

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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CONTENTS

In This Issue	Page
I. COUNTRY REVIEWS	
A. South Asia	2-7
B. East Asia	8-9
C. Russia	9-11
D. Iran , Iraq and the Gulf	12-19
E. United States of America	19-28
II. DEFENCE REVIEWS	29-30
III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS	31-35

I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Bangladesh

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Khaleda Zia free to go home; foreign diplomats condemn violence in Bangladesh; Bangladesh businesses are losing over Tk 2,277 crore every day due to the ongoing blockade and shutdown; Four suspected members of ISIS arrested; President left for Saudi Arabia**

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia appeared in public on January 19 for the first time in two weeks and announced that the blockade would continue until the government created a congenial atmosphere for a free, fair election. Khaleda had been confined to her Gulshan office since law enforcers locked it on the night of January 3. The last time she spoke to the press was on January 5, when police stopped her from coming out to join a planned showdown. Although now apparently free to leave her office, she has decided to stay put.¹

Condemning the ongoing political violence, a group of foreign diplomats in Dhaka urged the government to hold constructive dialogue with the opposition to find a peaceful solution to the current political crisis. They made the call at a meeting with Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali at State Guesthouse Padma on January 19. Briefing the diplomats, the foreign minister said the BNP is a “terrorist” party. It resorted to arson and destructive activities causing loss of many lives and property, said a diplomatic source. “Any dialogue with the BNP will be possible only after it behaves responsibly and severs ties with the Jamaat”. Ambassadors and representatives of the U.S., UN, China, Japan, Brazil, Australia, North Korea and South Korea attended the briefing organised as part of the foreign minister’s regular consultations with ambassadors and heads of mission in Dhaka.²

Bangladesh businesses are losing over Tk 2,277 crore every day due to the ongoing blockade and shutdown, with garment sector receiving the hardest blow. In the last 16 days’ political unrest, the economy lost at least Tk 36,445 crore, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) said, calculating the losses in all sectors, including apparel, agriculture, real estate and wholesale and retail markets. The figure is equivalent to 2.69 percent of the GDP.³

¹ “Blockade To Continue”, *The Daily Star*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/blockade-to-continue-60754>.

² “Foreign Diplomats Denounce Violence”, *The Daily Star*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/foreign-diplomats-denounce-violence-60767>.

³ “Loss Tk 36,445cr in 16 Wasted Days: Garment Worst-Hit in Political Impasse”, *The Daily Star*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/loss-tk-36-445cr-in-16-wasted-days-61306>.

Bangladesh detectives arrested four suspected members of militant outfit ISIS, including its coordinator in Bangladesh, from Dhaka's Jatrabari on January 18.⁴

President Abdul Hamid went to Saudi Arabia on January 24 to pay last respect to late Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.⁵

Sri Lanka

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **External affairs minister of Sri Lanka visits India; China hopes for continued cooperation with new government of Sri Lanka; Iran seeks expansion of bilateral relations with Sri Lanka; Pakistan's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka meets Prime Minister; Finance Minister of Fiji meets External Affairs Minister Samaraweera; Seychelles to assist MR probe; President's special envoy leaves for Geneva; Sri Lanka's trade deficit widens in November 2014; EU initiates housing project in Sri Lanka; EU delegation from Geneva meets the Minister and Commerce Ministry officials; Japan to assist the second stage of the expansion of the Bandaranaike International Airport.**

External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka Mangala Samaraweera made a three day visit to India on January 17, 2015. He met his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi during the visit. During his discussions with Sushma Swaraj, both the leaders discussed the issue of repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees living in India, fishermen issue, Indian development projects in Sri Lanka and economic issues. Both the leaders also agreed to hold a Joint Commission meeting this year.⁶ Minister Samaraweera met Prime Minister Modi on January 19. Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the people of Sri Lanka for the successful conclusion of elections, which had been watched with great regional and international interest. He congratulated President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wikramasinghe for the impressive victory and expressed hope that President Sirisena's victory will advance peace, reconciliation and development in Sri Lanka, and peace and progress in the region. Prime Minister thanked President Sirisena for accepting the invitation to visit India, and looked forward to receiving him at an early date. He also accepted the invitation to visit Sri Lanka at a mutually convenient date.⁷

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said on January 19 that it hoped for continued "cooperation" with Sri Lanka despite a pledge by the new government in Colombo to review

⁴ "4 Suspected ISIS Men Arrested", *The Daily Star*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/4-suspected-isis-men-arrested-60785>.

⁵ "President off to Riyadh", *The Daily Star*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/president-off-to-riyadh-61580>.

⁶ "Transcript of Media Briefing by Official Spokesperson (January 18, 2015)", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 18, 2015 at http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/24698/Transcript_of_Media_Briefing_by_Official_Spokesperson_January_18_2015.

⁷ "External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka calls on PM", *Official Website of Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India*, Jan 19, 2015 at http://pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/call-on-pm-by-external-affairs-minister-of-sri-lanka/.

Chinese infrastructure projects awarded under the previous administration. The remarks by China's Foreign Ministry come two days after a junior Sri Lankan Minister said President Maithripala Sirisena's government would look at benchmarks for Chinese infrastructure costs using independent audit firms.⁸

In a message addressed to President Maithripala Sirisena, Iranian President Rouhani congratulated him on winning the election and expressed hope for expansion of bilateral ties more than ever before, Iran's official news agency *IRNA* said in a release.⁹

Sri Lanka is committed to further strengthen the relationship with Pakistan, Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has assured when Pakistan's High Commissioner Maj Gen (R) Qasim Qureshi called on him at Temple Trees on January 19, 2015. The Prime Minister and the High Commissioner exchanged views on further promoting bilateral ties between the two countries during the meeting.¹⁰

Sri Lanka and India exchanged the fishermen who were detained in each other's jails for trespassing into their territorial waters on January 21. The first such exchange in this year after the new Sri Lankan government is installed in Colombo, took place at the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) off Kankasanthurai, Sri Lanka. Indian Coastguard ship ICGS Rajdhvaj handed over 10 Sri Lankan fishermen along with two fishing boats at the IMBL to Sri Lanka Coast Guard and Sri Lankan authorities handed over 15 Indian fishermen in exchange. According to the spokesman during 2014, Indian Coast Guard had repatriated 1,112 Indian fishermen with 165 fishing boats and 423 Sri Lankans with 60 fishing boats.¹¹

Finance Minister of Fiji Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum has extended an invitation to Sri Lanka Minister for External Affairs Mangala Samaraweera on January 22 to visit the country and further strengthen relations. He met with Samaraweera to discuss issues that will lead to improved bilateral relations between the two countries.¹²

In responding to allegations made in a Sri Lankan publication about speculation concerning assets held in Seychelles by the former President of Sri Lanka, the Seychelles Government has reiterated that Seychelles has nothing to hide and has said that if the Sri Lankan Government undertakes an

⁸ "China Has Hope Despite Review", *Colombo Gazette*, January 19, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/19/china-has-hope-despite-review/>.

⁹ "Iran for Stronger Ties with Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, January 19, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/19/iran-for-stronger-ties-with-lanka/>.

¹⁰ "Sri Lanka committed to further strengthen relationship with Pakistan- PM", *ColomboPage*, January 20, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan20_1421763496CH.php.

¹¹ "India, Sri Lanka Exchange Fishermen at Maritime Border", *ColomboPage*, January 21, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan21_1421861309CH.php.

¹² "Sayed-Khaiyum, Samaraweera Discuss Bilateral Relations", *Daily Mirror*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.dailymirror.lk/61835/raweera-discuss-bilateral-relations>.

investigation, that the Seychelles government is open to assist in the framework of treaties that are in force between the two countries. Seychelles Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Paul Adam, has emphasised that the partnership between the two countries is one which goes 'beyond politics.'¹³

Sri Lanka President's Senior Adviser for Senior Advisor on Foreign Relations Dr. Jayantha Dhanapala has left for Geneva on January 25 to meet the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein. Dhanapala as special envoy of President Maithripala Sirisena is expected to discuss the UN Human Rights Council's investigation into alleged serious violations of human rights by both parties in Sri Lanka with the High Commissioner.¹⁴

Sri Lanka's trade deficit widened 34.6 percent in November 2014 as earnings from exports declined, the Central Bank said in its External Sector Performance Review released on January 23. The trade deficit widened to US\$ 724.1 million in November 2014, compared to US\$ 537.8 million a year ago. On a cumulative basis, trade deficit in the first eleven months of 2014 increased by 6.6 percent to US\$ 7.51 billion compared to the corresponding period in 2013. Earnings from exports decreased by 10.7 percent, year-on-year, in November 2014 to US\$ 921.1 million while the cumulative earnings increased by 7.5 percent to US\$ 10.1 billion during the first eleven months of 2014. The decline in exports in November 2014 was largely due to decline in earnings from textiles and garments followed by rubber products and gems, diamonds and jewellery categorized under industrial exports.¹⁵

The European Union (EU) has initiated a programme for a housing project to resettle people displaced in the North and East and provide them with necessary facilities. The programme will grant Euro 14 million for an indicative 3,000 incremental owner driven houses, supporting also livelihood measures such as community infrastructure, also through securing land tenure, facilitating grievances mechanisms, improving the local construction supply chain. Manger of the Infrastructure and Reconstruction programme of the delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Jaime Royo-Olid and Ms. Libuse Soukupova of International Cooperation and Development of EU disclosed the EU assistance during a meeting with the Sri Lankan Minister of Resettlement, Reconstruction and Hindu Religious Affairs D. M. Swaminathan on January 23, 2015.¹⁶

¹³ "Seychelles To Assist MR Probe", *Colombo Gazette*, January 23, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/01/23/seychelles-to-assist-mr-probe/>.

¹⁴ "Sri Lanka President's Adviser Leaves for Geneva to Meet UN Human Rights Commissioner", *ColomboPage*, January 25, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan25_1422205800CH.php.

¹⁵ "Sri Lanka Exports Earning Declines In November, Trade Deficit Widens 34.6%", *ColomboPage*, January 23, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan23_1422025186CH.php.

¹⁶ "EU to Fund Euro 14 Million Housing Project to Resettle Sri Lanka War Displaced", *Colombo Page*, January 23, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan23_1422037313CH.php.

A top European trade delegation has arrived in Sri Lanka to formulate a trade-related capacity building project, which will enhance the overall performance of the export sector of Sri Lanka. The proposed US\$ 8 million project, which is scheduled to implement from 2016, will be funded by the European Union, the Minister of Commerce and Industries Rishad Bathiudeen said. The European delegation from Geneva's International Trade Centre (ITC) led by Xuejun Jiang, Chief-Office for Asia and the Pacific, ITC, Geneva, met the Minister and Commerce Ministry officials on January 21 at the Export Development Board in Colombo. The delegation also included top officials of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Geneva.¹⁷

The State Minister of Civil Aviation Faizer Mustapha said the Japanese government has expressed willingness to continue to support the second stage of the expansion of the Bandaranaike International Airport at Katunayake. Following a meeting with the Minister on January 23, the Ambassador of Japan in Sri Lanka Mr. Nobuhito Hobo has assured to continue supporting the infrastructure project uninterrupted. Sri Lanka in 2013 signed a Rs. 42.5 billion loan agreement with Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) to finance the expansion of the Bandaranaike International Airport and future developments. Under the Development Project Phase II Stage 2 work will be carried out to expand the terminal building, aircraft parking apron, and public utilities.¹⁸

Maldives

(January 19-25, 2015)

- Defence Minister Nazim dismissed; President Gayoom appointed Maj Gen Moosa Ali Jaleel as the Minister of Defence and National Security; President urges not to provide opportunities to spread religion other than Islam in Maldives; Maldives, Japan hold economic cooperation policy dialogue; President Xi monitors progress of Bridge, Airport projects; High level delegation departs to Saudi Arabia.

Mohamed Nazim has been dismissed from his post as Minister of Defence.

Spokesperson for the President's Office Ibrahim Muaz Ali said on *Twitter* that Nazim was dismissed in relation to an ongoing investigation. According to the *Sun Online* police seized a pistol from Nazim's apartment following a raid on January 17.

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom appointed Major General (Retired) Moosa Ali Jaleel as the Minister of Defence and National Security on January 20, 2015. The appointment ceremony was held at the President's Office on January 20, 2015. Minister Moosa Ali Jaleel took the oath of office before the Chief Justice, Hon. Uz. Abdulla Saeed.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Top European Trade Delegation in Sri Lanka To Initiate US\$ 8 Million Project", *ColomboPage*, January 25, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan25_1422127262CH.php.

¹⁸ "Expansion of Sri Lanka's International Airport With Japanese Funds To Continue", *Colombo Page*, January 25, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/Jan25_1422202573CH.php.

¹⁹ "President Appoints Major General (Retired) Moosa Ali Jaleel as the Minister of Defence and National Security", *The Presidency*, 20 January 2015, at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15232>.

In an address publicized on January 22 on the occasion of the anniversary of the Maldives' adherence to Islam, President Yameen advised the people of Maldives to think about influences from outside which are against Islam and efforts being done to weaken the faith Maldivians have in Islam and not to provide any chance to spread any other religion except Islam in Maldives.²⁰

Officials of Maldives and Japan have met for the Economic Cooperation Policy Dialogue. The meeting took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Malé on January 21. Ongoing projects were reviewed, and discussions were held at the meeting on ways of implementing projects and programmes under Japanese Assistance. The Foreign Ministry said that the dialogue was headed by Foreign Secretary of Maldives Dr Ali Naseer Mohamed, and Minister at the Embassy of Japan to the Maldives Asako Okai. Officials from Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Environment and Energy, and Communications Authority of Maldives participated in the dialogue. Also, Deputy Head of Mission of the Japanese Embassy Asako Okai called on Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives Dunya Maumoon at the Foreign Ministry on January 21. At the meeting, Dunya highlighted the close bilateral relations between Maldives and Japan, and expressed confidence that the governments of both countries would work towards promoting economic cooperation. The meeting was also attended by Joint Secretary of Foreign Ministry Aishath Azeema.²¹

President of China Xi Jinping said that he closely monitors the progress of China - Maldives Friendship Bridge Project and development of Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA) project in Maldives. According to Foreign Ministry, President Xi mentioned this in an event held to present Ambassador of the Republic of Maldives to the People's Republic of China Dr. Mohamed Faisal's Letter of Credence. Faisal has presented his letter of Credence to President Xi Jinping in an event held on January 23 at People's Hall of Beijing.²²

A high level delegation including Vice President Dr. Mohamed Jameel Ahmed has departed to Saudi Arabia on January 23 to pay respect and offer condolences to the Government and people of Saudi Arabia, on the passing away of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz and to extend congratulations to the new King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud on behalf of the Government, and the people of Maldives. The Vice President was accompanied by Minister at the President's Office Abdulla Ameen and Minister of Islamic Affairs Dr. Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed.²³

²⁰ "President Urges Not to Provide Opportunities to Spread Religion Other Than Islam in Maldives", *SunOnline*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27287>.

²¹ "Maldives, Japan Hold Economic Cooperation Policy Dialogue", *SunOnline*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27278>.

²² "President Xi monitors progress of Bridge, Airport projects", *SunOnline*, January 24, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27314>.

²³ "High Level Delegation Departs To Saudi Arabia", *SunOnline*, January 24, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/27312>.

B. East Asia

Japan

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Japan and UK hold their first two-plus-two dialogue in London; Japanese Prime Minister pledges cooperation towards Middle East in dealing with counter terrorism.**

On January 21, Japan and UK held their first two plus two dialogue in London. Foreign and Defence Ministers of both the countries joined that meeting. During that meeting, both sides agreed to boost their bilateral security ties by making efforts towards an early conclusion of an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) between the two sides, promoting joint research on defence equipment, enhancing collaboration between their respective defence authorities, deepening bilateral cooperation in the field of cyber security, etc. It needs to be noted that the two plus two framework was initiated as part of an agreement between the two countries during the Japan-UK summit meeting held in May 2014.²⁴

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe recently visited Jordan and Israel during his trip to the Middle East. During his meeting with Jordan's king Abdullah II, Abe pledged loans worth 12 billion yen to Jordan to help the country dealing with refugee inflow from neighbouring Syria in the wake of growing terrorist attacks by the Islamic State group. He also offered to provide the Syrian refugees with food and other aids worth \$28 million.²⁵ During Abe's talk with Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, both the leaders agreed to cooperate with each other in countering terrorism. Abe also offered aid worth \$1.04 million to the Multinational Force and Observers stationed in the Sinai Peninsula.²⁶

South Korea

- **China calls for greater efforts towards tourism with South Korea; Chinese Vice Premier visits Seoul, agree to work closely with South Korea on revising the SPT.**

Chinese President Xi Jinping, in his congratulatory message to South Korea on the latter's launch of the 'Year of Visit to China' on January 23, called for greater measures to be taken to bolster tourism and deepen cultural ties between the two countries. He hoped that such initiatives would strengthen the economic ties between the two countries further. It needs to be noted that in the summit meeting held between President Xi and his South Korean counterpart Park Geun-hye

²⁴ "Japan, UK Agree To Strengthen Security Ties", *The Yomiuri Daily*, January 23, 2015, at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001874541>

²⁵ "Abe Pledges 12 Bil. Yen For Jordan", *The Yomiuri Daily*, January 19, 2015, at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001864708>

²⁶ "Japan, Israel Agree On Anti-Terror Cooperation." *The Yomiuri Daily*, January 20, 2015, at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001866155>

last year, both agreed to designate this year as the 'Year of Visit To China' in South Korea. China is to reciprocate that gesture by designating 2016 as the 'Year to visit South Korea' in China.²⁷

Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yeng arrived at Seoul on January 22 on a three-day long visit. During his visit he met with South Korean President Park Geun-hye. In that meeting, both sides agreed to cooperate with each other in resuming the long stalled Six Party Talks (SPT) to denuclearize North Korea. Park, on her part, hoped that both China and South Korea would continue to seek "creative and varied" measures in reviving the talks.²⁸

North Korea

- **North Korea vows to take stern action against South Korea.**

On January 25, North Korea accused South Korea of failing to create a conducive environment for bilateral dialogue. The accusation came as activists from South Korea and the US launched balloons of anti-Pyongyang leaflets on January 19 and South Korea rejected North Korea's call for the cancellation of the South Korea-US annual joint military drill scheduled to be held next month.²⁹ North Korea's National Defence commission issued a warning that South Korea would face 'stern punishment' if the spread of anti-Pyongyang leaflets is not locked and the joint annual drill is not called off.³⁰

C. Russia

Russia

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Russian Defence Minister pays an official visit to India; Russia and Iran sign a military cooperation agreement; Russian and American Foreign Ministers discuss Ukraine; Normandy Quartet calls on all sides to stop hostilities in Ukraine; Moscow to support political process in eastern Ukraine after weapons pull-out; Russia rules out incorporating South Ossetia and Abkhazia into it; Russia will not artificially lower oil output; Russian banks profits plummet 40 per cent in 2014; Putin endorses setting up of a new state corporation in space industry.**

Russia's Defence Minister has paid an official visit to India on January 21 wherein he participated in the 14th session of the intergovernmental commission on military-technical cooperation. During

²⁷ "Xi Vows To Deepen Tourism With S. Korea", *The Korea Herald*, January 25, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150125000126>

²⁸ "S. Korea, China Confirm Joint Stance on N.K Nuclear Issue", *The Korea Herald*, January 23, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150123001106>

²⁹ "Pyongyang Warns Of 'Stern Punishment' Against Seoul", *The Korea Herald*, January 25, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150125000336>

³⁰ "N. Korea Warns Of Stern Punishment Against S. Korea", *The Korea Herald*, January 25, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150125000222>

the discussions that followed with his Indian counterpart Shri Manohar Parrikar, it was decided to step up bilateral partnership in combating terrorism and take steps to strengthen joint production of defence equipment including multi-purpose transport airplane, Ka-226T helicopters and the fifth-generation fighter aircraft- FGFA. It was also decided that the two Defence Ministers will discuss military-technical cooperation every three months via a hot line. Mr. Shoigu noted that India and Russia 'strongly condemn any terrorist acts and oppose a policy of double standards in the struggle against this evil.' He also met the Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi.³¹

Russia has signed a military cooperation agreement with Tehran during the visit of Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu to Tehran on January 20. Mr. Shoigu said afterwards that the two countries agreed to have a 'greater practical aspect in their bilateral cooperation and contribute to improve the combat readiness of their armed forces.' The agreement outlines the contours of delegation exchanges including increased port of call of naval ships, inter-staff talks, exchange of experience in peace-keeping operations and the struggle against terrorism and drug trafficking. The topic of humanitarian mine-clearing operations was considered at Russia's request. The defence minister also invited his Iranian counterpart to the Moscow conference on international security that is scheduled to be held in April. He added that Russia and Iran share similar assessment on developments in Middle East and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Lavrov has said that the theme of the S-300 air defence rocket launchers has been and remains within the realm of bilateral relations with Iran. He stated that 'Iran is a major power having rich history. Without its participation any long-term solution of regional problems, including Syria and Iraq, will be just impossible. The sooner the other actors develop this awareness and begin to be guided by considerations of pragmatism, the more useful that will be for our common efforts for the sake of stability in that region.'³²

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held a phone conversation with US Secretary of State John Kerry on January 20, in which he stressed upon the necessity to implement the ceasefire in south-eastern Ukraine and ensure adherence to the Minsk protocols. It was reported that the conversation was held on the request of the US. This came against the backdrop of a sharp increase in fighting between Ukrainian troops and the separatists of Donetsk and Luhansk.³³

A meeting of the Foreign ministers of the so-called Normandy Quartet (Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine), held in Berlin on January 22, has called on all sides to the Ukrainian conflict to stop combat operations in eastern Ukraine. They 'noted with serious concern that their call for full respect of the regime of quiet has not been followed, and that, to the contrary, fighting in the Donbass area has severely escalated causing the loss of many human lives including civilians.'

³¹ "Russia and India Set To Step Up Anti-Terror Fight – Defense Minister", *Itar-Tass*, January 21, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/772293> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

³² "Russia, Iran Sign Agreement On Military Cooperation", *Itar-Tass*, January 20, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/772087> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

³³ "Lavrov, Kerry Discuss Ukrainian Problems, Syrian Crisis By Phone", *Itar-Tass*, January 21, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/772270> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

The Quartet has also agreed on a demarcation line as mentioned in the Minsk protocol and withdrawal of heavy weaponry from the region.³⁴

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on January 21, that Russia will support the political process in south-eastern Ukraine including holding municipal elections after the withdrawal of heavy weaponry from the region. He also stressed on the need to develop the economy of this area.³⁵

Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin has said, on January 23, that Russia has no plans to politically incorporate Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the near future. He made these comments during the ratification of strategic partnership agreement between Russia and Abkhazia that was being discussed in the state Duma. Mr. Karasin stated that 'Georgian elites need to get used to new realities and accept the sovereignty of its former republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.' Russian President Vladimir Putin and Abkhazian President Raul Khadzhimba had signed the treaty on November 24, 2014. The agreement envisages the creation of a joint defence and security space, including the establishment of a unified group of troops of the Russian and Abkhazian Armed Forces.³⁶

Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich has said, on the side-lines of Davos International Economic Forum on January 21 that Russia will not artificially lower its oil output. He stated that 'implementation of some projects can be halted, but there are no reduction plans in the pipeline.'³⁷

Russian Central Bank has stated that the profits of Russian banks has declined by 50 per cent in 2014 banks profits in 2014 would be 10 per cent lower than in the previous year.³⁸

A new state space corporation titled Roscosmos will appear in the Russian space industry and will replace the federal space agency of the same name. It will involve the merger of Roscomos and the United Rocket and Space Corporation into a single state-run company. The United Rocket and Space Corporation, which is fully owned by the government, was set up by a presidential decree of December 2, 2013. Under its ambit came research, development, maintenance and recycling of military hardware, engine missiles and their components, as well as design, construction, and launching of space probes, manned and unmanned spacecraft, orbital and interplanetary stations.³⁹

³⁴ "Normandy Quartet Calls On All Sides To Ukraine's Conflict To Stop Hostilities", *Itar-Tass*, January 22, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/world/772621> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

³⁵ "Moscow To Support Political Process In Eastern Ukraine After Weaponry Pullout", *Itar-Tass*, January 21, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/772400> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

³⁶ "Incorporation of Abkhazia, S.Ossetia's into Russia Out Of Question – Russian Diplomat", *Itar-Tass*, January 23, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/772938> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

³⁷ "Russia Will Not Artificially Lower Oil Output – Deputy PM", *Itar-Tass*, January 21, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/772424> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

³⁸ "Russian banks' profits plummet 40% in 2014 – Central Bank", *Itar-Tass*, January 21, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/economy/772537> Accessed on January 27, 2015.

³⁹ "Putin Endorses Setting up New Russian State Corporation in Space Industry", *Itar-Tass*, January 21, 2015, at <http://itar-tass.com/en/russia/772494>. Accessed on January 27, 2015.

D. Iran, Iraq and the Gulf

Iran

(January 5-18, 2015)

- **Iranian volunteer killed in Iraq fighting ISIS; Iran's Rafsanjani says Civil Wars in Muslim Nations Bolster Terrorist Groups; Aytollah Khamenei says politics behind oil price fall; Iran and P5+1 to resume nuclear talks on January 18; Republicans in US Congress threaten Iran with more sanctions; Iran urges more active Russia role for nuclear solution.**

An Iranian volunteer has been killed in Iraq during a fight with terrorists of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Mehdi Norouzi was killed on January 10 while defending holy shrines in the Iraqi city of Samarra, *Tehran Times* reported.⁴⁰

Tasnim News Agency reported, Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani stressed the importance of unity in the Muslim world, particularly in Iraq to avert civil wars. "Shiite and Sunni leaders should be vigilant that Islam's enemies not drag Muslims into civil wars which would play into the hands of terrorist groups like ISIL, Boko Haram, Al-Nusra Front, Wahhabis and Salafis," he said. Elsewhere in his remarks, Rafsanjani pointed to Iran-Iraq relations, and stressed the need to boost mutual cooperation between the two neighbouring countries.⁴¹

Iran's supreme leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei said that he believes a political conspiracy is behind the dramatic fall of oil prices. He made the comment in a meeting with Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. He said, "Enemies of Iran and Venezuela are definitely playing a role in lowering crude prices." Ayatollah Khamenei welcomed an agreement between Tehran and Caracas to help stabilize oil prices.⁴²

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said that Iran and the 5+1 group (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) are scheduled to resume the next round of nuclear talks in Geneva on January 18. The talks are to be held at the level of deputy foreign ministers, he told *Islamic Republic News Agency*. He also stated that prior to the talks, the Iranian negotiating team will hold bilateral meetings with the U.S. and Russian delegations.⁴³

Republicans in the Senate plan to vote on the bipartisan bill well before President Barack Obama's team finishes the current round of international nuclear negotiations. The Arkansas Senator, Tom

⁴⁰ "Iranian Volunteer Killed in Iraq" , *Tehran Times*, January 11, 2015 at <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/120925-iranian-volunteer-killed-in-iraq>

⁴¹ "Iran's Rafsanjani: Civil Wars in Muslim Nations Bolster Terrorist Groups" , *Tasnim News Agency*, January 6, 2015 at <http://www.tasnimnews.com/English/Home/Single/610495>

⁴² "Iran Leader says political plot behind oil price fall" , *Presstv*, January 11, 2015, at <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/01/11/392600/Iran-Leader-says-political-plot-behind-oil-price-fall>

⁴³ "Iran, 5+1 to Resume Talks On January 18: Araqchi" , *Tehran Times*, January 7, 2015, at <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/120841-iran-51-to-resume-talks-on-january-18-araqchi>

Cotton, has said that the Congress will vote on any agreement Obama makes on Iran's nuclear programme. The Republican said if the Congress fails to prevent Obama from lifting the sanctions on Iran, he would then work with the next administration to re-impose them.⁴⁴

Javad Zarif, in a meeting with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov in Tehran, discussed various aspects of the negotiations process between Iran and the six world powers (five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany), *IRNA* reported. Referring to the high capacities of both countries, Zarif underlined the need to deepen and expand mutual ties in various areas. Ryabkov, stressed Moscow's responsible role in the nuclear talks, adding that friendly relations with Tehran necessitate using Moscow's capacities to help solve Iran's nuclear programme. He also stressed on Russia's readiness for more effective international and regional cooperation with Iran.⁴⁵

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **US house speaker Invites Nethanyahu to Address Congress on Iran; Zarif said Iran parliament to retaliate any new US Congress sanctions.**

Taking a very different line from President Barack Obama on Iran, House Speaker John Boehner said he had invited Israel's Prime Minister to address a joint meeting of Congress next month about the threats from Tehran and radical Islam. The Republican leader released a letter extending the invitation to Benjamin Netanyahu for February 11. Boehner also told a private meeting of GOP lawmakers that Congress would proceed on new penalties against Iran despite Obama's warning that any legislation would scuttle diplomatic negotiations over the country's nuclear programme.⁴⁶

Iran's Foreign Minister said that if the US Congress imposes fresh sanctions on Tehran, the Iranian parliament (Majlis) will retaliate by adopting a bill to further expand the country's nuclear enrichment level. He added, anyone who torpedoes the November 2013 interim nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries – the US, France, Britain, Russia, China and Germany – “should be isolated by the international community, even if it is the US Congress.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “Republicans in US Congress Threaten Iran With More Sanctions”, *Presstv*, January 14, 2015 <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/01/14/393118/GOP-threatens-Iran-with-more-sanctions>

⁴⁵ “Iran Urges More Active Russia Role For Nuclear Solution”, *Iran Daily*, January 12, 2015 at <http://www.iran-daily.com/News/109261.html>

⁴⁶ “Boehner Invites Israeli Leader to Address Congress on Iran”, *ABC News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/boehner-invites-israeli-leader-address-congress-iran-28371345>

⁴⁷ “Iran Parliament To Retaliate Any New US Congress Sanctions: FM”, *Presstv*, January 23, 2015, at <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/01/23/394471/Iran-to-retaliate-fresh-US-sanctions>

Iraq and Syria

(January 5-18, 2015)

- **Abadi pledges to liberate Iraq amid Jihadists advance; ISIL kills 24 Kurds in surprise attack in northern Iraq; Al-Nusra Front destroys historic Muslim tomb; Canada to take 13,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees; US troops to train Syrian rebels combat ISIL; France to extend strikes against ISIS after Charlie Hebdo attack; ISIS releases video of boy brutally executing two "Russian Spies"; ISIS frees 200 Yazidis.**

During a meeting with Anbar Governor Suhaib Al-Rawi, Abadi highlighted the important role being played by Iraq's Sunni tribes in the fight against ISIS. He called on the "sons of Iraq's provinces" to participate in liberating the country from the group. Just one day after his comments, suspected ISIS fighters launched a major attack on the Ain Al-Assad base in western Anbar, killing at least 23 Iraqi troops and pro-government fighters. A suicide bombing at a mosque in Al-Jubba, close to Ain Al-Assad, killed 10 anti-jihadist fighters, with jihadist militants subsequently attacking police and army positions in the region, killing at least 13, according to Iraqi officials.⁴⁸

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants have killed at least 24 members of the Kurdish security forces (Peshmerga) in a surprise attack in northern Iraq, in one of the deadliest single battles for the Kurds since last summer. More than 750 peshmerga have been killed in combat since ISIL overran their defences in northern Iraq last summer, prompting the first airstrikes by the United States. The Kurds have now regained most of the ground they lost in August. However, peshmerga commanders complain they remain ill-equipped compared with the militants, who plundered Iraqi arms depots when they overran Mosul in June.⁴⁹

Al-Nusra Front, has destroyed a 13th century tomb of a revered Islamic scholar in southern Syria. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, the mausoleum of Imam Nawawi in Nawa, near the Jordanian border, had been destroyed by the armed group. The Syrian government's Islamic endowments ministry, which has lost control of much of Deraa province to rebel groups, condemned the bombing as an attack on the "country's history and heritage".⁵⁰

Canada has agreed to resettle another 10,000 Syrian and 3,000 Iraqi refugees over the next three years in response to a UN plea for help. This meets 10 percent of the latest UN refugee agency's appeal for help resettling people fleeing violence in the two countries. According to a report released earlier by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of Syrian refugees has outstripped Afghans as the largest displaced population in need of protection.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Mustafa, Hamza, "PM Pledges To Liberate Iraq as ISIS Launch Major Anbar Assault" ,*Ashraq al- Aswat*, January 7, 2015 at <http://www.aawsat.net/2015/01/article55340157>

⁴⁹ "ISIL Kills 24 Kurds In Surprise Attack In Northern Iraq", *Hurriet Daily News*, January 11, 2015 at <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/isil-kills-24-kurds-in-surprise-attack-in-northern-iraq.aspx?pageID=238&nID=76783&NewsCatID=352>

⁵⁰ "Syrian Fighters Destroy Historic Muslim Tomb", *Aljazeera*, January 8, 2015, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/syria-rebels-destroy-13th-century-muslim-tomb-2015189829785527.html>

⁵¹ "Canada Opens Doors To 13,000 Syrian, Iraqi Refugees", *Al-Arabia*, January 8, 2015, at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/08/Canada-opens-doors-to-13-000-Syrian-Iraqi-refugees-.html>

The United States has said it will send 400 troops and hundreds of support personnel to train moderate Syrian rebels fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The announcement came just days after senior US officials met Syrian opposition and civil society leaders in Istanbul to discuss the programme. The Syrian rebels have been very opportunist and ineffective in fighting and analysts claim that US aid to the “non-existent” Free Syrian Army will change nothing on the ground. Instead, US should coordinate with “lesser evil” Assad’s army to combat the threat of ISIS.⁵²

French lower house voted overwhelmingly to extend the airstrikes against ISIS in the wake up of the most deadly attacks on civilians in France in decades. On January 8, Ahmed Coulibaly, a man claiming allegiance to ISIL, killed a policewoman and then took several hostages at a kosher grocery store near Paris. Coulibaly and four hostages were killed during a raid by police. That attack was linked to one conducted on January 7 by Said and Cherif Kouachi, two brothers whom Coulibaly had known for years, who killed 12 people at a newspaper office and claimed that they were affiliated with Al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Yemen.⁵³

Russia today reported that ISIS linked Al-Hayat media centre has released a video of a young boy shooting point blank at two kneeling men who have purportedly been accused of being “Russian spies” by the militants. The video then cuts to show the men kneeling in a field, with an armed boy and a bearded man standing behind them. Then the boy steps forwards and shoots the men in head point blank. According to the UN, the group abducts and brainwashes children in record numbers to use as soldiers in their bloody quest for a caliphate throughout the Middle East.⁵⁴

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) extremist group has freed more than 200 captive members of Iraq’s Yazidi religious minority. The Kurdish peshmerga security forces said that more than 200 Yazidis, among them elderly men and women, children, and people with mental disabilities, crossed out of ISIS-held territory. Hundreds of Yazidis were massacred and many more were kept under siege by ISIS on Sinjar mountains until Iraqi Army and Peshmerga forces backed by US airstrikes broke it. Hundreds and possibly thousands of Yazidi women and girls have been forced to marry or sold into sexual slavery by the jihadists, according to Amnesty International.⁵⁵

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **ISIL threatens to kill two Japanese hostages, demands ransom; Anti-ISIL coalition talks**

⁵² “Syrian State News Agency Attacks US Plan To Train Rebels”, *The Daily Star*, Lebanon, January 16, 2015, at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Jan-16/284344-syrian-state-news-agency-attacks-us-plan-to-train-rebels.ashx>

⁵³ “France Extends Airstrikes Against ISIL in Iraq”, *Aljazeera America*, Jan 13, 2015 at <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/1/13/france-airstrikesisil.html>

⁵⁴ “ISIS Releases Video Of Boy Brutally Executing 2 Hostages”, *Russia Today*, January 13, 2015 at <http://rt.com/news/222319-isis-boy-execution-hostages>

⁵⁵ “ISIS Frees Over 200 Yazidi Captives”, *Alarabia*, January 18, 2015 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/18/ISIS-frees-over-200-Yazidi-captives-officials.html>

held in London; Iraq coalition killed half of ISIS commanders; Iranian Commander and Hezbollah fighters killed by Israeli airstrike in Syria.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) threatened on January 20 to kill two Japanese hostages unless it receives \$200 million, demanding the ransom from Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe when he was on a visit to the Middle East. Goto, a freelance journalist, was abducted while reporting on Syria's civil war last year. Yukawa, a private military contractor, was kidnapped in Syria last August. In the video, the two Japanese men appear in orange jumpsuits with a rocky hill in the background, a masked man dressed in black standing between them. The scene resembles others featuring the five hostages previously beheaded by ISIL.⁵⁶

Senior officials from 21 countries attended talks in London on January 22 on pushing back Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants in Iraq and Syria and tackling the growing threat of home-grown jihadists in Europe. It was the first time the US-led coalition has met since this month's attacks in Paris against the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish supermarket that left 17 people dead.⁵⁷ The US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also announced that it intends to step-up its training of Syrian opposition forces in camps in the region, as well as establishing a fund to help those affected by ISIL.⁵⁸

Iraq and its allies have made significant gains in battling Daesh militants, killing thousands of fighters and 50 per cent of the group's top commanders, US Secretary of State John Kerry said in the anti ISIS meeting in London. He added, Iraqi ground troops backed by almost 2,000 air strikes had retaken 700 square kilometres of territory and deprived the militants of the use of 200 oil and gas facilities. He said the number of militants killed was in the "single digit" thousands.⁵⁹

The Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah announced the deaths of several fighters, including the son of a slain military leader and a senior commander, in an Israeli air attack in the Syrian province of Quneitra. Mughniyeh, 20, was the son of Imad Mughniyeh, who was killed in the Syrian capital Damascus in 2008, also in a suspected Israeli attack. "The group says there will be retaliation for the attack", raising threats of new war in the beleaguered Middle East. The Hezbollah-run al-Manar news channel said that the Israeli attack suggest "the enemy has gone crazy because of Hezbollah's growing capabilities and it could lead to a costly adventure that will put the Middle East at stake". The Iranian Revolutionary Guard said Mohammad Allah Daddi, an Iranian commander, had been killed in the attack on the Syrian soil.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ "ISIL Demands Ransom For Japanese Hostages", *Aljazeera*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2015/01/isil-threatens-kill-japanese-hostages-20151201357356260.html>

⁵⁷ "Anti-ISIL Coalition Talks Focus On Jihadist Threat", *Hurriet Daily News*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/anti-isil-coalition-talks-focus-on-jihadist-threat.aspx?pageID=238&nID=77271&NewsCatID=359>

⁵⁸ "Anti-ISIL Coalition To Train Syria Opposition Fighters", *Aljazeera*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2015/01/anti-isil-coalition-meets-london-201512213115898504.html>

⁵⁹ "Iraq Coalition 'Killed 50% Of Daesh Commanders'", *Gulfnews*, January 23, 2015 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/iraq/iraq-coalition-killed-50-of-daesh-commanders-1.1445673>

⁶⁰ "Hezbollah Fighters Killed In Israeli Attack", *Aljazeera*, January 19, 2015 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/israeli-air-raid-kills-hezbollah-commander-2015118163236960984.html>

The Gulf

(January 5-18, 2015)

- **ISIS Saudi members carried out attacks at Saudi- Iraq border; Saudi blogger flogged in public for ‘insulting Islam’; Hamas denies Khaled Mehsal’s expulsion from Qatar; Car bomb targeting Houtis kills 38 in Yemen; Bomb blast in Lebanon, Nusra front claims responsibility; UN says Saudi Arabia’s public flogging of blogger ‘cruel and inhuman; Bahrain opposition MP jailed for tweet; Yemen’s President’s chief of staff abducted.**

A deadly attack on Saudi border guards along the Saudi-Iraqi frontier was carried out by Saudi members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) seeking to cross back into the Kingdom undetected, *Ashraq Al-Awsat* reported. The attack resulted in the deaths of three Saudi border guards, including commanding officer Gen. Oudah Al-Belawi, and all four attackers. The four men were seeking to infiltrate Saudi territory from Iraq and were confronted by Saudi border guards close to Arar, capital of the Northern Borders Province.⁶¹

Saudi blogger Raef Badawi was flogged in public on January 9 near a mosque in Jeddah, receiving 50 lashes for “insulting Islam”. The United States, Amnesty International and Reporters without Borders have denounced the flogging as a horrific form of punishment, and said Badawi was exercising his right to freedom of expression.⁶²

CNN reported on January 5 that Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Meshaal has been expelled from the Qatari capital, Doha, to Turkey. Izzat al-Rishq, a top aide to the Hamas leader, however, denied the report, saying, “There is no basis of truth about brother Khaled Mashaal leaving Doha. We are in Doha now.” This event follows the reconciliation between the Sisi’s regime and Qatar, where Muslim Brotherhood and Sisi’s government in Egypt are engaged in a bitter power struggle.⁶³

A car bomb exploded outside a police college in Yemen’s capital Sanaa, killing at least 38 people. According to news reports, a dozen others were wounded in the explosion that targeted a centre of Houthi fighters near the police academy officers’ club. Houtis which are fighting for their political rights in the country have increasingly become target of Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula who considers “Shia” houthi fighters as infidels.⁶⁴

⁶¹ “Arar Border Attack Carried Out By Saudi ISIS Members: Sources”, *Ashraq Al-Aswat*, January 10, 2015 at <http://www.aawsat.net/2015/01/article55340286>

⁶² “Saudi Blogger Flogged In Public For ‘Insulting Islam” , *Gulfnews.com*, January 9, 2015, at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-blogger-flogged-in-public-for-insulting-islam-1.1438732>

⁶³ “Hamas Denies Leader Expulsion From Qatar” , *Presstv*, January 6, 2015, at <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/01/06/391912/Hamas-rejects-leader-expulsion-from-Qatar>

⁶⁴ “Car Bomb Rips Through Crowd In Yemeni Capital” , *Aljazeera*, January 8, 2015, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/car-bomb-explodes-outside-yemen-police-centre-2015175443717838.html>

Twin bombs hit a cafe in a predominantly Alawite neighbourhood, was the first major attack in Lebanon for months, when the country faces spill over from Syrian Civil war. There has been tension in the past between Tripoli's Sunni Muslim majority population and its Alawite minority some supporting Assad while other opposing him. In a statement, the Nusra Front said the attack was "in revenge for the Sunnis in Syria and Lebanon".⁶⁵

The top United Nations human rights official has issued an appeal to the Saudi Arabia to halt the punishment of Ra'ef Badawi, an online blogger sentenced to public flogging for "peacefully exercising his right to freedom of opinion and expression according to UN news centre. "Flogging is, in my view, at the very least, a form of cruel and inhuman punishment," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said. "Such punishment is prohibited under international human rights law, in particular the Convention against Torture, which Saudi Arabia has ratified," he added.⁶⁶

Jamil Kazem, a member of Bahrain's main Shiite opposition group was sentenced on January 13 to six months in jail for a tweet over election bribes, his Al-Wefaq movement which boycotted the November polls said. Former MP Jamil Kazem tweeted to attack the government of the Sunni-ruled kingdom over reported bribes it paid for candidates to take part in the legislative elections. Al-Wefaq said his conviction, including a fine, showed "the regime does not believe in political dialogue but rather in arbitrary procedures against those who do not share its opinions".⁶⁷

Houthi rebels in control of Yemen's capital abducted President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's chief of staff, a claim confirmed by a senior official. Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, who is also secretary general of the national dialogue set up to oversee the political transition. A statement by the Shia Houthi rebels said the kidnapping was a measure to prevent an UN-brokered agreement between the presidency and them in September "from being broken".⁶⁸

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Saudi King Abdullah dies, Crown Prince Salman new King, Western Media criticized for hailing Abdullah as "Cautious reformer" amid blogger's flogging; Yemeni President resigns amid political deadlock.**

Saudi Arabia's *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported that Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud has passed away and been succeeded to the throne by Crown Prince

⁶⁵ "Lebanon Violence: Bomb Blast Hits Northern City Of Tripoli", *BBC*, January 10, 2015 at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30765820>

⁶⁶ "Saudi Arabia: Public Flogging Of Blogger 'Cruel And Inhuman,' Says UN Rights Chief", *UN News Centre*, January 15, 2015 at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49809#.VMZJNdKUdds>

⁶⁷ "Bahrain Hands Shiite Opposition Ex-MP Jail Term For Tweet", *The Daily Star*, January 13, 2015 <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Jan-13/284003-bahrain-hands-shiite-opposition-ex-mp-jail-term-for-tweet.ashx>

⁶⁸ "Yemen President's Aide Kidnapped In Sanaa", *Aljazeera*, January 17, 2015 at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/yemen-president-aide-seized-sanaa-2015117131819633387.html>

Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. The new Saudi monarch, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz, called on Saudi Arabia's Allegiance Council to confirm Deputy Crown Prince Muqrin Bin Abdulaziz as the new Crown Prince and heir to the throne.⁶⁹

Saudi Arabia's deceased King Abdullah, according to just about every obituary in major Western publications, was a reformer. *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *BBC*, and *NPR* all describe Abdullah as a ruler committed to reforming Saudi Arabia's notoriously repressive practices. Senator John McCain called Abdullah an advocate for peace; IMF head Christine Lagarde called him a "strong advocate for women". But Abdullah did not, in fact, make any fundamental reforms to the Saudi state, which remains one of the most oppressive and inhumane on earth. It punishes dissidents, including currently with multiple rounds of publicly lashing a blogger, amputates hands and legs for robbery, and enforces a system of gender restrictions that make women not just second-class citizens, but in many ways the property of men.⁷⁰

Yemen's President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi quit along with his prime minister and cabinet, dragging the country into political crisis when Houthi rebels are increasingly consolidating their grip on the capital. Hadi's resignation came a day after he and Houthi rebels announced that they had reached an agreement to resolve the crisis gripping the country. Abu al-Malek Yousef al-Fishi, seen as the ideologue of the Houthis' Ansarullah group, described the resignation as good news for all Yemenis and said that the Arab country was heading towards "security, stability, tranquillity and prosperity".⁷¹

E. The United State of America

National

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dempsey says cyber vulnerabilities threaten national security; Assistant under-secretary Martin says 2016 budget factors asymmetrical warfare needs; Under Secretary Vickers says defence intelligence enterprise poised for historic transition; DoD seeks 10-year extension of small business mentoring programme; Hagel says budget, congressional partnership central to DoD strength; Army releases report on Fort Hood shooting investigation.**

Cyber vulnerabilities in the private sector pose a serious threat to national security, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. While military cyber defences are formidable, civilian infrastructure

⁶⁹ "Saudi King Abdullah dies, Crown Prince Salman new King", *Ashraq Al-Wasat*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.aawsat.net/2015/01/article55340716>

⁷⁰ "The Obscenity Of Calling Saudi King Abdullah A "Reformer", *Vox media*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.vox.com/2015/1/23/7877395/king-abdullah-reformer>

⁷¹ "Yemen President Quits Amid Worsening Crisis", *Aljazeera*, January 22, 2015, at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/01/yemen-president-resigns-amid-political-crisis-2015122135030512445.html>

and businesses often are targeted first and “present a significant vulnerability to our nation,” Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said in an interview earlier this week in Rome, at the start of a two-nation European tour focused on threats to U.S. and European security. Because of that, he said, the United States faces a “level playing field” against cyber threats. Cyber legislation is needed to protect the nation and to allow information sharing between the government and the private sector while safeguarding civil liberties, he said. President Barack Obama has made cybersecurity a top agenda item and pressed for new cyber legislation in his State of the Union address on January 20. Disruptive and destructive cyberattacks are becoming a part of conflict between states, within states and among non-state actors, the general said.⁷²

The 2016 budget will reflect how intelligence capabilities and other investments align with defence challenges such as asymmetrical warfare, a Pentagon official said on January 21 during the 2015 Potomac Officers Club second annual Intel Summit. Jim Martin, assistant under-secretary of defence for intelligence portfolios, programmes and resources, said asymmetrical warfare is a major focus not only for the intelligence community, but the Defence Department writ large. The United States’ distance to North Korea, China, Russia or the Middle East, Martin noted, can pose challenges in larger war-fighting scenarios. As such, China and Russia emphasize capabilities such as mobile ballistic missiles, cyber warfare and counter-space systems, which Martin explained are designed to stymie U.S. response and to limit the movement of its forces. And over the last 20 years, according to Martin, the United States has enjoyed significant war-fighting technological, logistic and combat advantage.⁷³

The defence intelligence enterprise faces unprecedented geopolitical challenges and technological change and at the same time is poised for its most significant transformation in decades, Under Secretary of Defence for Intelligence Michael G. Vickers said on January 21. He expects the transition to posture future U.S. leaders with the capabilities they’ll need to deal with emerging challenges, Vickers said during a discussion on intelligence in a dynamic world this morning at the Atlantic Council. He noted, the challenges include everything from instability across the broader Middle East and North Africa, sectarian conflict, and wars that end only to begin again, to cyber threats increasing in range and sophistication, and threats to space systems. The challenges extend to proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems in North Korea and Iran, Russia’s challenge to the European order through proxy war and to the West through information warfare and the development of advanced systems, and the continued rise of China.⁷⁴

The Defence Department intends to request a 10-year extension of a program that improves the ability of socioeconomically disadvantaged small businesses to compete for defence contracts, the programme’s manager said on January 21. The Small Business Mentor-Protege Program began

⁷² Ferdinando, Lisa, “Dempsey: Cyber Vulnerabilities Threaten National Security”, *DoD News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128001>

⁷³ Lyle, Amaani, “Intel Official: 2016 Budget Factors Asymmetrical Warfare Needs”, *DoD News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128004>

⁷⁴ Pellerin, Cheryl, “Vickers: Defence Intelligence Enterprise Poised for Historic Transition”, *DoD News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128006>

in 1991 as a way to foster small businesses and improve technology transfer between the Defence Department and industry, Robert Stewart said in a DoD News interview. Despite having been in existence for nearly 25 years, the programme is still categorized as a pilot and must be reauthorized in a National Defence Authorization Act every few years, he said.⁷⁵

The Defence Department's budget and its partnership with Congress are central to the success of ongoing efforts to strengthen the institution, increase its capabilities and prepare for future challenges, Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel said in Washington on January 21. During what he called one of his last official news conferences as secretary, Hagel said the defence budget is critical to funding ongoing operations around the world and to pursuing cost-saving measures essential to fielding a ready and capable force. Among the measures that received attention last year were the launch of a path-breaking defence innovation initiative, continuing efforts to strengthen and improve acquisition systems, and progress in embracing better business practices and moving toward greater institutional financial accountability.⁷⁶

On January 23, Army officials released the results of a months-long investigation into a shooting at Fort Hood, Texas, that left four people dead, concluding that there was nothing in the assailant's background, medical or military profile that might have provided an early warning for potential violence. On April 2, 2014, Army Spc. Ivan Lopez-Lopez opened fire at several locations on the sprawling Army installation, killing three soldiers and wounding 12. Lopez-Lopez took his own life after being confronted by a military police officer. "We find no indication in his medical and personnel records suggesting Spc. Lopez-Lopez was likely to commit a violent act," wrote Army Lt. Gen. Joseph E. Martz, who led an investigation team that interviewed and obtained sworn statements from 169 witnesses, in addition to reviewing materials and statements gathered during an earlier criminal investigation. Martz's investigation also determined that no "single event or stressor, in isolation, was the cause of the shooting."⁷⁷

International: Asia

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Barack Obama warns Pakistan to shut down terrorist safe havens; Obama seeks authorization for use of force against ISIL; U.S. ships on standby while forces clash in Yemen; Operation Inherent Resolve Airstrikes continue in Syria, Iraq; Dempsey says keep all options on table for use of force against ISIL; Pentagon says Iraqi training sites now operational; NATO Defence chiefs meet, Ukraine a 'significant concern'; Army Gen. Dempsey says NATO focuses on Russian violations of Ukraine's sovereignty; Defence Secretary Hagel discusses alliance**

⁷⁵ Roulo, Claudette, "DoD Seeks 10-year Extension of Small Business Mentoring Programme", *DoD News*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128014>

⁷⁶ Pellerin, Cheryl, "Hagel: Budget, Congressional Partnership Central to DoD Strength", *DoD News*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128015>

⁷⁷ "Army Releases Report on Fort Hood Shooting Investigation", *DoD News*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128024>

progress with South Korean counterpart; Pentagon's top policy official praises U.S.-Australia alliance.

President Barack Obama has warned Pakistan it must shut down terrorist safe havens and bring those behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks to justice on the eve of his visit to India. His comments, made in an interview with the magazine *India Today*, were condemned in Islamabad as an attempt to curry favour with his hosts which could undermine Pakistan's war against Taliban terrorists in its tribal areas along the Afghan border. To underline their common ground on terrorism, he contrasted how the United States had been "unrelenting in our fight against terrorist groups - a fight in which Indians and Americans are united". "Indians were tragically killed on 9/11, as were Americans on 26/11. On my previous visit to India, my first stop was the memorial at the Taj hotel to pay my respects to the victims, meet with survivors and send a strong message to the Indian people that we stand together in defence of our security and our way of life," he said.⁷⁸

In his State of the Union address on January 20, President Barack Obama called on Congress to authorize the use of military force against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In a speech largely focused on his domestic and economic agenda, Obama also touched on a myriad of topics related to the Defence Department, noting the start of the century "dawned with terror touching our shores." "We are 15 years into this new century – 15 years that dawned with terror touching our shores – that unfolded with a new generation fighting two long and costly wars. Tonight, for the first time since 9/11, our combat mission in Afghanistan is over." Nation has learned some "costly" lessons over the last 13 years of combat, Obama said, and he detailed efforts to have Afghan forces take charge of their own country's security.⁷⁹

While the uprising in Yemen continues with militia forces fighting to take control of the government there, U.S. Navy warships stand ready to respond if needed, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters on January 21. "We are continuing to closely monitor the situation in Yemen," Warren said. Two American warships are on routine deployment in the Red Sea in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, he said. The number of Americans in Yemen is not being revealed, he added, but if a need for evacuation arises, the State Department would handle the effort.⁸⁰

U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria and Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on January 23. Attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft conducted 12 airstrikes in Syria. Attack, bomber and fighter aircraft conducted 13 airstrikes in Iraq.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Nelson, Dean, "Barack Obama Warns Pakistan: Shut Down Terrorist Safe Havens", *The Telegraph*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/11365779/Barack-Obama-warns-Pakistan-Shut-down-terrorist-safe-havens.html>

⁷⁹ Marshall, Tyrone C. Jr., "Obama Seeks Authorization for Use of Force Against ISIL", *DoD News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123998>

⁸⁰ Cronk, Terri Moon, "U.S. Ships on Standby While Forces Clash in Yemen", *DoD News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128002>

⁸¹ "Operation Inherent Resolve Airstrikes Continue in Syria, Iraq", From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, *DoD News*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128021>

All options should remain on the table in an authorization for use of military force against Islamic terrorists, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said on January 22. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey spoke in an interview aboard his plane as he returned to Washington following a two-nation European tour focusing on threats to the continent. Dempsey said his “best military advice” is that such an authorization — called an AUMF for short — gives flexibility to military leaders charged with defeating ISIL. “I think in the crafting of the AUMF, all options should be on the table, and then we can debate whether we want to use them,” he said. “But the authorization should be there.” In his January 20 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama called on Congress to authorize an AUMF against ISIL.⁸²

The fourth and final training site for Iraqi forces started operations today in Irbil, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said on January 23. About 100 Kurdish peshmerga forces started training at the Irbil site on January 23, he told reporters at a regular Pentagon news briefing. “There’s still some site infrastructure work that has to go on at that particular site,” Kirby noted. About 3,500 additional forces are receiving training at the remaining three sites, located in Al Asad, Bismayah and at Camp Taji near Baghdad, the admiral said. Eventually, the training areas will be able to process a total of 12 brigades at once, he said — nine Iraqi security force brigades and three brigades of peshmerga troops. Training is being conducted by a combination of U.S. and coalition forces and a full training cycle will take about six weeks, Kirby added.⁸³

The first advance detachment of U.S. troops responsible for training moderate Syrian opposition forces will begin arriving in the U.S. Central Command area of operations in the next few days, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said on January 23. The detachment, numbering fewer than 100 troops, will begin establishing training sites for the moderate Syrian opposition at several sites in the region, Kirby told reporters during a regular Pentagon news briefing. The recruiting and vetting process is expected to take three to five months, Kirby said, while the actual training itself will take six to eight months.⁸⁴

The U.S. military says Russia has “funnelled hundreds of pieces of Russian military equipment” to Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine. The comments from the spokesman of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff came on January 21, on the first day of a two-day defence chiefs meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, who is attending the NATO meeting, is “closely following” reports of Russian activity inside Ukraine, said spokesman Air Force Col. Ed Thomas. He declined to discuss specifics about the reports of Russian activity, but did acknowledge a Russian role in the ongoing conflict. In the opening session, the chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Danish Gen. Knud Bartels, said Russia’s “illegal military

⁸² Ferdinando, Lisa, “Dempsey: Keep All Options on Table for Use of Force Against ISIL”, *DoD News*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128023>

⁸³ Roulo, Claudette, “Iraqi Training Sites Now Operational, Pentagon Spokesman Says”, *DoD News*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128030>

⁸⁴ Roulo, Claudette, “U.S. Troops to Begin Establishing Syrian Opposition Training Sites”, *DoD News*, January 23, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128026>

intervention” in Ukraine remains a “significant cause for concern.” The events in Ukraine are “shaping our thinking on NATO’s security challenges,” he said.⁸⁵

NATO is focused on strategies to deal with its two biggest threats — Russian aggression to its east, and the threat of terrorism from its south, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said on January 22. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey and other alliance defence chiefs today concluded two days of talks at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Russian aggression, Dempsey said, has “changed sovereign borders with the use of coercion.” And the recent terrorist attacks in Paris underscore the “very real threat of terrorism that comes up into NATO’s southern flank.” There was consensus among the military chiefs that NATO must confront these threats, he said.⁸⁶

Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel called South Korean Defence Minister Han Min-koo on January 21 to discuss recent progress made in strengthening the alliance between their nations and improving deterrence against North Korean provocations and aggression, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said. In a statement summarizing the call, Kirby said Hagel noted that the alliance between South Korea and the United States has grown ever stronger, based upon the shared interests and common values of both nations. Hagel expressed appreciation regarding the recent signing of the Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement Concerning the Nuclear and Missile Threats Posed by North Korea among the South Korean and Japanese Defence Ministries and the U.S. Defence Department, Kirby said.⁸⁷

The long history of the U.S.-Australia alliance has been a linchpin of stability around the world, the Defence Department’s top policy official said in Washington on January 21. Christine E. Wormuth, under-secretary of defence for policy, discussed the importance of the U.S.-Australia alliance during remarks at the Brookings Institute. “The United States and Australia have a very long history of standing shoulder-to-shoulder in every major conflict really since World War I,” Wormuth said. “Our security cooperation really continues to be a linchpin of stability around the world.” That cooperation is important, she said, noting examples such as a recent hostage crisis in Sydney, Australia, and the terrorist attacks in Paris two weeks ago.⁸⁸

India-US Relations

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **President Obama says breakthrough made in nuclear deal; Obama, Modi say progress made on civil nuclear trade; India, US release ‘declaration of friendship’, to elevate strategic**

⁸⁵ Ferdinando, Lisa, “NATO Defence Chiefs Meet, Ukraine a ‘Significant Concern’”, *DoD News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128007>

⁸⁶ Ferdinando, Lisa, “NATO Focuses on Russian Violations of Ukraine’s Sovereignty”, *DoD News*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128017>

⁸⁷ “Hagel Discusses Alliance Progress With South Korean Counterpart”, *DoD News*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128008>

⁸⁸ Marshall, Tyrone C. Jr., “Pentagon’s Top Policy Official Praises U.S.-Australia Alliance”, *DoD News*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128005>

partnership; India, US renew defence pact; to pursue co-production projects; Defence Secretary Hagel praises new defence cooperation agreements with India; India, US announce steps to promote clean energy.

On January 25, President Barack Obama said that a breakthrough has been made on two contentious issues in the civil nuclear deal that was signed with India in 2008, but has been lying in cold storage mainly because of a liability clause. "We reached a breakthrough understanding on two issues that were holding up progress on the civil nuclear deal," Obama said at a joint press conference after meeting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for bilateral talks in New Delhi. Obama did not specify what the issues were. The two leaders met amidst expectations of progress in deals in climate change, civilian nuclear cooperation, and defence among other areas. Modi said that discussions were held over last four months to move towards commercial cooperation in civilian nuclear technology consistent with local and international laws, and that there has been forward movement on the deal.⁸⁹

U.S. President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said they made progress on a range of issues, including moving toward an agreement on civil nuclear trade, cooperating on defence and addressing climate change. After extended talks Sunday, Messrs. Obama and Modi said they had resolved some of the issues that have prevented U.S. firms from investing in nuclear power plants in India but left unclear what sticking points remained. The two leaders discussed long-standing differences, including the impasse over India's liability law, which would hold American suppliers responsible for accidents at the power plants. Mr. Modi said a civil-nuclear agreement would be the centrepiece of a transformed U.S.-India relationship. "Six years after we signed our bilateral agreement, we are moving toward commercial cooperation, consistent with our law, our international legal obligations, and technical and commercial viability," Mr. Modi said.⁹⁰

Signalling renewed intensity in ties, India and the US on January 25 decided to further "elevate" the long-standing strategic partnership by enhancing cooperation in a raft of crucial areas including defence, trade and commerce, technology transfer, counter-terrorism and climate change. Both the countries released a 'declaration of friendship' outlining broad contours of engagements after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama held extensive talks during which they broke the 7-year-old logjam in operationalizing the civil nuclear deal. The declaration title "Chalein saath saath; forward together we go" said India and the US agreed to elevate their long-standing strategic partnership and that each step being taken to strengthen the ties is a step towards shaping international security and regional and global peace.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ghosh, Anirvan, "Obama Says Breakthrough Made In Nuclear Deal", *HuffPost*, at http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/01/25/obama-india-nuclear-deal_n_6541108.html

⁹⁰ Nelson, Colleen McCain, "Obama, Modi Say Progress Made on Civil Nuclear Trade", *The Wall Street Journal*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/obama-modi-say-progress-made-on-range-of-issues-1422193731>

⁹¹ "India, US Release 'Declaration Of Friendship', To Elevate Strategic Partnership", *Press Trust of India*, January 25, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-US-release-declaration-of-friendship-to-elevate-strategic-partnership/articleshow/46014408.cms?prtpage=1>

Vowing to take defence ties to a “new level”, India and the US on January 25 renewed their 10-year Defence Framework Agreement and agreed in principle to pursue joint development and production projects. The new framework will enhance bilateral defence partnership by stepping up joint military exercises and through more in-depth intelligence-sharing, maritime security efforts among others. “Today, we have also decided to take our growing defence cooperation to a new level. We have agreed, in principle, to pursue co-development and co-production of specific advanced defence projects,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after holding extensive talks with visiting US President Barack Obama in New Delhi.⁹²

On January 25, Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel issued a statement applauding agreements on defence cooperation between the United States and India, announced by President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Hagel’s statement reads as follows: “Today, on his historic visit to India, President Obama and Prime Minister Modi announced new, ground-breaking agreements on defence cooperation between India and the United States that promise to open a new chapter in our defence relationship and mark an important milestone in the U.S.-India strategic partnership. “By finalizing the renewal of our 10-year framework for the U.S.-India Defence Relationship, we will continue to build on the growing momentum in our defence cooperation over the last decade. This renewed framework will support stronger military-to-military engagement, including deeper maritime cooperation and increased opportunities in technology and trade.”⁹³

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 25 dismissed that there was any pressure to ink a pact similar to US-China agreement on emission cuts as India and the US announced important steps to promote clean energy and confront climate change. Speaking after talks with visiting US President Barack Obama in New Delhi, Modi said “President and I expressed hope for a successful Paris Conference on climate change this year”. Obama said that the two countries have agreed to make “concrete progress” in phasing out major greenhouse gases apart from expanding solar energy initiatives and launching joint projects to improve air quality in Indian cities. Both the countries agreed to “pursue” for a strong global climate pact on emission cuts in the forthcoming UN climate conference to be held in Paris in December this year.⁹⁴

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Meeting climate challenge will require concerted action by both nations: India-U.S. joint statement; US-India resume talks on ‘Totalization Agreement’; India, US ask Pakistan to**

⁹² “India, US Renew Defence Pact; To Pursue Co-Production Projects”, *Press Trust of India*, January 25, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-US-renew-defence-pact-to-pursue-co-production-projects/articleshow/46013581.cms?prtpage=1>

⁹³ “Hagel Praises New Defence Cooperation Agreements With India”, *DoD News*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128033>

⁹⁴ “India, US Announce Steps To Promote Clean Energy”, *Press Trust of India*, January 25, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-US-announce-steps-to-promote-clean-energy/articleshow/46012995.cms?prtpage=1>

bring 26/11 perpetrators to justice; The US to push for higher share for India in IMF, other institutions; India, U.S. agree on myriad global issues; Obama, Modi declare era of 'New Trust' in US-India relations.

President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi share a deep concern regarding the climate challenge and understand that meeting it will require concerted action by their countries and the international community. The United States of America and India recognize that global climate change is a profound threat to humanity and to the imperatives of sustainable development, growth and the eradication of poverty. They stressed the importance of enhancing their bilateral cooperation on adaptation measures, as well as joint research and development and technology innovation, adoption and diffusion for clean energy and efficiency solutions that will help achieve the goals of transitioning to a climate resilient and low carbon economy.⁹⁵

On January 25, in a significant move, India and US decided to resume talks on the bilateral investment treaty during discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama, who the lauded reforms being undertaken by the new government. The two nations also agreed to resume talks on the long pending 'Totalization Agreement' that will benefit millions of Indians working in the US, with regard to social security taxes. As per estimates, Indian IT professionals in the US pay over USD 1 billion annually as social taxes. The Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIT) aims at protecting investments in each other's country. The two nations have been discussing the pact since 2008. Addressing a joint press conference with Mr Modi after the meeting, Mr Obama said: "In the last few years, trade between our two countries increased by some 60 per cent, total record of USD 100 billion. We want to trade even more."⁹⁶

Identifying terrorism as a major challenge, India and the US on January 25 stressed the need for joint and concerted efforts to disrupt terror entities including LeT, D Company and the Haqqani Network and asked Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of 26/11 terror attack to justice. After his talks with President Barack Obama, Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a joint press conference said there should be no distinction between terrorist groups and pressed for countries to fulfil their commitment to wipe out terror safe havens and bring them to justice. He said India and the US have agreed that there was a need for comprehensive global strategy and approach to combat terrorism. The two sides noted the recent US sanctions against three D Company affiliates. The President and the Prime Minister further agreed to continue to work toward an agreement to share information on known and suspected terrorists.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ "Meeting Climate Challenge Will Require Concerted Action By Both Nations: India-U.S. Joint Statement", *ANI News*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.aninews.in/newsdetail2/story201326/meeting-climate-challenge-will-require-concerted-action-by-both-nations-india-u-s-joint-statement.html>

⁹⁶ "US-India Resume Talks on 'Totalization Agreement'", *Press Trust of India*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/us-india-resume-talks-on-totalization-agreement-653599?curl=1422208332>

⁹⁷ "India, US ask Pakistan To Bring 26/11 Perpetrators To Justice", *Press Trust of India*, January 25, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-us-ask-pakistan-to-bring-26/11-perpetrators-to-justice/articleshow/46014136.cms?prtpage=1>

US President Barack Obama on January 25 affirmed his commitment to enhancing India's 'voice and vote' in global financial institutions like IMF. Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the importance of strengthening international financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said a joint statement issued after a meeting between the two leaders in New Delhi. The President also affirmed his commitment to enhancing India's voice and vote in international financial institutions and ensuring that resources are made available and used creatively through multilateral development banks for infrastructure financing," it said. India has been pressing for higher voting rights in IMF which would reflect its growing influence in world economy.⁹⁸

India and the U.S. have agreed to expand their efforts to assist developing countries and address global development challenges for the benefit of the wider region and the world and they lauded ongoing triangular assistance, which may involve U.S.-India collaboration to address development challenges in third countries in areas including health, energy, food security, disaster management, and women's empowerment. The two sides noted that this collaboration, which is active with Afghanistan, East and West Africa, may be expanded to additional third countries. Further underscoring the importance of implementing infrastructure projects to enhance connectivity and enable freer flow of commerce and energy in the region, the Leaders agreed to develop additional areas in which both sides could work together, including on India's initiatives to enhance its connectivity with the South and South East Asian region.⁹⁹

President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 25 declared an era of "new trust" in the often fraught relationship between their nations as the U.S. leader opened a three-day visit to New Delhi. Standing side by side at the stately Hyderabad House, Obama and Modi cited progress toward putting in place a landmark civil nuclear agreement, as well as advances on climate change and defence ties. But from the start, the day was more about putting their personal bond on display. Modi broke with protocol and wrapped Obama in an enthusiastic hug after Obama got off Air Force One. Obama later told reporters that Modi's "strong personal commitment to the U.S.-India relationship gives us an opportunity to further energize these efforts." Modi was as effusive. He called Obama by his first name and said "the chemistry that has brought Barack and me closer has also brought Washington and Delhi closer."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ "Barack Obama To Push For Higher Share For India In IMF, Other Institutions", *Press Trust of India*, January 25, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/barack-obama-to-push-for-higher-share-for-india-in-imf-other-institutions/articleshow/46013519.cms?prtpage=1>

⁹⁹ "India, U.S. Agree On Myriad Global Issues", *ANI News*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.aninews.in/newsdetail2/story201327/india-u-s-agree-on-myriad-global-issues.html>

¹⁰⁰ Pace, Julie, "Obama, Modi Declare Era of 'New Trust' in US-India Relations", *ABC News*, January 25, 2015 at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/obama-received-warmly-india-seeks-policy-advances-28461859?singlePage=true>

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **India Mongolia Joint Training Exercise commences at Gwalior; Chief of Naval Staff Admiral RK Dhowan on a four day scheduled visit to Mauritius.**

The tenth India Mongolia Joint Training Exercise commenced at Gwalior on January 23, 2015. The aim of the exercise is to acquaint the armies of the two countries with each other's operating procedures in the backdrop of a Counter Insurgency and Terrorism environment. The Mongolian contingent from the 84 Airborne Special Forces Battalion comprising of one Infantry Platoon alongside an Indian Infantry Platoon is participating in the exercise. The 15 day exercise is planned to train troops of both nations on crossing of obstacles, special heliborne operations, water patrolling, firing a variety of weapons, handling and neutralisation of improvised explosive devices and conduct of cordon and search operations in a counter insurgency and terrorism environment. Moreover, the exercise will considerably enhance the interoperability between Indian Army and Mongolian Army in conduct of joint operations against international terrorism while serving in Peacekeeping Missions under the United Nations mandate.¹⁰¹

The Indian Chief of Naval Staff Admiral RK Dhowan is on a scheduled visit to Mauritius from January 19-22, 2015. The visit is expected to deepen the friendship as well as explore new avenues of defence cooperation between the two countries. The Chief of Naval Staff will meet various Government and Defence officials during his stay at Mauritius. The Admiral will inaugurate the data flow of the Information Exchange on white shipping (merchant marine) for greater Maritime Domain Awareness to the mutual benefit of both maritime nations. India and Mauritius share centuries old cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic bonds. The people of Indian origin comprise around 68 per cent of the population. This, in addition to the country's strategic location in the Indian Ocean, has resulted in a close relationship between India and Mauritius. The Indian Navy and Mauritius National Coast Guard enjoy a robust relationship. The Indian Navy has been actively supporting and cooperating with Mauritius Maritime agencies towards meeting their maritime security needs. The Mauritius Coast Guard Ship Barracuda has recently been built by GRSE Kolkata while orders have been placed by MCGS on GSL for construction of 2 Fast Attack Craft and 10 Fast Interceptor Craft.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ "Joint India Mongolia Exercise," *PIB*, January 23, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=114903>

¹⁰² "Chief of the Naval Staff Visits Mauritius," *PIB*, January 19, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=114780>

International

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Germany stops arms exports to Saudi Arabia; Sweden's Armed Forces Command pushes the newly elected socialist-green government to significantly increase the defence budget.**

Reports say that Germany has decided to stop arms exports to Saudi Arabia because of instability in the region. Weapons orders from Saudi Arabia have either been rejected, or deferred for further consideration. The decision was reportedly taken by the national security council, a government body that includes Chancellor Angela Merkel, Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel and seven other ministers. Saudi Arabia is one of the most important clients of Germany's arms industry with •360 million (\$400 million) of arms shipments authorized in 2013. Interestingly, a survey carried out by a German newspaper found that 78 percent of Germans believe Germany should stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia – and a further 60 percent want to break off trade ties all together due to human rights violations by the latter.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, according to reports, Sweden's Armed Forces Command (AFC) is pushing the newly elected socialist-green government to significantly increase long-term defence spending. It wants an increase between \$380 million and \$620 million to the spending plan, which is set at about \$5.5 billion in 2015. Sweden's Parliamentary Defence Committee (PDC), also supports increasing the defence budget given the prevailing security scenario. The AFC maintains that the lower \$380 million increase level is the absolute bare minimum amount required to cover the Swedish Armed Force's basic needs in operations and procurement in 2015-2020. Moreover, Sweden's defence Chief Gen. Sverker Goransson has warned the government that if the annual budget remains at \$5.5 billion, the armed forces could not finance key or smaller scale programmes, such as the next-generation Gripen fighter or submarine modernization projects. Goransson underlined the urgent need to provide the armed forces with the resources to do its job, particularly in light of Russia's actions¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ "Report: Germany Halts Arms Exports To Saudis," *Defence News*, January 26, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/01/25/report-germany-halts-arms-exports-saudi-arabia/22317259/>

¹⁰⁴ "Swedish Military Fights for Larger Budget," *Defence News*, January 25, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/budget/2015/01/25/sweden-military-larger-budget/22173811/>

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Ahead of President Obama's India visit, US warns Pakistan; Unified Command reviews border security in J&K; US and UK ask Pakistan to hand over Lakhvi to India.**

The US has asked Pakistan to ensure that there is no cross-border terror incident during President Barack Obama's trip and subtly warned of "consequences" if any such attack is traced back to the country. The warning has been issued keeping the track record of Pakistan-based militant groups that have carried out attacks in India coinciding with high-profile visits from the US.¹⁰⁵

Ahead of President Barack Obama's visit to India later this month, Unified Command on January 20, reviewed security situation along the border in Jammu and Kashmir. The meeting, chaired by Governor NN Vohra, reviewed security situation along IB, LoC and LaC and analysed issues relating to cross border movements and infiltration attempts across the IB and LoC in the state, an official spokesman said. The Governor also called upon the civil and police administration and the security forces to ensure continued close coordination and ensure timely measures for the security of civil population in the frontier belts. While reviewing the conduct of anti-militancy operations, Vohra stressed the vital importance of ensuring against co-lateral damage to the civil population and emphasised the use of increased application of technology to further improve the capability of security agencies.¹⁰⁶

The US and the UK have reportedly asked Pakistan to hand over Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, the mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, to India to improve bilateral ties, or to them for his "independent trial" as several nationals of different countries were killed in the Mumbai attacks.¹⁰⁷

Northeast Insurgency

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **NIA recovers huge cache of arms from Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border; BSF pushes fencing works in Tripura; Counter Insurgency operations led to the arrest of 26 ultras in a single day**

¹⁰⁵ "US Warns Pak of Consequences If Any Terror Attacks Happen During Obama's India Visit", *The Indian Express*, January 19, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/us-warns-pakistan-ensure-no-cross-border-terror-during-barack-obama-visit/>

¹⁰⁶ "Obama's India Visit: Unified Command Reviews Border Security in J&K", *The Economic Times*, January 20, 2015 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/obamas-india-visit-unified-command-reviews-border-security-in-jk/articleshow/45958593.cms>

¹⁰⁷ "US, UK Ask Pakistan To Hand Over Lakhvi to India", *The Indian Express*, January 20, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/neighbours/us-uk-ask-pakistan-to-hand-over-lakhvi-to-india/>

in Assam; Security forces dismantle three NDFB command centres; India, Myanmar to work together against militants.

As part of the investigation into the December 23 violence in Sonitpur district of Assam, the National Investigation Agency claimed to have recovered a huge cache of arms and ammunition from Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border on January 17. The NIA, in a joint operation with the Assam Police and the Army, recovered 2 AK 56 rifles, one HK 33 rifle, 2 grenades, three M 20 rounds, 123 5.56 mm rounds, 223 AK rounds, 2 HK magazines, 5 AK magazines and 3 ammunition pouches. Certain incriminating documents were also recovered in the search. The seizure was made following information by Ajoy Basumatary alias B Buhum, the arrested commander of 3rd Battalion of NDFB (S). It was allegedly under Basumatary direction and leadership that the violence took place in which more than 80 people were killed.¹⁰⁸

To ensure border dominance in Tripura, the BSF authority has pushed a plan to erect barbed wire fencing in four unfenced patches – Sidhai in West district, Chilbasti in Unakoti district, Rajnagar in South district and Sonamura in Sipahijala district. A joint meeting between BSF and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) was held on January 18 to find an amicable solution to the proposed barbed wire fencing near Sidhai BOP which has been lying undone for the past three years. The BGB authority has agreed to the BSF proposal of single row fencing near Sidhai BOP. At Chilbasti in Kailashahar subdivision, a joint inspection of BSF and BGB is expected to take place in the second week of February to push the stalled fencing work there. At Rajnagar area, fencing alignment still remains a contentious issue for the BSF due to objection from its Bangladesh counterpart. The BGB officials have assured to take up the issue with Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Bangladesh to get the proposal cleared as soon as possible”, said the BSF official. In Sonamura subdivision, around 13 km Indo-Bangla border remains unfenced due to various reasons including local objections. “The unfenced border is a serious obstacle for border dominance by the BSF troops. We are on the move to fence the entire Indo-Bangla border in the subdivision with single row fencing”, he said.¹⁰⁹

In yet another major breakthrough in anti-insurgency operations in Assam, 26 ultras were arrested on a single day on January 19, which included 18 members belonging to the Songbijit faction of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) and eight cadres of KLPF. Acting on specific intelligence inputs, the Army unit of Red Horns Division stationed at Udalguri, police and National Investigation Agency (NIA) launched a joint operation along the forest area of Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border and nabbed dreaded ultra Bikunas Narzary alias Birlangbai along with four other hard core militants. An AK 56 rifle with magazine, a 9 mm pistol (foreign made) with holster, twenty-five 7.62 mm live rounds of ammunition, fifty-four 9 mm live rounds of ammunition and a hand grenade were recovered from the possession of the militants. An Army release pointed out that the nabbing of Bikunas Narzary dealt a body blow to the NDFB(S), as he

¹⁰⁸ “NIA Recovers Huge Cache Of Arms From Assam Border”, *The Indian Express*, January 19, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/nia-recovers-huge-cache-of-arms-from-assam-border/>

¹⁰⁹ Sil, Prabir, “BSF Pushes Fencing Works In Tripura”, *The Assam Tribune*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan2015/oth051>

was the self-styled commander of the 13th battalion of NDFB(S). With the nabbing of Bikunas along with his accomplices, it can be said that the top leadership of 13th battalion of NDFB(S) has been wiped off. In another major blow to the NDFB(S), eleven of its cadres were apprehended in a joint operation by troops of the Red Horns Division based on hard intelligence provided by Gajraj Intelligence Unit, from the Panbari forest area in Chirang district. Two pistols, two improvised explosive devices and nine detonators were recovered from the cadres. In yet another operation, troops of the Red Horns Division nabbed NDFB(S) self-styled sergeant Bimal Boro alias Khwobla at Antaibari under Tamulpur Police Station in Baksa district. Meanwhile, based on intelligence provided by the Gajraj Intelligence Unit, Guwahati City police and 175th CRPF battalion apprehended a hardcore NDFB(S) militant in Guwahati. He was identified as Birsing Basumatary. It is suspected that he had entered the city to carry out disruptive activities in view of Republic Day. Also, the Army unit of Diphu Red Horns Division and police apprehended eight suspected KLPF cadres at Gandhipur in east Karbi Anglong in the early hours on January 19. Three pistols, several grenades and ammunition of different weapons were recovered from the nabbed militants.¹¹⁰

Reportedly, the security forces have succeeded in dismantling three out of four command centres of the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) faction led by I.K. Songbijit. Authoritative security sources disclosed that at least 64 hardcore NDFB rebels have been arrested so far and two others killed in the offensive launched after the December 23 massacre. Pointing out that 42 linkmen and sympathisers were also arrested, security sources said that security forces have also recovered 36 sophisticated weapons besides 33 grenades, 1,757 rounds of ammunition, 11 magazines, two IEDs from the NDFB rebels. Informing that NDFB had set up four command centres of four battalions comprising nearly 40 cadres in each command centres, security sources said that there are nearly 106 more NDFB cadres who are evading police offensives. These command centres were created by the military commander B. Bidai who was controlling the entire subversive and extortion-related activities of the outfit, security sources said adding that arrest of Ajo Basumatary alias B. Buhum in Nagaland has disorganised the most dreaded 3rd battalion of the outfit which killed 52 adivasis in Soniutpur district on December 23.¹¹¹

India and Myanmar on January 21 agreed to work together to thwart armed insurgent groups operating in the north-eastern region. This was agreed during talks between Vice President Hamid Ansari and visiting Myanmar First Vice President Sai Mauk Kham at New Delhi. Mauk Kham also held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during which he conveyed his appreciation of the transformation of India's 'Look East' policy to 'Act East'. Mauk Kham arrived in India on January 19 on a five-day visit at the head of a high-level delegation. India has been maintaining high-level contacts with Myanmar, the gateway of its 'Look East' policy with land border connect with Southeast Asia.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ "18 NDFB(S) Men Among 26 Ultras Nabbed in State", *The Assam Tribune*, January 20, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan2015/at051>

¹¹¹ Anand, Manoj, "Three Assam NDFB centres dismantled", *The Asian Age*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.asianage.com/india/three-assam-ndfb-centres-dismantled-298>

¹¹² "India, Myanmar to work together against militants", *The Sentinel*, January 22, 2015 at <http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=215595&dtP=2015-01-22&ppr=1#.VMoK3NKUeE4>

Left-wing Extremism

(January 19-25, 2015)

- **Maoist couple surrenders in Warangal; Kerala plans to distribute Food kits to check Maoist influence; Security forces arrest 3 hardcore Maoists in Jharkhand; Maoist blast derails train services in Orissa; Naxals hijack buses to protest President Obama's visit; Police unearth Maoist arms dumps in Odisha; Suspected Maoists attack government-owned hotel in Kerala.**

A Maoist couple, Bhairaboina Bikshapathi and Pada Rukmini, surrendered before rural SP Ambar Kishore Jha in Warangal on January 20. Presenting them before the media, the SP said Bhairaboina Bikshapathi alias Kiran alias Ramesh joined the Maoists in 2001 under the influence of revolutionary songs. Bikshapathi was involved in various offences, mainly in Chhattisgarh, including killing of CRPF and BSF jawans and decamping with weapons. He was working as Dandakaranya divisional committee member and was carrying 5 lakh reward. The other surrendered Maoist Pada Rukmini alias Sunitha, a member of Dandakaranya area squad, joined the Maoist party in 2006 and married Bikshapathi in 2009.¹¹³

Wary of Maoist influence among adivasis, the Kerala state government is planning to distribute food kits, each worth Rs 100, in vulnerable tribal colonies every day across the state from February under the assumption that only hungry bellies could be swayed by revolutionary ideas. The initiative, however, will benefit only selected adivasi families. In Kollam district, out of the 1550 tribal hamlets only 393 have been chosen. Most of them are from rehabilitated tribal colonies while some belong to the Malamchandaram and Vedar communities. District Panchayat president S Jayamohan said that the decision was taken at a recent high-level meeting held in Thiruvananthapuram.¹¹⁴

In a major offensive against rebels in Jharkhand, security forces, on January 22, arrested two hardcore Maoists and recovered ten guns, bullets and various mobile phones from their hideout. Security forces and police have launched an "all-out operation" against People's Liberation Front of India (PLFI), a breakaway faction of the CPI (Maoist) and the second largest extremist outfit in Jharkhand. Forces are raiding hideouts in Gumla, Simdega, Ranchi and Singhbhum districts of the rebel outfits' hotbed. According to police, PLFI cadres are engaged in collecting levy from contractors, small industrialists, traders and transporters. A police report in 2014 said that PLFI carried out as many incidents as CPI (Maoist).¹¹⁵ Reportedly, a Maoist zonal commander, identified

¹¹³ "Another Maoist Couple Surrenders in W'gal", *The New Indian Express*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/Another-Maoist-Couple-Surrenders-in-Wgal/2015/01/21/article2629260.ece>

¹¹⁴ Unnikrishnan S, "Food Kits to Check Maoist Influence", *The New Indian Express*, January 21, 2015 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/thiruvananthapuram/Food-Kits-to-Check-Maoist-Influence/2015/01/21/article2628823.ece>

¹¹⁵ "Security Forces Arrest Two Hardcore Maoist Rebels In Jharkhand", *Business Standard*, January 22, 2015 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/security-forces-arrest-two-hardcore-maoist-rebels-in-jharkhand-115012201076_1.html

as Madan Rai was also arrested in the joint operation on January 24. A country-made pistol and live cartridges were seized from his possession.¹¹⁶

Ahead of Republic Day, Maoists, on January 23, blasted a railway track in Muniguda in Rayagada district of Orissa, leaving movement of trains affected for several hours along the route. The blast spot was a few hundred metres away from the camp of Central Reserve Police Force's (CRPF's) 8th Battalion. Though the track suffered damage, no casualty was reported from the incident. The outlawed CPI (Maoist) had given a bandh call in five districts of the State East Coast Railway (ECoR), sources said.¹¹⁷

As a mark of protest against US president's visit and observation of the Republic Day, Maoists, on January 25 took two private buses into custody for 2-3 hours in Chhattisgarh's strife-torn Dantewada district. The rebels later released the buses, which had over fifty passengers on board, after fixing banners and messages. They also wrote slogans on the vehicles.¹¹⁸

The Orissa police on December 25 unearthed a huge cache of Maoist weapons at three different places in the Khadisaru jungle near the Ganjam-Kandhamal border in Odisha. Sources said that the arms had been dumped by the Odisha Maobadi Party, led by arrested rebel leader Sabyasachi Panda, whose cadres were still active in Ganjam and the adjoining Kandhamal district. The seized items include three SLRs, 793 rounds of ammunition (318 rounds of SLR, 240 rounds of .303, 206 rounds of 9 mm, 19 rounds of INSAS and ten rounds of .22), 30 magazines (19 INSAS, nine SLR and two of .303), 20 charge clips, two batteries, two battery stands, two steel containers, several pouches and belts, according to DIG (Southern Range), Amitabh Thakur.¹¹⁹

A budget hotel owned by a government undertaking in North Kerala's Wayanad district was attacked allegedly by Maoists in the wee hours on January 25, according to police. The reception counter and restaurant of Tamarind Easy Hotel, at Thirunelli, owned by Kerala Tourism Development Corporation, was vandalized by a six-member gang. They left posters protesting against India visit of US President Barack Obama.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ "Security Forces Arrest Maoist Zonal Commander In Jharkhand", *Business Standard*, January 24, 2015 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/security-forces-arrest-maoist-zonal-commander-in-jharkhand-115012400102_1.html

¹¹⁷ "Maoist Blast Derails Train Services Ahead of R-day", *The Indian Express*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/Maoist-Blast-Derails-Train-Services-Ahead-of-R-day/2015/01/25/article2635675.ece>

¹¹⁸ Khan, Sahar, "Naxals Hijack Buses With 50 Passengers On Board To Protest Against Obama Visit", *Mail Online*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2925892/Naxals-hijack-buses-50-passengers-board-protest-against-Obama-visit.html>

¹¹⁹ Dixit, Rakesh, "Police Unearth Maoist Arms Dump In Odisha", *Mail Online*, January 25, 2015 at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2925875/Police-unearth-Maoist-arms-dump-Odisha.html>

¹²⁰ Philip, Shaju, "Suspected Maoists Attack Govt-Owned Hotel In Kerala's Wayanad District", *The Indian Express*, January 25, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/suspected-maoists-attack-govt-hotel-in-keralas-wayanad-district/>