final Stage", *Khaama Press*, November 4, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/russia-says-request-of-military-assistance-from-afghanistan-is-at-final-stage-4078>

⁶ "Abdullah and Li Discuss Bilateral Cooperation", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, November 5, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=13517

not take place during the UPA government. The Afghan wish-list in 2013 included tanks, artillery and helicopters.⁷

An Afghan Taliban splinter group, which refuses Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor as successor of late Mullah Omar, says they are ready to talk peace with the Afghan government. The dissident group's deputy chief Mullah Abdul Manan told *BBC* on November 7 that if the foreign forces completely desert Afghanistan, the group will be ready to talk peace with the Afghan government. The group, which recently elected Mullah Mohammad Rassoul as their new leader in the western Ghor province, says they have no problem with the Afghan government. Mansoor – who some Taliban's Quetta Council members claimed was appointed by Pakistan's ISI – was elected as the new leader in August after the group confirmed that Mullah Omar had died two years ago. However many commanders within the movement accused Mansoor of hiding the news since April 2013 – causing a deep division in the insurgency. However Mullah Manan claimed that Mullah Mansoor besides killing the group's supreme leader has also imprisoned and tortured several other high-ranking members of the movement. He accused Mansoor of hijacking the so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. In addition, Manan criticized the movement's political office in Qatar, which he said, have had several secret deals with America. However this is believed to be the first public and official division of the group.⁸

Pakistan

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Defeat prompts introspection; Ten thousand army personnel for safety of CPEC; Pemra bans media coverage of JuD, FIF; Time not right to work for revival of Afghan talks; Gen Raheel meets Saudi forces chief; COAS seeks Saudi help in countering extremism; IMF approves \$502 million tranche.**

The diplomatic humiliation of losing in a bid for re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) has forced the Foreign Office to do some introspection and look for the causes. The country had served three terms on the 47-member council and was vying for a fourth one from the Asia-Pacific Group which had five vacant slots. Pakistan got 105 votes in the 193-member General Assembly and could not get re-elected. Other countries that lost from the group were Laos and Bahamas. The group was topped by Mongolia, which bagged over 150 votes. The United Arab Emirates, Kyrgyzstan, South Korea and the Philippines were also elected. The defeat was shocking because it was the first time that Pakistan had lost a major election at the UN. Just a year ago it had polled 180 votes to get elected to the Economic and Social Council. Pakistan had been in the rights council since 2006, except for a year-long mandatory break. The defeat on the one hand exposes the frictions with other countries

⁷ "Afghanistan To Get Four Mi-25 Attack Helicopters From India", *Tolo News*, November 7, 2015, at <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/22223-afghanistan-to-get-four-mi-25-attack-helicopters-from-india>

⁸ "Taliban Splinter Group Ready For Peace Talks", *Tolo News*, November 8, 2015, at <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/22243-taliban-splinter-group-ready-for-peace-talks>

(which were caused by the government's foreign policy decisions) while on the other it sheds light on the way the Foreign Office and its missions operate casually on critical matters.⁹

In order to ensure security of projects under \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Islamabad is going to apprise Beijing authorities that special security force of 10,000 personnel will be in place and become operational till December this year, The News has learnt. The 5th Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) under CPEC between Pakistan and China is scheduled to meet in Karachi from November 9 to 13, 2015 to review implementation on early harvest programme (EHP), scheduled to be completed in first phase till December 2017. There are 5 major agenda items and one of them is ensuring security of CPEC projects for which Pakistan Army has taken responsibility by placing one Major General as head of the special force to ensure fool proof security. Partially, the security force is in place but for whole Pakistan starting from Gwadar to Karakoram Highway (KKH), it will become operational within next couple of months. "Pakistan is going to request in the upcoming JCC with Chinese authorities to include establishing of transmission lines along with energy projects and it is yet to see how the Beijing is going to give its response," the agenda of upcoming JCC available with the scribe.¹⁰

The electronic media watchdog has banned media coverage of proscribed organisations, including the Lash-kar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jamaatud Dawa (JuD) and the Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation (FIF). Following the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament, the government of Pakistan banned LeT on January 14, 2002. After the proscription, the organisation continued to operate, first under the banner of JuD and then the FIF. However, under pressure from the United Nations, the government placed both JuD and FIF on its watch-list in December 2008 and March 2012, respectively. According to a circular issued by Pemra on November 2, the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior, under National Action Plan (NAP), have banned all kind of coverage of banned JuD, LeT and FIF under UN resolution 1267." Pemra also attached a list of 60 banned organisations and 12 organisations which were on the watch-list. However, the list seemed to be an outdated one as it did not include the self-styled Islamic State — or Daesh as it is popularly known — in the list. The government had added Daesh to the list of banned outfits in July, raising the number of such organisations to 61.¹¹

Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz believes that it is not the right time for Pakistan to work for the revival of Afghan reconciliation process. "Right now I don't think the time is opportune," Mr Aziz said on Monday while speaking to journalists at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). He was replying to a question about prospects of the Afghan government agreeing to restart the process which got derailed after the disclosure of Mullah

⁹ "Defeat in UN Body Prompts Introspection", *Dawn*, November 1, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1216769/defeat-in-un-body-prompts-introspection>

¹⁰ "Pakistan to Deploy 10,000 Army Personnel For Safety of CPEC Workers", *The News*, November 2, 2015, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-40513-Pakistan-to-deploy-10000-army-personnel-for-safety-of-CPEC-workers>

¹¹ "Pemra Bans Media Coverage of JuD, FIF", *Dawn*, November 3, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1217122/pemra-bans-media-coverage-of-jud-fif>

Omar's death in July. Pakistan, which facilitated and hosted the first round of peace process in Murree, has offered the Afghan government its help in resuming the process. But the Afghan government has not responded to the Pakistani suggestion. Anti-Pakistan rhetoric in Afghanistan is at an all-time high with Afghan Interior Minister Noorulhaq Uloomi telling the parliament in Kabul on November 2 that "Pakistan continues to support terrorist groups (here) as in the past". In his press talk, Mr Aziz explained that for revival of peace talks both warring sides needed to be convinced about the usefulness of the process and should create the right atmosphere for it.¹²

The Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), General Raheel Sharif, who arrived in Saudi Arabia on a two-day official visit on November 3, met Chief of the General Staff (CGS), Saudi Forces, General A Rehman Bin Saleh. Military-to-military relations, defence cooperation and regional security situation were discussed during the meeting, said an ISPR press release issued here. Earlier, on his arrival in Saudi Arabia, the COAS was accorded a very warm welcome. He was received by deputy defence minister and commander of the Saudi Land Forces.¹³

Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif has reached out to Saudi Arabia for seeking help in countering the threat of extremist violence faced by Pakistan. Gen Sharif's two-day visit to Saudi Arabia, which is being keenly followed by many and during which he met King Salman bin Abdul Aziz on November 4, focused on cooperation for countering terrorism and extremism. And as the general completed his trip he had an assurance in his hand from the Saudi monarch that his country would support peace and stability in Pakistan and any threat to the country was unacceptable. Although there was no formal statement, the tweets from the military spokesman Lt Gen Asim Bajwa made it clear that the agenda was to seek cooperation against extremism. Of the eight tweets on the meeting between King Salman and Gen Sharif four related to fighting terrorism and extremism and appreciating Pakistani operations.¹⁴

Despite three missed targets, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cleared on November 5 Pakistan's economic bailout package for disbursement of next instalment of around \$502 million by mid-December. "The mission and Pakistani authorities have reached staff-level agreement on the completion of the ninth review under the Extended Fund Facility arrangement," IMF's mission chief to Pakistan Harald Finger said at a press conference which was attended also by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar. About \$502m would be made available to Pakistan, Mr Finger added. He said Pakistan needed to work hard on four weak areas — taxation, energy sector reforms, restructuring and privatisation of public sector enterprises and improvement in investment climate. Mr Dar said the IMF executive board was expected to approve disbursement of next tranche of \$502m in its meeting on December 15. He said the fund had revised its inflation forecast to 3.7 per cent for the current year against its previous

¹² "Time not Right To Work For Revival Of Afghan Talks: Aziz", *Dawn*, November, 3, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1217116/time-not-right-to-work-for-revival-of-afghan-talks-aziz>

¹³ "Gen Raheel Meets Saudi Forces Chief", *The News*, November 4, 2015, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-40559-Gen-Raheel-meets-Saudi-forces-chief>

¹⁴ "COAS Seeks Saudi Help In Countering Extremism", *Dawn*, November 5, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1217579/coas-seeks-saudi-help-in-countering-extremism>

estimate of 4.7pc and kept economic growth rate projection at 4.5pc but the government would get close to its target of 5.5pc GDP growth rate.¹⁵

Bangladesh

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Prime Minister Hasina visits Netherlands; Foreign Minister attends Asia-Europe Meeting; US official visits Bangladesh; Islamic State claims responsibility for attack on police check post; Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein condemns attacks on bloggers, publishers, calls for urgent action.**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made a state visit to the Netherlands at the invitation of her Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte on November 3. After her meeting with Prime Minister Rutte on November 4, the two countries signed four agreements aimed at further strengthening bilateral cooperation in education and diplomacy. During her visit, Hasina also met Queen Maxima of the Netherlands. The prime minister later attended a banquet hosted by the Dutch premier. Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Lilianne Ploumen and Minister of Infrastructure and Environment Melanie Schultz van Haegen, among others, also called on Hasina during her stay in the Netherlands. In a meeting with Dutch business leaders on November 5, Hasina urged them to become Bangladesh's partner in boosting investment and trade. According to a joint statement issued during the visit, Bangladesh and the Netherlands had agreed to work together to ensure national security and implement the Delta Plan 2100 to boost investment and bilateral trade. The prime minister also attended a reception given by Bangladeshi expatriates in the Netherlands.¹⁶

Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali attended the two days Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) foreign ministers' meet in Luxembourg, which concluded on November 6. On the sidelines of the meeting, Foreign Minister Ali discussed issues of mutual interest with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. He also had meetings with his German counterpart Frank Walter Steinmeier, Belgian counterpart Didier Reynders, Luxembourg counterpart Jean Asselborn, Dutch counterpart Bert Koenders, and Swedish minister Margot Wallström. The foreign minister of Luxembourg expressed "keenness" in inking an 'Air Service Agreement' with Bangladesh which could be mutually beneficial. Belgium expressed their interest in further development of port and energy infrastructures in Bangladesh. The delegation of Lithuania met the foreign minister and conveyed their interest in launching a research publication to demonstrate considerable similarities between Bangla and Lithuanian languages.¹⁷

¹⁵ "IMF Approves \$502 Million Tranche", *Dawn*, November 6, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1217777/imf-approves-502-million-tranche>

¹⁶ Mahbub, Sumon, "PM Sheikh Hasina Returns Home after Three-Day Netherlands Visit", *bdnews24.com*, November 6, 2015 at <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2015/11/06/pm-sheikh-hasina-returns-home-after-three-day-netherlands-visit>.

¹⁷ "European Ministers Praise Bangladesh's Progress At Luxembourg Meet", *bdnews24.com*, November 8, 2015 at, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2015/11/08/european-ministers-praise-bangladeshs-progress-atluxembourgmeet>.

Dhaka and Washington both stand to benefit when they cooperate, says US State department official William Todd during his visit to Bangladesh. During the visit Todd met top government officials and “discussed Bangladesh’s bilateral relations with the US, the security situation, and regional issues”.¹⁸

Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for the attack on a police check post in Savar on November 4 that left a constable dead. Search for International Terrorist Entities (SITE) had earlier reported that IS claimed the murders of two foreigners—Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella and Japanese national Kunio Hoshi--and the bombings on a Shia gathering in Old Dhaka.¹⁹ However, according to the Bangladesh police, Ansarullah Bangla Team carried out the attacks on bloggers and publishers but it has no link with international terrorist groups. The government denies any presence of the West Asia-based organisation in Bangladesh, which has seized territories across northern and western Iraq and eastern Syria.²⁰

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein has “strongly” condemned the continuing attacks on bloggers and publishers in Bangladesh. In a statement on November 5, he also called on the government “to take urgent, concerted measures to ensure the protection of all those who are being threatened by extremists operating in the country”. The statement followed recent attacks on publishers who brought out slain secular writer Avijit Roy’s books.²¹

Sri Lanka

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **President visits Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh to enhance cultural sector cooperation; Sri Lanka subscribes to the IMF's Special Data Dissemination Standard; Sri Lanka ranks 61st in global 'Prosperity Index'.**

President Sirisena made a four days official visit to Thailand on November 1 to strengthen and celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. During the visit, President Sirisena met Prime Minister of Thailand General Prayut Chan-o-cha and discussed issues of mutual interests. During discussions, the Thai Prime Minister agreed to a special request made by President Sirisena to support Sri Lanka in technological and research work. Cooperation between the two countries can be promoted in potential products and industries, such as textile, gems and jewelleryes, and tea, in a complete and comprehensive

¹⁸ “US, Bangladesh Both Gain When They Cooperate, Says US Official William Todd”, *bdnews24.com*, November 8, 2015, at <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2015/11/08/us-bangladesh-both-gain-when-they-cooperate-says-us-official-william-todd>.

¹⁹ “Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Attack on Police Check Post in Bangladesh: SITE”, *bdnews24.com*, November 5, 2015, at <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2015/11/05/islamic-state-claims-responsibility-for-attack-on-police-check-post-in-bangladesh-site>.

²⁰ “Ansarullah Bangla Team Using Al-Qaeda’s Name to Claim Credit for Murders, Police Say”, *bdnews24.com*, November 7, 2015, at <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2015/11/07/ansarullah-bangla-team-using-al-qaeda-s-name-to-claim-credit-for-murders-police-say>.

²¹ “UN Rights Body Condemns Attacks on Bloggers, Publishers, Calls For Urgent Action”, *bdnews24.com*, November 5, 2015 at <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2015/11/05/un-rights-body-condemns-attacks-on-bloggers-publishers-calls-for-urgent-action>.

manner, the Thai Prime Minister said. President Sirisena addressed the Thailand - Sri Lanka Business Forum in Bangkok on November 3. On November 4, President Maithripala Sirisena met the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn at the Sra Pathum Palace. Sri Lankan President's delegation to Thailand also includes the Minister of Primary Industries Daya Gamage, Chief Minister of Central province Sarath Ekanayake, Governor of Southern Province Hema Kumara Nanayakkara, and Chief Minister of Southern Province Shan Wijayalal de Silva.²²

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh agreed to implement a Cultural Exchange Programme to improve the cultural relations between the two countries. This was expressed during , Bangladesh High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Tarik Ahsan's visit to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Wayamba Development, and Cultural Affairs, S. B. Navinne in Colombo in November 4. The High Commissioner handed over a letter of invitation from the Minister of Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh, Asaduzzaman Noor to the Sri Lankan Minister for the 17th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh (AABB) to be held in Dhaka in 2016. The Minister expressed his interest to visit Bangladesh on the occasion of AABB.²³

Sri Lanka has subscribed to the International Monetary Fund's Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS), bringing the number of subscribing jurisdictions to 66. Sri Lanka is the 15th country to graduate to the SDDS from the IMF's General Data Dissemination System (GDDS), in which the country has participated since July 14, 2000.²⁴

Sri Lanka has risen a notch higher this year and ranked 61st globally in the 2015 Legatum Prosperity Index, which ranks nations according to wealth and wellbeing of their people. This year's Prosperity Index, compiled by London-based Legatum Institute, ranks 142 nations on their performance across eight equally-weighted sub-indices: Economy, Entrepreneurship & Opportunity; Governance; Education; Health; Safety & Security; Personal Freedom and Social Capital. Sri Lanka's best performance is in the Social Capital sub-index, where it ranks 32nd in 2015. However, despite the end of the civil war with the Tamil Tiger terrorists six years ago, the country has not felt safe. The lowest rank is in the Safety & Security sub-index, where it ranks 113th in 2015 although the rank improved from the 120th last year. Sri Lanka's Economy improved five notches to rank at 65h globally this year from the 76th in 2014 and the Health improved a notch to rank at 77th. Education sub-index improved to the 59th places from the last year's 66th place ranking. In Governance, Sri Lanka ranked at 58th place.²⁵

²² "Sri Lanka, Thailand Agree To Promote Economic, Political Cooperation", *ColomboPage*, November 2, 2015, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Nov02_1446486340CH.php. "Sri Lankan President Calls For Strengthening Thai-Sri Lanka Investment And Business Ties", *ColomboPage*, November 3, 2015, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Nov03_1446562972CH.php. "Sri Lankan President Meets Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand", *ColomboPage*, November 4, 2015, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Nov04_1446650281CH.php.

²³ "Sri Lanka, Bangladesh to Enhance Cultural Sector Cooperation", *ColomboPage*, November 4, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Nov04_1446651941CH.php.

²⁴ "Sri Lanka Subscribes To the IMF's Special Data Dissemination Standard", *ColomboPage*, November 3, 2015, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Nov03_1446560258CH.php.

²⁵ "Sri Lanka Ranks 61st in Global 'Prosperity Index'", *ColomboPage*, November 3, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Nov03_1446567449CH.php.

Maldives

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Maldives declares state of emergency; Maldives impeaches VP; Sri Lankan sniper arrested in Maldives.**

Maldives President Abdulla Yameen has declared state of emergency for 30 days and curtailed some constitutional rights. The president's statement declaring emergency was delivered by Attorney General Mohamed Anil at a press conference at the President's Office on November 4.²⁶ In a press statement dated 4 November 2015, US State Department Spokesperson John Kirby said the US was deeply concerned with recent events in Maldives and called on the Maldivian government to terminate the state of emergency and restore full constitutional freedoms.²⁷ British MP and Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Hugo Swire has also released a statement raising concerns about the State of Emergency imposing on the basic human rights of Maldivian people and said that the decision further undermines the confidence in the country's democracy. Urging the Maldivian Government to uphold its commitments towards people, as a member of the Commonwealth, democracy and rule of law, Swire called to end the current State of Emergency and for the release of all political prisoners including the former President, Mohamed Nasheed.²⁸ The European Union in a statement, said, "the decision to declare a State of Emergency and suspend fundamental freedoms enshrined in the constitution of the Maldives is the latest in a series of worrying developments in the country".²⁹ Opposition party MDP has said that the economy is suffering incomprehensible damage due to the current State of Emergency declared in the country. MDP said that the losses on the tourism industry due to the State of Emergency declared this month could destroy the whole economy. MDP called to revoke the State of Emergency as soon as possible.³⁰

Maldives' Parliament voted overwhelmingly to impeach the country's vice president, who will be charged with terrorism for plotting to kill the president. Ahmed Adeen is the second vice president to be impeached in three months. He has been arrested for allegedly planning to kill President Yameen Abdul Gayoom in an explosion on his speedboat on Sept. 28. The impeachment motion received 61 votes in favour and none opposed in the 85-member Parliament. The main opposition group, the Maldivian Democratic Party, abstained.³¹

²⁶ "Maldives Declares State of Emergency", *SunOnline*, November 4, 2015, at <http://www.sun.mv/english/34374>.

²⁷ "US Calls to Terminate State of Emergency", *SunOnline*, November 5, 2015, at <http://www.sun.mv/english/34389>.

²⁸ "Commonwealth Raises Concerns about the State of Emergency in Maldives", *SunOnline*, November 5, 2015, at <http://www.sun.mv/english/34417>.

²⁹ "EU Calls to Restore Rights and Freedoms", *SunOnline*, November 6, 2015, <http://www.sun.mv/english/34429>.

³⁰ "MDP: Economy is Suffering Due To the State of Emergency", *SunOnline*, November 8, 2015, at <http://www.sun.mv/english/34472>.

³¹ "Maldives Impeaches VP Accused of Plotting to Kill President", *SunOnline*, November 5, 2015, at <http://www.sun.mv/english/34424>.

A Sri Lankan Sniper has been arrested in the Maldives on October 24 in suspicions of attempted illegal activity in the country and targeting President's life.³²

B. East Asia

China

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Defence Minister Parrikar expresses India's hope that all parties to the disputes in the SCS region will abide by the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties; Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju visits the ITBP Border outposts on Indo-China border; Xi Jinping meet Ma Ying-jeou; Li Keqiang urges political thinkers to help in planning the 13th Five Year Plan; Li Keqiang meets the President of Liberia; Chinese Naval ships visit the United States on goodwill trip; Chinese defence minister asserts freedom of navigation in South China Sea; Li Keqiang meets the President of France.**

On November 4, 2015, India's Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar expressed India's hope that all parties to the disputes in the South China Sea (SCS) region will abide by the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS, ensure its effective implementation and work together to ensure a peaceful resolution of disputes. Addressing the 3rd ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM-plus) at Kuala Lumpur, Defence Minister Parrikar said the situation in the SCS and recent developments there have attracted interest and concern. "This is natural since freedom of navigation in international waters, the right of passage and overflight, unimpeded commerce and access to resources in accordance with recognized principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, are of concern to all of us", he stated. He also hoped that the Code of Conduct on the SCS would be concluded at an early date by consensus.³³

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju visited the ITBP Border outposts on Indo-China border at Tadadege and Monigong in West Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh on November 03, 2015. During his visit to the two BoPs, Rijiju was briefed by the Post Commanders of the two Border outposts about the area of operation, ITBP deployment and functioning of the troops. He also interacted with the ITBP Force Personnel posted there and inquired about their well being and requirements, if any. While emphasizing that these BoPs are situated at one of the remotest corners of the country and in proximity of Indo-China Border, Rijiju praised the noteworthy job being done by the ITBP troops in guarding our borders in these difficult areas.³⁴

Leader of China and Taiwan, Xi Jinping and Ma Ying Jeou met in Singapore on November 7 after six decades. The last time leaders of both sides interacted was in 1949. This definitely sets

³² "The Sri Lankan national's Remand Has Been Extended for a Second Time", *SunOnline*, November 8, 2015, <http://www.sun.mv/english/34473>.

³³ "India Favours Early Conclusion of Code of Conduct on South China Sea by Consensus", *PIB*, Release ID :130198, November 4, 2015 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

³⁴ "MoS (Home) Shri Kiren Rijiju visits BoPs on Indo- China Border", *PIB*, Release ID :130240, November 4, 2015 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

in motion new stage of relationship between both sides and also lead to increased cooperation and interaction based on the One-China Principle. During the meeting Xi said that, "Today will be remembered in history".³⁵

During the opening of the 13th Session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on November 6, the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said that the political advisors of the country should 'pool wisdom' to map the new five-year plan. During the meeting Li said that, "Innovation can boost development and restructuring reforms, coordination can help achieve balanced development and narrow rural-urban gaps, green development can safeguard sustained development, opening-up can explore growth space for China to better integrate with the world, and sharing can reflect equality in development".³⁶

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with the President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on November 5 in Beijing. Both sides discussed ways to strengthen cooperation. During the meeting Li said that, "The fields in which the two countries can deepen their cooperation include energy, processing of lumber and agricultural produce, infrastructure and human resources".³⁷

Three Chinese naval ships arrived at the United States' Naval Station Mayport on November 3. This is the first goodwill visit. The Chinese ships will be in the US for five days. The Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai said that, "the visit is a very significant part of military-to-military exchanges between the two countries this year".³⁸

While speaking at the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus on November 4, the Chinese Defence Minister Chang Wanquan asserted that some countries should stop exaggerating the issue of freedom of navigation in South China Sea. During the meeting he said that, "Over 100,000 vessels pass through the South China Sea each year, and none has claimed to have encountered any hindrance, trouble or danger because of that, which points to the fact that freedom of navigation is never threatened in the South China Sea and therefore not a problem".³⁹

The Chinese Premier Li Keqiang met with the French President Francois Hollande on November 3 during the China-French Climate and Green Economy Forum in Beijing. During the meeting Li said that, "Cooperation between China and France on dealing with climate change shows that not only have the two powers common responsibility for major problems

³⁵ "Historic Handshake", By Xing Zhigang in Singapore and Zhao Yanan in Beijing, *China Daily*, November 8, 2015, at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-11/08/content_22399029.htm accessed November 9, 2015

³⁶ "Premier Encourages Political Advisors To Help Map Five-Year Plan", *China Daily*, November 7, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-11/07/content_22395036.htm accessed on November 9, 2015

³⁷ "Nation To Deepen Liberian Cooperation" By Wang Qingyun, *China Daily*, November 6, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-11/06/content_22385296.htm accessed on November 9, 2015

³⁸ "Chinese Naval Ships Visit US East Coast for First Time", *China Daily*, November 4, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-11/04/content_22372229.htm, accessed on November 9, 2015

³⁹ "China's Defence Minister Urges Not To Play Up South China Sea Issues", *China Daily*, November 4, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-11/04/content_22371938.htm, accessed on November 9, 2015

concerning humanity's destiny, but also that Sino-French relations are among the most advanced that China has with Western powers".⁴⁰

Japan

(October 26-November 8, 2015)

- **China-Japan-South Korea trilateral summit held in Seoul; India-Japan strengthen cooperation on science and technology; US-Japan joint exercise in South China Sea; Japan-South Korea bilateral summit meeting held in Seoul; Foreign Minister Kishida attends 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Foreign Ministers' Meeting; Japan and the US instituted a new body to combine security and diplomacy related activities; Japan deepens cooperation with Vietnam.**

The Sixth Trilateral Summit between Li Keqiang-Shinzo Abe-Park Geun-hye was held in Seoul on November 1. Several Joint Declarations were issued including Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia, Environmental Cooperation, Economy and Trade Cooperation, Customs Cooperation on Trade Facilitation, Agricultural Cooperation, and Education Cooperation were issued. Concerns were expressed over the developments in North Korea and leaders stressed that the Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks should be implemented. All countries agreed to reinforce cooperation in disaster risk reduction, environment, youth exchange, and economy. Leaders stressed on accelerating the trilateral FTA and RCEP negotiations aimed at economic integration of East Asia. The seventh trilateral summit will be hosted by Japan.⁴¹

India and Japan deepened their cooperation in science & technology during a meeting in Tokyo between Harsh Vardha, Indian Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences and Hiroshi Hase, Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Japan agreed to establish the joint DIALAB concentrating on drug development and therapeutics diseases. Both sides decided to establish India-Japan Joint Laboratories in collaboration between Department of Science & Technology (DST) and Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST).⁴²

Reports indicated that the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force and the US Navy held joint naval exercise in the South China Sea. However, Japanese authorities confirmed that it is an ordinary naval drill.⁴³

On November 2, the much awaited Japan-South Korea bilateral summit meeting was held in Seoul since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Geun-hye assumed respective office.

⁴⁰ "Li Urges Joint Effort on Climate Change", By Wang Qingyun/An Baijie, *China Daily*, November 4, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-11/04/content_22365782.htm, accessed on November 9, 2015

⁴¹ The Sixth Japan-China- ROK Trilateral Summit, *MOFA Japan*, November 2, 2015 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page3e_000409.html

⁴² *Press Information Bureau*, Government of India, Ministry of Science & Technology, November 2, 2015 <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130152>

⁴³ "A First: Japanese and US Navies Hold Exercise in South China Sea", *The Diplomat*, October 31, 2015 at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/a-first-japanese-and-us-navies-hold-exercise-in-south-china-sea/>

During the meeting both countries focused on a future-oriented cooperative relationship. Japanese foreign minister Fumio Kishida and his South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-se was also present. Both sides discussed several issues including security situation in North Korea and denuclearization, significance of the Japan-China-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the significance of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).⁴⁴ Besides, comfort women featured in the leader's discussion where both agreed to an early resolution of the issue which has been a stumbling block in the bilateral relation.⁴⁵

On November 5-6, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida attended the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Luxembourg. There were representation from 51 countries and two organizations. The leaders discussed several issues including climate change, 2030 agenda for sustainable development and disaster risk reduction and management, connectivity and the future of ASEM, and international and regional issues such as responses to terrorism and extremism, migration and refugees, Middle East and North Africa, Ukraine situation, the situation in the South China Sea and East China Sea. On the sidelines, Kishida held numerous other meetings including the Japan-EU Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Japan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Japan-Luxembourg Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Japan-Germany Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and Japan+V4 (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) Foreign Ministers' Meeting.⁴⁶

On November 3, Japan and the US instituted a new body to combine security and diplomacy related activities of the SDF and the US military. Subcommittee for Defence Cooperation decided to establish the group founded on the revised Japan-US defence cooperation guidelines. Members from the Japanese National Security Council, Foreign and Defence ministries and the SDF and the US National Security Council, State Department, Office of the Secretary of Defence, and Joint Chiefs will constitute the new group. There is expected to be a joint plan recommending defence force reactions to particular emergency circumstances. This plan intends to utilize the recent shifts in Japan's security legislation and expand SDF activities.⁴⁷

Japan gave two used 600-ton vessels to the Vietnamese Coast Guard to strengthen maritime security. In 2014, Japan decided to deliver Vietnam with six used ships to help deal with intensified tensions in the South China Sea.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ "Japan-ROK Summit Meeting", *MOFA Japan*, November 2, 2015 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page3e_000408.html

⁴⁵ "Abe, Park Hold First Bilateral Talks Since Taking Office, Address 'Comfort Women' Dispute", *The Japan Times*, November 2, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/02/national/abe-park-hold-first-bilateral-talks-since-taking-office/#.VmUUo6-6a1t>

⁴⁶ "12th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (ASEM FMM12)", *MOFA Japan*, November 9, 2015 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/aec/page1e_000064.html

⁴⁷ "Japan, U.S. To Unify Defence Operations Under New Body, Action Plan", *Kyodo*, November 3, 2015 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdHjxpcGvMk>

⁴⁸ "Two More Used Japanese Ships Delivered to Vietnam", *Jiji*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/03/national/politics-diplomacy/two-used-japanese-ships-delivered-vietnam/#.VmUvpq-6a1t>

Korean Peninsula

(October 26-November 8, 2015)

- **US Defence Secretary visits South Korea; Second NAPCI meeting held in South Korea; South fires five shots as North Korean vessel violates the Northern Limit Line; Seventh Worker's Party convention to be hosted in May; South Korea and France adopted Action Plan for a 21st Century Strengthened Comprehensive Partnership; South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se visits Iran; number of South Koreans visiting North Korea has increased following the August 25 inter-Korea agreement.**

On November 1, US Defence Secretary Ash Carter visited the Demilitarized Zone in South Korea as a part of his Asia-Pacific tour where he is expected to meet leaders of several nations with the aim of advancing the US regional rebalance by upgrading alliances and building new partnerships. He also attended the 47th annual US-Republic of Korea Security Consultative Meeting in Seoul. He reiterated that US is committed to the denuclearization of North Korea and urged North Korea to regional maintain peace and stability.⁴⁹

On October 28, Seoul hosted the second meeting on Northeast Asia peace and cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) which had representation from several nations and international organizations involved in the implementation of President Park Geun-hye's NAPCI, including the US, China, Japan, Russia, Mongolia, the UN, the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the ROK-China-Japan Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS). The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Kim Hong-kyun. This is aimed at further bolstering support for NAPCI from regional and global communities and speed up inter-governmental discussions on precise ways to carry out the initiative.⁵⁰

Reports in the South Korean media suggest that fires were shot at by the Navy at a North Korean patrol vessel which violated the Northern Limit Line maritime border in Yellow Sea on October 24. North Korean authorities clarified that it was a routine operation and called South's behaviour provocative. South Korean military has reportedly strengthened surveillance in the region to prepare for similar violations in the coming days.⁵¹

Reports on October 30 in the regional media indicated that North Korea will host the seventh Worker's Party convention in May. The sixth convention was held in 1980. While the agenda of the said conversion is not yet known but the long term objective is to build a thriving

⁴⁹ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Carter: South Korean Alliance 'Ironclad' in Face of Constant Danger", November 1, 2015, *DoD News*, at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626850/carter-south-korean-alliance-ironclad-in-face-of-constant-danger>

⁵⁰ "2nd Meeting on Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation and the 2015 Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative Forum to Take Place", *MOFA ROK*, October 26, 2015 at http://www.mofa.go.kr/webmodule/htsboard/template/read/engreadboard.jsp?typeID=12&boardid=302&seqno=315815&c=TITLE&t=&pagenum=5&tableName=TYPE_ENGLISH&pc=&dc=&wc=&lu=&vu=&iu=&du=#

⁵¹ "Navy Fires Warning Shots at NK Patrol Boat", *The Korea Times*, November 25, 2015 at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/10/116_189418.html

nation. There may be an attempt to further strengthen control by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un⁵²

On November 4, South Korea-France summit was held in Cheong Wa Dae. President Park Geun-hye and President François Hollande agreed on an action plan to reinforce bilateral cooperation as comprehensive partners encompassing several areas. Action Plan for a 21st Century Strengthened Comprehensive Partnership including South Korea-France cooperation across 11 sectors was adopted. Both countries decided to increase educational, cultural and language exchanges and signed two MoUs to advance collaboration in tourism and transportation. They also agreed to cooperate on issues like nano-technology, digital health care and aviation and space. A MoU on space cooperation was signed.⁵³

On November 7, South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se visited Iran and met Iranian Foreign minister Zarif. Both leaders discussed several issues including the progress in the employment of the Iran nuclear agreement and its effects for the North Korean nuclear issue, their bilateral relations, and security situation in Northeast Asia. South Korea and Iran decided to develop cooperation beyond conventional areas like energy and infrastructure, and explore other areas such as healthcare, culture, tourism, development cooperation and academic exchanges.⁵⁴

Reports in South Korean media suggested that the number of South Koreans visiting North Korea has increased following the August 25 inter-Korea agreement. Unification Ministry data reflects that 418 South Koreans travelled to the North in the January-September. In October, the number rose to 880 since the two Koreas had many joint events including an inter-Korean excavation project at the ancient palace.⁵⁵

C. Russia

Russia: National

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Putin signs temporary ban on passenger flights from Russia to Egypt; Russia's Central Bank sees potential for further reduction of interest rates; Exiled Kremlin critic appointed EBRD Chief Economist; Shorter contracts proposed for Russian soldiers fighting 'international terrorism'; Russia outlines its customers for the upgraded II-76TD transport plane; Rosneft to supply 4.2 million tonnes of oil to Japan in 2015; Putin says promotion of Russian language abroad strategically important; Russia criticises Charlie Hebdo's caricatures of the Sinai plane crash; Average export price of Russian**

⁵² "N. Korea To Hold Biggest Party Congress In Decades", *The Asahi Shimbun*, October 30, 2015 at http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201510300084

⁵³ "Park and Hollande Hold A Summit", *Korea Joong Ang Daily*, November 5, 2015 at <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3011162>

⁵⁴ "Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se Visits Iran as First ROK Foreign Minister to Do So in 14 Years", *MOFA ROK*, November 7, 2015 at http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/press/pressreleases/index.jsp?menu=m_10_20

⁵⁵ "Civilian Inter-Korean Exchanges On The Rise: Data", *Yonhap News Agency*, November 9, 2015 at <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2015/11/09/0401000000AEN20151109001900315.html>

gas fell by 27 per cent in the first nine months of 2015; Russia approves Far East development strategy for 2015-2025; Russian Security Council concerned with resumed shelling of Donbas; Kremlin finds privatization of undervalued assets inappropriate; Russia's international reserves fell by US\$ 5.4 billion; Russia to pay for its citizens foreign education provided they return home to work; Patriarch of Antioch and all East to make first visit to Moscow in almost 30 years; Russia may face meat and dairy deficit in 2016.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has, on November 8, signed a decree on temporary ban of passenger flights from Russia to Egypt. It strongly recommends travel companies not to sell holiday packages that include flights to Egypt. The decree also obliges the government to take measures to ensure the return of Russian citizens staying in Egypt and their luggage back to Russia. Meanwhile, Presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has stated that the suspension of flights did not imply that a terrorist attack is being seen as a plausible cause for the Russian plane crash in northern Sinai.⁵⁶

First Deputy Chairman Russia's Central bank, Sergey Shvetsov has spoken about the potential for further reduction of interest rates and inflation. He added that while annual inflation rate remained above 15 per cent, the government's target is to bring it down to a more manageable 7-8 per cent.⁵⁷

Sergei Guriev, a former adviser to the Russian government who fled the country two years ago, has been appointed chief economist at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). He will become the first Russian to hold the post at the EBRD, a multilateral lender that disperses funds in former Communist Eastern Europe. Guriev, left Moscow for Paris in 2013 in fear of arrest as investigators probed his connections with Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former Yukos owner who was in jail at the time, and Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner who has emerged as the most potent opponent to President Vladimir Putin. EBRD had stopped lending to projects in Russia in 2014 as part of sanctions imposed on Moscow by Western European countries, who are the bank's main backers.⁵⁸

According to a draft bill published on November 3 on the government's legislation portal, Russia's Defence Ministry has proposed that shorter terms be introduced for contract soldiers involved in fighting international terrorism outside the country's borders. The current legislation allows soldiers to be employed for terms of two, three or five years, with exceptions made only in the case of emergency situations such as national disasters. The amendment will allow contracts with a term of between six months and one year to be issued to contract soldiers and reservists engaged in 'combating international terrorist activities

⁵⁶ "Putin Signs Temporary Ban On Passenger Flights from Russia to Egypt", *Itar-Tass*, November 8, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/society/834736>

⁵⁷ "Russia's Central Bank Sees Potential For Further Reduction Of Interest Rates — Official", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/834573>

⁵⁸ "Exiled Kremlin Critic Becomes EBRD Chief Economist", *The Moscow Times*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/exiled-kremlin-critic-becomes-ebrd-chief-economist/541674.html>

outside Russia, activities to maintain or restore international peace and security and naval campaigns.' If passed, the amendment is likely to be implemented in August 2016.⁵⁹

Ilyushin Aviation Company General Designer Nikolay Talikov has said that Southeast Asian and African countries along with China will be the main buyers of Russia's upgraded Ilyushin Il-76TD transport planes. The Il-76TD is a transport modification of the Il-76T plane. Its take-off weight has been increased from 170 to 190 tons and its maximum payload from 47 to 52 tons. The designers have also increased the flight range with the maximum payload by reinforcing the wing and fuselage structures and the landing gear.⁶⁰

Rosneft will supply around 4.2 million tonnes of crude oil to Japan in 2015. This was outlined by its Chief Executive Officer Igor Sechin on November 6. He added that Russia is ready and capable of meeting Japan's liquefied natural gas (LNG) requirements and invited Japanese companies to participate in the construction of LNG plants in Russia's Far East.⁶¹

Russian President Vladimir Putin has, on November 6, signed a document of state support and promotion of the Russian language abroad. It states that Russian language is one of the main tools for the implementation of Russia's strategic foreign policy interests. It adds that "the language's spread abroad contributes to forming the positive attitude towards Russia in the world community, boosting Russian presence on the international scene. Thus, efforts to support and promote the Russian language abroad are an important part of Russia's foreign policy." The concept notes that the work to support and promote the Russian language abroad is long-term and "requires the appropriate resource support." The current concept is designed to make this work goal-oriented and consistent, which will ultimately make it possible for Russia to step up the use of 'soft power' tools on the international stage.⁶²

Russian lawmakers have criticised Charlie Hebdo's satirical caricatures on the A321 plane crash in Egypt. The head of State Duma's Committee for Foreign Affairs Alexey Pushkov has said that 'the caricatures are overgrowing the boundaries of French journalism. They are so sacrilegious that they require some kind of reaction from the French officials. Their silence will mean their taciturn consent to Charlie's usurped right to mock and scoff at the tragedy.'⁶³

Russia's Federal Customs Service has reported on November 6 that the average export price of Russian natural gas was US\$ 238.2 per 1,000 cubic meters and declined nearly 27 per cent year-on-year during January-September 2015. Revenues from gas export during the same period also declined by US\$ 12.8 billion to US\$ 31.3 billion. Meanwhile, the export of Russian

⁵⁹ "Shorter Contracts Proposed for Russian Soldiers Fighting 'International Terrorism'", *The Moscow Times*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/shorter-contracts-proposed-for-russian-soldiers-fighting-international-terrorism/541642.html>

⁶⁰ "Southeast Asia, Africa, China To Purchase Russia's Upgraded Il-76TD Transport Plane", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/834515>

⁶¹ "Russia's Rosneft To Supply 4.2 mln Tonnes of oil to Japan in 2015 — CEO", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/834511>

⁶² "Promotion of Russian Language Abroad Strategically Important for Russia — Concept", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/834473>

⁶³ "Charlie Hebdo Caricatures on A321 Air Crash Outrage Russian Public", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/834422>

oil dropped in value terms by nearly 43 per cent to US\$ 69.6 billion. The actual volume of oil export increased by 8.1 per cent to 180 million tonnes.⁶⁴

The Russian government has approved a concept to develop Far Eastern territories, including the Kuril Islands, to spur regional economic growth. An instruction signed by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev on November 6 highlights various measures to ensure the sustainable development of the Far Eastern economy and social stability of border regions and make them competitive with the territories of adjacent countries. The programme is designed to encourage local population to stay at the places of their living, expand local system of entrepreneurship and tourist potential and create hi-tech production facilities. Earlier, the government had also approved a state programme for the development of Kuril Islands in 2016-2025 that aims to expand the size of local population by 25 per cent and develop the agrarian, tourist and mining industries. The program is worth 70 billion roubles (US\$ 1.1 billion). The programme envisages building 200 km of asphalt roads on the Kuril Islands and connecting all the populated settlements of the Islands of Kunashir, Iturup and Parmushir, increase the number of air flights and sea carriages and build a network of enterprises. Under the programme, the gross regional product of the Kuril Islands is expected to expand at least twofold in the next 5-6 years. Also, a new powerful Russian air base will be deployed on the Islands.⁶⁵

Russian President Vladimir Putin has, on November 6, discussed with Russian Security Council the resumption of 'provocations' along the contact line in Donbas. Meanwhile, political directors of the Normandy Four (Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany) are expected to hold a coordination session in Berlin in the immediate future with a view to oversee the implementation of Minsk agreements. This will be followed by a meeting at the Foreign Ministers level.⁶⁶

Russian President's press secretary Dmitry Peskov has said that privatization of undervalued assets is not only inappropriate but also ineffective. He added that there have been no changes in the concept of privatization. Earlier, the Head of Russia's Federal Property Management Agency, Olga Dergunova had said that the agency is ready to speed up the privatization of Rosneft, Aeroflot, Alrosa and RusHydro, if there is a relevant ruling from the Russian President.⁶⁷

Russia's international reserves, mostly comprising gold and foreign currency, fell by US\$ 5.4 billion in the week of October 23-30 to US\$ 369.2 billion. Russia's international reserves are highly liquid foreign assets managed by the Central Bank of Russia. They comprise foreign

⁶⁴ "Average Export Price Of Russian Gas Fell 27% In Nine Months Of 2015 — Customs Service", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/834402>

⁶⁵ "Russia Approves Far East Development Strategy for 2015-2025", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/834354>

⁶⁶ "Russian Security Council Concerned With Resumed Shellings of Donbas — Kremlin", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/834395>

⁶⁷ "Kremlin Finds Privatization Of Undervalued Assets Inappropriate", *Itar-Tass*, November 5, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/834257>

currency, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), a reserve position in the International Monetary Fund and monetary gold.⁶⁸

Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov has said that Russia will pay for its students to study at elite foreign universities, provided they return home to work after graduation. The programme, titled "Global Education," was signed into force in June 2014 and is designed to send 1,500 Russian students abroad for the 2014 through 2016 school years. The government has approved a list of prestigious world universities for which students can receive funding from the state budget, including the United States' Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard and Yale, and Britain's Cambridge and Oxford.⁶⁹

Eastern Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, the ruling hierarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church Ignatius Aphrem II Karim is expected to make a visit to Moscow from November 9 through November 13. He is likely to have talks with the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Kirill I, as well as hold meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the chairman of foreign policy committee in the State Duma, Dr. Alexei Pushkov. The Syriac Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian denominations in the Middle East. The greater part of its communities is located in Syria and Iraq, where Christians have faced harsh persecutions in recent years.⁷⁰

Russia can face a deficit of meat and dairy products in 2016 due to country's embargo on certain imported food and raw materials. This was reported by Ria Novosti citing the Audit Chamber which is a government spending watchdog. The Chamber stated that 'there is a risk that certain banned food items will not be fully replaced by domestic products.' Russia is also likely to face a decrease in demand for domestic products since 'Russian consumers will not be satisfied with domestic versions of lower quality.' In October 2015, Russia's agricultural watchdog Rospotrebnadzor had said that 80 per cent of cheese in Russian supermarkets was fake as it contains a significant amount of palm oil. In total, 25 per cent of all dairy products in Russian shops are counterfeit.⁷¹

Russia: International

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Lavrov and Kerry discuss cooperation on Syria and fight against Islamic State; Russian and Turkish Foreign Ministers discuss developments in Syria; Russia's General Staff says coordinates of 24 terrorist targets in Syria provided by the opposition; Russian and**

⁶⁸ "Russia's International Reserves Fell By \$5.4 Bln Over One Week", *Itar-Tass*, November 5, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/834145>

⁶⁹ "Russian Students to Get Paid Foreign Education — If They Return Home Afterward", *The Moscow Times*, November 9, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-students-to-get-paid-foreign-education--if-they-return-home-afterward/545644.html>

⁷⁰ "Patriarch of Antioch and all East to Make First Visit To Moscow In Almost 30 Years", *Itar-Tass*, November 7, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/society/834606>

⁷¹ "Russia May Face Meat and Dairy Deficit Next Year", *The Moscow Times*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russia-may-face-meat-and-dairy-deficit-next-year/541606.html>

US air groups practice manoeuvres to prevent mid-air conflict over Syria; Russian planes hit 2,084 terrorist targets since the start of Syrian operations; Foreign Ministry says Russia does not consider all those fighting against Damascus as terrorists; Russia sends 1,00,000 tonnes of wheat as humanitarian aid to Syria; Russia hopes for Trans-Pacific Partnership talks at G20 summit in Antalya; Russia and Ukraine agree upon preliminary terms of uranium supplies in 2016; NATO Secretary General says military exercises in southern Europe a warning to Russia; Russian specialists to build vaccine production lab in Nicaragua.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US State Secretary John Kerry have, on November 6, discussed prospects of international cooperation in finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis and the fight against the Islamic State (IS).⁷²

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Turkish counterpart Feridun Sinirlioglu have, on November 6 via telephone, discussed ways of finding a political settlement of the Syrian crisis. They also discussed bilateral ties. The conversation was initiated by the Turkish side.⁷³

The Chief of the Main Department for Operations at the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Gen Andrey Kartapolov has said, on November 3, that the Russian military has established contacts with leaders of the Syrian opposition and field commanders of a number of armed groups. He stated that 'despite their four-year-long confrontation with the government troops, these patriotically-minded forces postpone their political ambitions to the ideas of preserving Syria as a united independent state free from the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations. We hope this step will give a new vector in the settlement of the Syrian conflict.' Mr. Kartapolov also added that the Syrian opposition has provided coordinates of 24 terrorist targets in Syria to the Russian military.⁷⁴

Russian and United States air groups have, on November 3, conducted drills of pilots and ground services in order to avoid mid-air confrontation over Syria. This was stated by the Chief of the Main Department for Operations at the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Gen Andrey Kartapolov. Earlier, the defence ministries of Russia and the United States had signed a memorandum on preventing air accidents in Syria.⁷⁵

Russia warplanes taking part in the anti-terrorist operation in Syria have flown 1,631 sorties and hit 2,084 terrorist targets since the launch of military operations in September 2015. This involves destruction of 287 control centres, 52 training camps, 40 plants and workshops for

⁷² "Lavrov and Kerry Discuss Cooperation On Syria And Fight against Islamic State", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/834494>

⁷³ "Russian, Turkish Foreign Ministers Discuss On Phone Syrian Settlement", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/834318>

⁷⁴ "General Staff: Coordinates of 24 Terrorist Targets In Syria Provided By Opposition", *Itar-Tass*, November 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/833851>

⁷⁵ "Russian, US Air Groups Drill Skills To Prevent Midair Proximity over Syria — General Staff", *Itar-Tass*, November 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/833843>

the production of bombs and missiles and 155 munitions and fuel depots. Meanwhile, Russian authorities have 'ruled out the possibility of a ground campaign in Syria.'⁷⁶

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova has said, on November 5, that Moscow does not consider all those who have taken up arms against the Syrian government to be terrorists. She stated that 'we have never said that all those involved in the Syrian conflict are terrorists, we said that there were terrorists, extremists and there was the armed opposition. That was why at the Vienna meeting the lists were compiled and a common understanding was developed of who should be reckoned among terrorists.' Meanwhile, the spokeswoman did not confirm a meeting with representatives of the Free Syrian Army in Abu Dhabi next week, but noted that contacts may take place through the embassy.⁷⁷

Agriculture Minister Alexander Tkachev has said that Russia has sent 1,00,000 tonnes of wheat as a humanitarian aid to Syria.⁷⁸

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov has hoped that there will be detailed discussions on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement at the G20 summit scheduled to be held in Turkey during November 15-16. He stated that 'the undermining of the WTO is the source of serious worries for us and we believe that the United States, which initiated work on the TPP formation, did so in the non-transparent way, without not only a due and simple involvement, but without informing about it to other key centres of the economic force.... they in fact took the same path as they take in the sphere of security. In other words it is an approach of a bloc, of an alliance, where there are guiders and those guided, where decisions are in fact dictated from one centre. We will be seeking that the content of the agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership would be provided to us in subject, detail and without omissions.' Earlier, Russian President Vladimir Putin had said that the TPP will be ineffective without the inclusion of Russia and China.⁷⁹

Russia's International Uranium Enrichment Centre (IUEC) and Ukraine's State Concern Nuclear Fuel have agreed upon preliminary terms of uranium feedstock supplies from Ukraine to Russia in 2016. Ukraine sends its uranium to Russia for enrichment and further production of nuclear fuel for its nuclear power plants.⁸⁰

NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has said, on November 2, that the 'Trident Juncture' military exercise carried out in southern Europe is a warning to all potential enemies of NATO, including Russia. The active phase of the exercise started in Spain, Portugal and Italy on October 21 and will last till November 6. The training involves a total of 36,000 troops

⁷⁶ "Russian Planes Hit 2,084 Terrorist Targets Since Start Of Syria Operation — General Staff", *Itar-Tass*, November 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/833831>

⁷⁷ "Foreign Ministry: Moscow Does Not Consider All Those Fighting Against Damascus Terrorists", *Itar-Tass*, November 5, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/834140>

⁷⁸ "Russia Sends 100,000 Tonnes Of Wheat As Humanitarian Aid To Syria", *Itar-Tass*, November 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/833878>

⁷⁹ "Moscow Hopes For Trans-Pacific Partnership Talks At G20 Summit In Antalya — Diplomat", *Itar-Tass*, November 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/833531>

⁸⁰ "Russia and Ukraine Agree Upon Preliminary Terms Of Uranium Supplies In 2016", *Itar-Tass*, November 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/833781>

from 30 countries, including non-NATO Austria and Sweden, as well as 140 aircraft, 90 ships and submarines. Mr. Stoltenberg added that NATO is increasing its capability to respond to various crisis situations and raising the readiness of its forces to rapid deployment.⁸¹

Russian Minister of Health Veronika Skvortsova has said, on November 5, that Russian specialists will build a laboratory for the production of vaccines in Nicaragua. She added that Russia had already allocated about US\$ 14 million to finance the first stage of the project.⁸²

India-Russia Relations

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **India and Russia sign military-technical cooperation agreement; Joint Army Exercise Indra-2015 in Bikaner to focus on counter terrorism; Kalashnikov may launch joint arms concern with India; Joint military exercises 'Indra 2015' begin in Rajasthan; Sistema finalizes merger with RCom.**

The Russian and Indian Defence Ministers have, on November 2 in Moscow, signed a military-technical cooperation agreement as a follow-up to the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission for Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC).⁸³ Some key weapons deals that were discussed involved S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems, manufacture of Kamov Ka-226T light utility helicopters under the "Make in India" policy and acquisition of a second nuclear-powered submarine on a lease from Russia.⁸⁴

On November 5, *PIB* reported that Indian and Russian Armies would be conducting a joint military exercise as a part of a continuing series of annual joint exercises under the banner 'Exercise INDRA-2015'. A 250 member strong Russian Army contingent would arrive in Bikaner for INDRA-2015 for the joint exercise to be held with the Indian Army from November 07, to November 20, 2015. Exercise INDRA-2015 is the seventh edition in a series of bilateral exercises under this banner. The joint exercise this year would focus on 'Counter Terrorism Operations in Desert Terrain under a United Nations Mandate'.⁸⁵

The Kalashnikov Concern, a Russian small arms manufacturer, has begun negotiations with Indian companies to produce weapons in the country. Kalashnikov's CEO Alexei Krivoruchko stated that 'we are in talks with both public as well as private companies in India. But it is a bit early to offer any specific names, as we are still in negotiations.' He added that the arms

⁸¹ "Stoltenberg Calls NATO Exercises in Southern Europe a 'Warning' to Russia", *Sputnik International*, November 2, 2015 at <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20151102/1029493481/stoltenberg-nato-exercises-warning-russia.html#ixzz3rFh9Bew5>

⁸² "Russian Specialists To Build Vaccine Production Lab In Nicaragua - Russian Health Minister", *Itar-Tass*, November 5, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/society/834027>

⁸³ "Russia, India Sign Military-Technical Cooperation Agreement", *Sputnik International*, November 2, 2015 at <http://sputniknews.com/military/20151102/1029475393/military-cooperation-russia-india.html>

⁸⁴ "India, Russia Discuss Missile, Helicopter, Sub Deals Ahead Of Modi-Putin Summit", *The Times of India*, November 2, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-Russia-discuss-missile-helicopter-sub-deals-ahead-of-Modi-Putin-summit/articleshow/49633635.cms>

⁸⁵ "India-Russia Joint Army Exercise Indra-2015 in Bikaner to Focus on Counter Terrorism", *PIB*, Release ID :130254, November 5, 2015 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

manufacturer expects to produce at least 50,000 rifles a year by sharing its technology with Indian partners. Indian companies must invest around US\$ 100 million to launch production in the country.⁸⁶

The seventh edition of India-Russia Joint Military Exercise 'Indra-2015' has begun in the Bikaner district of Rajasthan on November 7. Its focus is on 'counter-terrorism operations in desert terrain under a United Nations mandate.' The drills are due to be conducted in two stages, namely 'Combat Conditioning and Tactical Training' and 'Validation'.⁸⁷

Russia's Sistema JSFC has, on November 2, signed binding documents to merge its Indian telecommunications business with Reliance Communications Ltd (RCom). The President and CEO of Sistema Mikhail Shamolin stated that 'the merger of SSTL and RCom's telecom businesses is a milestone event... despite the numerous challenges the sector faced in recent years, the combination of two leading data service providers is a clear sign of progress for the Indian telecom industry.' Sistema's telecom business will be demerged from Sistema Shyam TeleServices Ltd (SSTL), a joint venture of Russia's Sistema JSFC and India's Shyam Group, working in India under MTS brand, and merged with RCom's telecom business through an agreement to be approved by Indian courts. As a result, SSTL will acquire and hold a 10 per cent equity stake in RCom. In exchange, RCom would acquire all the equity of Sistema Shyam Teleservices, which has a market share of less than one percent, with around nine million customers and Rs 1,500 crore in annual revenue. In an official statement, Sistema noted that an appropriate earn-out mechanism has also been agreed in connection with disputed spectrum contiguity charges claimed by the DoT. Sistema expects the transaction to be closed in the second quarter of 2016. Meanwhile, Mr. Shamolin said that the deal will serve as an example of growing business ties between Russia and India and likely encourage other investments between them.⁸⁸

D. Central Asia

Kazakhstan

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Kazakhstan and UK sign agreements worth US\$ 5 billion during Nazarbayev's visit to London; Kazakhstan to sign new partnership agreement with EU in December; Kazatomprom to supply uranium to Électricité de France; China to invest US\$ 600 million in Khorgos-Eastern Gate infrastructure; Kazakhstan to liberalize foreign labour force market; Kazakhstan's National Bank to minimize participation in currency market; EBRD and Kazakhstan to boost investments in the Kazakh transport sector.**

⁸⁶ "Kalashnikov May Launch Joint Arms Concern with India", *Russia and India Report*, November 9, 2015 at http://in.rbth.com/economics/defence/2015/11/09/kalashnikov-concern-may-launch-joint-arms-concern-with-india_538487

⁸⁷ "India, Russia to Hold Joint Military Drills on November 7-20", *Russia and India Report*, November 6, 2015 at http://in.rbth.com/news/2015/11/06/india-rusia-to-hold-joint-military-drills-on-november-7-20_537735

⁸⁸ "Sistema Finalizes Merger with RCom", *India and Russia Report*, November 2, 2015 at http://in.rbth.com/economics/business/2015/11/02/sistema-finalized-merger-with-rcom_536369

Kazakhstan and Great Britain have signed contracts and memorandums worth US\$ 5 billion during Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's official visit to London on November 3. Mr. Nazarbayev stated that the agreements are directed at the future development of the Kazakh economy and involve joint projects in the gas, energy, petrochemical, and pharmaceutical industries. The two countries also agreed to launch additional air flights between Astana and London.⁸⁹

Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov has said that the country will sign a new expanded partnership agreement with the European Union in December 2015. Masimov emphasized that since independence, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev has been pursuing a multi-vector policy with all countries of the world. Astana and Brussels have discussed the 280-page Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement for nearly five years.⁹⁰

Kazakhstan's national atomic company Kazatomprom and Électricité de France (EDF) have signed a contract for the supply of natural uranium. Accordingly, Kazatomprom will supply 4,500 tons of natural uranium concentrates to EDF during the period 2021 to 2025. Kazatomprom's development strategy for the next decade aims to allow the company to preserve the world's leading position as producer of natural uranium. To achieve this goal, Kazatomprom will develop existing and build new mines, and introduce the latest technologies to improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of uranium extraction. Kazakhstan became the world's largest uranium producer in 2009.⁹¹

China will invest around US\$ 600 million in the logistics and industrial zone of the Khorgos-Eastern Gate special economic zone (SEZ) on the Kazakh-Chinese border. The Deputy Director of Kazakhstan's national railways company Kazakhstan Temir Zholy (KTZ), Abdur-Rashid Sakenov stated that 'these investments come directly from [China's] Jiangsu Province, it is our gate towards Southeast Asia.' He added that China is interested in importing raw materials from Kazakhstan and 'the investments will focus on primary processing of our raw materials in the industrial zone on the territory of Kazakhstan... then they will be packed and shipped in containers, vehicles, wagons to China.' The Khorgos-Eastern Gate SEZ is located on the border with China in the Almaty province and occupies more than 4 thousand hectares. It consists of a dry port, logistics and industrial zones. Since the beginning of its operations, the Khorgos-Eastern Gate dry port has handled over 10 thousand containers and transported goods from the European Union and China. The planned volume of cargo is expected to exceed 4.4 million tons by 2020.⁹²

⁸⁹ "Kazakhstan and UK Ink Deals Worth \$5 Billion During Nazarbayev Visit", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 4, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15939-kazakhstan-and-uk-ink-deals-worth-5-billion-during-nazarbayev-visit>

⁹⁰ "Kazakhstan To Sign New Partnership Agreement with EU in December", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 9, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15971-kazakhstan-to-sign-new-partnership-agreement-with-eu-in-december>

⁹¹ "Kazatomprom To Supply Uranium To Électricité de France", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 7, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15954-kazatomprom-to-supply-uranium-to-electricite-de-france>

⁹² "China To Invest \$600 Million In Khorgos-Eastern Gate Infrastructure", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 5, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15944-china-to-invest-600-million-in-khorgos-eastern-gate-infrastructure>

Deputy Minister of Health and Social Development Birzhan Nurymbetov has said that Kazakhstan will simplify the rules for attracting of foreign labour force in line with international practice. He added that the upper house of Kazakhstan's Parliament has approved the draft law "on amendments and additions to some legislative acts on migration and employment". The bill is aimed at the modernization of social and labour relations in order to improve the investment attractiveness of the country. It calls for 'creating a free market of highly skilled foreign specialists and liberalization of procedures to attract foreign labour by employers.'⁹³

The National Bank of Kazakhstan has said that it will reduce its participation in the domestic currency market with the purpose of preserving its foreign currency reserves. The Bank stated, in a press release dated November 5, that in September and October it did not follow its policy of a free floating exchange rate of the national currency and instead sold foreign currency in the domestic forex market. During this period, it sold more than US\$ 5 billion from its own reserves and the National Fund, with the Bank's participation in the currency market reaching 60 per cent. On November 5, the tenge traded on the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange at 300 Tenges for US\$ 1, when compared to 284 a day earlier.⁹⁴

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the government of Kazakhstan have agreed to boost cooperation on road sector reform and investment, and on financing the remaining section of Astana-Almaty highway. According to the Memorandum of Understanding, signed between the EBRD and the Ministry for Investment and Development of Kazakhstan on November 3, the Bank will support the national economic policy known as Nurlı Zhol, which envisages boosting infrastructure investment to stimulate economic growth.⁹⁵

Kyrgyzstan

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Kyrgyzstan establishes diplomatic relations with Iraq; Kyrgyz President replaces management team of security, defence and law enforcement agencies; Ambassadors of Germany, Japan and Turkey review UNHCR's peacebuilding activities in southern Kyrgyzstan; National Guard of Kyrgyzstan receive technical assistance from China; Sariyev reappointed Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan; Union of Entrepreneurs warns of an exodus of Kyrgyz businesses to Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan refutes allegations of negotiating with Australian authorities on taking refugees.**

⁹³ "Kazakhstan To Liberalize Foreign Labor Force Market", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 6, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15950-kazakhstan-to-liberalize-foreign-labor-force-market>

⁹⁴ "Kazakhstan's National Bank To Minimize Participation In Currency Market", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 6, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15949-kazakhstan-s-national-bank-to-minimize-participation-in-currency-market>

⁹⁵ "EBRD and Kazakhstan To Boost Investment In Kazakh Road Sector", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 4, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15940-ebrd-and-kazakhstan-to-boost-investment-in-kazakh-road-sector>

The Permanent Missions of Kyrgyzstan and Iraq to the UN have on November 6 signed a joint communique on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The document states that the parties, in accordance with the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of April 18, 1961 and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of April 24, 1963, confirmed their intentions to build a relationship in accordance with the UN Charter and principles of peaceful coexistence, equality, mutual respect for territorial sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of each other.⁹⁶

Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev has signed several decrees wherein he has made several changes to the team of security, defence and law enforcement agencies of the country. Accordingly, former deputy chairman of the State Committee on National Security Abdil Segizbaev has replaced Busurmankul Taabaldiev and became Chairman of the State Committee on National Security. Busurmankul Taabaldiev has been appointed Advisor to the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Head of General Staff Asanbek Alymkozhoev has been replaced by Janybek Kaparov who is the former Deputy Chief of General Staff of Kyrgyzstan. And Marat Kenzhesariev has been appointed as the Chairman of the newly formed National Committee for Defence. No reasons have been given for these changes.⁹⁷

The Ambassadors of Germany, Japan and Turkey have visited the city of Osh and Nookat town on November 5 wherein they reviewed UNHCR's Peacebuilding project titled 'Building Trust between People, Communities and Authorities.' Since 2014, the UN Refugee Agency, together with its local implementing partners, has implemented over 100 small-scale peacebuilding initiatives in 25 target communities. The projects range from the supply of drinking water, creating access to heads of villages to building medical centres or children's playgrounds in a multi-ethnic environment. Local working groups consisting of community members develop the projects, often using local budgets, which are designed to ease tensions in the communities.⁹⁸

The National Guard of Kyrgyzstan has on November 4 received technical assistance worth 40 thousand yuan from China. This involves office equipment in the form of computers, scanners and fax machines.⁹⁹

Kyrgyzstan's newly-elected parliament has on November 5 reappointed Temir Sariyev as the country's Prime Minister and approved his new cabinet. Sariyev has been serving as Prime Minister since May 2015. During the parliament session, lawmakers also agreed to transform the Energy Ministry into a holding company that will group together all state-owned energy companies and also transform the Defence Ministry into the State Committee for Defence. It was stated that the Government will focus on encouraging economic growth by creating more

⁹⁶ "Kyrgyzstan Establish Diplomatic Relations with Iraq", *Kabar*, November 6, 2015 at <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/politics/full/14327>

⁹⁷ "President Replaces Management Team Of Security, Defence And Law Enforcement Agencies of Kyrgyzstan", *Kabar*, November 5, 2015 at <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/personnel-policy/full/14324>

⁹⁸ "Ambassadors of Germany, Japan and Turkey Review UNHCR's Peacebuilding Activities In Southern Kyrgyzstan", *Kabar*, November 5, 2015 at <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/society/full/14321>

⁹⁹ "National Guard of KR Receive Technical Assistance From Military Attaché of China", *Kabar*, November 4, 2015 at <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/society/full/14312>

favourable taxation conditions as compared to neighbouring countries. This is likely to make Kyrgyzstan more attractive for doing business.¹⁰⁰

Vice president of the Union of Entrepreneurs of Kyrgyzstan Rustam Zhunushov has warned, that Kyrgyz businessmen are likely to move to Kazakhstan with their enterprises. He stated that 'due to the large volume of contraband products from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan domestic producers on the verge of bankruptcy...they have nothing to pay salaries...for this reason, they are forced to close...several entrepreneurs intend to move to Kazakhstan with all their enterprises and work there...in addition, all have loans that need to be paid... for this reason, we ask the government to support domestic producers.' Producers also noted that Kazakhstan and Russia faced similar problems when they opened their borders till they checked smuggling.¹⁰¹

The Head of the Department for Information and Press of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nurlan Suerkulov has said, on November 3, that there have been no negotiations with the Australian authorities on sending refugees to Kyrgyzstan. He stated that the 'information that the Australian authorities intend to resettle refugees from Nauru and Manus Island to Kyrgyzstan, is inadequate. This was written in a newspaper without any reference.' On October 31 the Australian media had reported that Kyrgyzstan was being considered for the resettlement of refugees on Nauru and Manus Islands, as the Turnbull government has struggled to find a political solution for more than 1500 asylum-seekers who attempted to reach Australia by boat.¹⁰²

Uzbekistan

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **President Islam Karimov meets Korea's Trade and Industry First Vice Minister; US Secretary of State John Kerry visits Tashkent; Deals worth US\$ 12 billion inked at an investment forum in Uzbekistan; Uzbeks arrested in Tashkent for trying to join Al-Qaeda group in Syria.**

President Islam Karimov has met the First Vice Minister of South Korea's Industry, Trade and Energy, Lee Kwan-Sup in Tashkent on November 5. Mr. Karimov pointed out that South Korea is one of Uzbekistan's key investment and technology partners and a number of strategic projects across diverse sectors are in various stages of implementation. The two leaders discussed 'issues pertinent to the engagement of Korean investors in the processes of privatization of public enterprises and assets in Uzbekistan and to the joint realization of new investment schemes in principal industrial and infrastructure sectors.' Some key areas of focus

¹⁰⁰ "Sariyev Reappointed as Prime Minister in Kyrgyzstan", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 6, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15948-sariyev-reappointed-as-prime-minister-in-kyrgyzstan>

¹⁰¹ "Kyrgyz Businessmen Are Going To Move To Kazakhstan With Their Enterprises - Union of Entrepreneurs", *Kabar*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/economics/full/14306>

¹⁰² "Kyrgyzstan Does Not Hold Any Negotiations With Australian Authorities On Sending Refugees To KR", *Kabar*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.kabar.kg/eng/politics/full/14304>

involved hydrocarbon, chemical, electro-technical, machine-building, food industries, construction and infrastructure sectors.¹⁰³

The US Secretary of State John Kerry has visited Tashkent on November 1. Uzbek President Islam Karimov noted that Mr. Kerry's first visit to Uzbekistan is a 'good opportunity to exchange views across range of issues in the bilateral cooperation along with topics in international affairs.' Apart from economic cooperation, the two leaders discussed the evolving security situation in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁴

More than 100 agreements on purchase of Uzbekistan's state-owned assets by foreign investors and implementation of new investment projects in the oil and gas, chemical, electro-technical, food, and construction materials industries worth US\$ 12 billion were signed (including approx US\$ 5 billion of foreign direct investments) during the International Investment Forum held in Tashkent on November 5 and 6. A total of 560 foreign participants including heads and managers of over 300 foreign companies, government officials from South Korea, Germany, Poland, Japan, and Kuwait, representatives of financial and business circles from 33 countries, as well as international financial institutions participated in the Forum. As part of the Forum, potential investors were provided with an opportunity to visit large enterprises and joint-stock companies located in Tashkent, Bukhara, Navoi, Samarkand, Fergana and Khorezm provinces whose state-owned shares are being offered for sale to strategic foreign investors. The aim of the ongoing privatization is the transfer of state-owned shares and facilities to experienced professional investors who are ready to introduce advanced technologies and modern methods of corporate governance in Uzbek enterprises as well as promote the products in foreign markets.¹⁰⁵

A group of Uzbek citizens have been arrested in Tashkent on the grounds that they were planning to join Jannat Oshiqdari (Loving Paradise) militant group in Syria. Jannat Oshiqdari is also known as Tawhid wal-Jihad (TWJ), an Uzbek-led group based in Aleppo Province. The group recently pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda.¹⁰⁶

Tajikistan

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Japan funds anti-locust effort in Tajikistan; Japan completes three Grassroots Grant Projects (GGPs) in northern Tajikistan; The United States urges Tajikistan not to go overboard in its crackdown on Islam; 21.5 kilos of narcotics seized at Tajikistan's border**

¹⁰³ "President Islam Karimov Meets with Korea's Trade and Industry First Vice Minister", *Uzbekistan National News Agency*, November 6, 2015 at <http://uza.uz/en/politics/president-islam-karimov-meets-with-korea-s-trade-and-industr-06-11-2015>

¹⁰⁴ "Uzbekistan's President Receives the U.S. Secretary of State", *Uzbekistan National News Agency*, November 2, 2015 at <http://uza.uz/en/politics/uzbekistan-s-president-receives-the-u-s-secretary-of-state-02-11-2015>

¹⁰⁵ "Deals Worth \$12 Billion Inked At Investment Forum in Uzbekistan", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 9, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15960-deals-worth-12-billion-inked-at-investment-forum-in-uzbekistan>

¹⁰⁶ "Uzbeks Arrested For Allegedly Trying To Join Al-Qaeda Group In Syria", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, November 6, 2015 <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-al-qaeda-group-syria-jannat-oshliqari/27349840.html>

with Afghanistan in Khatlon province; Tajik citizen jailed in Russia on 'terrorism propaganda' charges; European Parliament delegation visits Tajikistan; World Bank gives US\$ 9 million to Tajikistan to support climate change mitigation; Tajik and Uzbek railway companies agree to make mutual concessions; World Bank expected to provide US\$ 250 million aid to Tajikistan during 2015-2018; United States donates five ATVs to Tajik peace-keeping battalion.

A three year US\$ 5 million anti-locust project is being funded by Japan in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. The Tajik Deputy Minister of Agriculture Jamila Saidova stated that three out of four provinces of the country are regularly affected by locust infestations and therefore welcomed the project. It is designed to develop national capacities and encourage regional cooperation. Experts will have regular exchange of information and joint activities including cross-border surveys. A regional training-of-trainers programme on locust management will be instituted, along with development of practical guidelines on reducing risk to human health and the environment from locust control operations. Tajikistan will serve as a training and meeting centre, with the project supplying prefabricated buildings for this purpose.¹⁰⁷

Japan has completed three projects worth US\$ 274,447 in Tajikistan's Khujand, Bobojonghafourov and Jabborrasoulov districts under the framework of its "Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGPs)." These projects seek to improve the quality of healthcare services by providing medical equipment to clinics and hospitals.¹⁰⁸

The U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has on November 3 urged the Tajik authorities not to go overboard in their crackdown on political Islam and expression of faith. He also acknowledged concerns that religious extremists could infiltrate over Tajikistan's long border with Afghanistan. He stated that 'we talked about the difficulties and challenges of counterterrorism and fighting against violent extremism effectively, but also in a way that balances human rights and religious freedom.' Meanwhile, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has 2 criticized the Tajik government's ongoing efforts to control religious activities that include the recent ban of Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRP) due to allegations of promoting extremism.¹⁰⁹

Tajik guards have seized 21.5 kilograms of narcotics at Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan in Khatlon province. This includes 20 kilograms of hashish and 1.5 kilograms of heroin. According to the press centre of the Main Border Guard Directorate under the State Committee for National Security (SCNS), Tajik border guards on a routine patrol spotted a

¹⁰⁷ "Japan Funds Anti-Locust Efforts in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan", *Asia Plus*, November 2, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/japan-funds-anti-locust-efforts-tajikistan-kyrgyzstan-and-afghanistan>

¹⁰⁸ "Japan completes Three Grassroots Grant Projects (GGPs) in Northern Tajikistan", *Asia Plus*, November 9, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/japan-completes-three-grassroots-grant-projects-ggps-northern-tajikistan>

¹⁰⁹ "The United States Urges Tajikistan Not To Go Overboard In Its Crackdown on Islam", *Asia Plus*, November 4, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/united-states-urges-tajikistan-not-go-overboard-its-crackdown-islam>

group of Afghan smugglers who were illegally crossing the border river in the Hamadoni district on November 4.¹¹⁰

A court in Russia's Arkhangelsk city has sentenced a Tajik man to three years in prison on "terrorist propaganda" charges. The Arkhangelsk regional prosecutor's office said that the 20-year-old Shahboz Azimov was found guilty of inciting hatred, making public calls for terrorism, and publicly justifying terrorism via the Internet. Investigators said that Azimov had placed materials on the Internet calling on Muslims in Russia to launch jihad against non-Muslims and to join Islamic militants in Iraq and Syria.¹¹¹

The European Parliament delegation for relations with Central Asia, has visited Dushanbe on November 4. The delegation held talks with representatives of both houses of Tajikistan's parliament, senior representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon wherein they discussed issues related to state and prospects of further expansion of cooperation between the European Union and Tajikistan. The Tajik President expressed satisfaction with the level of cooperation between Tajikistan and the European Union and pointed to the necessity of expanding economic and security cooperation. The EU is active in Tajikistan since 1992 and provides approximately 25 million Euros annually in development assistance.¹¹²

The World Bank has on November 3 approved an allocation of US\$ 38 million from the International Development Association (IDA) to finance the first phase of the Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Programme for Aral Sea Basin. The World Bank has said that the approved financing for the first phase of this regional programme includes US\$ 9 million for Tajikistan, US\$ 14 million for Uzbekistan, and US\$ 15 million for regional activities to be implemented by the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (EC-IFAS) with support from the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC). The new programme will support a platform for sustained regional dialogue and knowledge exchange among all Central Asian countries on climate change across a broad range of sectors, including agriculture, disaster risk management, water, energy, etc. An integrated analytical system with improved data, information, and tools on climate change will be available to all countries of the region to inform policies and prioritization of climate-smart investments.¹¹³

Tajik and Uzbek state railway companies have reportedly agreed to make mutual concessions. According to the Tajik Ministry of Transport (MoT), Tajik state railway company, Rohi Ohani Tojikiston (Tajik Railways), and Uzbek state joint-stock company, Ozbekiston Temir Yollari

¹¹⁰ "21.5 Kilos Of Narcotics Seized At Tajikistan's Border With Afghanistan In Khatlon Province", *Asia Plus*, November 4, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/215-kilos-narcotics-seized-tajikistan-s-border-afghanistan-khatlon-province>

¹¹¹ "Tajik Jailed In Russia On 'Terrorism Propaganda' Charges", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, November 11, 2015 at <http://www.rferl.org/content/tajik-jailed-russia-terrorism-propaganda/27358573.html>

¹¹² "European Parliament Delegation For Relations With Central Asia Visits Tajikistan", *Asia Plus*, November 4, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/european-parliament-delegation-relations-central-asia-visits-tajikistan>

¹¹³ "World Bank Provides US\$9 mln to Tajikistan to Support Climate Change Mitigation", *Asia Plus*, November 4, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/world-bank-provides-us9-mln-tajikistan-support-climate-change-mitigation>

(Uzbek Railways), have reached an agreement on lowering the transit rates for oil products, alumina and aluminum shipped through the Kudukli-Keles and Kudukli-Karakalpakiya sections of the Uzbek railway. In exchange, the Tajik side has lowered transit rates for Uzbek goods shipped through the Spitamen-Istiqlool section of the Tajik railway.¹¹⁴

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has met with the World Bank Vice President for Europe and Central Asia Mr. Cyril Muller in Tashkent on November 9 wherein they discussed a issues related to state and prospects of further expansion of cooperation between Tajikistan and the World Bank. Mr. Rahmon noted that Tajikistan attaches significant importance to cooperation with the Bank on improvement of energy, agrarian, transport, budgetary and social sectors. They also discussed ways of implementing a new Country Partnership Strategy (CPS), which outlines support for Tajikistan over the period 2015-2018. The new CPS reportedly provides for allocation of US\$ 250 million to Dushanbe.¹¹⁵

The United States has on November 9 donated five all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) worth one million U.S. dollars to the peacekeeping battalion of the Tajik Ministry of Defence (MoD). The US has provided about US\$ 6.5 million since 2009 for equipping the Tajik peacekeeping battalion.¹¹⁶

Turkmenistan

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Turkmenistan to start construction of TAPI gas pipeline.**

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov has on November 6 signed a resolution that calls for starting construction of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline from December 2015. Turkmenistan expects the gas pipeline will be fully operational by the end of 2018.¹¹⁷

E. West Asia

Iran

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Iran faced off with Saudi Arabia in Syria talks; Iran's Syria policy is based on self-determination.**

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif authoritatively took on Saudi Arabia's foreign minister during recent negotiations on the Syrian crisis in the Austrian capital of

¹¹⁴ "Tajik, Uzbek Railway Companies Reportedly Agree To Make Mutual Concessions", *Asia Plus*, November 5, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/tajik-uzbek-railway-companies-reportedly-agree-make-mutual-concessions>

¹¹⁵ "World Bank Expected To Provide \$250 Million To Tajikistan in 2015-2018", *Asia Plus*, November 9, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/world-bank-expected-provide-250-million-tajikistan-2015-2018>

¹¹⁶ "United States Donates Five ATVs to Tajik Peace-Keeping Battalion", *Asia Plus*, November 9, 2015 at <http://news.tj/en/news/united-states-donates-five-atvs-tajik-peace-keeping-battalion>

¹¹⁷ "Turkmenistan To Start Construction of TAPI Gas Pipeline", *The Times of Central Asia*, November 9, 2015 at <http://www.timesca.com/news/15958-turkmenistan-to-start-construction-of-tapi-gas-pipeline>

Vienna, says a senior Iranian official. The ministerial summit on Syria was held in Vienna on October 30. Apart from the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia, foreign ministers and representatives from the United States, Turkey, France, Germany, Egypt, Russia, Jordan, the UK, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, Lebanon, China and Oman also attended the talks.¹¹⁸

Iran's policy toward Syria is logical and stable with clear principles of self-determination by Syrians themselves without dictation from foreigners, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said. During a meeting with Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Meqdad in Tehran, Zarif said that Syrians should decide about their own fate and future and outside parties may only play the role of facilitator in the political process. He also said that Iran believes there is a political solution for the Syrian crisis and the conference was a good move in this direction. He added that Iran has declared its position clearly.¹¹⁹

Iraq

(November 4-8, 2015)

- **Moscow: Baghdad did not ask us to conduct airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq; PKK announces ending truce with Turkey; Source suggests ISIS leader al-Baghdadi arrives in Nineveh amid secrecy.**

The Russian Presidency denied the presence of a formal request by Iraq for Russia to conduct air strikes against ISIS sites in Iraq. The spokesman for the Russian presidency at the Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, said in a press statement followed by *IraqinNews.com* that "Iraq has not provided any formal or informal request to Russia to launch air strikes against ISIS in Iraq." He added, "The present time does not require thinking about such a possibility."¹²⁰

The PKK announced ending the truce with the Turkish army, noting that the cease-fire agreement by one party is "unacceptable," pointing out that the Turkish Justice Party is continuing to launch operations against the "Kurdish people." The PKK said in a statement obtained by *IraqiNews.com*, "The truce, which was declared before the Turkish elections, had ended." It pointing out that, "The cessation of operations was made by one party only."¹²¹

A local source in Nineveh province said, that the leader of the "ISIS" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has arrived in the province coming from the Syrian area of Albu Kamal accompanied by leaders of Arab and foreign nationalities. Anonymous sources have reported that, "al-Baghdadi as well as a group of the Arab and foreign leaders of the ISIS organization arrived in

¹¹⁸ "Iran Faced Off With Saudi Arabia In Syria Talks: Abbas Araqchi", *Tehran Times*, November 4, 2015 at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=250599. Accessed on November 13, 2015

¹¹⁹ "Iran's Syria Policy Is Based on Self Determination: Zarif", *Tehran Times*, November 5, 2015 at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=250624. Accessed on November 13, 2015

¹²⁰ "Moscow: Baghdad Did Not Ask Us to Conduct Airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq", *Iraqi News*, November 5, 2015 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/moscow-baghdad-not-ask-us-conduct-airstrikes-isis-iraq/>. Accessed on November 13, 2015

¹²¹ "PKK Announces Ending Truce with Turkey", *Iraqi News*, November 6, 2015 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/pkk-announces-ending-truce-turkey/>. Accessed on November 13, 2015

Nineveh coming from the area of Albu Kamal,” noting that, “His arrival was not in the form of a large convoy.”¹²²

Syria

(November 4-8, 2015)

- **Information Minister Omran al-Zou’bi has stressed that Vienna meeting on Syria has been the most important turning point in political efforts.**

Information Minister Omran al-Zou’bi has stressed that Vienna meeting on Syria has been the most important turning point in political efforts aiming to stop the war in Syria and put an end to foreign interference and to the flow of terrorists towards Syria. Interviewed by the *Syrian TV* on November 4, al-Zou’bi said the communiqué of the Vienna meeting included several points of agreements and it was acceptable in terms of content and results. “From the very beginning of the crisis, the Syria government has called for maintaining Syria’s unity, independence and sovereignty over all its territories and for preserving the secular identity of the Syrian state, the minister said, pointing out that these points were literally provided in the first item of Vienna conference communiqué. Al-Zou’bi affirmed that Syria’s unity, independence and sovereignty were preserved thanks to the Syrian army and people’s sacrifices in defence of the homeland. The information minister went on to say that “Hizbollah, Iraq, Iran and Russia constitute a real front in the face of terrorism as to reinforce international law, attain stability in the region and preserve national sovereignty of states.” On the Omani Stance on the crisis in Syria, al-Zou’bi said the Omani Sultanate “has played a distinguished role in the search for diplomatic ways to solve the crisis in Syria. It has been supporting the Syrian people and leadership and has rejected interference in Syria’s internal affairs.”¹²³

Israel and Palestine

(November 4-8, 2015)

- **Luxembourg: We will help construct Gaza; PLO may withdraw recognition of Israel; Right- wing minister and IDF clash over Israel’s intel assessment.**

The Luxembourg government and UNRWA will be working to assist in the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and to push the process forward, Luxembourg’s Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn said. In a press conference held in Gaza, Asselborn also stated: “I believe that this is clearly a humanitarian issue and is considered one of the top issues for the Palestinian people. We must not only be satisfied with reconstructing Gaza.” Asselborn also expressed his discontent regarding the confrontations carried out by the Palestinian youth in Jerusalem and

¹²² “Source: ISIS Leader Al- Baghdadi Arrives in Nineveh amid Secrecy”, *Iraqi News*, November 10, 2015 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/source-isis-leader-al-baghdadi-arrives-nineveh-amid-secrecy/>. Accessed on November 12, 2015

¹²³ “Vienna Meeting a Turning Point in Political Efforts to Solve Crisis in Syria: Al Zou’bi”, *Syria Times*, November 5, 2015 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/20490-vienna-meeting-a-turning-point-in-political-efforts-to-solve-crisis-in-syria-al-zou-bi>. Accessed on November 14, 2015

Hebron, and stressed that violence should not be encouraged; rather, there should be calls to end it.¹²⁴

Secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee Saeb Erekat said that the organisation may withdraw recognition of Israel because the latter is not committed to agreements the two parties have signed, *Arab48.com* reported. Erekat said: "It is possible to withdraw the recognition which took place in 1993 based on the Oslo Accords because the consecutive Israeli governments have never committed to any of the mutual agreements or understandings." Asked if Israel would further reoccupy the already occupied West Bank, he said: "All what is feared to happen has already taken place in the West Bank." "The West Bank had been reoccupied, civil administrations were re-established and all the agreements and understandings have been abolished."¹²⁵

Minister Zeev Elkin accused IDF Intelligence Chief Herzi Halevi of faulty assessments, claiming that the military does not take into account incitement by the Palestinian Authority. He told the Cabinet that there were three compounded reasons as to why these riots erupted: tensions on the Temple Mount; the arsen attack in the Palestinian village of Douma, in which the Dawabsheh family was murdered on July 31; and an overall sense of hopelessness and frustration among the younger generation of Palestinians. Elkin said that what Halevi told the Cabinet is the Palestinian narrative, and that it seemed as if Halevi was a spokesman for the PA and not the Israeli government. Halevi responded to Elkin by saying that his role as chief of Military Intelligence in the IDF is to brief the political leadership about what is happening on the other side and what the enemy is thinking. Elkin was not convinced.¹²⁶

The Gulf

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **'Chapala' is likely to move further westwards: PIB; Latin, Arab leaders hold summit in Saudi Arabia; Saudi foreign minister in Oman ahead of Yemen peace talks.**

The PIB reported on November 2 that the Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm, called 'Chapala' is likely to move further westwards during next 12 hours, then west and north-westwards and cross Yemen coast, south of Riyan as a very severe cyclonic storm around noon tomorrow November 3rd, 2015. A depression in the Central Arabian Sea had now turned into a Cyclonic

¹²⁴ "Luxembourg: We will Help Construct Gaza", *Palestine Chronicles*, November 9, 2015 at <http://www.palestinechronicle.com/luxembourg-well-help-reconstruct-gaza/>. Accessed on November 13, 2015

¹²⁵ "PLO May Withdraw Recognition of Israel", *Palestine Chronicles*, November 5, 2015 at <http://www.palestinechronicle.com/plo-may-withdraw-recognition-of-israel/>. Accessed on November 13, 2015

¹²⁶ "Right- Wing Minister and IDF Clash over Israel's Intel Assessment", *Al Monitor*, November 4, 2015 at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/zeev-elkin-herzi-halevi-terror-wave-incitement-abbas.html>. Accessed on November 13, 2015

storm but moved away from the Indian Coast moving west-and North-westwards initially and then south-westwards over the last four days.¹²⁷

Arab leaders and top officials from South America converged on Saudi Arabia for a summit aiming to strengthen ties between the geographically distant but economically powerful regions. The 34 countries participating represent some 700 million people, approximately 10 per cent of the world's population. Ahead of the two-day summit, Arab League Secretary General Nabil Al Arabi was quoted in the state-run Kuwait News Agency as saying that trade between the two regions reached \$30 billion (Dh110 billion) in 2014, compared to just \$6 billion when the summit began a decade ago. Saudi Arabia's Prince Turki Bin Mohammad Bin Saud Al Kabeer, deputy foreign minister for international relations, was quoted in Saudi media as saying that the ASPA summit, as it is known, would focus on bolstering political, trade, cultural and investment cooperation between the two regions.¹²⁸

Saudi foreign minister Adel Al Jubeir arrive in Muscat and will meet with top officials to discuss the situation in Yemen and Syria, a diplomatic source told Gulf News. The sources did not reveal whether Al Jubeir would meet with an Al Houthi delegation currently stationed in Muscat for negotiations on a settlement to the crisis in Yemen. It is Al Jubeir's first visit to Oman since he was appointed foreign minister in April. He was received by Oman's foreign minister Yousuf Bin Alawi and Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thaqafi, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Oman. UN sponsored talks to discuss and resolve the situation in Yemen is set to take place in mid-November.¹²⁹

India and West Asia

(November 4-8, 2015)

- **India and Qatar discussed measures to further deepen bilateral cooperation, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, security, defence, culture and people to people contacts; Syria, India discuss boosting academic co-operation; Twenty eight Omanis return home after being stuck at Indian airport.**

Ono November 2, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to the Emir of the State of Qatar, H.H. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who had called and invited PM to pay a visit to Qatar. Prime Minister recalled the State visit of the Emir of Qatar to India in March 2015 that has provided new vigour and momentum to bilateral relations. He emphasized that India attached high importance to its relations with Qatar. He appreciated the steps taken by the Emir and the Government of Qatar for protecting the interests and ensuring continued well-being and safety of Indian community staying there. The two leaders also discussed measures

¹²⁷ "Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm 'Chapala' Over Arabian Sea to move and Cross Over Yemen Coast", *PIB*, Release ID :130147, November 2, 2015 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

¹²⁸ "Latin , Arab Leaders Hold Summit in Saudi Arabia", *Gulf News*, November 10, 2015 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/latin-arab-leaders-hold-summit-in-saudi-arabia-1.1617543>. Accessed on November 14, 2015

¹²⁹ "Saudi Foreign Minister in Oman Ahead of Yemen Peace Talks", *Gulf News*, November 5, 2015 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/saudi-foreign-minister-in-oman-ahead-of-yemen-peace-talks-1.1614262>. Accessed on November 14, 2015

to further deepen bilateral cooperation, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, security, defence, culture and people to people contacts.¹³⁰

Methods of Boosting academic cooperation and exchanging cultural and academic scholarships between Syria and India were the focus of Higher Education Minister Mohammad Amer al-Mardini's meeting with the Charge d' Affaires of the Indian Embassy in Damascus S.R. Meena. The minister stressed that the distinguished cultural and scientific ties between the two countries reflected the high level of friendship and fraternity that link between the peoples of India and Syria. He asserted the keenness of the ministry to increase the number of scholarships particularly for higher studies and for scientific and applied sciences specializations as to build necessary scientific skills. He called for organizing visits to Indian universities in order to discuss possibilities of signing twinship agreements and carrying out joint scientific research with these universities.¹³¹

Twenty-eight Omanis who were stuck in Chennai International Airport in India returned home as they did not have the right visas. The Indian authorities refused to allow the Omanis entry into the country because they were on tourist visas while being in India for medical reasons. "The Indian Embassy in Muscat did not notify us that we have to obtain medical visas." said Mohammad Al Wahaibi, one of those who was stuck in India. Al Wahaibi said that they were ill-treated by the employees at the Chennai airport. He added that the airport authorities kept them in two small cold rooms without giving them food or water. "We have more than three children, who froze, and spent their day without food", explained Al Wahaibi¹³²

F. The United States of America

National

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **US renewing its focus on international aviation security after Russia passenger aircraft crash; Americans' religious beliefs shows a modest shift downward: Pew report; Democratic presidential hopefuls participated in a television forum; US labour market rebounded sharply from three months of weak job growth; Obama administration face challenges in closing Guantanamo bay prison; US lawmakers pledge close scrutiny of the TPP; . Trade Representative Froman defends rules governing trade in autos.**

The US is renewing its focus on international aviation security as evidence increasingly points to the possibility that a bomb destroyed a Russian passenger airliner over Egypt's Sinai

¹³⁰ "PM Speaks To the Emir of Qatar", *PIB*, Release ID :130155, November 2, 2015 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

¹³¹ "Syria, India Discuss Boosting Academic Co-Operation", *Syria Times*, November 4, 2015 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/20469-syria-india-discuss-boosting-academic-cooperation>. Accessed on November 14, 2015

¹³² "28 Omanis Return Home After Being Stuck At Indian Airport", *Gulf News*, November 4, 2015 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/28-omanis-return-home-after-being-stuck-at-indian-airport-1.1613055>. Accessed on November 14, 2015

Peninsula, killing all 224 people aboard the jet. Although much of the tragedy remains shrouded in mystery, a clue emerged from the doomed Airbus' cockpit voice recorder that could point to a bomb. Egyptian lead investigator Ayman El-Muqadem said, "A noise was heard in the last second of the CVR recording". While further analysis continues, a claim of responsibility was repeated on social media.¹³³ Homeland Security chief Jeh Johnson said on November 6 that he is taking the precautionary measures "out of an abundance of caution," adding to aviation security requirements already in place at airports with direct flights to the United States. He did not identify the airports where the U.S. would boost security.¹³⁴

A newly-released poll by the *Pew Research Centre* on Americans' religious beliefs shows a modest shift downward in the number of adults who believe in God, pray daily and regularly go to church. The *2014 Religious Landscape Study*, released on November 3 by *The Pew*, found that the percentage of Americans who say they are "absolutely certain" God exists fell from 71 percent in 2007 to 63 percent in 2014. Despite the declines, Pew said there is a "great deal of stability in the U.S. religious landscape," saying that for those who claim a religion, there was no "discernible drop" in their commitment to the religion. And the belief in God remains strong compared to other advanced industrial countries, Pew said.¹³⁵

The three U.S. Democratic presidential hopefuls - Hillary Clinton, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley - participated in a television forum on November 6. MSNBC host Rachel Maddow, in Rock Hill, South Carolina, interviewed each candidate, one at a time.¹³⁶

On November 6, the U.S. Labour Department reported that its labour market rebounded sharply from three months of weak job growth, adding 271,000 more jobs in October and likely easing the way for the central bank to raise interest rates next month. The U.S. unemployment rate edged down to 5 percent last month - the lowest rate in seven years. The world's largest economy shrugged off a sluggish manufacturing sector, showing strong job growth in professional and business services, health care, retail, food services and construction.¹³⁷

Obama pledged to close Guantanamo on his second day in office seven years ago and has repeatedly vowed to shut it down before he leaves office in 2017. But he has been thwarted by

¹³³ Bowman, Michael, "Washington Eyes Aviation Security After Russian Jet Disaster", *VOA News*, November 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/washington-eyes-aviation-security-after-russian-jet-disaster/3049087.html>; and, Schearf, Daniel, "Grounding of Russian Flights to Egypt Supports Bomb Theory", *VOA News*, November 07, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/grounding-russian-flights-egypt-supports-bomb-theory/3048275.html>

¹³⁴ "US Tightens Airport Security", *VOA News*, November 06, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-tightens-airport-security/3043189.html>

¹³⁵ "US Becoming Less Religious Says Pew Study", *VOA News*, November 03, 2015 <http://www.voanews.com/content/mht-us-becoming-less-religious-says-pew-study/3035446.html>

¹³⁶ "Democratic Presidential Candidates Take Part in Forum", *VOA News*, November 07, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/democratic-presidential-candidates-take-part-in-forum/3047985.html>

¹³⁷ Bredemeier, Ken, "Jump in US Jobs Eases Future Interest-Rate Hike", *VOA News*, November 06, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/jump-in-us-jobs-eases-future-interest-rate-hike/3042163.html>; and, "US Employers Add 271,000 New Jobs", *Associated Press*, November 06, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-employers-added-271-thousand-new-jobs-in-october/3042028.html>

Congress, which has passed restrictions on bringing any of the suspected terrorist detainees to the United States. Republican lawmaker Senator John said Congress would use every option available to block Obama from using executive action to close the facility against Congress' will. Asked on November 4 at the White House briefing whether the president would consider issuing an executive order to unilaterally close down Guantanamo, Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters: "We would like to work with Congress where we can." But Earnest also said the president "would not take anything off the table" to close down the prison. U.S. officials have also considered transferring Guantanamo detainees to facilities in Kansas, South Carolina or Colorado. But Republican senators from those states strongly oppose the plans, citing national security concerns.¹³⁸

New House Speaker Paul Ryan, a Republican, said that trade is essential for the United States, and the U.S. should be at the table to help make the rules. But Ryan said members of Congress will need time to read and review the expansive 30-chapter deal, which is hundreds of pages long. The Obama administration has released the full text of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, launching what is expected to be a fierce battle in the U.S. Congress over the controversial 12-country Pacific Rim trade accord. Under the terms of so-called "fast-track" legislation passed by Congress earlier this year, Congress now has 90 days to study, deliberate and debate the details of the trade deal, known as the TPP, before holding votes on whether to ratify it in the House and Senate.¹³⁹

In the meantime, U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman defended rules governing trade in autos as part of a Pacific trade pact and warned that trying to renegotiate parts of the deal could unravel the whole thing. The TPP will cut trade barriers for a dozen nations but has angered U.S. carmakers and some lawmakers by stopping short of sanctions against countries that deliberately weaken their currencies. Froman said a separate declaration by TPP partners not to manipulate exchange rates was the first to tie currency rules to a trade deal and was "extremely meaningful."¹⁴⁰

International: Asia

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **General Brown: pace of U.S. airstrikes targeting IS militants in Syria and Iraq will increase; Secretary Kerry returns from a five Central Asian countries trip with "a deepening commitment" strengthen relationship; Obama determined Israeli and**

¹³⁸ Saine, Cindy, "Republicans Warn Obama Not to Close Guantanamo on His Own", *VOA News*, November 06, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/republicans-warn-obama-not-to-close-guantanamo-on-his-own/3044282.html>

¹³⁹ Saine, Cindy, "Lawmakers Pledge Close Scrutiny of Obama's TPP Trade Deal", *VOA News*, November 05, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/lawmakers-pledge-close-scrutiny-of-obama-tpp-trade-deal/3040941.html>; and, Bowman, Michael, "Sceptical US Lawmakers Await Text of Massive Pacific Trade Pact", *VOA News*, November 03, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/skeptical-us-lawmakers-awit-text-of-massive-pacific-trade-pact/3035437.html>

¹⁴⁰ "US Trade Chief Defends Pacific Trade Deal Auto Rules", *Reuters*, November 05, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-trade-representative-michael-froman-defends-pacific-trade-deal-auto-rules/3039977.html>

Palestinian leaders will make no significant progress toward peace; US and Thailand exchange views on regional security issues; Defence Secretary Carter expresses commitment to enhance bilateral defence relationship with Singapore; Secretary Carter welcomes enactment of the Peace and Security Legislation in Japan; Tensions in the South China Sea and disagreements in cyberspace affects US-China relations; Asia-Pacific countries "deeply concerned" about the risk of conflict between those making claims in the SCS; US and South Korea warn North Korea on military provocation.

Speaking to reporters on the side-lines of the Dubai International Air Chiefs Conference, Air Force Lieutenant General Charles Brown said on November 7 that the pace of U.S. airstrikes targeting Islamic State (IS) militants in Syria and Iraq is likely to increase in the coming weeks after a lull in September and October. Brown said, the slowdown in coalition bombing raids was due to poor weather and a lack of movement by IS forces on the ground. He said officials are starting to see more ground movement by IS militants.¹⁴¹

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry returned from a whirlwind trip to five Central Asian countries with "a deepening commitment" to collaborate on building the region's economy, fighting international terrorist organizations and combating climate change, as top diplomats stated in a joint statement. Kerry's four-day visit briefly focused attention on the former Soviet nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The trip, which ended on November 3, was intended to reassure them of America's continued support, despite the U.S. military drawdown in Afghanistan and subsequent spending reductions in the region.¹⁴²

According to White House officials, President Barack Obama has determined Israeli and Palestinian leaders will make no significant progress toward peace by the time he leaves office in early 2017. The statement comes as Obama prepares to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House on November 9. The summit is seen as an attempt to mend diplomatic ties and deepen the U.S. military relationship with the Israeli government, which strongly opposed the Iran nuclear deal.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new spokesman has apologized for past comments in which he called President Barack Obama anti-Semitic and Secretary of State John Kerry childish. Ran Baratz's apology came just days before Netanyahu and Obama meet at the White House.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ "US Airstrikes to Increase Against IS Militants in Syria, Iraq", *VOA News*, November 07, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-to-increase-airstrikes-against-islamic-militants-in-syria-iraq/3048109.html>

¹⁴² Guensburg, Carol, "Central Asia Merits Sustained US Attention, Experts Say", *VOA News*, November 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/central-asia-merits-sustained-us-attention-experts-say/3044782.html>

¹⁴³ Gallo, William, "Obama Sees No Progress on Israeli-Palestinian Peace Deal", *VOA News*, November 06, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-sees-no-progress-on-israel-palestinian-peace-deal/3041643.html>; and, Pande, Aru, "Obama, Netanyahu to Meet on Mideast Security", *VOA News*, November 05, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/disagreement-on-iran-in-spotlight-as-netanyahu-visits-obama/3037814.html>

¹⁴⁴ "Netanyahu Spokesman Apologizes for Insulting Obama, Kerry", *VOA News*, November 05, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/netanyahu-spokesman-apologizes-for-insulting-obama-kerry/3041486.html>

On November 3, 2015, US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter met for the first time with his Thai counterpart Minister of Defence Prawit Wongsuwan in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on the side-lines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Defence Ministers' Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus). The Defence Secretary Carter expressed his commitment to the 182-year-old alliance with Thailand, and the two exchanged views on regional security issues. Carter relayed his hope to see democracy fully restored in Thailand in order to fully realize bilateral defence cooperation between the two nations.¹⁴⁵

Secretary Carter also met with Singapore Minister of Defence Ng Eng Hen in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where the ADMM-Plus is being held. The meeting followed on previous defence-related consultations between the two officials earlier this year. The Secretary expressed his commitment to enhancing the bilateral defence relationship. The two leaders also exchanged views on regional security issues, including recent developments in the South China Sea. Secretary Carter relayed his appreciation for Singapore's vocal support for freedom of navigation in the region, and looked forward to welcoming Minister Ng to the Pentagon in December.¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Defence Secretary Carter held an extensive bilateral meeting with Japanese Minister of Defence Gen Nakatani in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where the ADMM-Plus was held. Secretary Carter welcomed the enactment of the Peace and Security Legislation in Japan. Both ministers expressed support for the establishment of the new Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) and the Bilateral Planning Mechanism (BPM), a key implementation effort for the new bilateral defence guidelines, which were released in April this year. Secretary Carter and Minister Nakatani also discussed U.S. force realignment; both expressed strong commitment to the Futenma Replacement Facility. They also exchanged views on the ongoing host nation support negotiations, trilateral cooperation with Southeast Asian partner countries, and defence equipment and technology cooperation.¹⁴⁷

Defence Secretary Carter also held a bilateral meeting on November 3 with the Minister of National Defence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) General Chang Wanquan in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on the side-lines of the ADMM-Plus. Secretary Carter opened the meeting by reaffirming the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, which he said preserves the peace, stability, and openness of the region. He said military-to-military relations can contribute to

¹⁴⁵ "Readout of Secretary of Defence Ash Carter's Meeting With Thai Minister of Defence Prawit Wongsuwan in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia", *DoD News*, Release No: NR-419-15, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/627108/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-ash-carters-meeting-with-thai-minister-of-defen>

¹⁴⁶ "Readout of Secretary of Defence Ash Carter's Meeting With Singaporean Minister of Defence Ng Eng Hen in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia", *DoD News*, Release No: NR-421-15, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/627110/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-ash-carters-meeting-with-singaporean-minister-o>

¹⁴⁷ "Readout of Secretary of Defence Ash Carter's Meeting With Japanese Minister of Defence Gen Nakatani in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia", *DoD News*, Release No: NR-423-15, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/627113/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-ash-carters-meeting-with-japanese-minister-of-d>

regional understanding. During the discussion, the secretary identified two security issues still affecting U.S.-China relations: tensions in the South China Sea and disagreements in cyberspace. The secretary reiterated that the U.S. takes no position on maritime disputes in the South China Sea, which he said should be resolved peacefully. Regarding cyberspace, Secretary Carter expressed U.S. concerns about cyber threats to companies and citizens. He reiterated U.S. support for the common understanding reached between President Obama and President Xi that both governments will work together to investigate cyber incidents, promote appropriate norms of state behaviour in cyberspace, and refrain from conducting or knowingly supporting the cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property.¹⁴⁸

Speaking at the Reagan National Defence Forum near Los Angeles on November 7, U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter said that the United States and everyone else in the Asia-Pacific region is "deeply concerned" about the risk of conflict between those making claims in the South China Sea (SCS). Carter said the pace and scope of land reclamation by China and others increase the risk of miscalculation and ought to stop. A Chinese destroyer trailed a U.S. warship last month as it came within 11 kilometres of an artificial island China is building in the SCS. China has territorial claims in nearly the entire body of water. Several other countries are also making claims.¹⁴⁹

U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter and his South Korean counterpart, Han Min Koo, warned North Korea that any aggression or military provocation by the isolated regime "is not to be tolerated." Carter and Han met in Seoul on November 2, in an annual review of their nearly five-decade old military alliance. In a joint statement, the duo pledged to "work shoulder-to-shoulder to demonstrate our combined resolve." They also expressed "grave concern" about Pyongyang's recent vows to carry out another long-range missile test or a fourth nuclear test.¹⁵⁰

India-US Relations

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Defence Secretary Carter reaffirms the United States' commitment to strengthening defence relationship with India; Climate Central report warns climate change threatens nearly 55 million people in India's coastal areas; Even if the world succeeds in meeting goal to limit 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F), rising seas would still submerge land; India and US hold the second Meeting of the bilateral Investment Initiative.**

¹⁴⁸ "Readout of Secretary of Defence Ash Carter's Meeting With People's Republic of China's Minister of National Defence, General Chang Wanquan in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia", *DoD News*, Release No: NR-424-15, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/627162/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-ash-carters-meeting-with-peoples-republic-of-ch>

¹⁴⁹ "Carter: US 'Deeply Concerned' by Risk of South China Sea Conflict", *VOA News*, November 07, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/carter-concerned-south-china-sea/3048615.html>; and, "Carter Makes Subtle Dig at China on South Sea Visit", *VOA News*, November 05, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-defense-chief-visits-warship-in-south-china-sea/3037837.html>

¹⁵⁰ "US, South Korea Revise Agreement on Military Control", *VOA News*, November 02, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-south-korea-military-control-agreement/3032845.html>

On November 3, 2015, the US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter held a bilateral meeting today with India Minister of Defence Manohar Parrikar in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Both are in Malaysia to attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Defence Ministers' Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus). Defence Secretary Carter reaffirmed the United States' commitment to strengthening the defence relationship with India. The two leaders highlighted the critical role that ASEAN plays in the region, and discussed ways that the United States and India can work together to realize shared security goals in the Indian Ocean region. Secretary Carter is also scheduled to host Minister Parrikar in Washington D.C. on December 10 during the minister's first visit to the United States.¹⁵¹

A new report published on November 8 in Climate Central, a US-based non-profit research and journalism organisation, warns that climate change threatens nearly 55 million people in India's coastal areas and could lock in enough sea level rise to submerge land currently home to more than half a billion people globally if the temperature spikes by 4 degrees Celsius -- humanity's current trajectory. Homes of 55 million people in coastal areas of India are likely to be submerged in sea with a 4 degrees Celsius global increase in temperature. It warned that a 4 degrees Celsius increase in temperature could submerge a whopping 145 million in China. The findings came just weeks ahead of a UN climate summit in Paris from November 30 to December 11. The objective of the summit is to cap the rise in Earth's temperatures to 2 C above pre-industrial levels. Achieving the two-degree goal remains a serious challenge.¹⁵² It stated that even if the world succeeds in meeting a goal to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F), rising seas would still submerge land that is home to some 280 million people around the planet. But if U.N. talks fail to reach a new deal to slow climate change and it continues at today's rate, the number of people living on threatened land would jump to 627 million as global temperature rise hits 4 degrees Celsius.¹⁵³

Mr Ajay Tyagi, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Mr Ramin Toloui, Assistant Secretary for International Finance, U.S. Department of Treasury participated in the second Meeting of the U.S-India Investment Initiative, held in New Delhi on November 4. In the Joint Press Statement issued after the second U.S-India Investment Initiative Meet, the two sides stated that "The U.S.-India Investment Initiative will help our governments discuss and explore capital market reforms and policy measures to spur long-term investment by domestic and foreign investors in India." The statement also noted, "Our discussion today focused on potential policy measures that could deepen India's capital markets and drive greater U.S. investment in India. Specifically, we discussed new

¹⁵¹ "Readout of Secretary of Defence Ash Carter's Meeting With India Minister of Defence Manohar Parrikar in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia", *DoD News*, Release No: NR-420-15, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/627109/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-ash-carters-meeting-with-india-minister-of-defe>

¹⁵² "Climate Change Threatens 55 Million People In India's Coastal Areas: Report", *PTI*, November 9, 2015, at http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2015-11-09/news/68133970_1_4-degrees-celsius-coastal-areas-world-temperature.

¹⁵³ Rowling, Megan, "Rising Seas Menace 280 Mln People Even With 2c Warming – Scientists", *Reuters*, November 9, 2015 at <http://in.reuters.com/article/climatechange-summit-sealevel-idINL8N1342TE20151109>

initiatives to mobilize private capital to fund infrastructure, policies that can develop a deeper and more liquid corporate debt market, and instruments to help sub-sovereign governments raise financing for development.” It added, “We also discussed potential avenues of technical collaboration between the Ministry of Finance and Treasury in developing deeper and more robust Indian capital markets.¹⁵⁴

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **India-Russia to hold joint military exercise INDRA-2015 in Bikaner; Government of India issues the notification regarding implementation of One Rank One Pension for defence forces personnel.**

Indian and Russian Armies would be conducting a joint military exercise under the banner ‘Exercise INDRA-2015’. A 250 member Russian Army contingent would arrive in Bikaner for INDRA-2015 for the joint exercise to be held with the Indian Army from 07 November to 20 November 2015. Exercise INDRA-2015 is the seventh edition in a series of bilateral exercises under this banner. The joint exercise this year would focus on ‘Counter Terrorism Operations in Desert Terrain under a United Nations Mandate’. Russian and Indian armies would work towards achieving inter-operability in such joint operations in the future. The joint training would also focus on ensuring a high degree of physical fitness, tactical drills, techniques and procedures. During the exercise, participants will engage in variety of missions including joint planning, Cordon and Search operations, Search and Rescue, joint tactical drills and special arms skills. The exercise would be conducted in two phases, namely ‘Combat Conditioning & Tactical Training’ and ‘Validation’ phases. The nature and scope of the exercise stands as a testimony to the deep and mature military to military ties between Russia and India.¹⁵⁵

The Government of India has issued the notification regarding implementation of One Rank One Pension (OROP) in respect of Defence Forces personnel on November 07, 2015. The issue of OROP was a long standing demand of the defence forces spanning almost four decades but the issue could not be resolved. Salient features of the OROP as stated in the order are as follows:

- The pension of the past pensioners would be re-fixed on the basis of pension of retirees of calendar year 2013 and the benefit will be effective with effect from 1.7.2014.
- Pension will be re-fixed for all pensioners on the basis of the average of minimum and maximum pension of personnel retiring in 2013 in the same rank and with the same length of service.

¹⁵⁴ “Joint Press Statement issued after the second meeting of U.S-India investment initiative”, *PIB*, Release ID :130205, November 4, 2015 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

¹⁵⁵ “India-Russia Joint Army Exercise Indra-2015 in Bikaner to Focus on Counter Terrorism,” *PIB*, November 05, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130254>

- iii. Pension for those drawing above the average shall be protected.
- iv. Arrears will be paid in four equal half yearly instalments. However, all the family pensioners, including those in receipt of Special/Liberalized family pensioners, and Gallantry award winners shall be paid arrears in one instalment.
- v. In future, the pension would be re-fixed every 5 years.

Significantly, the notification says that personnel who opt to get discharged henceforth on their own request will not be entitled to the benefits of OROP. It will be effective prospectively. The govt. has also decided to appoint a judicial committee to look into anomalies, if any, arising out of implementation of OROP. The Judicial Committee will submit its report in six months. The actual additional annual expenditure on OROP would be eight to ten thousand crore at present and will increase further in future.¹⁵⁶

International

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Russia to provide Afghanistan with military aid; Royal Australian Air Force receives into service its eighth and final Boeing C-17 Globemaster III airlifter.**

Reports say that Russia will provide Afghanistan with military aid following a request from the later. Russia had promised to supply small arms to Afghanistan free of charge and that the deal is being finalised. The provision of further military assistance is also being considered, albeit on a commercial basis. This includes helicopters, spare parts, ammunition, and some armaments. It is also being reported that Russia will provide Afghanistan with several Mil Mi-35 helicopter gunships.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, according to reports, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) received into service its eighth and final Boeing C-17 Globemaster III airlifter with the arrival of aircraft A41-212. This aircraft is the last of two additional aircrafts that the Australian government signed for earlier this year, to augment the six it is already operating. The two aircraft, plus associated equipment and support, were procured at a cost of USD713 million. The RAAF received its first C-17 in December 2006. Australia's C-17 procurements are part of a wider revamp of the RAAF's airlift capabilities.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ "Notification for Implementation of OROP Issued," *PIB*, November 07, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130325>

¹⁵⁷ "Russian Ambassador Promises Small Arms Donation for Afghanistan," *IHS Jane's*, November 09, 2015, at <http://www.janes.com/article/55872/russian-ambassador-promises-small-arms-donation-for-afghanistan>

¹⁵⁸ "Australia Receives Final C-17 Airlifter," *IHS Jane's*, November 05, 2015, at <http://www.janes.com/article/55770/australia-receives-final-c-17-airlifter>

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Two jawans killed in Pakistani firing; Thirteen CRPF personnel injured in grenade attack in Srinagar; PM Modi announces Rs.80, 000-Cr package for J&K; PM aid package would give new strength to the State, and generate jobs.**

Two army jawans were killed on November 2 as Pakistani troops pounded Indian positions with mortars and machine guns in Gurez sector in Kashmir along the Line of Control (LoC). The latest incident of ceasefire violation came five days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Jammu and Kashmir on November 7.¹⁵⁹

At least 13 CRPF personnel were injured on November 5 in a grenade attack on their camp in the Nowpora area of Srinagar city. According to police, militants hurled grenades towards Hotel Ikhwan, the site of the CRPF camp, resulting in minor injuries to 13 CRPF personnel.¹⁶⁰

Invoking Atal Bihari Vajpayee's mantra for development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 7 announced a package of Rs 80,000 crore for Jammu & Kashmir and pledged to transform it into a new, modern, progressive and prosperous state for which there will no dearth of money. Recalling the words of the former prime minister — "Kashmiriyat, Jamhooriyat aur Insaniyat", he said, "I will like to follow these three mantras which are the pillars of development of Kashmir. Kashmiriyat ke bina Hindustan adhura hai. (Without Kashmiriyat, India is incomplete). Sufi tradition has emerged from this land and this tradition has taught us oneness and strength of unity", Modi added.¹⁶¹

Prime Minister Modi said, "India is not complete without Kashmiriyat". He also praised the people of the state for reposing their faith in Jamhooriyat (democracy) and said that the progress of Jammu and Kashmir had to be based on Insaniyat. The Prime Minister said the Rs. 80,000 crore package for Jammu and Kashmir, which he announced in Srinagar, would give new strength to the State, and generate employment for youth.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ "Two Jawans Killed In Pakistani Firing", *The Economic Times*, November 2, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/two-jawans-killed-in-pakistani-firing/articleshow/49634049.cms>

¹⁶⁰ "Jammu & Kashmir: 13 CRPF Personnel Injured In Suspected Grenade Attack", *The Economic Times*, November 5, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/jammu-kashmir-13-crpf-personnel-injured-in-suspected-grenade-attack/articleshow/49678747.cms>

¹⁶¹ "PM Modi Announces Rs 80,000 Crore Package for J&K, Invokes Vajpayee", *The Economic Times*, November 8, 2015 at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-11-08/news/68108791_1_pm-modi-jammu-kashmir-kashmiriyat

¹⁶² Prime Minister Modi "Addresses Public Meeting in Srinagar; Announces Rs. 80,000 Crore Package for the State", *PIB*, Release ID :130323, November 7, 2015 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

Northeast India

(November 2-8, 2015)

- **Three NSCN (K) militants gunned down in Nagaland; UNC lifts economic blockade temporarily; NIA unravels NSCN (IM)'s role.**

NSCN-K finance secretary identified as one L Tuccu was shot dead by security forces in Nagaland on November 2. Reports said L Tuccu along with two others were killed by the security forces at Sataka village in Zunheboto district of Nagaland at around 3 am on November 2. The identities of the other victims were yet to be ascertained as the report goes to press.¹⁶³

United Naga Council (UNC) has temporarily lifted its 10-day economic blockade on the national highways in Manipur which was commenced from the intervening night of November 2 and November 3. A statement of the UNC said that the decision to lift the blockade was taken in an emergency "Presidential Council Meeting" of the apex body held on November 5 at its office.¹⁶⁴

The establishment of the involvement of the NSCN (IM) – which is under ceasefire agreement with the Government of India and has signed a peace pact – in an ambush on security forces on April 2 this year has become a matter of concern. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a hardcore self-styled captain of the NSCN (IM), Singmaty Kapai for his involvement in the attack. NIA sources told *The Assam Tribune* that Kapai was the mastermind of the attack on security forces in Tupi village in Khonsa area of Arunachal Pradesh on April 2. Three security personnel were killed in the attack, while three others received serious injuries. During preliminary questioning, the arrested militant said that the Army had launched at least 50 attacks on NSCN (IM) in Arunachal Pradesh within this year and they wanted to retaliate.¹⁶⁵

Left-wing Extremism

(November 2-November 8, 2015)

- **Three Maoists killed, eight held in Chhattisgarh; Women cops being trained in disposing IEDs; Two wanted Maoists arrested in Odisha.**

Three guerrillas of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) were killed and eight others were arrested from different part of restive Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on November 3. Briefing the media in Jagdalpur after the successful operations, Mr. S.R.P. Kalluri, the Inspector General of Police, Bastar range said that the anti-Maoist operations had begun in

¹⁶³ "NSCN (K) Finance Secy Killed", *The Assam Tribune*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=nov0315/oth054>

¹⁶⁴ "UNC Lifts Economic Blockade Temporarily", *Nagaland Post*, November 6, 2015 at <http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/Regional/RegionalNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA4OTI1Mg%3D%3D>

¹⁶⁵ "NIA Unravels NSCN (IM)'s Role", *The Assam Tribune*, November 7, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=nov0715/at052>

Bastar. "The operations have begun in Sukma and all parts of Bastar would witness anti-Maoist operations now. During encounters, the outsider senior Maoist leaders don't lead but they send local Dalams (units) to fight. This is how they have been surviving here but very soon they would be exposed," he told reporters.¹⁶⁶

In a bid to ensure significant participation of women police personnel in anti-Maoist operations in the future, they are being imparted cutting-edge training in disposing IEDs along with jungle warfare tactics in insurgency-riddled Chhattisgarh. As part of 45-day rigorous jungle warfare training course at the government's Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare College (CTJWC), located at Kanker district in north Bastar, the state's women troopers are being trained in diffusing Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).¹⁶⁷

Two wanted Maoists were nabbed by the police from Pagharpani jungle in Nabarangpur district of Odisha on November 6. The arrested Maoists were identified as Pundit Gond and Subedar Gond of Tandapara village bordering Chhattisgarh. For the past several years, both were involved in many cases of violence in the district. Speaking to *The Hindu*, inspector-in-charge of Raigarh police station, Rashmiranjan Das said these two were among the Maoists who had blasted the Kundei police station in July 2010. As per the police records, they were also involved in at least two murders.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Dahat, Pavan, "3 Maoists Killed in Bastar", *The Hindu*, November 3, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/3-maoists-killed-8-arrested-in-chhattisgarh/article7838215.ece>

¹⁶⁷ "Chhattisgarh's Women Cops Being Trained In Disposing IEDs to Combat Naxals", *Business Standard*, November 6, 2015 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/women-cops-being-trained-in-disposing-ieds-to-combat-naxals-115110600173_1.html

¹⁶⁸ "Two Wanted Maoists Nabbed", *The Hindu*, November 7, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/two-wanted-maoists-nabbed/article7852851.ece>