

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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CONTENTS

In This Issue	Page
I. COUNTRY REVIEWS	2-28
A. South Asia	2-9
B. East Asia	9-10
C. Southeast Asia and Oceania	10-13
D. Russia	13-19
E. United States of America	19-25
II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS	26-28

I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Kabul hopes 4th quadrilateral meeting to pave way for direct talks; Russia to hand over 10,000 Ak-47s to Afghan forces; Gen. Salangi slams ISI for its destructive role in Afghanistan.**

The national unity government on February 22 hoped the fourth quadrilateral meeting scheduled for tomorrow in capital Kabul would pave the ground for direct talks with the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) insurgent groups. Three of the quadrilateral meetings involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China and the US had previously been held in Kabul and Islamabad. Representatives from the four nations in the third meeting on February 6 agreed on a roadmap towards resuming the stalled peace talks with militants. Javed Faisal, the deputy spokesman for Chief Executive Officer (CEO), told *Pajhwok Afghan News* the fourth quadrilateral meeting would take place in Kabul on February 22. “We hope the meeting will yield positive results and pave the ground for a clear mechanism on peace negotiations. We also wish that the time and venue for direct talks with militants will also be decided in the meeting,” he said. Direct talks with Taliban militants would begin after the quadrilateral meeting, Faisal said, adding the Afghan government intended to talk with all armed opposition groups, including Taliban, HIA and the Haqqani Network.¹

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will receive 10,000 Ak-47 assault rifles from Russia on February 24 as part of Moscow’s efforts to equip and bolster the capabilities of the Afghan troops. The delivery of the rifles will be done in a ceremony to be organized in military section of the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. The Afghan National Security Adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar and officials from the Embassy of the Russian Federation are also expected to attend the ceremony. The delivery of the assault rifles is part of Russia’s support to bolster the capabilities of the Afghan security forces to fight the menace of terrorism. Russian President’s special envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov said late in December last year “Russia has been consistently pursuing the policy of providing comprehensive assistance to Afghanistan in the establishment of a peaceful, independent, stable and self-sufficient state, free from terrorism and drugs.” The Afghan government has stepped up efforts to attract the regional as well as global support to equip the Afghan national security forces.²

The former senior deputy interior minister for security Gen. Ayub Salangi slammed Pakistan’s military intelligence – Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) for supporting the anti-government armed militant groups in Afghanistan. Gen. Salangi was speaking during his farewell ceremony in the Ministry of Interior (MoI) compound, a day after President Ghani nominated General Abdul Rahman Rahman to replace him as Senior Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs. He reiterated his stance towards ISI’s interference in Afghanistan by taking into his official *Twitter*

¹ “Kabul Hopes 4th Quadrilateral Meeting to Pave Way for Direct Talk”, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 23, 2016, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=14535

² “Russia to Hand Over 10,000 Ak-47s to Afghan Forces”, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.khaama.com/russia-pulls-back-from-cooperating-with-u-s-on-afghanistan-report-4587>

account which he was usually using to provide regarding the security situation of the country. “ISI continues to play a destructive role in Afghanistan. ISI is responsible for bloodshed, chaos and destruction in Afghanistan,” a *Twitter* post he published earlier today reads. The four star general further added “Without support of ISI, Taliban can’t be this strong. ISI’s support for Taliban, Haqqanis and other terrorist groups is very clear.” He also urged the leaders of the government of national unity to refrain from taking the security institutions to political affairs, saying “As I said in my farewell ceremony at MOI, I urge leaders of NUG not to politicize ANSF, police in particular. Sadly, I experienced the politicization of police in last 16 months or so. ANSF are the real heroes. They need all the support this critical time.”³

Pakistan

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **COAS held discussion with Qatari leadership; National Command Authority calls for strategic restraint pact in S. Asia.**

Army chief General Raheel Sharif met the Qatari leadership in Doha to discuss facilitation in the Afghan reconciliation process, ISPR said. Army Chief General Raheel Sharif who is on an official visit to Qatar separately called on Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani and Qatar Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa al-Thani in Doha on February 22. Matters related to regional security and enhanced bilateral defence cooperation came under discussion during the meetings. Facilitation of reconciliation process in Afghanistan through Qatar office was discussed in detail.⁴

The National Command Authority (NCA) has renewed the proposal for a regional Strategic Restraint Regime as it expressed alarm over India’s growing conventional and nuclear arsenals. The NCA — the principal decision-making body on nuclear issues — at its meeting presided over by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on February 24, “took note of the growing conventional and strategic weapons’ development in the region”, according to a press statement issued by the ISPR. Besides expressing its resolve to do everything, short of entering an arms race, for keeping national security intact, the NCA “re-emphasised Pakistan’s desire for establishing the Strategic Restraint Regime in South Asia”. The need for a sustained dialogue with India for resolution of outstanding disputes was also underscored. The proposal for Strategic Restraint Regime has been on the table since October 1998, but India, which is opposed to a regional mechanism, has always avoided discussions on it.⁵

Bangladesh

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Indian firm wins contract to build Rampal power plant; Bangladesh, US to curb terrorism; Bangladesh, Sweden sign cooperation deal; Forex reserve touches record \$28 billion; AIIB**

³ “Gen. Salangi Slams ISI for Its Destructive Role in Afghanistan”, *Khaama Press*, February 29, 2016, at <http://www.khaama.com/gen-salangi-slams-isi-for-its-destructive-role-in-afghanistan-0208>

⁴ “COAS Held Discussion with Qatari Leadership”, *The Nation*, February 23, 2016, at <http://nation.com.pk/national/23-Feb-2016/coas-discusses-afghan-peace-with-qatari-leadership>

⁵ “National Command Authority Calls for Strategic Restraint Pact in S. Asia”, *Dawn*, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1241802/national-command-authority-calls-for-strategic-restraint-pact-in-s-asia>

bill passed in parliament; Bangladesh Government to support SAARC satellite; Indian Air Force Chief Arup Raha makes official visit to Bangladesh.

Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) won a deal to build the much-debated Rampal coal-fired power plant in Bangladesh. BHEL has turned out as the lowest bidder for the 1,320-megawatt coal-based power plant, said Anwarul Azim, the spokesman for the Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Ltd (BIFPCL), a joint venture set up to build the plant. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$1.8 billion. The construction is expected to start by June this year. BHEL will have to complete the project in 41 months after the financial closure, which is expected to complete in four months. Reportedly, China's Harbin Electric International Company Ltd, which has power projects in Iran, Turkey and Indonesia among others, lost the bid on technical grounds. The *Reuters* report also said the Indian government's external lending arm, the Exim Bank, has backed up BHEL's offer with nearly 70 per cent funding of the project's costs at a soft interest rate of around one per cent above Libor, the leading global benchmark for pricing transactions.⁶

Bangladesh Police and the United States will work together to curb terrorism through sharing intelligence, technology and training, says a press release of Bangladesh Police. Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque and US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat expressed their respective opinions in this regard during a courtesy meeting at Police Headquarters on February 22, 2016.⁷

Bangladesh and Sweden signed a cooperation agreement on poverty alleviation, strengthening democracy, human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development on February 23, 2016. Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh Johan Frisell and Senior Secretary of Economic Relations Division (ERD) Mohammad Mejbahuddin signed the agreement in the capital on behalf of their respective governments. The cooperation agreement is constituted on the basis of the Swedish government's newly adopted Results Strategy for Sweden International Development Corporation with Bangladesh. The Swedish development cooperation, which has been supporting Bangladesh since the latter's independence in 1971, is expected to disburse around \$26 million in this year for various development programmes in Bangladesh.⁸

Bangladesh's foreign currency reserve crossed a record \$ 28 billion on February 25, 2016. According to Kazi Sayedur Rahman, General Manager Forex Reserve and Treasury Management Department of the Bangladesh Bank said, "it is attributed to falling commodity prices, a rise in export and inflowing remittances." "Declining import bills for petroleum oil and food grain also fuelled the reserve," he said. The reserve of \$28 billion is enough to meet the country's import bills for eight months, according to the central bank.⁹

Parliament approves a bill titled "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank Bill, 2016" on February 23, 2016, paving the way for Bangladesh to join the AIIB as a founding member. State Minister for Finance and Planning M.A. Mannan placed the bill with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the

⁶ "Indian Firm Wins Contract To Build Rampal Power Plant", *The Daily Star*, February 23, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/indian-firm-wins-contract-build-rampal-power-plant-576454>.

⁷ "Bangladesh, US To Curb Terrorism", *The Daily Star*, February 23, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/bangladesh-us-curb-terrorism-576595>.

⁸ "Bangladesh, Sweden Sign Cooperation Deal", *The Daily Star*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/bangladesh-sweden-sign-cooperation-deal-659731>.

⁹ "Forex Reserve Touches Record \$28 Billion", *The Daily Star*, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/forex-reserve-touches-record-28-billion-665941>.

chair. The bill approved by the cabinet on December 29, 2015 was passed in voice vote. A number of lawmakers, including Fakhru Islam of Jatiya Party, opposed the bill saying that World Bank (WB) or Asian Development Bank (ADB) may get disappointed if Bangladesh joins the China-based AIIB. In response, the state minister said joining AIIB does not mean that Bangladesh is leaving WB or ADB or any other international donor agencies.¹⁰

The government of Bangladesh will support India's move to launch a 'SAARC Satellite' provided that it would not affect the business and operational frequency of Bangabandhu satellite. From the onset, Bangladesh was with this initiative, but the local authority has some concerns, said Tarana Halim, State Minister for Telecom, before leaving for Barcelona to attend the World Mobile Congress. To resolve the confusion, a specialised committee was formed, which has already given the green light. The committee held several meetings with experts on the possibility of overlapping frequencies between the two satellites, and came to the decision. The telecom division has forwarded the proposal to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the final approval.¹¹

Indian Air Force Chief Arup Raha made a five-day official visit to Bangladesh on February 21, 2016. Air Chief Marshall Raha met Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina at her office on February 23. During the meeting Prime Minister Hasina said that the initiatives on regional cooperation like BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) and BCIM-EC (Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar Economic Corridor) would generate greater economic activities among neighbouring countries, accelerating their development. Terming his visit to Bangladesh significant, the Indian Air Chief said the bilateral relations have reached a new height, adding that the military-to-military cooperation between the two countries has also increased. Raha said India and Bangladesh could work together on disaster management sectors and mentioned that a lot of visits are taking place at military training level between the two neighbours. Bangladesh Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Dr. Gowher Rizvi and Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Harsh Vardhan Shringla were present at the meeting.¹²

Sri Lanka

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **ADB President visits Sri Lanka; Eleventh round of Iran-Sri Lanka trade talks held in Colombo; Sri Lankan army contingent leaves to join UN Interim Force in Lebanon; Mangala Samaraweera attends the UNDP 50th anniversary ministerial meeting; Mangala Samaraweera meets John Kerry; Mangala, Power discuss expanding Lanka's role in peacekeeping; US-Sri Lanka holds first annual partnership dialogue; Prime Minister of New Zealand visits Sri Lanka; Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka sworn in as cabinet minister for regional development.**

¹⁰ "AIIB Bill Passed in Parliament", *The Daily Star*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/aiib-bill-passed-parliament-659839>.

¹¹ Muhammad Zahidul Islam, "Govt To Support Saarc Satellite", *The Daily Star*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/govt-support-saarc-satellite-659851>.

¹² "Indian Air Force Chief Arup Raha in Town", *The Daily Star*, February 22, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/indian-air-force-chief-arup-raha-town-575944>. "Assam, Meghalaya People Could Use Sylhet Airport", *The Daily Star*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/assam-meghalaya-people-could-use-sylhet-airport-659815>.

Asian Development Bank President Takehiko Nakao called on President Maithripala Sirisena on February 23, 2016 at the Presidential Secretariat. Nakao arrived in Sri Lanka on February 22 on a two-day official visit. President held discussions on ADB-funded projects in Sri Lanka. Some of the new projects include a Rural Electrification Project of \$70 million, an SME Credit Line of \$100 million and a Local Government Enhancement Sector Project costing of \$40 million. The ADB also expressed keenness to increase its funding portfolio by more than \$1.2 billion in the next three years. A new Country Partnership Strategy is also on the cards to cover the period 2017-2021.¹³

Iran has agreed to provide technical support to Sri Lanka, the Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen said following the end of the 11th round of Iran-Sri Lanka trade talks in Colombo on February 25. This was the first trade talks to be held with Sri Lanka after international sanctions were lifted on Iran. Iranian Minister of Energy and Water Hamid Chitchiaian, who attended the talks in Colombo, said that the areas of cooperation discussed between both sides included banking and investment, trading, standards, customs and economic cooperation, oil, energy and water, health, science and culture, and other mutually beneficial areas of two sides. According to the Department of Commerce, total trade between Sri Lanka and Iran surpassed \$ 1 billion in 2008 but decreased to \$ 162 million in 2015.¹⁴

The 10th Sri Lanka Army contingent for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNFIL) left the country on February 29. The Sri Lanka Force Protection Unit (SLFPU) is comprised of 150 army personnel including 10 officers and 140 other ranks. The first advance 49 member party of the SLFPU left the country prior to this team on February 16, 2016. Since 2010 the Sri Lanka Army has to-date sent 9 such contingents to serve in Lebanon at the request of the UNIFIL.¹⁵

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mangala Samaraweera concluded a three day visit to New York to attend the UNDP 50th Anniversary Ministerial meeting held at the UN Headquarters, from the February 21-24. The Minister's visit commenced with a courtesy call on Helen Clark, Administrator of the UNDP, where he underscored the strong partnership between the organisation and the Sri Lankan Government and its people that had existed since the 1960s. Discussions included ways and means of enhancing this cooperative relationship, to meet the development challenges in Sri Lanka's current peace building environment. Samaraweera also met with Jeffrey Feltman, United Nations Under-Secretary General at the Department of Political Affairs, to discuss current peace building mechanisms and ongoing efforts to enhance Sri Lanka's peacekeeping presence around the world. At a luncheon meeting hosted by the Permanent Mission of Sweden in honour of Minister Samaraweera, together with key donor countries including US, Australia, Japan, and South Korea, he elaborated on Sri Lanka's Post Conflict Peace Building mechanisms, and the importance of development, stating that all stakeholders must feel that their development was being cared for and their lives were improving. He said that the relationship between peace and development was holistic and dynamic, and the faster the peace dividend the greater and faster the likelihood of a lasting peace. During the UNDP 50th Anniversary Ministerial Meeting, Minister Samaraweera served as a principal panellist at the thematic breakout session titled 'Preventing Violent Conflict, Building Peaceful Societies,' where he elaborated on the link between development and peace.

¹³ "ADB President Calls on President", *PMD News*, February 23, 2016, at <http://www.pmdnews.lk/adb-president-calls-president/>.

¹⁴ "Iran Agrees to Provide Technical Support to Sri Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, February 25, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/02/25/iran-agrees-to-provide-technical-cooperation-to-sri-lanka/>.

¹⁵ "Army Contingent Leaves To Join UN Interim Force in Lebanon", *Colombo Gazette*, February 29, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/02/29/army-contingent-leaves-to-join-un-interim-force-in-lebanon/>.

During his visit, he also met the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway Borge Brende, and the Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation of Sweden, Kristina Persson to discuss matters of mutual interest. The Minister further held meetings with the Permanent Representative of the USA to the United Nations, Ambassador Samantha Power, and Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador Michele Sison.¹⁶

US Secretary of State John Kerry, speaking to reporters after meeting with his Sri Lankan counterpart Mangala Samaraweera, said that Sri Lanka has taken very impressive continuing steps towards reconciliation. Kerry said that his meeting with Samaraweera was taking place on the eve of a Strategic Dialogue with Sri Lanka, which will be led by US Under Secretary Tom Shannon. "Their efforts to try to address the regional issues, and most importantly, to make peace in their own country are very, very significant. And we really welcome you here," Kerry said. Samaraweera, who is in Washington to attend the US-Lanka strategic dialogue, said the relationship between the two countries has elevated recently. "And that is why I'm looking forward for the inaugural meeting of the U.S.-Sri Lanka Partnership Dialogue, which I'm sure will go – which will further strengthen and broaden the relationship between our two countries," he said.¹⁷

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mangala Samaraweera met the US Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and discussed issues related to Sri Lanka. During the talks the top US official and Samaraweera had also discussed the possibility of expanding Sri Lanka's role in UN peacekeeping operations. Samaraweera, who was in the US, also met other foreign diplomats based in New York and briefed them on the latest developments in Sri Lanka. Samaraweera attended a discussion at the US Institute of Peace, co-sponsored by the Heritage Foundation, on how the initiatives to advance reconciliation, post-conflict development and stronger democratic institutions are progressing.¹⁸

The first US-Sri Lanka Annual Partnership Dialogue was held in Washington on February 26, 2016 with the participation of Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera. US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon led the US delegation in the dialogue. The two sides discussed several issues including democratic governance, development cooperation, people-to-people ties, economic cooperation, security cooperation, international and regional affairs, and other issues of mutual interest.¹⁹

Sri Lanka and New Zealand signed a partnership agreement for the Sri Lanka Dairy Excellence Training Initiative between the Sri Lanka Ministry of Rural Economic Affairs and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Dairy Cooperation Arrangement (DCA), which was signed in November 2013. The agreement was signed following bilateral talks between President Maithripala Sirisena and the visiting New Zealand Prime Minister, John Key on February 24, 2016. Secretary, Ministry of Rural Economic Affairs, Daya Ekanayake signed the MOU on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka and New Zealand High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Grahame Morton signed on behalf of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A Letter of

¹⁶ "Government Says National Consultative Process Underway", *Colombo Gazette*, February 25, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/02/25/government-says-national-consultative-process-underway/>.

¹⁷ "Kerry Tells Mangala US Happy with Reconciliation Efforts", *Colombo Gazette*, February 26, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/02/26/kerry-tells-mangala-us-happy-with-reconciliation-efforts/>.

¹⁸ "Mangala, Power Discuss Expanding Lanka's Role in Peacekeeping", *Colombo Gazette*, February 24, 2016, <http://colombogazette.com/2016/02/24/mangala-power-discuss-expanding-lankas-role-in-peacekeeping/>.

¹⁹ "Several Issues Discussed at First Annual US-Lanka Partnership Dialogue", *Colombo Gazette*, February 27, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/02/27/several-issues-discussed-at-first-annual-us-lanka-partnership-dialogue/>.

Intent was also signed to gift a second baby elephant to Auckland Zoo. Delivering a media statement after conclusion of bilateral discussions with President Maithripala Sirisena, John Key said that he first visited Sri Lanka in 2013 for the Commonwealth Summit and in the current visit he personally noticed the vast transformations taken place in the country. Prime Minister of New Zealand John Phillip Key described Sri Lanka as the ‘Shining Light of Asian Region’. He said there are enormous opportunities available in Sri Lanka for New Zealand entrepreneurs and investors.²⁰

Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka, was sworn in as the Cabinet Minister for Regional Development before President Maithripala Sirisena at the Presidential Secretariat on February 25, 2016.²¹

Maldives

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **President Yameen establishes national counter terrorism centre; Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon visits the UAE; CMAG suggests six things to the Maldives along with freeing political prisoners.**

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has established the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) in order to combat the growing threat of radicalisation and extremism in the Maldives. The NCTC has been mandated to act as the national focal point on all counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism efforts. The centre will formulate counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism guidelines and procedures based on the analysis of international benchmarks and best practices. NCTC is set to gather and analyse intelligence, from all state agencies, on terrorism activities and inform relevant state authorities. It will also seek to identify radicalised elements within the communities and run targeted rehabilitation programmes to those in need. The Centre will coordinate with the relevant state agencies and social NGO’s in eradicating the threat of terrorism and radicalism in the country.²²

Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon made a 2-day official visit to United Arab Emirates (UAE) on February 27 on the invitation by the country’s Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Dunya Maumoon met with Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and handed over a letter from President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayeh Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Abu Dhabi. Discussions between the two ministers focused on ways to further strengthen the close bilateral ties between the two countries especially in areas of trade and investment. Minister Dunya was accompanied by Abdullah Hameed, Non-Resident Ambassador of Maldives to UAE and Maryam Bassama Farooq, Assistant Director at Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the visit, Minister Dunya met with the Maldivians in a special reception hosted in UAE for them.²³

²⁰ “New Zealand, Sri Lanka Sign Agreement To Enhance Dairy Cooperation”, *PMD News*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.pmdnews.lk/new-zealand-sri-lanka-sign-agreement-enhance-dairy-cooperation/>. “Sri Lanka is the Shining Light of Asian Region – New Zealand Prime Minister”, *PMD News*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.pmdnews.lk/sri-lanka-shining-light-asian-region-new-zealand-prime-minister/>.

²¹ “Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka Sworn in as Cabinet Minister for Regional Development”, *PMD News* February 25, 2016, at <http://www.pmdnews.lk/field-marshal-sarath-fonseka-sworn-cabinet-minister-regional-development/>.

²² “President Establishes National Counter Terrorism Centre”, *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=16491>.

²³ “Foreign Minister Dunya Meets with the Foreign Minister of UAE”, *SunOnline*, February 28, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36480>. “Dhunya Meets with Maldivians Living in UAE”, *SunOnline*, February 28, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36462>.

Instead making a definitive action against the Maldives, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) has proposed six things for the Maldives at the Extraordinary Meeting by the CMAG held on February 24. A statement issued by the Commonwealth regarding the meeting said that CMAG believes it is important to oversee if the country is continuing to do the listed actions. And so the CMAG proposed an all-party talk initiated by the Government and granting freedom all the political prisoners in the country. It also includes taking steps to improve the judicial system and bring a halt to the terrorism charges to suppress the political debate. In the meeting, Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon extended the invitation to the Commonwealth to appoint a Special Envoy for the Maldives to help the country in accelerating its democratisation process. The Foreign Ministry reports that Minister Dunya and Attorney General Mohamed Anil also briefed the CMAG about the Government's on-going collaboration with the UN and the European Union in further strengthening the justice sector in the meeting.²⁴

B. East Asia

China

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Deep seafloor exploration Law adopted by China; China upset with THAAD deployment news; Chinese outpost in Djibouti begins infrastructure work; Beijing to get 30 more air monitoring stations.**

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) passed the first law on deep seafloor resource exploration to protect the maritime environment and ensure sustainable exploitation. This legislation will come in effect on May 1. According to the Law, "the nation will protect the rightful interests of Chinese citizens and organizations in their search for resources and in deep sea surveys".²⁵

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as a response to the United States decision to deploy the THAAD missile defence system in the Republic of Korea said that, "We believe China's legitimate security concerns must be taken into account, and a convincing explanation must be provided to China. I don't think it's too much to ask. It's a reasonable position". United States and South Korea have already started the preliminary talks to discuss the THAAD deployment.²⁶

The Chinese government has started building infrastructure of the People's Liberation Army first overseas support facilities in Djibouti. According to the Ministry of National Defence spokesperson,

²⁴ "CMAG Suggests Six Things to the Maldives Along with Freeing Political Prisoners", *SunOnline*, February 24, 2016 at <http://english.sun.mv/36437>. "Government Invites Commonwealth To Appoint Special Envoy to Maldives", *SunOnline*, February 24, 2016 at <http://english.sun.mv/36438>.

²⁵ "China Adopts First Law on Deep Seafloor Exploration", *China Daily*, February 26, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/26/content_23661543.htm, accessed on February 29, 2016

²⁶ "China Urges US To Fully Explain Missile Defence System Deployment", By Zhang Yunbi, *China Daily*, February 26, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/26/content_23656224.htm, accessed on February 29, 2016

“currently, the construction of infrastructure of the support facilities has started, and the Chinese side has dispatched part of the personnel to Djibouti for relevant works”.²⁷

Chinese government has decided to double the air monitoring stations in Beijing according to the *Xinhua state news agency*. The government has decided to install another 30 new monitoring stations. Currently there are 35 stations to monitor air quality in Beijing.²⁸

C. Southeast Asia & Oceania

Southeast Asia

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **ASEAN Foreign Ministers retreat; ASEAN disaster management; Chinese naval warships visited Cambodia; Singapore Police arrested and deported four Indonesians en route to Syria; Malaysian PM facing criticism over alleged involvement in corruption; US-China war of words to continue on South China Sea; Cyclone Winston hit Fiji; Australian Defence White Paper mentions an increase in the military spending.**

As the ASEAN Foreign Ministers met for the annual retreat at Vientiane, Lao PDR, concerns about ‘war of words’ between China and Southeast Asian countries were raised. In response, General Wang Jiaocheng of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) said that he is committed to protect maritime security and ensure Beijing’s rights in South China Sea. The retreat happened in the last week of February where the foreign ministers from ASEAN issued a joint communique expressing their concerns over the ongoing tension in South China Sea. Lao PDR’s Foreign Minister Thongloun Sisoulith said, “The year 2016 is a deeply meaningful year, since it is the starting point of the ASEAN community and the implementation of the ASEAN community Vision 2025 and the blueprints. We are mindful of the challenges and the opportunities ahead of us”. Besides South China Sea, the ministers also discussed about ASEAN community which was established on December 31, 2015. Following the official launch of the ASEAN Community, this retreat was the first ASEAN meeting, hosted by the current chair, Lao PDR.²⁹

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

²⁷ “PLA Outpost in Djibouti Starts Infrastructure Construction”, By Zhang Yunbi, *China Daily*, February 25, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-02/25/content_23646131.htm, accessed on February 29, 2016

²⁸ “Beijing Set To Double Air Monitoring Stations”, *China Daily*, February 23, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/23/content_23599774.htm, accessed on February 29, 2016

²⁹ Khamid, Hetty Musfirah Abdul, “Strengthening ASEAN Community Vision on Agenda at Laos Retreat”, *Channel News Asia*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/strengthening-asean/2551716.html>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

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

attempt to homogenise but rather synchronize the different mechanisms that exist for disaster response.³⁰

Three Chinese warships carrying about 1,000 crew members paid a visit to Sihanoukville on February 22 to take part in five days of naval exercises with the Cambodian navy. They visited Koh Tang, Koh Rong Sanloem and Koh Russei Islands. The visit was aimed at enhancing maritime security. Surprisingly, just three days before this visit, Japanese naval ships too visited Sihanoukville. The naval visits came at a particularly difficult time for Japan and China as both are seeking for support in their expedition for control of the East Sea. Multiple Asian nations have expressed that China should not build landing strips and warship docks on disputed islands in the South China Sea, a crucial shipping route for an estimated \$5 trillion in oil and manufacturing tankers per year.³¹

Four Indonesians were deported from Singapore while trying to fly to Syria. The quartets were aged between 15 and 49 and were arrested by the Singaporean authority on February 21. Indonesian police spokesman Agus Rianto told *AFP* that "...we are now investigating the case to find out more." They were believed to have linkages with Jamaah Anshorut Daulah, an Islamic radical outfit. Indonesian counter-terrorism unit is investigating the matter. The alleged four are believed to be followers of Aman Abdurrahman, a radical Indonesian hardliner preacher who is currently in custody for terrorism. According to reports, he had allegedly motivated hundreds of Indonesians to join Islamic State (IS). Singapore's Ministry of Affairs confirmed the deportation by declaring the following,

"MHA confirms that four Indonesians were deported to Indonesia after investigations revealed that they had plans to make their way to Syria to fight for ISIS."

Before this incident, the Indonesian police arrested about 30 suspected extremists who were allegedly conducting training on a remote mountain in Java Island. Till date, around 500 Indonesians have joined IS to fight in Syria and about 100 of them are now back at home.³²

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak is facing a lot of criticism over his alleged role in the scandal revolving around 1Malaysia Development Bhd., or 1MDB, set up by him in 2009 to augment economic growth. It was alleged that Mr. Razak has illegally received money from banks, businesses and other agencies to 1MDB just before the 2013 national election in which, his party, UMNO got a narrow victory. As the ruling party and Mr. Razak are not ready to accept the allegations, they have chosen to shut those mouths which are critical of them. Former deputy prime minister of Malaysia Mr. Muhyiddin who was also holding an important position in the party was removed from his government and party. Another journalist who published a long report on Mr. Razak's alleged involvement in the case in an open online source was summoned to the police station to face questions. Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director of Human Rights Watch mentioned, "Apparently,

³⁰ Siswo, Sujadi, "ASEAN Develops Joint Disaster Response Plan for Better Emergency Aid", *Channel News Asia*, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/asean-develops-joint/2548678.html>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

³¹ "Chinese Warships Dock in Sihanoukville", *Khmer Times*, February 22, 2016, at <http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/21723/chinese-warships-dock-in-sihanoukville/>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

³² "4 Indonesians Allegedly Planning To Join IS Deported from Singapore", *Channel News Asia*, February 23, 2016, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/4-indonesians-allegedly/2539342.html>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

Najib is willing to sacrifice Malaysia's prior respect for freedom of online expression if it means he can successfully stifle critical reporting about his government's policies."³³

Admiral Harry Harris, the head of the US Navy's Pacific Command, told a hearing of the House of Representatives armed services committee that US will 'fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows'. He said this in the context of the US freedom of navigation operation in the South China Sea. He further said that "We must continue to operate in the South China Sea to demonstrate that that water space and the air above it is international". These comments coincided with a visit by Mr. Wang Yi, China's foreign minister to the US. China's growing militarisation of South China Sea can be seen as one of the reasons of increasing US involvement in the region. While asked, what more US can do to prevent Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, Admiral Harris said, "We could consider putting another [attack] submarine out there, we could put additional destroyers forward ... there are a lot of things we could do, short of putting a full carrier strike group in the western Pacific".³⁴ Before Mr. Wang Yi's visit to the US to meet US Secretary of State John Kerry, China was asked whether both sides will discuss the militarisation of South China Sea issue. In response, China's foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying mentioned, US should not use the issue of military facilities on the islands as a "pretext to make a fuss". In addition, she said, "The U.S. is not involved in the South China Sea dispute, and this is not and should not become a problem between China and the United States".³⁵

Cyclone Winston has killed at least 42 people and left around 8000 people homeless in Fiji. Fijian government officials claimed that the powerful cyclone brought winds of over 320km/h (200mph), torrential rain and waves of up to 12m (40ft), destroyed many buildings in parts of the main Viti Levu and Koro islands of Fiji. Ahmad Sami, the acting head of the Red Cross's Pacific office, informed *AFP news agency* that the death toll numbers will continue to change with gradual access to information and better communications. India, Australia, New Zealand and European Union started helping the Pacific nation with aid.³⁶

Under the new defence plan, as published in the Australian Defence White Paper 2016, the country's defence spending will comprise 2 per cent of Australia's GDP by 2021 and military spending will grow by A\$29.9b (\$21.4b, £15.4b) over next 10 years. Around 25 per cent of the additional spending will be put towards the most "comprehensive regeneration of our Navy", mentioned the Australian Prime Minister Turnbull. He further said, "[This] is a plan to become more powerful on land and in the skies, and more commanding both on the seas and beneath them. It is a program to be more resilient in the cyberspace, to be more innovative with technology, and to have greater situational awareness thanks to our advanced intelligence capabilities". The white paper also mentions about an increase in personnel of around 2,500 to a total of 62,400 across the Australian Defence Force. The white paper on defence identified three strategic defence interests for Australia, namely, securing

³³ Wright, Tom, "Malaysia Leader Najib Razak Lashes Out Against His Critics in Party and Media", *The Wall Street Journal*, February 28, 2016, at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/malaysia-leader-lashes-out-against-his-critics-in-party-and-media-1456500740>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

³⁴ "South China Sea: US May Consider Sending More Destroyers To Patrol Islands", *The Guardian*, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/south-china-sea-us-may-consider-sending-more-destroyers-to-patrol-islands>, accessed on March 28, 2016.

³⁵ Richard Borsuk, "China Signals No South China Sea Backdown as Foreign Minister Goes to U.S.", *Reuters*, February 23, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-china-usa-idUSKCN0VV0RD>, accessed on March 28, 2016.

³⁶ "Cyclone Winston: Fears for Isolated Fiji Communities as Death Toll Jumps", *BBC News*, February 24, 2016, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35647854>, accessed on March 28, 2016.

Australia's northern borders and communication lines; ensuring security in its immediate region and maintaining a "rules-based global order", particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. The last two ones reiterate Australia's commitment to the US and articulate incongruity on China, by talking about China's land reclamation activities in South China Sea.³⁷

D. Russia

Russia: National

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov announces retirement from active politics; Most Russian monotown residents say economic situation unbearable; Russian Constitutional Court considers easing migrant registration punishment; Novatek wants equal conditions with Gazprom for gas supplies to the domestic market; Privatizing Rosneft can fetch US\$ 6.5 billion; Russia to start develop light multi-role planes for Arctic; Putin approves higher gasoline and diesel excise rates from April 1; Labour Minister says 500,000 Russians face unemployment.**

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has said that the time has come for him to step down. He stated 'at present, to prevent them using me, my name against my people, I think the leadership of our state should find someone else (...) My time has come. Everyone has their limits'. He dismissed a conjecture that he might be transferred to Moscow to work as a government minister. Kadyrov added that he is going to pursue his personal interests in the future.³⁸

A total of 59.8 per cent of residents of Russia's single-industry towns consider their socio-economic situation unbearable or hardly bearable. This was revealed by *RBC newspaper* that cited a poll by the Federal Guard Service (FSO). 3.9 per cent of respondents said the socio-economic situation in their town was favourable while 31.3 per cent said that the conditions in their town were normal. In addition to socio-economic conditions, respondents were asked to assess their own financial situation. According to the results, 5 per cent of the residents of monotowns believe that they are living below the poverty line and 37.7 per cent consider themselves poor. The poll also revealed that almost 36 per cent of respondents think that it is nearly impossible to find a decent job in their town. The poll was conducted in December 2015 among 55,600 people in 201 towns. There are currently 319 monotowns in Russia with a total population of 14 million people.³⁹

The Russian Constitutional Court is considering easing punishment for migrant registration violations in the Moscow and the Leningrad regions. The decision was made after a Moldovan national Mikhail Tsurkan filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court, claiming that the

³⁷ "Australia To Boost Defence Spending", *BBC News*, February 25, 2016, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-35657021>, accessed on March 28, 2016.

³⁸ "Kadyrov Says He Seeks Retirement To Devote Himself To His Family And Study Islam", *Interfax*, February 29, 2016 at <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12793>

³⁹ "Most Russian Monotown Residents Say Economic Situation Unbearable", *The Moscow Times*, February 25, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/most-russian-monotown-residents-say-economic-situation-unbearable/560656.html>

deportation of migrants who failed to complete the necessary paperwork in time was a violation of the Russian Constitution.⁴⁰

Russia's largest independent gas producer Novatek is interested in equal economic conditions with gas giant Gazprom on the domestic market. At present, Gazprom is the single owner of the Unified system of gas supply in Russia. Under the Russian law, it is fully responsible for the reliability and security of gas supplies in the country. Earlier, Deputy Energy Minister Kirill Molodtsov had said that his ministry plans to complete work on the concept of development of the Russian domestic gas market by May 1. The concept is expected to include the idea of 'guarantee-supplies' in the domestic gas market.⁴¹

Deputy Finance Minister Yuri Zubarev has said, on February 26, that privatisation of Rosneft can bring around 490 billion roubles (US\$ 6.5 billion) to the federal budget. Privatisation is one of the measures discussed by the government to stabilize the economic situation and to replenish the federal budget. The Government has also talked about cutting federal spending by 10 per cent, increasing excise duties on petrol from April 1, 2016, and increasing dividends from state-owned companies.⁴²

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has said, on February 26, that Russia will start research and development work on a whole family of light multi-role planes for the Arctic in 2016. The planes are scheduled to be delivered in 2016. According to Rogozin's estimates, about 135 light planes seating up to 19 passengers will be required up to 2030 for meeting transport needs in the Arctic.⁴³

Russian President Vladimir Putin has, on February 29, signed the law increasing the excise rates on motor gasoline, diesel fuel, straight-run gasoline and middle distillates from April 1, 2016. As such, the excise on Class 5 motor gasoline effective from April 1 to December 31, 2016 will be 10,130 roubles (US\$ 133.2) a tonne. According to the estimates of the Finance Ministry, fuel prices will go up by 5 per cent and additional revenues of the federal budget will be about 90 billion roubles (US\$ 1.2 billion) by the end of 2016. This is the second rise in Russia's excise rates in 2016. Euro 5 gasoline excise rate was increased by 36.1 per cent and diesel fuel excise rate by 20.3 per cent in January 2016.⁴⁴

Labour Minister Maxim Topilin has said, on March 2, that half a million Russians stand to lose their jobs in 2016. He added that 'individual industries, such as car manufacturing, may see sharper increases of unemployment'. The number of Russians living below the official poverty line increased

⁴⁰ "Russian Constitutional Court Considers Easing Migrant Registration Punishment", *The Moscow Times*, February 25, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-constitutional-court-considers-easing-migrant-registration-punishment/560589.html>

⁴¹ "Russia's Novatek Wants Equal Conditions with Gazprom for Gas Supplies on Domestic Market", *Itar-Tass*, February 29, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/859743>

⁴² "Privatizing Russia's Rosneft Could Bring Around \$6.5 Bln To Budget — Finance Ministry", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/859187>

⁴³ "Russia will Start Developing Light Multi-Role Planes for Arctic In 2016 — Deputy PM", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/859091>

⁴⁴ "President Putin Approves Higher Gasoline And Diesel Excise Rates from April 1 – Kremlin", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/859606>

to 20.3 million by September, 2015, according to data released by state statistics service Rosstat in 2015.⁴⁵

Russia: International

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Syrian jihadist groups claim their car bomb killed many Russian Generals; Putin and Assad discuss Syrian cease-fire deal; Turkey accuses Russia of fresh airspace violation; Kremlin 'regrets' rejection by UN of Russia's Syrian resolution; Russia invites China to take part in Arctic sea route project; Russia presents an investment project on small-scale power generation to BRICS Bank; Russia to promote normalization of Arab countries' relations with Iran; Memorandum on India's joining the SCO to be signed at SCO summit in Tashkent; Russian Railways offers cooperation on high speed railways to Japanese companies; Russia and Egypt discuss contract to supply equipment for Mistral warships; Russian military conducts anti-terrorist drills in Tajikistan; Russia to continue assisting Afghanistan in equipping its security forces; Russia threatens counter-measures after U.S. extends sanctions; Abe 'snubs' Obama over Russia visit; Iraq says it positively assesses Russia's role in Syrian settlement.**

Jihadist opposition groups in Syria have claimed to have set off a car bomb at a Russian military base in Latakia that resulted in the death of several Russian generals. A spokesperson for the Ahrar al-Sham opposition group has said, on February 25, that its fighters along with members of Bayan movement and jihadists inside the Russian base detonated the car bomb after spotting a gathering of senior Russian officers at the base. The Kremlin has not commented on the report.⁴⁶

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation with Syrian President Bashar Assad on February 24 wherein they discussed the cessation of hostilities in Syria from February 27. The Kremlin's press service said in a statement that 'the Presidents discussed various aspects of the Syrian crisis in light of the Russian-U.S. agreement on the partial cease-fire... Bashar Assad considered the agreement's terms to be a big step toward political regulation of the crisis.' Earlier, Russia and the United States agreed to halt military operations in Syria from February 27, though the deal would not concern Russia's fight against Islamic State and other terrorist groups. Meanwhile, Russian Presidential spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov has said that joint work on the Syrian problem may improve relations between Russia and the United States and increase their level of trust.⁴⁷

Turkish President Recep Erdogan has claimed that Russian military airplanes entered Turkey's airspace on February 24. Relations between Russia and Turkey have deteriorated since November

⁴⁵ "Labor Minister Topolin: 500,000 Russians Face Unemployment", *The Moscow Times*, March 2, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/labor-minister-topolin-500-000-russians-face-unemployment/561194.html>

⁴⁶ "Syrian Jihadist Groups Claim Their Car Bomb Killed Russian Generals", *The Moscow Times*, February 25, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/syrian-jihadist-groups-claim-their-car-bomb-killed-russian-generals/560639.html>

⁴⁷ "Putin and Assad Discuss Syrian Cease-fire Deal", *The Moscow Times*, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-and-assad-discuss-syrian-cessate-fire-deal/560580.html>

when a Turkish fighter jet shot down a Russian Su-24 warplane after it allegedly violated Turkish airspace.⁴⁸

Russian Presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said, on February 22, that the Kremlin regrets the UN Security Council's rejection of Russia's resolution on Syrian sovereignty. Russia had presented a draft resolution that called for an end to cross-border shelling in Syria, respect for the country's sovereignty and halt plans for foreign ground invasion into Syria. Peskov added that 'Russia will continue its consistent, transparent and understandable policy of ensuring stability, territorial integrity and fight with terrorism in Syria'.⁴⁹

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has said that Russia wants China to participate in constructing railways to transport cargo to ports on the Arctic or Northern Sea Route. He stated 'integrated development of the Northern Sea Route guarantees the security of year-round cargo shipments both foreign and domestic. In fact, we can say now that this is not just the economic Silk Road but the cool [Arctic] Silk Road'. Russia wants to increase shipping capacity along the route from the current four million tons to 80 million tons over the next 15 years. The government has also ordered a maritime traffic regulation system and protection of the seas against pollution.⁵⁰

Russia has, on February 26, presented its first investment project on small-scale power generation development to the BRICS New Development Bank. Russia's Minister of Finance and Chairman of Bank's Board of Governors Anton Siluanov stated that the 'project is categorized with energy projects - development of small-scale power generation in Karelia. This is hydropower generation making possible to provide our cities, townships and industry with power'.⁵¹

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on February 26, that Russia is prepared to promote further normalization of Arab countries' relations with Iran. He stated 'we believe this is a very important goal as such. Its achievement would help move towards the settlement of various crises in the region, including those in Syria, Yemen and a number of others. This is the aim of our well-known concept of ensuring security in the area of the Persian Gulf. We will keep advancing the corresponding initiative in order to eventually create the necessary 'critical mass' for launching a specific dialogue on all these issues'. Mr. Lavrov attended the third ministerial-level meeting of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum.⁵²

Russian President's special envoy for SCO affairs Bakhtiyer Khakimov has said, on February 26, that a memorandum on India's joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is expected to be signed during the SCO summit in Tashkent, scheduled to be held during June 23-24, 2016. He stated 'draft memorandums have been coordinated at the level of national coordinators...there is a

⁴⁸ "Turkey's Erdogan Accuses Moscow of Fresh Airspace Violation", *The Moscow Times*, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/turkeys-erdogan-accuses-moscow-of-fresh-airspace-violation/560583.html>

⁴⁹ "Kremlin 'Regrets' Rejection by UN of Russia's Syria Resolution", *The Moscow Times*, February 22, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/kremlin-regrets-rejection-by-un-of-russias-syria-resolution/560215.html>

⁵⁰ "Moscow Invites Beijing To Take Part in Arctic Sea Route Project", *RT*, February 22, 2016 at <https://www.rt.com/business/324973-russia-china-sea-route/>

⁵¹ "Russia Presents First Investment Project on Small-Scale Power Generation to BRICS Bank", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/859117>

⁵² "Russia To Promote Normalization of Arab Countries' Relations with Iran — FM", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/859119>

decision to refer these drafts to the partners and later we will discuss these drafts with them in an established order'.⁵³

Russian Railways suggests that Japanese companies consider cooperation in terms of creating high speed railways in Russia. This was stated by the Chief Executive Officer of the Russian railways, Oleg Belozerov on February 29. He stated 'experience of Japanese colleagues in the field of construction and operation of high-speed rail lines is important for us... we invite Japan's companies to consider an opportunity of cooperating in this promising area for us'. Russian Railways plan to build over 4,000 kms of high speed railways.⁵⁴

Russia and Egypt have, on February 29, discussed the details of a contract to supply Cairo with communication and control systems for Mistral-class helicopter carriers although no final decision has yet been made. Russia had ordered the Mistral-class helicopter carriers from France in summer 2011. However, in 2014 France froze the delivery of warships amid the Ukrainian conflict. In 2015, Russia and France reached an agreement on terminating the contract and the Mistral warships were then purchased by Egypt.⁵⁵

Antiterrorist exercises have been conducted at Russia's Lyaur military range in Dushanbe on February 29. A spokesman for the Russian Central Military District Nikolay Berkalov stated 'reconnaissance teams of the 201st military base were involved in the simulated terrorist headquarters' seek and destroy mission'. The 201st Russian military base was created in 2004 on the premises of the 201st division and numbers 6,000 officers and soldiers. It is the largest Russian military contingent abroad. The military units of the base are deployed in Dushanbe, Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab.⁵⁶

Russian Foreign Ministry has said, on February 29, that Russia will continue to render assistance to Afghanistan in equipping national security forces for the fight against terrorism and drug threat. It stated 'a large batch of Russian small arms and ammunition for the needs of the Afghan Interior Ministry has been delivered to Afghanistan gratis through the Russian Interior Ministry. In view of this, the Afghan authorities have expressed gratitude to the Russian leadership. We reaffirm our readiness to continue cooperation with Afghanistan in fighting against terrorism and the drug threat both on the bilateral basis and in cooperation with foreign partners and international organizations. We will continue to render assistance to Kabul in establishing and equipping the combat-capable national security forces, in training the personnel for the Afghan law enforcement agencies, including on the basis of specialized Russian universities and colleges'.⁵⁷

The Russian Foreign Ministry has expressed regret over the extension of sanctions by the United States and said Moscow reserves the right to retaliate with counter-measures. It stated 'it is regrettable that the United States continues to enthusiastically play with sanctions against Russia, which they have used for two years already, trying to deflect responsibility for the coup d'état in

⁵³ "Memorandum on India's Joining SCO to be Signed at SCO Summit in Tashkent", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/859116>

⁵⁴ "Russian Railways Offers Cooperation on High Speed Railways To Japanese Companies", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/859569>

⁵⁵ "Russia, Egypt Discuss Contract To Supply Equipment For Mistral Warships", *Itar-Tass*, February 29, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/859570>

⁵⁶ "Russian military conduct antiterrorist drills in Tajikistan", *Itar-Tass*, February 29, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/defense/859627>

⁵⁷ "Russia To Continue To Assist Afghanistan in Equipping Security Forces — Foreign Ministry", *Itar-Tass*, February 29, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/859772>

Ukraine, and now for the sad consequences of their ruling Kiev clients'. The ministry also said that the extension of U.S. sanctions does not help 'the regulation of the Ukrainian crisis, stalled because of the unwillingness of Kiev to fulfil the Minsk agreements. But it has a devastating effect on Russian-American relations'. Earlier, U.S. President Barack Obama signed a decree extending the sanctions against Russia until March 6, 2017.⁵⁸

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has snubbed an appeal by U.S. President Barack Obama, who asked that he not visit Russia in May. Obama made the appeal by phone on February 9, but Abe rejected it and will press ahead as planned with a visit to the Russian city of Sochi for talks with President Vladimir Putin.⁵⁹

Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister Nazar Issa Abdulhadi Al-Khairullah, during a meeting with Russian State Duma's International Affairs Committee Alexey Pushkov, has said that the country positively assesses Russia's role in the political settlement of Syrian conflict. The meeting took place in Moscow on February 26. The two sides also discussed the prospect of observing ceasefire, role of regional powers and coordination of the list of terrorist organizations.⁶⁰

India-Russia Relations

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Russian paratroopers to take part in international drills in India; India okays agreement with Russia for railways modernisation; Indian and Russian companies to form joint venture to manufacture heavy equipment for the steel and mining sectors.**

Russian paratroopers have arrived at a military base in Pune on February 29. They will take part in peacekeeping operation drills and humanitarian demining manoeuvres that are scheduled to take place from March 1 to March 8. The exercise involves troops from 18 countries. In November 2015, Russia and India had held the joint Indra exercises that focused on counterterrorism operations. In mid-December, the joint Russia-India naval drills, Indra Navy, took place in the Bay of Bengal wherein they practiced the protection of surface ships.⁶¹

Keeping in view the challenges faced by India in modernising the railways system, the government has on March 2 approved a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Russia. This will help get technical input on railway safety, rolling stock including train sets/EMU, signalling and telecommunication, train control system etc.⁶²

Russia's heavy equipment building company Uralmash and India's Noida-based SRB International have agreed to form a joint venture (JV) to manufacture heavy equipment for the steel and mining

⁵⁸ "Russia Threatens Counter-Measures After U.S. Extends Sanctions", *The Moscow Times*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-threatens-counter-measures-after-us-extends-sanctions/561510.html>

⁵⁹ "Abe Snubs Obama over Russia Visit", *The Japan Times*, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/02/24/national/politics-diplomacy/obama-jittery-over-abes-possible-visit-to-russia/#.VuD0PH197IX>

⁶⁰ "Iraq Positively Assesses Russia's Role in Syrian Settlement — Deputy Foreign Minister", *Itar-Tass*, February 26, 2016 at <http://tass.ru/en/politics/859244>

⁶¹ "Russian Paratroopers Take Part in International Drills in India", *India-Russia Report*, March 1, 2016 at http://in.rbth.com/news/2016/03/01/russian-paratroopers-are-taking-part-in-international-drills-in-india_571961

⁶² "Govt Okays Agreements with Russia, Japan for Railways", *The Tribune*, March 2, 2016 at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/business/govt-okays-agreements-with-russia-japan-for-railways/203901.html>

sectors. The joint venture “Uralmash SRB India,” to be officially set up in the next few months, will be the maiden JV between Russia and India in this field. Uralmash plans to invest up to US\$ 6 million annually in the new JV. Since, 1950s, Uralmash has supplied heavy equipment to many large-scale metallurgical plants in India, including steel plants in Bhilai, Bokaro, Vishakhapatnam and Rourkela. In December 2015, Uralmash had also signed an agreement to manufacture and supply about 85 tons of equipment for the third and fourth units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant (KNPP).⁶³

E. The United State of America

National

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Pentagon: the plan submitted to Congress to close the detention facility at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay the best way; Investments in science and technology are critical in maintaining the nation's military edge; Dunford: fiscal year 2017 defence budget request is a good start -- but only a start; Carter: fiscal year 2017 budget proposal accounts for America's leading role as an underwriter of worldwide security; Progress of reforms in DoD's nuclear deterrent; Biden felt "almost obliged" to say sorry for verbal attacks on Mexico in the U.S. presidential campaign; Republican candidates tackled issues such as illegal immigration, U.S. policy in the Middle East and transparency of candidates' tax records; Trump has won the endorsement of Governor Christie.**

Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook said on February 23 that the plan submitted to Congress to close the detention facility at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, is the best way forward. Cook said at a Pentagon news conference that Congress has an opportunity to close the detention facility in a way that maintains U.S. national security, saves taxpayer money, eliminates a terrorist propaganda tool, and strengthens U.S. relations with allies. Earlier on February 23, the Defence Department submitted to Congress the Obama administration's plan for closing the detention facility.⁶⁴

US Defence Department officials told Congress on February 24 that investments in science and technology are critical in maintaining the nation's military edge in an increasingly competitive global arena. Stephen Welby, the assistant secretary of defence for research and engineering, told the House Armed Services Committee's subcommittee on emerging threats and capabilities that the United States is at a "pivotal moment in history" where investments in military technology are being made by "increasingly capable and assertive foreign powers". Welby appeared at the hearing to discuss defence innovation to create the future military force. Other witnesses included Arati Prabhakar, the director of the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA. Prabhakar said in her written statement that the United States is still the largest investor in research and

⁶³ “‘Make in India’: Uralmash & SRB Tie up to Make Heavy Equipment”, *India-Russia Report*, March 3, 2016 at http://in.rbth.com/economics/cooperation/2016/03/03/make-in-india-uralmash-srb-tie-up-to-make-heavy-equipment_572393

⁶⁴ Ferdinando, Lisa, “Guantanamo Closure Plan is Best Way Forward, Pentagon Press Secretary Says”, *DoD News*, February 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/671878/guantanamo-closure-plan-is-best-way-forward-pentagon-press-secretary-says>; and, “DoD Submits Guantanamo Closure Plan to Congress”, *DoD News*, February 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/671548/dod-submits-guantanamo-closure-plan-to-congress>

development around the world. She added, "But unlike past decades, we are not alone in our excellent scientific and technical capabilities".⁶⁵

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the House Appropriations Defence Subcommittee on February 25th that the fiscal year 2017 defence budget request is a good start -- but only a start -- toward maintaining a military capable of fighting and winning today's wars and producing a military capable of winning in the future. "I don't believe we ought to ever send Americans into a fair fight," Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. said in his testimony on the \$582.7 billion budget request. Dunford said that the United States must maintain a joint force that has the capability and credibility to reassure allies and partners, deter aggression and overmatch any potential adversary. He added, "This requires us to continually improve our joint warfighting capabilities, restore full spectrum readiness and develop the leaders who will serve as the foundation for the future".⁶⁶

Defence Secretary Ash Carter also said that the Defence Department's fiscal year 2017 budget proposal accounts for America's leading role as an underwriter of worldwide security and the need to invest in technologies and people in a new strategic era. Carter testified before the House Appropriations Defence Subcommittee along with Dunford. "In this budget," Carter told the panel, "we're taking the long view. We have to, because even as we fight today's fights we must also be prepared for what might come 10, 20, 30 years down the road." Five evolving strategic challenges drive DoD's planning and budgeting, the secretary said, and described the range of issues DoD is addressing with Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and terrorism -- especially the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.⁶⁷

Deputy Defence Secretary Bob Work observed the test of an unarmed Minuteman 3 missile at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, February 25th night, at the culmination of a trip to examine the progress of reforms in DoD's nuclear deterrent. Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Paul J. Selva and Navy Adm. Cecil D. Haney, the commander of U.S. Strategic Command, joined the deputy secretary for the launch. The warhead splashed down at the military's test range near Kwajalein Atoll more than 4,000 miles away. The crew that launched the missile are assigned to Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, and Vandenberg.⁶⁸

On February 25, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden said he felt "almost obliged" to say sorry for verbal attacks on Mexico in the U.S. presidential campaign, in which Republican front-runner Donald Trump has labelled Mexican migrants rapists and drug runners. Speaking alongside Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto during a visit to Mexico City, Biden never mentioned Trump, who nonetheless loomed large over the proceedings. "There's been a lot of damaging and incredibly inaccurate rhetoric, and I would argue, I feel almost obliged to apologize for some of what my

⁶⁵ Ferdinando, Lisa, "DoD Officials Urge Continued Science, Technology Investments", *DoD News*, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/672699/dod-officials-urge-continued-science-technology-investments>

⁶⁶ Garamone, Jim, "Fiscal '17 Budget Request Starts to Fund Defense Needs, Chairman Says", *DoD News*, February 25, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/673182/fiscal-17-budget-request-starts-to-fund-defense-needs-chairman-says>

⁶⁷ Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter: Budget Reflects Defence Needs in a New Strategic Era", *DoD News*, February 25, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/673090/carter-budget-reflects-defense-needs-in-a-new-strategic-era>

⁶⁸ Garamone, Jim, "Work Finishes Trip Focusing on U.S. Nuclear Deterrent", *DoD News*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/674495/work-finishes-trip-focusing-on-us-nuclear-deterrent>

political colleagues have said ... about Mexico, about the Mexican people," said Biden, a Democrat. Without naming Trump, Pena Nieto also weighed in, saying "building walls is just isolating oneself."⁶⁹

The latest debate among Republican candidates for the U.S. presidency on February 25 turned into a shouting match as the candidates tackled issues such as illegal immigration, U.S. policy in the Middle East and transparency of candidates' tax records.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Republican U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump has won the endorsement of one of his formal rivals, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who says Trump had the best chance to win the November election. Christie's announcement on February 26 made him the first major party figure to endorse the billionaire real estate mogul. Speaking at a news conference in Texas ahead of a Trump rally on February 26, Christie said Trump has the best chance of beating the leading Democratic presidential contender, former U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton, in the presidential election.⁷¹

International: Asia

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Inaugural U.S.-Sri Lanka Annual Partnership Dialogue in Washington, D.C.; Over the past nine months, Iraqi security forces have had significant successes; Syrian town of Shadadi is expected to be liberated soon from the ISIL; Two Serbian hostages were not killed in the U.S. strike; Cease-fire agreement between government and rebel forces in Syria's civil war is set to take effect; Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq; Russia and instability on Europe's southern flank pose serious threats to U.S. and European security interests; First segment of "American Innovation Roadshow" across Asia to be launched; U.S. military's strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region is "real and being realized": Pacific Commander; Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are the highest; Cope North 16 Pacific partners sharpen air combat skills; LNOs helped coordinate and communicate with the Murasame-class destroyer JDS Samidare (DD-106); Multinational Communications Interoperability Programme (MCIP) Planning Staff Workshop 1 (PSW1) in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.**

The US Secretary of State John Kerry welcomed Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera to the State Department in Washington, D.C., on February 25 for the inaugural U.S.-Sri Lanka Annual Partnership Dialogue, which the two had announced during Secretary Kerry's visit to the country in May 2015. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon led the U.S. delegation for discussions on democratic governance, development cooperation, people-to-people ties, economic cooperation, security cooperation, international and regional affairs, and other issues of mutual interest. The Partnership Dialogue is a regularly planned policy consultation designed to

⁶⁹ "Biden Rues 'Damaging' Tone Against Mexico in US Presidential Race", *Reuters*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/biden-mexico/3209263.html>

⁷⁰ "Republican Candidates Spar Over Immigration, Foreign Policy", *VOA News*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/republican-candidates-squabble-over-immigration-foreign-policy/3209039.html>

⁷¹ Duzor, Megan, "Trump Wins Endorsement From Ex-rival Christie", *VOA News*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/trump-wins-endorsement-from-former-rival-christie/3209926.html>

advance common agenda and opportunities for cooperation across the full range of bilateral and regional issues.⁷²

The commanding general of the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command for Operation Inherent Resolve said on February 23 that over the past nine months, Iraqi security forces have had significant successes and have made noticeable progress that will lead to the eventual defeat of the ISIL. Army Maj. Gen. Richard D. Clarke, with responsibilities only in Iraq, briefed Pentagon reporters by video teleconference from Baghdad. Clarke said that about 400 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division have formed the nucleus of the ground effort in Iraq for more than nine months from their headquarters in Baghdad. Marines, Air Force, Navy and 20 different coalition nations also are helping with the mission, with more than 4,100 personnel, he added.⁷³

Pentagon spokesman, Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, said on February 24 that the Syrian town of Shadadi is expected to be liberated soon from the ISIL. Davis said, Syrian Democratic Forces have encircled and isolated the town in northeastern Syria. He said, "We continue to see very solid progress in Shadadi". Davis said the United States is enabling friendly forces in northeastern Syria as a "central element to dealing a lasting defeat against ISIL." The friendly forces have launched sustained offensive operations against ISIL with U.S. support and taken back ground, Davis said. Many ISIL fighters are fleeing, he said. There is still work to be done, the captain said. ISIL is expected to put up a fight, but Shadadi is expected to be liberated in the "very near future," he said.⁷⁴

Davis also told reporters that the Defence Department has not received any evidence to support the claim that two Serbian hostages were killed in the U.S. strike last week in Libya. He said, "We, the United States government and with Department of Defence support, are in contact with the Serbian government". Davis said officials have looked at the photos of the Serbian citizens who died and have received further information about the strike itself, including the extensive damage from the February 19 operation. He said, "So far we have not seen any credible information that would indicate that these people were killed in the strike that we conducted". U.S. forces carried out a strike against an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant training camp and a senior leader of the terrorist organization, according to a DoD news release issued last week. The U.S. military goes to extraordinary lengths to limit the risk to civilians in the campaign to defeat ISIL, he said.⁷⁵

The cease-fire agreement between government and rebel forces in Syria's civil war is set to take effect on February 27 at midnight Damascus time -- 5 p.m. EST, the public affairs officer for Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) told reporters in a teleconference from Baghdad on February 26. During the weekly OIR operational update, Army Col. Chris Garver said task force officials encourage military or paramilitary fighters in the hostilities to honour the cease-fire in Syria as agreed on February 22. Brokered by the U.S. and Russia, the cessation of hostilities includes the Syrian government, Russia, and several rebel factions. The OIR task force

⁷² "First Annual U.S.-Sri Lanka Partnership Dialogue", *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/253741.htm>

⁷³ Pellerin, Cheryl, "U.S. General Reports Iraqi Forces' Successes, Progress", *DoD News*, February 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/671689/us-general-reports-iraqi-forces-successes-progress>

⁷⁴ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Shadadi in Syria Expected to Be Liberated Soon, DoD Spokesman Says", *DoD News*, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/672378/shadadi-in-syria-expected-to-be-liberated-soon-dod-spokesman-says>

⁷⁵ Ferdinando, Lisa, "No Evidence Serbians Killed in U.S. Strike in Libya, Defense Official Says", *DoD News*, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/672358/no-evidence-serbians-killed-in-us-strike-in-libya-defense-official-says>

will not have a role in the cease-fire, Garver said. OIR's mission continues to militarily defeat ISIL in Syria and Iraq, he said, and the coalition will strike the enemy with "precision and concern for mitigating civilian casualties."⁷⁶

Meanwhile, U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorists in Syria and Iraq. Attack, fighter and ground attack aircraft conducted 12 strikes in Syria. And, fighter aircraft conducted 12 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government.⁷⁷

The commander of U.S. forces in Europe said on February 25th that Russia and instability on Europe's southern flank pose serious threats to U.S. and European security interests. The complex security situation in Europe "has only grown more serious and more complicated" in recent months, said Air Force Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and commander of U.S. European Command. Speaking before the House Armed Services Committee on security challenges in Europe, Breedlove outlined challenges ranging from a "resurgent, aggressive" Russia, mass migration of refugees, and the threat of terrorism from the ISIL. Because of these challenges, the general said, tailored, supportable increases in capabilities are needed, as called for in the Defence Department's fiscal year 2017 budget request.⁷⁸

The State Department will launch the first segment of its "American Innovation Roadshow" across Asia in March 2016, as announced by Secretary of State John Kerry during his speech on "America and the Asia-Pacific: Partners in Prosperity"⁷⁹ in Singapore. Senior members of Secretary Kerry's economic team will lead business delegations that comprise a mix of leadership from U.S. multinational companies, financial investors, and successful early stage companies. The Roadshow will showcase the American brand of innovation and entrepreneurship with the objective of promoting shared prosperity and inclusive growth.⁸⁰

The commander of U.S. Pacific Command told Pentagon reporters on February 25 that the U.S. military's strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region is "real and being realized". After testifying before House and Senate committees this week, Navy Adm. Harry Harris Jr. said he appreciated "the opportunity to go on the record about America's rebalance," adding that it cannot take place quickly enough in his area of responsibility, which covers 36 nations and half the globe. The rebalance to the region comprises four components, he said: economic, political, military and diplomatic. The Navy and Air Force want to have 60 percent of their forces in the region by 2020, and because the Navy's presence is nearly at 50 percent today, "we're proceeding apace," Harris

⁷⁶ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Cease-Fire to Begin in Syria, OIR Spokesman Says", *DoD News*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/674433/cease-fire-to-begin-in-syria-oir-spokesman-says>; and, Besheer, Margaret, "Syrian Cease-Fire in Effect, Some Violence Reported", *VOA News*, February 27, 2016 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/on-syrian-cease-fire-eve-terrorist-fight-continues/3209357.html>

⁷⁷ "Coalition Strikes Hit ISIL Terrorists in Syria, Iraq", *DoD News*, February 28, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/674820/coalition-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

⁷⁸ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Breedlove: Russia, Instability Threaten U.S., European Security Interests", *DoD News*, February 25, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/673338/breedlove-russia-instability-threaten-us-european-security-interests>; and, "Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria", *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 22, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/253115.htm>

⁷⁹ "Remarks on America and the Asia Pacific: Partners in Prosperity", Remarks by John Kerry, Secretary of State, at Singapore Management University, Singapore, August 4, 2015 at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/08/245634.htm>

⁸⁰ "U.S. State Department Launches "American Innovation Roadshow" Across Asia", *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/253172.htm>

said. "It's a well-thought-out strategy in my opinion, and I think we're moving right along at the proper timeline," he added.⁸¹

Army Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti told the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 23 that tensions on the Korean Peninsula are the highest he has seen in his time in command of the Combined Forces Command. Scaparrotti added that the "semi-war status" in August "was highest tension that we have seen probably since 1994." In August, North Korea placed mines that wounded two soldiers on the South Korean side of the Demilitarized Zone. The incident escalated to an exchange of artillery before North Korea took responsibility for the incident. The general, who also commands U.S. Forces Korea and the United Nations Command, said he is concerned that "in a provocation, much like we had in August, both sides had very high alert status, and that there could be a miscalculation. And then with a response, it would be ... hard to control that situation." In August, the United States and South Korea "stood shoulder-to-shoulder and de-escalated the situation," he said.⁸²

Pilots from the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, Japan Air Self-Defence Force and Royal Australian Air Force conducted a large force employment in Andersen Air Force Base, Guam from February 18-26 as part of exercise Cope North 16. The exercise began with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief training on February 14, followed by an LFE exercise that shifted the focus to air-combat tactics. The LFE portion challenged large numbers of aviators, from fighter aircraft to command and control platforms, to interact effectively in realistic combat scenarios, while employing offensive and defensive counter air techniques to either gain or protect area and assets.⁸³

Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) Naval Liaison Officers (LNOs) visited USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), on February 22. The LNOs helped coordinate and communicate with the Murasame-class destroyer JDS Samidare (DD-106) as it received an advanced biofuel mixture from the Great Green Fleet. "The primary purpose [of our visit] is to deepen the mutual understanding and the interoperability with the U.S. Navy and JMSDF," said Capt. Atsushi Minami, Commander, Escort Division Four, "particularly focusing on our tactical skills through bilateral operation with John C. Stennis Strike Group."⁸⁴

A total of 18 nations and more than 50 participants attended U.S. Pacific Command's (USPACOM) Multinational Communications Interoperability Programme (MCIP) Planning Staff Workshop 1 (PSW1) in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, from February 22-February 26, 2016. The workshop was co-hosted by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) command, control, communications, and computers/cyber division and USPACOM. The PNGDF Commander, Secretary of Defence, Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, plus Indonesia's and New Zealand's Defence Attaches, and Head of Australian Defence Staff (in PNG) all participated in activities at

⁸¹ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Pacom Commander: Rebalance to Asia-Pacific 'Being Realized'", *DoD News*, February 25, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/673465/pacom-commander-rebalance-to-asia-pacific-being-realized>

⁸² Garamone, Jim, "General Cites High Level of Tension on Korean Peninsula", *DoD News*, February 23, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/671643/general-cites-high-level-of-tension-on-korean-peninsula>

⁸³ "Cope North 16 Pacific Partners Sharpen Air Combat Skills", By Staff Sgt. Alexander Riedel, *US PACOM*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/674612/cope-north-16-pacific-partners-sharpen-air-combat-skills.aspx>

⁸⁴ "Japan Maritime Self Defence Force, US Navy Grow Green Partnership", By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Susan Damman, *US PACOM*, February 26, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/674598/japan-maritime-self-defense-force-us-navy-grow-green-partnership.aspx>

PSW1. Planning objectives for PSW1 focused on developing a construct to support MCIP Pacific Endeavour 2016 (PE16) events.⁸⁵

India-US Relations

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Assistant Secretary of State Judith Garber will discuss ocean issues during her visit to India; Senator McCain acknowledges the "timing" of the announcement on the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan was "really bad"; Lawmaker Dana Rohrabacher has introduced a "joint resolution" in the House to express Congress's disapproval over an arms deal with Pakistan.**

The US Department of State informed that acting Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs Judith Garber will travel to India from February 23-27, 2016. During her visit, she will meet with government leaders and NGO representatives to discuss ocean issues in the lead up to the September 2016 Our Ocean conference in Washington, D.C. Acting Assistant Secretary Garber will also meet with Indian experts on air quality, climate change, hydrofluorocarbons, and wildlife trafficking.⁸⁶

On February 25, top Republican senator John McCain acknowledged the "timing" of the announcement on the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan was "really bad" and that the Obama administration needs to explain the reason behind its decision which "complicates" India-US relations. At a time, when the US is pushing hard to improve its defence relationship with India as part of its effort to maintain its dominance in the Asia Pacific region, such a move tends to "complicate" India-US ties, McCain, Chairman of the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee, told reporters at the Defence Writers Group. "I think that the future of Asia, if we want to have the kind of influence that we always had and a deterrence to the Chinese behaviour is a very close relationship between the United States and India. Which by the way the F-16 issue complicates that," McCain said.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, a top US lawmaker Dana Rohrabacher has introduced a "joint resolution" in the House of Representatives to express Congress's disapproval over an arms deal with Pakistan which includes the sale of eight nuclear-capable F-16 fighter jets to the latter. "The government of Pakistan has been using weapons from the US to repress its own citizens and especially the people of Baluchistan," Congressman Rohrabacher said on February 25 after he introduced the resolution in the House of Representatives. Rohrabacher said, "The deciding factor of whether to support this Joint Resolution is, for me, the arrogant and hostile actions taken by the government of Pakistan against the man who helped bring Osama bin Laden to justice".⁸⁸

⁸⁵ "Multinational Communications Interoperability Program Planning Staff Workshop 1 Held in Papua New Guinea", By Martin Ortogero Jr., *US PACOM*, February 24, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/672168/multinational-communications-interoperability-program-planning-staff-workshop-1.aspx>

⁸⁶ "Acting Assistant Secretary Judith Garber Travel to India", *US Department of State*, Washington, DC, February 22, 2016 at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/253130.htm>

⁸⁷ "F-16 Sale to Pakistan 'Complicates' India-US Relationship: John McCain", *The Economic Times*, February 25, 2016 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/f-16-sale-to-pakistan-complicates-india-us-relationship-john-mccain/articleshow/51145460.cms>

⁸⁸ "Resolution Introduced in US House to Block Sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan", *The Indian Express*, February 26, 2016 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/us-f16-fighter-jets-pakistan/>

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Pampore encounter ends, three suspected LeT terrorists killed; '2015 witnessed fewer terror strikes in J&K than previous year'; Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist, 5 aides held in Kashmir.**

A 50-hour standoff between security forces and terrorists at a government training centre in Jammu and Kashmir's Pampore town ended on February 22 with the gunning down of three suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists, five soldiers and a civilian. Security forces also recovered a "warlike stockpile" of weapons and ammunition at the besieged Entrepreneurship Development Institute, a 15-acre campus housing three multi-storey buildings, where the terrorists were hiding. Major Arvind Dutta said the terrorists looked like foreigners. "The Lashkar group is suspected in the attack and the men seemed to be part of a suicide squad." People in Kashmir's northern-most town of Uri protested against a police attempt to bury the three terrorists. Hundreds of people clashed with police demanding the bodies of the three terrorists. Security agencies bury slain terrorists far-off from the place where they are killed to prevent public funerals in their honour.⁸⁹

Terrorists in Jammu & Kashmir may be increasingly targeting security forces by attacking their convoys and engaging them in protracted encounters, but overall terror related incidents has seen a perceptible decline in 2015 as compared to 2014. While terrorist incidents fell to 208 last year from 222 in 2014, total security personnel killed in the counter-insurgency grid were 17 per cent lower at 39 as compared to 47 in 2014. As many as 108 terrorists were liquidated by the security forces in the Valley in 2015, almost maintaining the 2014 count when 108 jihadis were killed. Civilian casualties were also significantly fewer at 15 last year as compared to 28 in 2014. "Much of the improvement in indices of militancy-related violence in J&K could be due to lower infiltration, thanks to higher vigil at the LoC and international border," said a senior officer of the security establishment. Infiltration attempts in 2015 dipped to 121 last year as compared to 222 in 2014. In fact, successful cases of infiltration were only 33, almost half of the 65 cases recorded in 2014. "However, despite the lower infiltration, the terrorists who manage to sneak in are coming prepared for a long haul, with loads of ammunition and IEDs to keep the forces engaged for several days," an intelligence officer pointed out. The officer said this might require some strategic review given the casualties terrorists have been able to inflict on the security forces in recent encounters.⁹⁰

A Pakistani Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist and his five local associates were arrested from north Kashmir's Baramulla town on February 25. "Acting on specific information that a Pakistani fidayeen terrorist has made entry into Baramulla town, police along with CRPF and Army men launched multiple operations in and around Baramulla in north Kashmir," a police spokesman said. During an operation, the fidayeen, Mohammad Sidiq, was arrested. The spokesman said Sidiq is a resident

⁸⁹ "Three Militants Killed as Pampore Encounter Ends, LeT Hand Suspected", *Hindustan Times*, February 23, 2016 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/two-militants-killed-in-pampore-encounter-lashkar-hand-suspected/story-e2fevUyMMs5ogsBrqNYA6J.html>

⁹⁰ "2015 Witnessed Fewer Terror Strikes in J&K Than Previous Year", *The Economic Times*, February 24, 2016 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/2015-witnessed-fewer-terror-strikes-in-jk-than-previous-year/articleshow/51117640.cms>

of Sialkot. His accomplices were identified as Suhail Arif Ganaie, Rashid Rasool Bhat, Javaid Ahmad Dhobi, Farhan Fayaz Liloo and Ehsan Fayaz Lillo.⁹¹

Northeast India

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Meghalaya: Security forces seized 47 IEDs in East Garo Hills.**

A major IED attack was averted by security forces in Meghalaya on February 25, who seized and diffused at least 47 of them from several link roads to villages in Meghalaya's East Garo Hills district. IG (Operations) G H P Raju said the IEDs were seized when an operation involving the special commandos of the state police was launched following inputs by villagers of Doengkhuigre and adjoining areas of the district about the presence of strange and suspicious looking objects. Raju said the IEDs were hidden at the roadsides, with only their wires visible over ground. They were handmade and assembled by GNLA cadres with the help of ULFA (I) under Dristi Rajkhowa. The bombs had adequate explosive powers and could have caused serious damage if they had exploded, he said, adding they were later diffused. Today's recovery has been the biggest explosives haul made by the state police in the Garo Hills region, the IG said. Operation is now on to sanitise the area and check the presence of IEDs in the adjoining villages, he added.⁹²

Left-wing Extremism

(February 22-28, 2016)

- **Two Maoists killed in encounter in Visakha agency; Twenty-three Maoists surrendered in Bastar, Chhattisgarh.**

Two Maoists were killed in an encounter with police in agency area of Visakhapatnam district, police said on February 22. The gun battle took place for about 15 minutes between Valakapudi and Devulapadu areas under Koyyuru police station limits of the district on February 21 when a team of police personnel and the rebels came face-to-face, Superintendent of Police (Visakha Rural) Dr Koya Praveen said. Two 12 bore single-barrel guns, some cartridges and two kit bags containing two mobile phones, Maoists' uniforms and their literature were also recovered from the spot. The deceased Ultras, yet to be identified, belonged to the Galikonda Area Committee of the banned CPI (Maoists). The Maoists have been trying to regain their lost ground in Vizag agency, East Godavari region and Andhra-Odisha border areas, and appealing youths to fight against the security forces and the government over bauxite mining and some other issues, police said. Meanwhile, security has been intensified at some places in the Vizag agency area for which additional security forces are likely to be deployed, police added.⁹³

Twenty three Maoists, including two women cadres, surrendered in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh on February 28, police said. The ultras turned themselves in before senior police officials, saying

⁹¹ Pandit, Saleem M, "JeM Terrorist, 5 Aides Held in Kashmir", *The Times of India*, February 26, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/JeM-terrorist-5-aides-held-in-Kashmir/articleshow/51147832.cms>

⁹² "47 IEDs Seized in East Garo Hills", *Business Standard*, February 25, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/47-ieds-seized-in-east-garo-hills-116022501212_1.html

⁹³ "Two Maoists Gunned Down in Encounter with Police", *Business Standard*, February 22, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/two-maoists-gunned-down-in-encounter-with-police-116022200501_1.html

they were “frustrated” with the ill-treatment meted out to them, Bastar superintendent of police RN Dash told *PTI*. Of them, three cadres - Katku (Kudur Janatana Sarkar head), Lali Mandavi and Raju Mandavi (area committee members), carried a reward of Rs three lakh each on their heads. Similarly, Kawasi Gore (35) who was the head of Chetna Natya Mandli (CNM) -- a cultural outfit of the Maoists -- carried a reward of Rs one lakh on his head, the SP said, adding the rest of the surrendered ultras were lower-rung members. An encouragement amount of Rs 10,000 was given to each of them and will be given facilities under the surrender and rehabilitation policy, the official said.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ “Chhattisgarh: 23 Maoists Surrender Due to ‘Ill-Treatment’ by Seniors”, *Hindustan Times*, February 28, 2016 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/chhattisgarh-23-maoists-surrender-due-to-ill-treatment-by-seniors/story-YUkQjtjGYE4NPb1wFA6OYN.html>