

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

(December 14-January 3, 2016)

- **Afghanistan-Central Asia Dialogue III in Balkh; ISIS is creating 'little nests' in Afghanistan, Warns US Chief; Jihad waged for development of country, Afghans should not flee to Europe; Mi 25 attack helicopter gifted to Afghanistan reaches; Afghanistan inks two accords with Azerbaijan; India approves completion of Salma dam project at revised cost of \$268m; Public perception about Pakistan would change through actions; Afghanistan signs grant agreements worth \$128 million with World Bank; Parliament objects Russia's contacts with Taliban; NATO, US military commander seeks to keep more troops in Afghanistan.**

The third conference between Afghanistan and Central Asia has kicked off in the capital of northern Balkh province. Experts from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kirghizstan will exchange views on mutual concerns and interests. The two-day expert-level talks begun on December 16 and will continue till December 17 in Mazar-i-Sharif. Atta Mohammad Noor, acting governor of Balkh province, while talking to the gathering this morning said that the region and rest of the world should fully cooperate and support efforts for the stability in Afghanistan. Noor added that security of the region and world is connected to the security of Afghanistan. "History has proved this," he said, adding that world won't be secured if there is no security in Afghanistan. Afghanistan-Central Asia Dialogue III is jointly organized by the Institute for International Studies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Afghanistan-Central Asia Dialogue I and II were also held in Afghanistan respectively in 2013 and 2014. Afghanistan-Central Asia Dialogue aims to identify the reasons for the gap between the potential and actual state of cooperation and to recommend effective ways and policies for strengthening cooperation and connectivity between Afghanistan and the Central Asia.¹

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group is creating 'little nests' in Afghanistan as the group has stepped up efforts to gain foothold and expand its activities in the country. The US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter warned regarding the emergent threat of the terror group during a surprise visit to Afghanistan on December 18. Following a meeting with the acting Afghan defence minister Masoom Stanikzai, Carter said the threat posed by ISIS terror group is being tracked very closely. The remarks by Carter comes shortly after the commander of the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan Gen. John Campbell said the loyalists of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group are attempting to establish a regional base in Jalalabad, the capital city of eastern Nangarhar province. In an interview with *The Associated Press*, the commander of the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, Gen. John

¹ "Afghanistan-Central Asia Dialogue III kicks off in Mazar-i-Sharif", *Khaama Press*, December 17, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-central-asia-dialogue-iii-kicks-off-in-mazar-i-sharif-4393>

Campbell, said that foreign militants from Syria and Iraq had joined the loyalists of the terror group in eastern Nangarhar province and are trying to consolidate links with the leadership of the terror group based in Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, Pentagon released a report regarding the situation of Afghanistan on the same day, stating that overall security has deteriorated dramatically during the second half of 2015 as the country continues to face threats from both the Afghan insurgency and extremist networks, including the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and to a lesser extent al Qaeda.²

With dramatic surge in the number of Afghans leaving the country with majority heading towards European countries amid growing violence, the Taliban militants group in Afghanistan has issued an unusual statement urging the Afghans to remain in the country, insisting that they wage jihad for the development of the country. The statement by the Taliban group was released and days after reports emerged that some of the Afghan migrants are purchasing threat letters forged by certain individuals who are charging considerable amounts in the black market to issue the letters in a bid to help the migrants easily go through the asylum process. "While the Islamic Emirate sees the corrupt Kabul regime as the main driver behind the mass migration of our countrymen, it calls on all its countrymen fleeing the lap of their motherland towards the uncertainties of drowning in dark seas and being killed or held prisoners in foreign lands to choose the path of patience and perseverance by enduring the little hardships inside their country instead of illegal migration and defaming the Islamic Emirate by presenting fake threat letters," the statement reads. Despite the group is blamed for majority of casualties incurred to the civilians, however, Taliban said "The Islamic Emirate is waging Jihad so that the country is developed and our countrymen provided with a prosperous secure life under the shade of an Islamic system. Hence no one should be fooled by the propaganda against the Taliban and Mujahideen. The Islamic Emirate has done and will continue to do everything possible to aid and provide serenity to our countrymen."³

India has delivered its first major offensive military platform to Kabul, with a Mi 25 attack helicopter reaching Afghanistan earlier this month. The first of the four Russian origin choppers that have been gifted to the neighbouring nation has arrived in Afghanistan, with three more on the way, senior officials have told the scribe. The attack helicopters, designed to take on fortified enemy positions and flying in troops to locations prone to heavy ground fire, will join the Afghanistan Air Force that already operates three of the Indian built Cheetal light helicopters. The delivery marks the first time India has gifted offensive combat capability to Afghanistan, a sensitive topic in the past due to strong objections by Pakistan. In the past, India has transferred non-lethal equipment, including vehicles, transport choppers, communication equipment and medical supplies to Afghanistan. However India is a major training partner with Kabul sending across cadets for various courses as well as basic officers

² "ISIS is Creating 'Little Nests' in Afghanistan, US Defence Chief Warns", *Khaama Press*, December 19, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/isis-is-creating-little-nests-in-afghanistan-us-defense-chief-warns-1828>

³ "Taliban: Jihad Waged for Development of Country, Afghans Should Not Flee to Europe", *Khaama Press*, December 20, 2015, at, <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-jihad-waged-for-development-of-country-afghans-should-not-flee-to-europe-1835>

training programmes. India is currently in the process of retiring its Mi 25 chopper fleet that are being replaced with newer generation Apache choppers that have already been contracted from the US this year under a government-to-government deal. The Mi 25 transfer is the second helicopter dispatch to take place this year. In April, India delivered three military choppers to Kabul weeks ahead of the first visit by Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani. The three Cheetal utility helicopters were manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) with Afghan pilots and technicians trained to operate them.⁴

The visiting Afghan delegation signed two accords with Azerbaijan officials on December 22. The documents include a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) "On cooperation in the sphere of labour, social protection and employment" and an agreement "On cooperation between Azerbaijan Television and Radio Broadcasting Closed Joint-Stock Company and the National Radio Television of Afghanistan (RTA)". The MoU was signed by Afghanistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Salahuddin Rabbani and Azerbaijan's Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Population Salim Muslumov while the agreement of cooperation in media sector was inked by Sultan Ahmad Bahen on behalf of RTA and head of Azerbaijan's Television and Radio Broadcasting Closed Joint-Stock Company Arif Alishanov. The documents were signed in the presence of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev. The documents were signed following a meeting between both Presidents during which it was noted that bilateral relations between the two countries have successfully developed in the political arena, and that there is good potential to develop economic ties.⁵

The Indian cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the reconstruction and completion of Salma dam at a revised cost of INR 1,775.69 crore which is equivalent to around \$268,050,296. According to local media reports, the revised reconstruction cost was approved by Union Cabinet– three days before the likely visit of Modi to Kabul for the inauguration of the newly-built Afghan parliament building. "The project is scheduled to be completed by June, 2016. M/s. WAPCOS, a central public sector unit under the Ministry of Water Resources, is executing the project," a statement by the government said. The cost of reconstruction and completion of the project was revised due to foreign exchange rate variation between the Indian rupee and US dollar, increase in consultancy charges due to extended period of project completion, training of Afghan personnel etc. Built on Harirod river, the dam is expected to produce 42 megawatt of electricity and will irrigate around 75,000 hectares of agricultural land. India has played a crucial role by participating in the rebuilding of Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Since 2002, the Government of India has committed USD 2 billion dollars to the socio-economic rebuilding of the Afghan state and society in accordance with the development priorities of the

⁴ "Mi 25 Attack Helicopter Gifted By India To Afghanistan Reaches Kabul, 3 More To Follow", *Afghanistan Times*, December 22, 2015, at <http://afghanistantimes.af/mi-25-attack-helicopter-gifted-by-india-to-afghanistan-reaches-kabul-3-more-to-follow/>

⁵ "Afghanistan Inks Two Accords with Azerbaijan", *Khaama Press*, December 23, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-inks-two-accords-with-azerbaijan-4416>

Government and the people of Afghanistan.⁶ The availability of power and water through the project upon its successful completion will lead to the overall economic development of the western region of Afghanistan and generate goodwill for India in Afghanistan. The completion of this project will address the energy requirements and irrigation needs of western Afghanistan.⁷

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah has said that Kabul recognizes change in Pakistan's policies particularly with Islamabad's assurance of working for peace and stability in Afghanistan but public perception would change through actions. "It will take time for common Afghans to be on-board. They have doubts which need to be removed through actions," CEO Abdullah said in an interview with Pakistan's leading daily on December 23. While pointing to Pakistan's breach of trust, CEO Abdullah said that Kabul was told peace talks with Taliban are taking place with the blessing of Mullah Omar but he had died two years ago. "We were told that the [peace] talks were taking place with his [Omar's] blessing... who leaked the news [of Omar's death] ... why and how this happened... this is not important anymore," he said. "What is important is why this was kept from us. It was clear breach of trust." Pakistan arranged and hosted first round of face-to-face peace talks between Afghan government and Taliban in July and the process was expected to continue but it halted when the news about Mullah Mohammad Omar's death surfaced.⁸

Two grant agreements worth \$128 million were signed between the Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan and the World Bank, covering two key sectors – Farm Water Management Project and Hydropower Rehabilitation Project. The Ministry of Finance in a statement said \$45 million of the funds has been allocated as "additional grant to the ongoing On Farm Water Management Project (OFWMP). OFWMP will continue to support efforts to improve agricultural productivity by enhancing the efficiency of water use through the rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation schemes, and helping farmers adopt new agricultural practices." The remaining \$83 million of the grant has been allocated to finance the Naghlu Hydropower Rehabilitation Project (NHRP), which aims to improve dam safety and to increase the supply of electricity at the Naghlu Hydropower Plant. According to Finance Ministry the project will help enhance the reliability of the electric power system and benefit both households and industries, thereby stimulating economic development and growth. "Both these projects outline the government's position to improve on water usage in Afghanistan and utilize them for the economic and social development of the Afghan people," said HE Eklil Hakimi, Finance Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "They are also intended to improve irrigation, improve access to electricity, boost jobs creation and provide more opportunities for employment in the agriculture sector in rural areas. In this context, the Afghan

⁶ "India Approves Completion of Salma Dam Project at Revised Cost of \$268m", *Khaama Press*, December 23, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/india-approves-completion-of-salam-dam-project-at-revised-cost-of-268m-1852>

⁷ "Revised Cost Estimates of Salma Dam Project in Afghanistan", *PIB*, December 22, 2015, Release ID :133813, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

⁸ "CEO Abdullah: Public Perception About Pakistan Would Change Through Actions", *Khaama Press*, December, 24, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/ceo-abdullah-public-perception-about-pakistan-would-change-through-actions-4419>

government values its partnership with the World Bank and our international partners contributing generously to the ARTF; we look forward to continued cooperation in the various sectors in the years ahead to boost economic development in Afghanistan.”⁹

Parliament objected Russia’s contacts with Taliban calling it interference in Afghan affairs. While raising concerns over the contacts, parliamentarians said this is fight between two super powers and Afghans are not able to stand in rivalry. “There are concerns that Afghanistan might become a battle field for world powers,” said MP Sayed Mohammad Hassan, adding that “Fate of the people would resemble to that of Iraq and Syria.” Shinkay Karokhil, another Member of Parliament said Russia does not trust the government of Afghanistan. “That is why it has established contacts with Taliban,” she said. MP Zahir Sadat while directly criticizing the remarks of Zamir Kabulov said, “There are no good and bad among terrorists.” MPs raised concerns after Zamir Kabulov, a Russian diplomat and President Vladimir Putin’s special envoy to Afghanistan pointed that they exchange information with Taliban regarding the terrorist group of Islamic State (IS) or Daesh. However, such contacts have been rejected by the Taliban.¹⁰

As the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorating day by day, the NATO and U.S. military commander in Afghanistan General John F. Campbell seeks to keep as many U.S. troops in Afghanistan as possible through 2016. In a telephonic interview with *USA Today* from Kabul, Gen. John Campbell said that maintaining the current force of 9,800 U.S. troops to train Afghan forces and conduct counter-terrorism raids is vital, and that the scheduled reduction to 5,500 by January 1, 2017, should be put off as long as possible. “My intent would be to keep as much as I could for as long as I could,” he said. “At some point it becomes physics. I’m going to have to get them out.” Gen. Campbell will be Washington soon to brief senior leaders on the security situation in Afghanistan and troop levels required for their missions. “My job as commander on the ground is to continually make assessments,” he said. “Every time I’ve gone to the president and said, ‘I need X,’ I’ve been very, very fortunate that he’s provided that. So he’s been very flexible. It’s actually been conditions based as we’ve gone forward. “If I don’t believe that we can accomplish the train, advise and assist and the (counter-terrorism) missions, then I owe it to the senior leadership to come back and say, ‘Here’s what I need.’ If that’s more people, it’s more people.”¹¹

⁹ “Afghanistan Signs Grant Agreements Worth \$128 Million with World Bank”, *Khaama Press*, December 25, 2015, <http://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-signs-grant-agreements-worth-128-million-with-world-bank-0045>

¹⁰ Parliament Objects Russia’s Contacts with Taliban, *Khaama Press*, December 26, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/parliament-objects-russias-contacts-with-taliban-4428>

¹¹ “NATO, US Military Commander Seeks To Keep More Troops in Afghanistan”, *Khaama Press*, December 30, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/nato-us-military-commander-seeks-to-keep-more-troops-in-afghanistan-4441>

Pakistan

(December 14-January 3, 2016)

- **Mess Caused by Past policies of military and political elite; Railway inducted into larger project of CPEC; Recognition of fighting Taliban on increase in Pakistan; Much awaited Afghan peace talks may restart soon; Genuinely interested in improving tie; Change of government in Pakistan's restive region; Zehri offers dialogue for political reconciliation in Balochistan; Can't expect much from India dialogue; US ups pressure to choke terror groups' financing; Ministers in the dark about outcome of army chief's Kabul visit.**

In an impassioned speech in the National Assembly on December 18, Minister for Interior Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan held the past policies of the military and political elite responsible for bringing the country to a level where it has become difficult to govern. "We are all responsible for creating this mess in the country, where it is easy to commit bad deeds and people find it difficult to do good things," the minister said while winding up a debate on the performance of his ministry. Even worse, he added, there was no difference between the good and bad in the country. Chaudhry Nisar cited a number of incidents to substantiate his claim about mis-governance the country had descended into and explained how the present government was trying to clear the deck. "In a meeting during the previous PPP time, which I attended as a leader of the opposition on national security of the country, the then army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani presented a list of banned organisations present in the country. When I contested the figure based on information which the government had been presenting in the then National Assembly, in response, the army chief said actually there was some miscommunication," the minister said, highlighting the chronic lack of coordination among government departments.¹²

The government has planned to install and upgrade railway tracks under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. Under the plan, a railway line will be developed from Gwadar to Quetta and Jacobabad via Besima tehsil in Balochistan and a 560km track will be laid from Bostan to Kotla Jam on the main line-II via Zhob and Dera Ismail Khan and another 682km track will be laid from Havelian to Khunjerab, said the report quoting Radio Pakistan's website. The upgradation of 1,872km track from Karachi to Peshawar via Kotri, Multan, Lahore and Rawalpindi (including Taxila-Havelian) – along with dualisation of the track from Shahdara to Peshawar – will also be carried out. According to the report, 1,254 kilometres of railway track from Kotri to Attock City via Dadu, Larkana, Jacobabad, Dera Ghazi Khan, Bhakkar and Kundian will be upgraded.¹³

There is an increasing recognition in Pakistan that to defeat the TTP, they must also fight the Afghan Taliban, says a senior US official. "And that creates an opportunity that we will want to pursue as much as possible," Ambassador Richard Olson told the Senate Foreign Relation

¹² "Past Policies of Military, Political Elite 'Caused Mess'", *Dawn*, December 19, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1227385/past-policies-of-military-political-elite-caused-mess>

¹³ "Railway Tracks To Be Built, Upgraded As Part of CPEC Project: Report", *Dawn*, December 21, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1227822/railway-tracks-to-be-built-upgraded-as-part-of-cpec-project-report>

Committee. In an earlier testimony, Mr Olson had told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the US had held candid discussions with Pakistan on its short-range nuclear weapons and Pakistan was willing to engage with the US on the issue. "I think there is increasingly a recognition on the part of the government of Pakistan that there is significant bleed over between the Pakistani Taliban and the Afghan Taliban. This is one of the motivations for their desire to that it is no longer as simple for them as it may have been in the past even if they in principle agree to distinguish between good and bad Taliban," he said. In his second testimony this week, Mr Olson said terror had always been at the centre of dialogue between the two countries, adding that in all discussions US asked Pakistan to take action against the Haqqani network and Taliban.¹⁴

Pakistan-brokered peace talks between Afghanistan and Taliban insurgents could restart in early January after weeks of pressure from partners including the United States and China, officials in Islamabad and Kabul said. Pakistan's army chief General Raheel Sharif is expected in Afghanistan this week in the latest in a series of high-level contacts between Islamabad and Kabul to restart the peace process which was broken off in July. A senior Pakistani official told *Reuters* the resumption of talks should take "no longer than two weeks ... I would say the first week of January we will see the process restart again." He said the current plan was for the meetings to be held in Pakistan. The aim was to bring Afghan and Pakistani leaders together with special representatives from China and the United States as well as Taliban representatives. "The understanding is that all stakeholders should be there, everyone with a stake in this," said the official, requesting anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the media on the issue. According to a Taliban official in the movement's office in Qatar, Pakistan had also asked deputy Taliban leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, head of a Taliban-affiliated network blamed for a spate of recent suicide attacks in Kabul, to join the talks. But after repeated failed efforts, prospects for any immediate breakthrough appear distant, with a high risk the process may "crash soon after take-off", in the words of one senior Afghan official who has been closely involved. "The Taliban are suffering from leadership chaos and the movement is fractured and it is not clear who is going to talk and which side is going to continue to fight," said the official, who like others spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.¹⁵

The United States believes that India and Pakistan now seem genuinely interested in fostering greater understanding between the two countries, says the State Department. At a news briefing, Spokesman John Kirby of the department also emphasised the need for all South Asian nations to work together to defeat terrorists. "We continue to welcome efforts by India and Pakistan to work bilaterally to solve these very difficult, complicated issues," he said Kirby while noting that both countries were victims of terrorism. Relations between South Asia's two nuclear-armed neighbours have started to warm up after an unscheduled meeting between their prime ministers in Paris earlier this month. A week after this meeting, Indian

¹⁴ "Pakistan Recognises Need To Fight Afghan Taliban: Olson", *Dawn*, December 21, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1227813/pakistan-recognises-need-to-fight-afghan-taliban-olson>

¹⁵ "Pakistan-Backed Afghan Peace Talks May Restart In First Week of January", *Daily Times*, December 22, 2015, at <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2015-12-22/page-1/detail-3>

Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj visited Islamabad where both sides agreed to resume bilateral talks after two years of nerve-wrecking tensions. And the Indian media reported this week that Prime Minister Narendra Modi also planned to visit Pakistan next month. "They have started to do that (working together to improve relations) and appear to be genuinely interested in fostering greater understanding between the two countries, that's welcome. And we continue to encourage that," said Mr Kirby when asked to comment on these developments.¹⁶

Balochistan Chief Minister Dr Abdul Malik Baloch tendered his resignation to Governor Muhammad Khan Achakzai in accordance with the 'Murree Accord'. "As per the Murree agreement, I have stepped down from the post of the chief minister," Dr Malik Baloch said after submitting his resignation. An official at the Governor House confirmed that Achakzai had accepted Dr Malik's resignation. "Yes, Chief Minister Dr Abdul Malik has tendered his resignation to the governor, who has accepted it," Governor's Principal Secretary Abdul Jabbar said. He said the Services and General Administration Department had also notified the resignation of Dr Abdul Malik. The ruling Pakistan Muslim League –Nawaz (PML-N) has already nominated its provincial chief Nawab Sanaullah Zehri to be the next chief minister of Balochistan. PML-N, National Party and Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) signed an agreement in Murree soon after the May 11 general elections, called the 'Murree Accord'. According to its terms, December 4 this year was supposed to be the last day of Dr Malik Baloch as the chief minister of Balochistan, following which a PML-N nominee was to take over for the next two-and-a-half years. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, PkMAP Chairman Mehmood Khan Achakzai and Senator Hasil Bizenjo were the signatories of the agreement. "We have handed over the chief minister's slot to our partners," Senator Bizenjo said. In the meantime, the deputy speaker of Balochistan Assembly, Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo, also submitted his resignation.¹⁷

The newly-elected chief minister of Balochistan, Nawab Sanaullah Zehri, said he will continue to carry forward the policies of his predecessor Dr Malik Baloch and will make efforts to improve governance in the province. Zehri of the PML-N was elected Balochistan chief minister unopposed after Dr Baloch resigned from the post on December 23. The chief minister, while addressing the assembly, said grievances of Balochistan's people would be addressed with the development and progress on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. He said that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is arriving to inaugurate the CPEC route on December 30. "Let's come for peace, we are ready for dialogue," Zehri said, while referring to political reconciliation in Balochistan. He, however, made it clear that no compromise would be made regarding attacks at security forces and civilians in Balochistan. He said attacks against Hazara community would not be tolerated anymore.¹⁸

¹⁶ "Pakistan, India Genuinely Interested in Improving Ties: US", *Dawn*, December 23, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1228273/pakistan-india-genuinely-interested-in-improving-ties-us>

¹⁷ "Change of Guard: Dr Malik Resigns, PML-N's Zehri Set To Become CM", *Daily Times*, December 24, 2015, at <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2015-12-24/page-1/detail-4>

¹⁸ "Zehri Offers Dialogue for Political Reconciliation in Balochistan", *Daily Times*, December 25, 2015, at <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2015-12-25/page-1/detail-0>

Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz on December 26 said it would not be fair to expect instant resolution of all issues during the initial phase of comprehensive dialogue between the foreign secretaries of Pakistan and India, Radio Pakistan reported. In an earlier announcement, Aziz had said that the meeting between the foreign secretaries of the two countries has been scheduled for the mid of next month. Aziz said, "Initially the focus (of talks) would be on the reduction of tensions and maintenance of calm on the Line of Control to provide relief to the people living across the LoC." He said as the dialogue proceeds, all issues would be discussed. The comprehensive dialogue between Pakistan and India will eventually focus all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir, he maintained. The adviser said, "In the recent meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries in Lahore, it was decided that foreign secretaries would meet in the midst of next month to decide details of dialogue on all issues." Promotion of good neighbourly relations with all neighbours is the policy of the incumbent government, said Aziz, adding, "As this is a prerequisite to benefit from projects aimed at increasing regional connectivity and resolution of energy crisis." He said major political parties, including the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), had the consensus on peace and enhanced people-to-people contacts between the two countries.¹⁹

After recent terrorist attacks in the West, the United States has increased pressure on Pakistan to prevent certain outfits from collecting donations inside the country, diplomatic sources told the scribe. The sources also said that three organisations – Falah Insanyet, Ganj Madressah and Lashkar-e-Taiba/Jamaatud Dawa – topped the US list. All three have been declared terrorist outfits by the US State Department as well as the United Nations. "The pressure to prevent these three groups from collecting donations has always been there but has increased after the recent attacks," said a diplomatic source. At a recent congressional hearing, Special US Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard G. Olson told lawmakers that terrorism had always been at the centre of dialogue between the United States and Pakistan. "There was no conversation that I had with the security establishment in Pakistan that did not include a very direct, very frank discussion about, specifically the Haqqani network, but also the Taliban in general," he said. When Chief of Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif visited Washington last month, US officials raised this issue with him.²⁰

In a reflection of growing civil-military disconnect on crucial foreign policy and security matters, two key government ministers expressed ignorance in the Senate on December 29 over the outcome of the army chief's weekend visit to Afghanistan. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, who had specially been called to the Senate for the purpose, made a statement on the Indian prime minister's surprise visit to Lahore, but passed the responsibility of briefing the senators on the visit of Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif to Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, who was not present in the house. It was during an exchange

¹⁹ "Modi Breaks With Diplomatic Protocol To Pay Surprise Visit to Nawaz Sharif : Can't Expect Much From India Dialogue: Pakistan", *Daily Times*, December 27, 2015, at <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/E-Paper/Lahore/2015-12-27/page-1/detail-1>

²⁰ "US Ups Pressure To Choke Terror Groups' Financing", *Dawn*, December 29, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1229356/us-ups-pressure-to-choke-terror-groups-financing>

of remarks between Senate Chairman Raza Rabbani and Mr Aziz on the matter when Defence Minister Khawaja Asif entered the house, but only to seek some time for the briefing. The defence minister said he would speak on Gen Sharif's visit only after getting some input from his ministry for which he required at least one day. The chairman directed him to brief the house on December 31. Interestingly, when Mr Rabbani inquired from Khawaja Asif if he wanted to have an in camera session on the issue, the minister said he would let the Senate secretariat know, if needed.²¹

Bangladesh

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Dhaka court sentenced death penalty to two of the killers of blogger Abhijeet; Bangladeshi killed in BSF shooting; Municipal Elections in Bangladesh.**

A Dhaka court handed down death penalty to two people and different jail terms to six others, including the chief of banned Islamist outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team, on December 31, for the killing of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider almost three years ago. Gonojagoron Mancha, of which Rajib was a key organiser, rejected the judgment and called for protests as even though five were confessed to the killing of the blogger they were not given death penalty.²²

Members of Indian Border Security Force shot dead a Bangladesh national near the Borogram border in Dinajpur on December 31, 2015, according to Bangladesh media. Lt Col Korban Ali, commanding officer of BGB-29 Battalion in Phulbari, said the BSF men of Elenbari camp under 41 BSF Battalion in Dakkhin Dinajpur of West Bengal shot Mohammad Nuruzzaman as he entered the Indian territory, leaving him critically injured. Nuruzzaman was taken to a local hospital in Dakkhin Dinajpur where he died. BGB officials strongly protested the incident and called for a flag meeting. They also urged their Indian counterpart to return the body as soon as possible. At least four Bangladesh nationals were killed in Dinajpur by BSF men in 2015. Of them, two were killed in April and two others in December, according to BGB officials.²³

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has rejected the results of municipal polls held on December 30, 2015, alleging widespread vote-rigging, ballot-stuffing and capture of more than a thousand polling stations by the ruling party men. The Election Commission and the ruling Awami League (AL), however, claimed that the municipal polls were free and fair except for some stray incidents. The AL, however, accused the police of causing some of the incidents.²⁴

²¹ "Ministers in the Dark About Outcome of Army Chief's Kabul Visit", *Dawn*, December 30, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1229602/ministers-in-the-dark-about-outcome-of-army-chiefs-kabul-visit>

²² "Blogger Rajib Murder: 2 Get Death; 6 Others Jailed", *The Daily Star*, January 1, 2016 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/2-get-death-6-others-jail-term-195412>.

²³ "Bangladeshi Killed in BSF Shooting", *The Daily Star*, January 1, 2016 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/bangladeshi-killed-bsf-shooting-195277>.

²⁴ "BNP Rejects Polls Results: Terms Elections Farcical", *The Daily Star*, December 31, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/bnp-demands-re-polls-157-municipalities-194722>. "Polls Free, Fair, Claim EC, AL", *The Daily Star*, December 31, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/polls-free-fair-claim-ec-al-194704>.

Sri Lanka

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Australia extends support to Sri Lanka's fishery industry; Sri Lanka Army releases another 700 acres of land in North; Sri Lanka's economy is stable: Central Bank Governor; Sri Lanka inflation declines to 2.8 percent in December 2015; Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Norway meets King Harald.**

Australia has agreed to support to develop and maintain Sri Lanka's fishery industry on a "sound footing", the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources says. An Australian trade delegation headed by Australian Trade Commissioner Grayson Perry recently held a meeting with the Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development, Mahinda Amaraweera at the Ministry in Colombo. At the discussion, the Australian Trade Commissioner has agreed to extend support to provide the necessary knowledge and training, on the methods and ways followed by Australia, to the officers of the Ministry of Fisheries and to the officers of the institutions coming under the Fisheries Ministry and to conduct and maintain the fisheries industry in Sri Lanka, on a sound footing.²⁵

Sri Lanka Army, in keeping with the new government's policy to release more security forces-held lands to the civilians, has released another 700 acres. The Army has formally released 700 acres of land held by Armed Forces in Valikamam North area of Jaffna and handed them over to the Jaffna Government Agent Nagalingam Vedanayagam, the *BBC* reported. According to the Government Agent 300 families have lived in the land before the war but since the boundary markers of the plots have been removed, the lands need to be re-measured before handing over to the owners.²⁶

The Governor of Sri Lanka's Central Bank Governor Arjun Mahendran says the island nation's economy is at a stable level and the foreign reserves are sufficient at the moment. Addressing a news conference in Colombo on December 31, the Central Bank Governor said the country's economy is in a stable course and no need for an immediate loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). "Our reserves are quite comfortable. We have four and a half months of imports and the country is in no dire need of emergency funding," the official said. However, the country is examining the possibility to obtain a loan facility next year and may make a formal request to the global lender for a loan early next year, the Governor said.²⁷

²⁵ "Australia Extends Support To Sri Lanka's Fishery Industry", *ColomboPage*, December 28, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Dec28_1451318719CH.php.

²⁶ "Sri Lanka Army Releases another 700 Acres of Land in North to Rightful Owners", *ColomboPage*, December 29, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Dec29_1451412230CH.php.

²⁷ "Sri Lanka's Economy is Stable - Central Bank Governor", *ColomboPage*, December 31, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Dec31_1451573698CH.php.

Sri Lanka's inflation, as measured by the change in the Colombo Consumers' Price Index, declined to 2.8 per cent in December 2015 from previous month's 3.1 per cent on a year-on-year basis, the Department of Census and Statistics reported on January 1, 2016.²⁸

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Norway, Musthafa M. Jaffeer, on completion of his tenure as Ambassador to the Kingdom, recently paid a farewell call King Harald. During this meeting, the Ambassador briefed His Majesty on the new policies and direction being adopted by the government under President Maithripala Sirisena in particular moves to reinvigorate the relations with countries that Sri Lanka had once difficult relations over a number of issues. In this respect, Ambassador Jaffeer expressed his happiness over the positive shift taking place in the bilateral relations between Norway and Sri Lanka, since early this year. Ambassador Jaffeer, also met Thommessen Olemeic, the President of the Norwegian Parliament. At this meeting, he handed over a letter from Karu Jayasuriya, Speaker of the Parliament to his counterpart extending an invitation for him to visit Sri Lanka with a Parliamentary delegation. Olmeic, while thanking the Ambassador for the Speaker's invitation, said that the Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee would give its consideration to Sri Lanka's invitation to undertake the visit at a later date. Ambassador Jaffeer was also hosted for farewell events by Sri Lanka Expat Associations in Norway, including the Sri Lankan Association of Norway, Sri Lanka Friends Association of Norway and the Tisarana Sri Lanka Buddhist Association. A special ceremony was also arranged for the Ambassador at the Durga Kanapathi Temple.²⁹

Maldives

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Japanese embassy is opened in Male; Gross international reserves at \$566.7 million at the end of November; Dunya: Challenges remain for Maldives in eliminating human trafficking; Agreement signed with China Exim Bank for \$373 million loan for runway project; President: India our closest partner in diplomatic, political relations; President inaugurates the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge.**

A new Japanese resident Embassy was opened in Male' City on January 1, 2016. Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon has said that opening of the Japanese Embassy in the Maldives is a new chapter in the relations between the Maldives and Japan. Minister Dunya said that a Japanese Embassy in the Maldives not only symbolises the relations between the two countries but it is also "another stamp of approval by the international community of the strong and prudent policies of President Yameen." Japan has been providing aid to the

²⁸ "Sri Lanka Inflation Declines To 2.8 Percent in December 2015", *ColomboPage*, January 1, 2016 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Jan01_1451661926CH.php.

²⁹ "Sri Lanka to Improve Ties with Some Countries", *Colombo Gazette*, January 2, 2016 at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/01/02/sri-lanka-to-improve-ties-with-some-countries/>.

Maldives in diverse sectors via Embassy of Japan in Colombo, Sri Lanka until now. A Maldivian resident Embassy was opened in Tokyo in 2007.³⁰

Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) has announced in its Monthly Economic Review, December 2015, that the gross international reserves stood at \$566.7 million at the end of November 2015. The Central Bank said that this was a decline of 1 per cent in monthly terms, and an increase of 4 per cent in annual terms.³¹

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon has said that Maldives still faces a multitude of challenges in eliminating human trafficking. Dunya made this remark at a ceremony at Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 28, 2015, for the signing of the instrument of accession to the 'Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children', supplementing the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organised Crime. She said that the Maldives' accession to the protocol reflects "the government's on-going efforts to curb and stamp out offences related to trafficking throughout the country and towards the promotion and protection of the rights of those vulnerable to trafficking including the migrant workers." She added that being a small island developing state with limited means, Maldives needs to develop and strengthen efforts in identifying potential victims of human trafficking.³²

The Government of the Maldives has signed an agreement with the Exim Bank of China for a loan worth \$373 million for the construction of a new runway, as part of the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA) development project. This has been confirmed by Minister of Tourism Moosa Zameer. In addition to the new runway, the loan money will also go to the construction of a fuel farm and cargo complex at the airport. Zameer was accompanied in the meeting by Maldivian Ambassador to China Mohamed Faisal, Managing Director of Maldives Airports Authority Limited (MACL) Adil Moosa, Minister of State for Finance Ahmed Munawwar, and Deputy Attorney General Ahmed Husham.³³

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has said that India has been the Maldives' closest partner in terms of diplomatic and political relations. The President made this remark at a farewell call by Indian High Commissioner to the Maldives, Rajeev Shahare, at the President's Office on December 28, 2015. President Yameen expressed his gratitude to Shahare for his contributions during his time in office, towards strengthening and expansion of bilateral relationship between both countries. The President and the High Commissioner highlighted areas to be further addressed in order to enhance the good working relationship between the Maldives and India, and discussed supporting each other in the international arena and in times of political distress. The President was accompanied at the meeting by Minister of

³⁰ "Dunya: Opening of the Embassy Begins New Chapter Japan-Maldives Relations", *SunOnline*, January 2, 2016 at <http://english.sun.mv/35548>.

³¹ "Gross International Reserves At \$566.7 M at the End of November", *SunOnline*, January 1, 2016 at <http://english.sun.mv/35530>.

³² "Dunya: Challenges Remain for Maldives in Eliminating Human Trafficking", *SunOnline*, December 28, 2015 at <http://english.sun.mv/35460>.

³³ "Agreement Signed With China Exim Bank For \$373 Million Loan for Runway Project", *SunOnline*, December 28, 2015 at <http://english.sun.mv/35459>.

Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon and Under Secretary at the President's Office Mohamed Naseer.

The agreement for the construction of the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge to be built between Malé and Hulhulé has been signed and the project has been inaugurated. At the special function held at Dhraubaaruge on December 30, Housing Minister Dr. Mohamed Muizzu signed the agreement on behalf of the Maldivian Government. And the contractor China Communication and Construction Company (CCCC) was represented by the President of the company, Chen Gong. The construction of the project was inaugurated by the President Abdulla Yamin Abdul Gayoom and the Deputy Minister of Commerce of China, Gao Yan, who has been appointed to attend the ceremony as a special envoy of the President of China, Xi Jinping.. The government has said that the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge would be 1.39 kilometres long and 20 meters wide with two lanes for four-wheel vehicles and two lanes for motorcycles along with a separate lane for bicycles and one for pedestrians on foot. CCCC said that the bridge connecting the two islands across the sea would have a life span of 100 years.³⁴

B. East Asia

China

(December 21-January 3, 2016)

- **270 official punished in last three years in China; Chinese test flight on Nansha Island within Chinese sovereign rights; China building a second aircraft carrier; China releases guidelines for military reforms; Counter-terrorism law adopted by China; China amends national education law; Chinese Foreign Minister meets Nepalese Deputy Prime Minister; China announces aid for Syria.**

On January 2 the Supreme People's Court (SPC) of China said that in the last three years around 270 officials were punished for violating the Party code of conduct. According to a statement released by the SPC, "among those punished, 42 were Party chiefs and court presidents, while eight were discipline inspection officials accredited to the courts".³⁵

As a response to the Vietnamese protests regarding the Chinese test flight to newly-built airport on Yongshu Jiao on Nansha Islands, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying said that, "The Chinese government conducted a test flight to the airport with a civil aircraft in order to test whether or not the facilities on it meet the standards for civil aviation. Relevant activity falls completely within China's sovereignty".³⁶

³⁴ "President Inaugurates the Bridge Project", *SunOnline*, December 30, 2015 at <http://english.sun.mv/35510>.

³⁵ "China Punishes 270 Court Officials in Three Years", *China Daily*, January 3, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-01/03/content_22915082.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

³⁶ "Spokeswoman: Test Flight 'Completely within China's Sovereignty'", By Zhang Yunbi, *China Daily*, January 3, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-01/03/content_22909339.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

According to the Chinese Ministry of National Defence, China is building its second aircraft carrier in the coastal city of Dalian. According to the spokesperson, "the second carrier, fully based on China's own independent design, will have a displacement of 50,000 tons, a conventional power plant, and will carry domestically developed J-15 fighter jets and other ship-borne aircraft".³⁷

The Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC) released a guideline on deepening the national defence and military reform. According to the guidelines, "a new structure will be established in which the CMC takes charge of the overall administration of the People's Liberation Army, the Chinese People's Armed Police and the militia and reserve forces, battle zone commands focus on combat preparedness, and various military services pursue development". The primary goal is to achieve the results by the year 2020. The guidelines also propose reduction in the number of troops.³⁸

The National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee adopted China's first counter-terrorism law. This is to address the issues of terrorism domestically as well as globally. At a press conference An Weixing, an official with the public security ministry, said that, "Terrorist attacks have caused heavy losses of people's lives and properties, posing a serious threat to our security, stability, economic development and ethnic unity." It proposed a national anti-terrorism body which will coordinate work nationwide.³⁹

The NPC Standing Committee also adopted amendments to the China's education-related law. This was undertaken with the aim to strengthen the bilingual teaching among ethnic minorities.⁴⁰

The Nepalese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Kamal Thapa visited Beijing from December 24 to December 29, 2015. During the visit he met with the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Both sides agreed to the work faster on post-earthquake reconstruction projects and also improve trade and other cooperation. They also discussed cross-border trade, culture and tourism.⁴¹

China has announced that it will provide Syria with \$ 6.18 million as humanitarian aid. This was after the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with the Deputy Prime Minister of Syria

³⁷ "2nd Aircraft Carrier Confirmed", By Wang Qingyun/Zhang Yunbi, *China Daily*, January 1, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-01/01/content_22893717.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

³⁸ "China Releases Guideline on Military Reform", *China Daily*, January 1, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-01/01/content_22898563.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

³⁹ "China Adopts First Counter-Terrorism Law in History", *China Daily*, December 28, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/28/content_22835405.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

⁴⁰ "China Passes Law Amendments to Boost Bilingual Teaching among Ethnic Minorities", *China Daily*, December 27, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/27/content_22830899.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

⁴¹ "China, Nepal Agree on Wider Cooperation", *China Daily*, December 25, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/25/content_22810655.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

Walid al-Moallem. Both sides also discussed the current political situation and the UN's mediation effort.⁴²

India-China Relations

(December 21-January 3, 2016)

- **Peace and tranquillity on the border is the basis for the continued expansion of India-China relations; India conveys to China that all Indian passport holders should be treated equally.**

India and China agree that peace and tranquillity on the border is the basis for the continued expansion of India-China relations. However, there is no commonly delineated Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China. There are areas along the border where India and China have differing perception of LAC. Due to both sides undertaking patrolling upto their perception of the LAC transgressions do occur. Government regularly takes up any transgression along LAC with the Chinese side through established mechanisms including Border Personnel meetings, flag meetings, meeting of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs and diplomatic channels. Further, in order to improve exchanges between two sides, two additional Border Personnel Meeting points has been operationalised in 2015.⁴³

It has been conveyed to the Chinese side on several occasions, including at the highest level, that all Indian passport holders should be treated equally on the basis of reciprocity. Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and inalienable part of India.⁴⁴

Japan

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Japan starts its two year spell as a UNSC non-permanent member; Prime Minister's New Year's speech emphasize on making a mark on the global stage and prove leadership; Taiwan-Japan likely to discuss comfort woman issue shortly; US welcomed Japan-South Korea deal on comfort women issue.**

Japan starts its two year spell as a UNSC non-permanent member. The 2016 marks the 60th year of Japan's entrance into the UN. Japan is likely to intensify efforts for UNSC reforms which in the long run will help Japan to achieve its aim of becoming a permanent member.⁴⁵

⁴² "China Announces Over \$6 M Humanitarian Aid To Syria", *China Daily*, December 24, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/24/content_22800284.htm, accessed on January 4, 2016

⁴³ "Ensuring Peace and Tranquillity at Indo-China Border", *PIB*, December 22, 2015, Release ID :133731, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

⁴⁴ "VISA to People of Arunachal Pradesh", *PIB*, December 23, 2015, Release ID :133833, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

⁴⁵ Okasaka, Kentaro, "With Eye Toward Permanent Slot, Japan Kicks Off Two-Year Stint on U.N. Security Council", *Kyodo*, January 1, 2016 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/01/national/politics-diplomacy/with-eye-toward-permanent-slot-japan-kicks-off-two-year-stint-on-u-n-security-council/#.VqWjK5p961t>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe underscored that 2016 will be a year to “take on challenges”⁴⁶ including the structural problem of aging society and accept greater responsibility in safeguarding international peace and stability. 2016 will witness Tokyo International Conference on African Development and Japan will chair the Japan-China-Republic of Korea (ROK) Trilateral Summit Meeting. Prime Minister expressed his resolve to address the economic challenges including increasing nominal GDP to ¥600 trillion (\$5 trillion) from ¥490 trillion by around 2020 and boosting the fertility rate from 1.4 to 1.8 by around 2025.⁴⁷

In January, Japan and Taiwan are likely to hold discussions on the contentious issue of Taiwanese comfort women following an agreement in principle. Taiwan is anticipated to have had approximately 2,000 comfort women but very few survive today. Momentum is infused in Japan-Taiwan negotiation following the recent Japan-South Korea deal on the comfort women issue where Japan agreed to establish a new fund with ¥1 billion (\$8.3 million) for the victims.⁴⁸

Secretary of State, John Kerry welcomed Japan and South Korea’s efforts in reaching an agreement on the complex historical matter of comfort women. US stressed that this agreement they will “finally and irreversibly” resolve this contentious issue and recover bilateral relations between two of US’s key allies.⁴⁹

C. Southeast Asia and Oceania

ASEAN and Southeast Asia

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **ASEAN achieved the milestone of ASEAN community; Vietnam protests after China lands plane on Spratly; New Economic Reforms in Brunei; Dual citizenship banned for Cambodian political leaders; Kuala Lumpur-Singapore high speed railway; Lao-Japan SEZ on way.**

All ten countries in ASEAN officially launched the ASEAN Community to bring closeness in the region through trade, social improvement and peace, security and stability. ASEAN is home to 625 million people and the grouping is 48 years old now. ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is intended to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers from intra-regional trade and integrate the region in a robust way. Other two pillars of the ASEAN Community are the ASEAN Political Security Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Like

⁴⁶ “New Year’s Reflection by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe”, *Kantei*, January 1, 2016 at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201601/newyear2016.html

⁴⁷ “Abe Says Japan Will Play Leading Global Role In ‘Challenging’ 2016”, *Kyodo*, January 1, 2016 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/01/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-says-japan-will-play-leading-global-role-challenging-2016/#.VqWkPpp961t>

⁴⁸ “Taiwan, Japan to Hold Talks on ‘Comfort Women’ Issue”, *Kyodo*, December 30, 2015 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/12/30/national/politics-diplomacy/taiwan-japan-to-hold-talks-on-comfort-women-issue-next-month/#.VqWkCjp961t>

⁴⁹ “Resolution of the Comfort Women Issue”, Press Statement, John Kerry, Secretary of State, *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, December 28, 2015 at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/12/250874.htm>

European Union (EU), ASEAN Community (AC) aims to build a peaceful, integrated and stable community which can face the regional challenges together. ASEAN has endorsed the Vision 2025 which would require the member countries narrowing down the gaps currently exist in the pillars of AC, reported *Bangkok Post*. However, achieving the goals set by the AC would be difficult and one of the major hurdles would be to maintain cooperation with the non-AC members who will not be eligible to get similar preferences when it comes to trade and commerce. Another challenge is to give similar priorities to the ASEAN Political Security Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community along with the AEC. Though the ASEAN governments are working towards achieving the desired goals, it may take few years' time, opined governments officials and practitioners from the region.⁵⁰

As China landed a plane in an airstrip in the artificial island in the disputed South China Sea, Vietnam launched protests saying the actions of China is violating the sovereignty of the country. The airstrip has been built on the Fiery Cross Reef in Spratlys which is contested between Vietnam, China, Philippines and few other countries. Vietnam's foreign ministry spokesperson said that China's action of building the artificial island is illegal. On the other hand, China's foreign ministry mentioned that the Yongshu Jiao (as Spratlys is called in China) belongs to China's territory. China further mentioned that the flight test was conducted to examine the workability of the newly-built airstrip. While condemning the action, the USA said that all involved parties should refrain themselves from acting unilaterally in an order that peace and stability is maintained there.⁵¹

Brunei will undertake several economic reforms to diversify its economic performance which is dependent on oil and gas. While delivering his New Year speech, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, mentioned that the country should move toward strong and competitive economic growth and realize that challenges from the uncertain world economic situation are becoming harder gradually. The Foreign Direct Investment and Downstream Industry Committee will be formed, informed the Sultan. He also stressed on the potential important role played by the sectors like agriculture and fisheries, manufacturing, services including financial, transportation, logistics, telecommunications, commercial and tourism in strengthening the economy.⁵²

Holders of dual citizenship will no longer be able to pursue political career in Cambodia, mentioned Prime Minister Hun Sen. This law is already functional for the National Election Committee; but now will be implemented for the presidents of the political parties as well. He

⁵⁰ Kamjan, Chananthorn, and Jitcharoenkul, Prangthong, "Asean Bloc Readies for Integration", *Bangkok Post*, December 31, 2015, at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/812284/asean-bloc-readies-for-integration>, accessed on January 26, 2016. And, "Birth of Asean Community 'a Significant Milestone': Singapore Minister", *Jakarta Post*, and, *The Strait Times*, December 31, 2015, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/12/31/birth-asean-community-a-significant-milestone-singapore-minister.html>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

⁵¹ "Vietnam Protests after China Lands Plane on Disputed Spratlys", *Reuters*, January 2, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-protests-idUSKBN0UG0FA20160103>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

⁵² "Brunei to Take Crucial Reforms to Diversify Economy: Sultan", *Global Post*, January 4, 2016, at <http://www.globalpost.com/article/6713978/2016/01/03/brunei-take-crucial-reforms-diversify-economy-sultan>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

said. “The president and members of the National Election Committee must hold only Khmer nationality, so [we] must eliminate this for political parties as well”. This will enable the legal authorities in Cambodia to desist a political leader from fleeing from the country after committing any offence and seeking shelter in other country. Currently, Sam Rainsy, the opposition leader, is abroad as he wants to avoid legal charges against him in Cambodia. This context helps one to understand why PM Hun Sen wants extension of the law for the presidents of the political parties. Since Prince Norodom Ranariddh, many political leaders in Cambodia hold dual citizenships which help them to get shelter in another country in case they face any legal hassles in Cambodia. Hun Sen, who is the prime minister of Cambodia for more than three decades, wants to bring an end to this custom. Hun Sen is criticised for being undemocratic and authoritative by the human rights watchers.⁵³

The 330 km high-speed railway linking Kuala Lumpur and Singapore will be operational with two varieties of train services- one will be a direct service linking two capitals and the other will have transit stops in between. MyHCR Corp is responsible for developing the project and it is the project delivery vehicle accountable for the definitions of technical and commercial aspects of the project. The non-stop high-speed train will take 90 minutes to reach Singapore from Kuala Lumpur. On the other hand, the one which will be having transit stops, will take approximately two hours to reach the destination. The estimated cost for the project is RM 70 billion as of now. A request for information (RFI) exercise has already been done by Malaysia’s Land Public Transport Commission (SPAD) and Singapore’s Land Transport Authority. Chinese, Japanese, European and South Korean companies may compete for the contract, given its high value, reported the Malaysian Insider.⁵⁴

Pakxe-Japan SME Specific Economic Zone (SEZ) is being developed with the help of Japan and aims at creating new and local job opportunities in Lao PDR and development of Champassak province. Pakxe-Japan SME Specific Economic Zone in Champassak province was approved in August 2015 and late in December, Pakxe-Japan SME SEZ Development Co. was sanctioned by the government. Eight Japanese and Lao-Japanese companies will be working in the project and 195 ha land will be used. According to reports, once operational, 50 percent of revenue will go to the state budget, 20 percent to the provincial authorities, 15 percent to the districts where the zone is located, 10 percent to CSEZ administrative expenses and the rest to an environmental fund. The land owners whose land will be taken up are likely receiving adequate compensation, said a government representative during the opening of the project.⁵⁵

⁵³ H. Reaksmey, “Hun Sen Calls for Ban on Dual Citizens Leading Political Parties”, *Voice of America (VOA)*, December 28, 2015, at <http://www.voacambodia.com/content/hun-sen-calls-for-ban-on-dual-citizens-leading-political-parties/3121559.html>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

⁵⁴ “2 High-Speed Train Services to Singapore, Says Operator”, *The Malaysian Insider*, January 4, 2016, at <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/2-high-speed-train-services-to-singapore-says-operator>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

⁵⁵ “Laos-Japan Economic Zone To Benefit Local Community”, *The Nation*, January 2, 2016, at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/Laos-Japan-economic-zone-to-benefit-local-communit-30276007.html>, accessed on January 26, 2016.

D. The United State of America

National

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **President Obama directs his staff to "look into any new actions I can take to help reduce gun violence"; Defence Department forwards legislative proposal outlining a number of reforms; International collaboration opportunities in scientific research and technology development; a U.S. federal grand jury indicted on terrorism charges the friend and neighbour of California mass shooters; First export of U.S. crude oil in four decades; Al-Shabab video highlights U.S. police shootings and Trump's plan to ban Muslims; State Department newly classified Clinton's emails; 2016 U.S. presidential campaign is speeding up;**

In his weekly address, U.S. President Barack Obama said, "What if Congress did something – anything – to protect our kids from gun violence". Obama said expressing his frustration with the "unfinished business" to control the country's "epidemic of gun violence." Obama said he has directed his staff to "look into any new actions I can take to help reduce gun violence," and he is meeting with Attorney General Loretta Lynch on Monday to "discuss our options." "We know that we can't stop every act of violence. But what if we tried to stop even one," asked the president, apparently reflecting on lawmakers who have repeatedly failed to take any action that would reduce the epidemic.⁵⁶

Following a two-year review of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), the Defence Department on December 28 forwarded to Congress a legislative proposal outlining a number of reforms. The UCMJ is the statutory framework of the military justice system, according to a news release announcing the proposed changes. The proposal is based on the recommendations of the Military Justice Review Group, which conducted a detailed analysis of each article of the UCMJ, including the historical background of the UCMJ, current practice, and comparison to federal civilian law.⁵⁷

U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command scientists and engineers are stationed around the globe to explore international collaboration opportunities in scientific research and technology development, opportunities that will potentially close capability gaps for the U.S. Army. Three regional RDECOM organizations represent this international endeavour: RDECOM-Atlantic; RDECOM-Americas; and, RDECOM-Pacific. From basic science to insights on maturing technology, foreign research contributes to the development of U.S. products and provides solutions that improve American capabilities.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ "Obama Calls on Congress to do 'Something - Anything' to Curb Gun Violence", *VOA News*, January 01, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-admonishes-congress-on-gun-control/3127238.html>

⁵⁷ "Defence Department Proposes UCMJ Changes", *DoD News*, December 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/638108/defense-department-proposes-ucmj-changes>

⁵⁸ "U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command-Pacific Collaboration Efforts throughout the Asia-Pacific Region", By US Army, *US PACOM*, December 29, 2015 at

On December 30, a U.S. federal grand jury indicted on terrorism charges the friend and neighbour who bought the guns for a couple who massacred 14 people in California December 2. Enrique Marquez faces up to 50 years in prison if convicted on all charges. The charges include conspiring with terrorists, lying about the gun purchase, and immigration fraud for entering into a fake marriage. The 24-year-old Marquez is being held without bail and will make his next court appearance January 6. Marquez legally bought the weapons Syed Rizwan Farook and his Pakistan-born wife, Tashfeen Malik, used in the California massacre.⁵⁹

The first export of U.S. crude oil in four decades departed a Texas port on December 31, just weeks after a ban on such exports was lifted. The ship is carrying a cargo of oil from ConocoPhillips' wells in south Texas that was sold to Swiss trading house Vitol Group. In December, President Barack Obama signed legislation lifting the ban put in place during the mid-1970s in the wake of the Arab Oil Embargo. The embargo, which began in 1973, had many short- and long-term effects on global politics and the global economy.⁶⁰

The Somali militant group al-Shabab has released a new recruiting video that highlights U.S. police shootings and the call by presidential candidate Donald Trump to ban Muslims from entering the United States. The video released on January 1st, 2016 may be the first instance of a U.S.-designated terrorist group using Trump's call or other current issues in the U.S. to attract followers online. Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton said last month that the Islamic State militant group was "showing videos of Donald Trump insulting Islam and Muslims in order to recruit more radical jihadists." That claim has yet to be proven. But now al-Shabab is using Trump. Its new video shows a clip of the Republican candidate reading out his demand for a ban on Muslim visitors.⁶¹

The State Department said portions of 275 emails released on New Year's Eve from Hillary Clinton's time as secretary of state have been newly classified, bringing 2015 to a close for the Democratic presidential front-runner. Clinton has said she didn't send or receive information that was classified at the time via her personal email account, which was run on a private server at her New York home. Republicans have repeatedly questioned whether her use of a private email system put sensitive information at risk. In all, the State Department said 1,274

<http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/639497/us-army-research-development-and-engineering-command-pacific-collaboration-effo.aspx>

⁵⁹ "Friend of California Shooter Indicted on Terrorism Charges", *VOA News*, December 31, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/friend-of-california-shooter-indicted-on-terrorism-charges/3125590.html>

⁶⁰ "US Crude Exports Resume After Four Decades", *VOA News*, December 31, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-crude-exports-resume-after-four-decades/3127125.html>

⁶¹ Joseph, Dan, "New al-Shabab Video Highlights Trump Statement, US Police Brutality", *VOA News*, January 01, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/new-shabab-video-highlights-trump-statement-united-states-police-brutality/3127909.html>

of Clinton's emails have been retroactively classified since the department started reviewing them for public release.⁶²

The 2016 U.S. presidential campaign is about to kick into overdrive only a month before the first votes are counted in Iowa. Contenders from both parties will ramp up their campaign activities early in January, with a heavy focus on the early voting states of Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina. Republican frontrunner Donald Trump will launch his New Year's push with a campaign rally in Mississippi on January 2, followed by appearances in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and South Carolina next week. Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton is also ramping up with an intensified campaign schedule on January 4 beginning with several stops in Iowa.⁶³

International: Asia

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Afghan trucking company has been charged in U.S. federal court with bribing soldiers; Kerry says Iran has taken significant steps toward fulfilling its commitment to the nuclear deal; Treasury Department is preparing to levy new sanctions on Iran; US spied on communications of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu; Carter offered his congratulations to Iraq's prime minister after Iraqi forces succeeded in retaking Ramadi; ISIL leader killed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes; Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists; Obama: a "marked and troubling" increase in civilian casualties in Syria since Russia began airstrikes; Search and recovery operations in the Java Sea, following the crash of AirAsia Flight 8501; Submarine tender USS Emory S. Land (AS 39) will shift its homeport; Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Charlotte (SSN 766) arrived at Fleet Activities Yokosuka.**

The owner of an Afghan trucking company contracted to move supplies for coalition soldiers in 2009 has been charged in U.S. federal court with bribing soldiers in order to get contracts worth millions of dollars. A criminal complaint filed last week against Hikmatullah Shadman in U.S. District Court details a scheme involving trucking operations in southern Afghanistan and meetings with two U.S. Army members to hand them payments in bundles of \$100 bills. The two soldiers, Robert Green and David Kline, have both pleaded guilty for their roles. Green was sentenced in September to 10 months in prison and a year of supervision after his release. Kline was convicted in November and is due to be sentenced in January.⁶⁴

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry says that Iran has taken one of its most significant steps toward fulfilling its commitment to the nuclear deal. Providing an update on the progress, Kerry said, "Five months after we, the European Union, and our P5+1 partners finalized the

⁶² "State: Hundreds of Old Clinton Emails Newly Classified", *Associated Press*, January 01, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/ap-state-hundreds-of-old-clinton-emails-newly-classified/3127184.html>

⁶³ Malone, Jim, "US Presidential Race Shifting Into High Gear", *VOA News*, December 31, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-presidential-race-shifting-into-high-gear/3126236.html>

⁶⁴ Hannas, Chris, "Afghan Businessman Faces Charges for Bribing US Soldiers", *VOA News*, December 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghan-businessman-facing-charges-for-bribing-us-soldiers/3124158.html>

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, I remain so proud of our team in achieving what was truly one of our most important accomplishments of 2015 – ensuring that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively peaceful going forward"⁶⁵. He said that step took place December 28, when a ship carrying more than 11,300 kilograms of low-enriched uranium materials left Iran for Russia. The removal of enriched uranium is among the hurdles that Iran needs to clear under the agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in order to get relief from nuclear-related sanctions. Other hurdles include removing thousands of centrifuges used to enrich uranium, and redesigning a heavy water reactor so that it cannot be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium. When the JCPOA is implemented, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany say Iran's breakout time will have increased to at least a year.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, the U.S. officials say the Treasury Department is preparing to levy new sanctions on a group of Iranians and companies in other countries connected with Iran's ballistic missile programme. *The Wall Street Journal*, which first reported the planned move, said the sanctions will likely be formally announced this week and include about 12 people and companies in Iran, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates. The sanctions would call on U.S. banks to freeze the assets of those on the list and bar individuals and companies in the U.S. from doing business with them, according to the *Journal*. Iran test-fired missiles in October and November. The U.S. and France said the October launch violated a U.N. Security Council resolution banning Iranian development of a ballistic missile. Iran rejected the allegations, saying the sanctions only applied to missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead and that their missiles had no such capability. U.S. experts said the only purpose of the missile would be to deliver a nuclear warhead.⁶⁷

The Wall Street Journal reported on December 29 that the United States spied on communications of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, although President Barack Obama promised two years ago to curtail eavesdropping on friendly heads of state. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the White House decided to secretly keep certain allies under close watch, with Netanyahu topping the list. The report said the U.S., while pursuing a landmark nuclear arms deal with Iran, captured communications between Netanyahu and his aides. Intercepting the conversations "inflamed mistrust between the two countries and planted a political minefield at home when Mr. Netanyahu later took his campaign against the [nuclear] deal to Capitol Hill," the report said. *The Wall Street Journal* said the U.S. targeting of Israeli leaders and officials also intercepted their private conversations with U.S. lawmakers and

⁶⁵ "An Update on Progress Toward Implementation Day of the JCPOA", Press Statement by John Kerry, Secretary of State, *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, December 28, 2015 at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/12/250876.htm>

⁶⁶ Dockins, Pamela, "US Hails Iran's Progress on Nuclear Deal", *VOA News*, December 28, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/united-states-hails-iran-progress-nuclear-deal/3122063.html>

⁶⁷ "Officials: US Preparing New Sanctions for Iran Missile Programme", *VOA News*, December 31, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/iranian-test-rockets-fly-near-us-aircraft-carrier/3124090.html>

American-Jewish groups. That move raised fears that the White House would be accused of spying on Congress, according to an unnamed senior U.S. official quoted in the report.⁶⁸

Defence Secretary Ash Carter offered his congratulations on December 28 to Iraq's prime minister after Iraqi forces succeeded in retaking the government centre in Ramadi from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Carter said in a statement that "The expulsion of ISIL by Iraqi security forces, supported by our international coalition, is a significant step forward in the campaign to defeat this barbaric group and restore Iraq's territorial sovereignty". The operation to reach the centre of Ramadi was a significant milestone on the path to clear ISIL from the historic city and the overall campaign to defeat the terrorist group across Iraq, according to a statement released by Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve officials. Ramadi's strategic location on the highway that connects Iraq with Syria and Jordan made it a prized target for ISIL, which took the city in May.⁶⁹

A high-value ISIL leader killed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes December 24 was just one of 10 ISIL leaders targeted and killed so far this month, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren confirmed on December 29. Speaking to reporters at the Pentagon via a live satellite feed from Baghdad, Warren said Syria-based Charaffe al Mouadan was "planning additional attacks against the West," and was directly linked to Abdelhamid Abaaoud, leader of the cell responsible for the terrorist attacks in Paris last month. The ISIL leaders were killed in coalition airstrikes that took place from December 7-27, he said, noting that several were external attack planners linked to the Paris attacks.⁷⁰

On January 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.⁷¹

On December 29, the Obama administration said that there had been a "marked and troubling" increase in civilian casualties in Syria since Russia began airstrikes in September. Human rights groups report hundreds of civilians have been killed by Russian missile strikes

⁶⁸ "Report Says US Spied on Israel During Iran Negotiations", *VOA News*, December 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-newspaper-us-spied-on-israel-during-iran-negotiations/3124350.html>

⁶⁹ "Iraqi Forces Reach Strategic Milestone in Fight For Ramadi", *DoD News*, December 28, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/639410/iraqi-forces-reach-strategic-milestone-in-fight-for-ramadi>; "Iraqi Security Forces seize Ramadi Government Centre", *US CENTCOM*, December 29, 2015, Release # 20151229-01 at <http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/articles/dec.-29-iraqi-security-forces-seize-ramadi-government-center>; and, "On Recent Advances in Ramadi", Press Statement by John Kerry, Secretary of State, *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, December 28, 2015, at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/12/250877.htm>

⁷⁰ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Coalition Killed 10 Senior ISIL Leaders in December", *DoD News*, December 29, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/639489/coalition-killed-10-senior-isil-leaders-in-december>

⁷¹ "Military airstrikes continue against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq", *US CENTCOM*, January 3, 2016, Release # 20160103-01 at <http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/articles/jan.-3-military-airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-and-ir>

on emergency medical workers, hospitals, schools and markets. State Department spokesman Mark Toner said Secretary of State John Kerry brought up the matter in a telephone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. However, Russia has denied causing civilian deaths in Syria. It says its airstrikes against what it calls "terrorists" are carefully coordinated with the Syrian army to avoid all civilian targets. Russia has said its mission in Syria is directed against Islamic State. The U.S. says Russia has been targeting the moderate opposition and is trying to prop up President Bashar al-Assad's floundering government. Toner also said the killing of a top Syrian rebel leader last week complicated efforts for a cease-fire.⁷²

As the ball dropped in Times Square to usher in 2015, more than 300 Sailors aboard USS Sampson (DDG 102) were busy conducting search and recovery operations in the Java Sea, following the crash of AirAsia Flight 8501 December 28, 2014. Days later USS Fort Worth (LCS 3) also joined the multi-national recovery effort, along with vessels and aircraft from Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, the Republic of Korea, Japan, China and Russia. While tragic, the incident emphasized the value of maritime partnerships in the Indo-Asia Pacific. Allies and partner nations teamed up with U.S. 7th Fleet in more than 110 exercises to exchange information and training throughout 2015. Major exercises this year included Annual Ex, Ulchi Freedom Guardian, Malabar and nine different Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) series exercises. The largest exercise was Talisman Sabre, where roughly 33,000 U.S. and Australian personnel participated in the biennial military training exercise July 4-19.⁷³

The U.S. Navy announced December 23 that submarine tender USS Emory S. Land (AS 39) will shift its homeport from Diego Garcia to Naval Base Guam. Emory S. Land will join USS Frank Cable (AS 40) in Guam to support four fast-attack submarines stationed there in addition to submarines rotationally deployed throughout the U.S. Pacific Fleet area of responsibility. The decision to homeport Emory S. Land in Guam supports recent moves by the Navy in relocating submarines and provides essential forward support for those units to complete their missions. US PACOM stated that the security environment in the Indo-Asia-Pacific requires the U.S. Navy to station the most capable ships forward. This action supports the maritime strategy to maintain naval presence where it matters, allows the most rapid response times possible for maritime and joint forces when it matters.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Charlotte (SSN 766) arrived at Fleet Activities Yokosuka, December 23, for a visit as part of its deployment to the Western

⁷² "US Notes 'Troubling' Rise in Civilian Deaths From Russian Airstrikes in Syria", *VOA News*, December 29, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/united-states-troubling-rise-civilian-deaths-russian-airstrikes-syria/3124004.html>; and, "US: Russian Airstrikes on Syrian Civilians 'Disturbing'", *VOA News*, December 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-russian-airstrikes-on-syrian-civilians-disturbing/3124129.html>

⁷³ Kofonow, Jason, "7th Fleet 2015 Wrap Up: A Year of New Technology and Thriving Partnerships", *US PACOM*, December 31, 2015 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/639738/7th-fleet-2015-wrap-up-a-year-of-new-technology-and-thriving-partnerships.aspx>

⁷⁴ "Emory S. Land to be Stationed in Guam", *US PACOM*, December 28, 2015 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/638096/emory-s-land-to-be-stationed-in-guam.aspx>

Pacific. The visit strengthened the already positive alliance between the U.S. and Japan through the crew's interaction with the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force. It also demonstrated the Navy's commitment to regional stability and maritime security in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. US PACOM stated that Charlotte is on a regularly scheduled six-month deployment to the Western Pacific. Charlotte not only will conduct important missions to strengthen theatre security, but will also engage with strong partners throughout the region.⁷⁵

India-US Relations

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Facebook to bring free Internet access to the poor in India has run into a storm of criticism; US strongly condemns the terrorist attack on an air force base in Punjab.**

The Voice of America reported on December 30 that an initiative by *Facebook* to bring free Internet access to the poor in India has run into a storm of criticism by those who say it will violate net neutrality -- the principle that Internet providers allow equal access to all online content. In recent days, *Facebook* has been defending its plans in appeals directly to the public, through advertisements in leading newspapers and on huge billboards in major cities. The advertisements defend its app, called Free Basics, which gives free access on mobile phones to a handful of sites for services such as communication, healthcare, and education. The ads say the platform aims to bring a million Indians in poor rural areas online.⁷⁶

"The United States strongly condemns the terrorist attack on an air force base in the Indian state of Punjab on January 2". In a statement, John Kirby, spokesperson, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State, said that "We extend our condolences to the victims and their families. The United States is committed to our strong partnership with the Indian government to combat terrorism." Kirby said, "We urge all countries in the region to work together to disrupt and dismantle terrorist networks and to bring to justice the perpetrators of this heinous act."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "USS Charlotte visits Yokosuka during Western Pacific Deployment", By Lt. j. g. Shane R. Moore, *US PACOM*, December 28, 2015 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/638100/uss-charlotte-visits-yokosuka-during-western-pacific-deployment.aspx>

⁷⁶ Pasricha, Anjana, "Facebook's Plan for Free Internet in India Draws Fierce Criticism", *VOA News*, December 30, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/facebook-plan-for-free-internet-in-india-draws-criticism/3124130.html>

⁷⁷ "Attack at Indian Air Force Base in Northern Punjab", Press Statement by John Kirby, Spokesperson, Bureau of Public Affairs, *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, January 2, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/01/250936.htm>

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Terrorist attempt to destroy valuable assets of the Air Force foiled; India showcasing its state-of-the-art airborne platforms and associated sensors and communication systems at Bahrain International Airshow.**

A group of terrorists were detected by the aerial surveillance platforms as soon as they entered the Air Force Station at Pathankot. Intelligence inputs had been available of a likely attempt by terrorists to infiltrate into the military installation in Pathankot area. The infiltrators were immediately engaged and contained within a limited area. Due to timely action of the security agencies the terrorists could not enter the Technical zone where high value assets are parked and their plan to destroy valuable assets of the Air Force has been foiled.⁷⁸

India is showcasing its state-of-the-art airborne platforms and associated sensors and communication systems designed and developed by Defence Research & Development Organization (DRDO) during the Bahrain International Airshow being held at Sakhir Airbase, Bahrain from January 21-23, 2016. DRDO, along with some of its production partners is displaying India's strength in advanced defence technology areas, with the aim of exploring the potential of exporting these advanced systems to friendly countries in the region. India will be displaying the latest and state of the art Light Combat Aircraft Tejas. It is noteworthy that for the first time LCA- Tejas will be flying outside the country's airspace at the Bahrain air show.⁷⁹

International

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Pakistan to push hard for JF-17 sale to Sri Lanka during Sharif's visit; Delivery of Russian frigate Project 22350 Admiral Gorshkov delayed.**

Reports say that following the first export deal for its JF-17 multirole fighter to Myanmar, Pakistan is expected to be pushing hard for a follow-up agreement with Sri Lanka. Pakistan's wooing of Sri Lanka would mark an important step in further extending its defence co-operation footprint in the Indian Ocean region. Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka in the first week of January 2016. Efforts to secure an agreement in principle for the sale of the JF-17 Thunder - a third-generation fighter co-produced by Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) and China's Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation

⁷⁸ "Terrorist Attack at Air Force Station Pathankot," *PIB*, January 2, 2016, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=134119>

⁷⁹ "Indian Defence Technologies on Display at Bahrain International Airshow This Month," *PIB*, January 1, 2016, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=134098>

(CAC) - are likely to be high on his agenda. Both countries have already done some ground work in this direction.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, according to reports, delivery of the first-of-class Russian frigate Project 22350 Admiral Gorshkov has been delayed with the vessel still undergoing weapons testing. The ship has completed initial gun, air defence, and cruise missile tests, with firing on maritime and coastal targets in the White Sea and on the Chizh range in the Arkangelsk region. The frigate is likely to be transferred to the navy in 2016.⁸¹

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Militancy indicators show declining trend: Army official; Two LeT militants gunned down by security forces in Pulwama; J&K SPOs honorarium enhanced to Rs. 6000.**

In its assessment of the security situation in J&K during the year 2015, Army asserted that internal security situation in the state is "stable and peaceful" and terrorism indicators have shown a "declining trend" in the state, but cautioned against "radicalisation". "The internal security situation in Jammu and Kashmir is stable and peaceful. The counter-terrorism operations are effective and the potential of terrorists have significantly reduced", a senior Army officer told *PTI*. "There is high level of synergy among all security forces and government agencies. Consequently, terrorism indicators have shown a declining trend", he said. Army also asserted that development activities on the government front have increased in the state and maintained that there is no change in Pakistan posture as it continues its intransigence on proxy war.⁸²

Two Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants, including a foreigner, were killed in an overnight encounter with security forces in south Kashmir's Pulwama district on the intervening night of December 29-30. The killings triggered a shutdown in Pulwama and clashes were reported between police and stone-throwing youth at several places in the town. The slain militants have been identified as Manzoor Ahmad Bhat, a resident of Samboora in Pulwama, and a Pakistani national. Police said it has recovered two rifles from their possession.⁸³

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has enhanced the honorarium of Special Police Officers (SPOs) of Jammu and Kashmir from Rs. 3000 per month to Rs. 6000 per month. The

⁸⁰ "Pakistan Pushes for JF-17 sale to Sri Lanka," *IHS Jane's*, December 29, 2015, at <http://www.janes.com/article/56924/pakistan-pushes-for-jf-17-sale-to-sri-lanka>

⁸¹ "Delivery of Russia's First Project 22350 Frigate Delayed until May," *IHS Jane's*, December 30, 2015, at <http://www.janes.com/article/56957/delivery-of-russia-s-first-project-22350-frigate-delayed-until-may>

⁸² "Terrorism Indicators Show Declining Trend in J&K: Army Official", *The Economic Times*, December 28, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/terrorism-indicators-show-declining-trend-in-jk-army-official/articleshow/50355514.cms>

⁸³ Masood, Bashaarat, "J&K: Two LeT Militants Gunned Down By Security Forces in Pulwama", *The Indian Express*, January 1, 2016 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/jk-two-militants-gunned-down-by-security-forces-in-pulwama/>

honorarium is given by the State Government and reimbursed by the Central Government under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme. The last enhancement was done in 2006. The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh has also constituted a committee for assessing the performance, utility and efficacy of the SPOs.⁸⁴

Northeast India

(December 28-January 3, 2016)

- **Govt. bid to schedule six communities of Assam opposed; SULFA body threatens to take up arms; Three NSCN-K cadres arrested in Nagaland; Porous India-Bangladesh border in Assam to be sealed: Rajnath Singh; Mizoram not to hold talks with HPC (D).**

A national convention organised by the Coordination Committee of Tribal Organisations of Assam in Guwahati on December 29 has unanimously opposed granting of ST status to the six communities of Assam. An umbrella organisation comprising of 19 indigenous tribal organisations of Assam state has also decided to take recourse to legal action if the Government of India and the State Government go ahead to grant ST status to the six communities.⁸⁵

Claiming neglect by the Centre and the State governments, a group of surrendered ULFA-men (SULFA) have threatened to go back to the jungle and pick up arms. Demanding fulfilment of their demands, the All Assam Surrendered ULFA Committee staged a day-long demonstration at the Jantar Mantar in Delhi on December 29. President of the group, Raj Kumar Duara told newsmen that if the Central and the State governments do not solve their problems then they would pick up guns 'for the safeguard of the future generation'. Stating that they are about 800 SULFAs who have surrendered since 1998, Duara said that they have not been offered rehabilitation and cases registered against them have not been withdrawn. The SULFA group is also demanding identification of the illegal Bangladeshis and introduction of Inner Line Permit in the State, besides grading of Assam as a tribal State. Duara alleged that negotiations with the Government last took place in 1998, after which there has been no contact.⁸⁶

In a setback to the outlawed NSCN-K group, security forces arrested the outfit's self-styled finance secretary -Asheto Rochelle and two other cadres on December 3 in two separate operations in Dimapur district of Nagaland.⁸⁷

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, on his two-day visit to Assam, visited Karimganj sector of the India-Bangladesh border on January 3 and said the porous border will be sealed in

⁸⁴ "Enhancement of Honorarium in respect of SPOs of Jammu & Kashmir to Rs. 6000 per month", *PIB*, Release ID: 134109, January 1, 2016 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

⁸⁵ "Govt Bid To Schedule 6 Communities Opposed", *The Assam Tribune*, December 30, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec3015/at050>

⁸⁶ "SULFA Body Threatens To Take Up Arms", *The Assam Tribune*, December 30, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=dec3015/at051>

⁸⁷ "Top NSCN-K Cadre Among Three Nabbed", *The Assam Tribune*, January 3, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan0316/at046>

2016. The minister inspected the Steamerghat Border Out Posts (BOP) in Karimganj district of Assam.⁸⁸

Mizoram government has refused to hold negotiations with Manipur-based Hmar People's Convention (Democrats) militants despite the outfit having expressed its willingness. "We do not have any intention to hold negotiations during 2016 unless the militants fulfil our conditions," home minister R. Lalzirliana told *PTI* on January 3. He reiterated that parleys with the Hmar outfit would not take place until the militants returned all the arms taken by them.⁸⁹

Left-wing Extremism

(December 28 - January 3, 2016)

- **Maoist gunned down in Andhra Pradesh; Top Maoist leader surrenders in Telangana; Maoist responsible for Katiya massacre surrenders in Jharkhand; Chhattisgarh: Two Maoists killed, four arrested in Bastar; Eleven Naxals surrender in Chhattisgarh, claim police.**

Maoist leader K Chukka alias Nagesh (35), who was wanted in at least 15 cases of murder and was carrying a reward of Rs 10 lakh on his head, was killed in an encounter with police in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh on December 28, police claimed. Nagesh was a member of Sabari area divisional committee of the banned CPI (Maoist).⁹⁰

Top Maoist leader and secretary of South Bastar District Committee Gajerla Ashok (41) alias Aithu surrendered before police in Warangal district of Telangana on December 29. Hailing from Velishala village in Chityal mandal of Warangal district, Ashok went underground at the age of 18 and worked in the CPI (Maoist) party for about 24 years. He is considered a good organizer and strengthened the party in various capacities in Telangana and Chattisgarh states. Ayatu had masterminded three attacks on police, which resulted in the killing of 52 policemen in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district in 2009.⁹¹

CPI (Maoist) sub zonal commander Gajendra Saw alias Gajju Saw, who was reportedly behind the 2013 Katiya massacre in Latehar district where 13 jawans were killed and one's stomach was stuffed with bomb by extremists, laid down arms with another Maoist before

⁸⁸ "Porous India-Bangladesh Border In Assam To Be Sealed: Rajnath", *The Assam Tribune*, January 3, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan0316/at044>

⁸⁹ "Mizoram Not To Hold Talks with HPC (D) ultras", *Business Standard*, January 3, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/mizoram-not-to-hold-talks-with-hpc-d-ultras-116010300437_1.html

⁹⁰ "Naxal Killed in Encounter with Police in AP", *PTI*, December 28, 2015 at http://www.ptinews.com/news/6910650_Naxal-killed-in-encounter-with-police-in-AP.html

⁹¹ Rao, G Srinivasa Rao, "Key Maoist Leader Surrenders", *The Hindu*, December 29, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/key-maoist-leader-surrenders/article8041543.ece>

Jharkhand DGP at police headquarters in Ranchi on December 29. Saw was wanted in 32 cases while Kuldeep Mehta, his colleague, in seven.⁹²

Two Maoists were killed and four others were arrested in different parts of restive Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on January 1. "The District Reserve Guard (DRG) of Narayanpur district police recovered two dead bodies of uniformed Maoists and apprehended three Maoists during an anti-Maoist operation in Kutul area of Maoists' undeclared capital Abujmarh on January 1. Seven weapons, including a 303 rifle, were recovered," said Mr. S.R.P. Kalluri, the Inspector General of Police, Bastar range. In a separate incident, Nandu, a deputy section commander of military company number 2, surrendered before Dantewada police. He carried a reward of Rs.8 lakhs on his head.⁹³

As many as 11 Naxals, including those carrying cash rewards on their head, surrendered in Kondagaon district on January 3, police said. The ultras turned themselves in before senior police officials, saying they were frustrated with the ill-treatment by senior leaders and that they got impressed by the surrender policy of Chhattisgarh government, Kondagaon Superintendent of Police J.S. Watti said.⁹⁴

Radicalisation & Terrorism

(December 28- January 3, 2016)

- **Terrorists stormed Pathankot Air Force Base in Punjab.**

A week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an unannounced trip to his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif's home in Lahore to signal the willingness at the top to revive ties between the two countries, heavily-armed terrorists, suspected to be members of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Muhammad, attacked the Pathankot airbase in a pre-dawn strike on January 2. Security forces, including commandos of the National Security Guard and Army and Indian Air Force personnel, engaged the terrorists, and gun battles through the day left at least four terrorists and three security personnel dead – there are fears that the count of dead among security personnel may be higher. It was unclear how many terrorists were in the assault team. Officials said search and sanitising operations at the airbase were continuing to eliminate the possibility that more intruders could be holed up inside. They said the terrorists were unable to enter the area where MiG-21 fighter aircraft and attack helicopters were parked. As security forces on the ground engaged the terrorists, attack helicopters took to the air. The airbase had been on high alert since December 1 evening after two incidents off the Jammu-Pathankot highway early on December 1. One was the murder of a taxi driver, and the other the hijacking of an SUV of a Superintendent of Police who managed to escape and alert

⁹² Mishra, Alok K N, "Maoist Allegedly Responsible For Katiya Massacre Surrenders in Jharkhand", *The Times of India*, December 29, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ranchi/Maoist-allegedly-responsible-for-Katiya-massacre-surrenders-in-Jharkhand/articleshow/50370638.cms>

⁹³ Dahat, Pavan, "Two Maoists Killed, Four Arrested in Bastar", *The Hindu*, January 1, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/two-maoists-killed-four-arrested-in-bastar/article8054871.ece>

⁹⁴ "11 Naxals Surrender in Chhattisgarh", *The Hindu*, January 3, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/11-naxals-surrender-in-chhattisgarh/article8061289.ece>

the police. The NSG arrived at the Pathankot airbase and the Garud commandos of the IAF were also placed on high alert. Suresh Arora, Director General of Punjab Police, whose men assisted in the operation along with the Border Security Force, said late on January 2 that the “operation is still on”.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Gopal, Navjeevan and Brar, Kamaldeep Singh, “Terror Attacks Pathankot Air Force Base, India-Pakistan Thaw”, *The Indian Express*, January 3, 2016 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/terror-attacks-pathankot-airbase-india->