

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

February 29 – March 6, 3 (1), 2016

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Taliban's demand for interim government rejected; sceptical about peace talks' success; youth disappointed with unity govt. shows Survey.**

As preparations for peace talks are moving into top gear, President Ashraf Ghani has reportedly spurned Taliban's demand for the installation of an interim government in Kabul. However, Ghani was ready to accommodate Taliban's demands if the group dropped preconditions for direct talks, the presidential advisor on peace affairs said in an interview published on March 2. Qutbuddin Hilal told a Pakistani newspaper: "The national unity government is willing to discuss amendments to the constitution, help remove names of Taliban leaders from a UN sanctions list, reopen the Taliban political office in Qatar and release their prisoners." The Taliban have asked the Quadrilateral Contact Group, involving Afghanistan, China, the US and Pakistan to take initiative certain confidence-building measures before they could join the talks in Islamabad. Hilal said: "There is no opposition to all but one Taliban demands. Ghani has rejected the Taliban demand for installation of an interim government. The president insists he will not compromise on a government elected by the people." He claimed the militant outfit was no longer insisting on an immediate pull-out of foreign forces. Instead the Taliban are now seeking a timeframe for the withdrawal of the international troops from the country. "They (Taliban) must participate (in Islamabad talks). If they don't, then it means nothing will happen," Hilal remarked, calling on the government to come up with a positive response to the Taliban demands.¹

Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) chief Abdul Sattar Sadat on March 2 said he was skeptical the renewed international push to revive the Afghan peace talks would succeed as he doubted Pakistan's sincerity. Sadat said he would support every initiative aimed at bringing peace and stability to the country. Pakistan will host direct talks between Afghan government and Afghan Taliban, including other insurgent groups, in the first week of March. A joint statement issued at the conclusion of the fourth meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) in Kabul said the QCG member states invite Taliban and other groups to participate through their authorised representatives in the first round of direct peace talks with the Afghan government. In the meeting representatives of four participant countries; Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and United States decided the date of first session of direct talks between Afghan government and Taliban insurgents. The IECC chief said the Afghans should support every effort for peace and stability in their country. "As far as we know our neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan, we have doubts and we are not optimistic about a positive outcome," he said. He said he had no doubt about China's sincerity but it was too early for China to realise the gravity of the situation.²

¹ "Ghani Says No To Taliban's Demand For Interim Government", *Pajhwok*, March 2, 2016, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/02/ghani-says-no-taliban%E2%80%99s-demand-interim-government>

² "IECC Chief Skeptical About Peace Talks' Success", *Pajhwok*, March 2, 2016, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/02/iecc-chief-skeptical-about-peace-talks%E2%80%99-success>

Surveys shows most youth not happy with the unity have government's performance alleged that young men linked to warlords get jobs. The survey was conducted by the Afghanistan Election Watch Network (AEWN), interviewing more than 2,000 youth in 14 districts of Nangrahar, Kandahar, Herat, Balkh and Baghlan provinces in eight months. In the survey, the youth have expressed their disappointment and have said the government did not provide jobs to youth despite their active participation in the presidential election. They also complained about the low quality of education, insecurity and unemployment and alleged that only those having links to warlords were able to get jobs. Habibullah Shinwari, a AEWN member, said the government's hiring process had been incorrect. He said blue-eyed individuals were hired before their appearance in related test and interview. Ahmadzia Masoud, the president's special envoy for reforms and good governance, called youth's political participation as vital for a strong government. He said the Afghan society was a complex one and it was the government's responsibility to maintain discipline and harmony among different ethnicities.³

Pakistan

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Bill to convert PIA into company rejected; yet to remove differences over N-arsenal; Afghan Taliban leadership is in Pakistan: Aziz.**

A Senate body rejected the government's proposal to convert Pakistan International Airlines Corporation (PIAC) into a limited company. The Senate Standing Committee on Cabinet will present its report in the upper house of the parliament March 1 just making the seven-day deadline set by the Senate chairman, Raza Rabbani. Although the committee rejected the proposed bill, titled 'PIAC Bill-2016', several of its members believe the government will soon call a joint session of the parliament to get it passed. The ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) enjoys a simple majority in a joint session. On January 21, the National Assembly passed the PIAC bill amid protests by the opposition. The bill was then sent to the upper house, which referred it to the standing committee. "We believe the Senate will uphold the decision of the standing committee and the government would have to convene a joint session of parliament to get the bill passed," said PPP Senator Saeed Ghani, who attended the committee meeting as a special invitee.⁴

US and Pakistani officials are still deliberating on the contents of a joint statement that was supposed to be issued after the sixth meeting of their strategic dialogue on March 1 afternoon. Neither side is willing to talk about the differences that have reportedly delayed the statement but in their opening remarks on March 1, leaders of the US and Pakistani delegations highlighted some pressing issues. US Secretary of State John Kerry emphasised the need for Pakistan to reduce its nuclear arsenal, urging it to "process that reality (of reduction) and put that front and centre in its policy." On the other hand, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz, asked the United States to show a "greater understanding of Pakistan's security concerns and its desire to contribute actively as a mainstream nuclear power." The two statements clearly underline major differences between their positions on the nuclear issue. Pakistan insists that its nuclear programme is designed only to

³ "Survey Shows Youth Disappointed with Unity Govt", *Pajhwok*, March 6, 2016, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2016/03/06/survey-shows-youth-disappointed-unity-govt>

⁴ "Senate Panel Rejects Bill To Convert PIA Into Company", *Dawn*, March 1, 2016, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1242803/senate-panel-rejects-bill-to-convert-pia-into-company>

deal with a possible threat from India and that it will not accept any unilateral reduction in nuclear weapons.⁵

Prime Minister's senior aide Sartaj Aziz has said for the first time publicly that the Afghan Taliban's leadership enjoys a safe haven inside Pakistan, which Islamabad uses as a "lever" to pressure the group into talks with Kabul. The admission by Sartaj Aziz comes after years of official denials by Islamabad that it offers shelter or exerts any influence over the Taliban, whose 14-year-insurgency against Afghan and NATO forces has claimed tens of thousands of civilian and military lives.⁶

Bangladesh

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Foreign Minister visits India; UK parliamentary group lauds progress of Bangladesh.**

Foreign Minister of Bangladesh A.H. Mahmud Ali made a two-day visit to India to attend the *Raisina Dialogue* organised by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi.⁷

Bangladesh received a high appreciation from the UK All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for its commendable successes in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), poverty reduction, women empowerment, and transformation of its economy in the recent years. APPG met on February 29, 2016 at the UK Houses of Parliament. Chair of APPG, Anne Main MP, presided over the meeting, which was attended by Desmond Swayne, Minister of State for International Development, Baroness Shreela Flather and Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Paul Scully MP, Rupa Huq MP and Bangladesh High Commissioner in London Md Abdul Hannan among others. Desmond Swayne admired Bangladesh garment sectors' remarkable transformation from low to high-value end products. Baroness Flather praised the Bangladesh Government for creating jobs for millions of women in these sectors, which impacted positively on addressing other social challenges like child marriage. Bangladesh High Commissioner briefed the meeting on the socio-economic developments of Bangladesh under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.⁸

Sri Lanka

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga attends Raisina Dialogue; Indian envoy takes on opposition over economy pact; Pakistan attaches highest importance to relations with Sri Lanka; UN notes Lanka at an important stage in its post war recovery; Switzerland notes progress in reconciliation process; Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies visits Sri Lanka; Twenty-nine Indian fishermen arrested for poaching.**

⁵ "Pakistan, US Yet To Remove Differences Over N-arsenal", *Dawn*, March 2, 2016, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1243057/pakistan-us-yet-to-remove-differences-over-n-arsenal>

⁶ "Afghan Taliban Leadership is in Pakistan Admits Aziz", *The Express Tribune*, March 3, 2016, at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1058595/afghan-taliban-leadership-is-in-pakistan-admits-aziz/>

⁷ "Foreign Minister Leaves for India", *The Daily Star*, March 1, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/foreign-minister-leaves-india-784546>.

⁸ Ullah, Ansar Ahmed, "UK Parliamentary Group Lauds Progress of Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, March 6, 2016, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/uk-parliamentary-group-lauds-progress-bangladesh-787030>.

Speaking at the inauguration of the three-day Raisina Dialogue, envisioned as India's flagship conference of geopolitics and geo-economics, the former President of Sri Lanka Chandrika Kumaratunga said that the economic integration in South Asia proceeded very slowly while the cooperation and economic integration proceeded very fast in the rest of the world. The former President called for a pragmatic action plan for regional integration in South Asia. During the visit, former President met India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on March 2, 2016.⁹

Y.K. Sinha India's High Commissioner Y K Sinha has taken on former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Joint Opposition, an informal coalition of pro-Rajapaksa parties and groups, over the proposed Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) between India and Sri Lanka, *The Hindu* newspaper reported. Referring to reported observations of the former President and members of the Joint Opposition against the ETCA, Amb. Sinha told members of the Sri Lanka-India Society on March 4 that he was "surprised" to come across Rajapaksa's statements in sections of the local press on the issue.¹⁰

The newly arrived High Commissioner of Sri Lanka, Major Gen (Retd) Jayanath Lokuketagodage paid a courtesy call on the Special Assistant to the Pakistan Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs (SAPM) Syed Tariq Fatemi at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan.¹¹

The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to UN Secretary General Ban ki-moon, Adama Dieng, says Sri Lanka is at an important stage in its post war recovery. He told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, during the ongoing 31st session, that Sri Lanka has a chance to make things right by investing in reconciliation and an impartial accountability process that would restore confidence and reduce the risk of recurrence of the past violence. Meanwhile, UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq said that the UN wants to make sure that there is an actual good-faith effort by the Government of Sri Lanka when investigating incidents related to the war. He told a daily briefing at the UN Headquarters in New York that the UN is trying to encourage an effort to get to the bottom of what happened in the end of the conflict.¹²

A meeting between Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera and Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter was held in Switzerland on March 3 on the progress in the reform and reconciliation process in Sri Lanka and the expansion of bilateral relations between Switzerland and the island state in the Indian Ocean. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs said the two ministers also signed a memorandum of understanding on regular political consultations between representatives of the two states. They also agreed to explore the possibility of a migration partnership between Switzerland and Sri Lanka. This was the first visit by a Sri Lankan foreign minister to Switzerland in more than 30 years.¹³

⁹ "Former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga Says Sri Lanka Could be a Bridge for South Asian Nations", *ColomboPage*, March 1, 2016, at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_16A/Mar01_1456855270CH.php. "Sushma Swaraj Meets Ex-Sri Lankan President Kumaratunga", *Colombo Gazette*, March 2, 2016, <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/02/sushma-swaraj-meets-ex-sri-lankan-president-kumaratunga/>.

¹⁰ "Indian Envoy Takes on Opposition over Economy Pact", *Colombo Gazette*, March 6, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/06/indian-envoy-takes-on-opposition-over-economy-pact/>.

¹¹ "Pakistan Attaches Highest Importance To Relations with Sri Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, March 4, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/04/pakistan-attaches-highest-importance-to-relations-with-sri-lanka/>.

¹² "UN Notes Lanka at an Important Stage in Its Post War Recovery", *Colombo Gazette*, March 4, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/04/un-notes-lanka-at-an-important-stage-in-its-post-war-recovery/>.

¹³ "Switzerland Notes Progress in Reconciliation Process", *Colombo Gazette*, March 4, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/04/switzerland-notes-progress-in-reconciliation-process/>.

The Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Elhadj As Sy paid a courtesy call at the President's Official Residence on March 3, in the meeting, Elhadj said that he would report to the UN Office in Geneva regarding his positive experiences when visiting former conflict areas. President Sirisena thanked the IFRC and Sri Lanka Red Cross Society for the humanitarian work they have been doing in Sri Lanka for long years responding to situations of natural disasters such as floods, drought and especially during the past tsunami disaster.¹⁴

Sri Lanka Coast Guard with the assistance of the Sri Lankan Navy arrested 29 Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching in Sri Lankan waters. The navy said that of the 29 fishermen, nine were arrested North of Thalai-mannar and 20 were arrested North-west of Kudiremalai Point. The navy also seized a trawler and three small boats. The fishermen along with the boats were handed over to the officials of the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Thalai-mannar and the Kalpitiya police.¹⁵

Maldives

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **China donates LED lights to the Maldives to be distributed to all households; Increase in number of European tourists boosts Maldivian economy; Dunya: Will change Maldives into a democracy that protects the rights of everyone; President: India and Pakistan pushed to remove Maldives from CMAG agenda; Foreign Minister and the Attorney General meet with the Chair of European Parliament Delegation for South Asia; State income, State reserve goes down.**

LED lights donated to Maldives by Chinese government are to be distributed to all households through Stelco, MWSC, and Fenaka Corporation. Memorandum of Understanding to distribute the lights to all households throughout Maldives was signed by Stelco (State Electric Company), MWSC (Male Water and Sewerage Company) and Fenaka Corporation in a ceremony held at national radio building on March 2, 2016. Speaking during the ceremony, Environment Minister Toriq Ibrahim said that the donation from China would result in lower electricity costs borne by households in Maldives and said that more LED lights from China were on the way. The 210,000 LED lights donated by China are worth MVR 10 million. 78,750 of the lights are to be distributed to State companies, and the remaining 131,250 lights are to be distributed to households.¹⁶

Tourist arrivals to Maldives in January were increased by 11.7 per cent, providing a boost to Maldivian economy. Statistics released by Tourism Ministry for the month of January shows that 108,396 tourists visited Maldives in January, which is a boost of 11.7 per cent, when compared to the 97,073 tourists who visited the country in January, 2015. Most noticeable increase comes from European tourists.¹⁷

¹⁴ "President Wants Mindset of People in the South to Change", *Colombo Gazette*, March 3, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/03/president-wants-mindset-of-people-in-the-south-to-change/>.

¹⁵ "Twenty-Nine Indian Fishermen Arrested for Poaching", *Colombo Gazette*, March 6, 2016, at <http://colombogazette.com/2016/03/06/twenty-nine-indian-fishermen-arrested-for-poaching/>.

¹⁶ "LED Lights Donated by China to Be Distributed to All Households", *SunOnline*, March 2, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36520>.

¹⁷ "Increase in Number of European Tourists Boosts Maldivian Economy", *SunOnline*, March 2, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36513>.

Speaking at the 31st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon said that the government would “transform” the Maldives into an advanced democracy that protects the rights of everyone. She said that it cannot be achieved in a matter of days, weeks, or even years and history shows that it takes at least few generations to achieve a sustainable change. The Minister said that all that the country is asking is to give the people of the Maldives the chance, and the privilege to work at its own pace, in its own way, facing its challenges, and learning from them.¹⁸

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom has said that it was India and Pakistan that mostly came in defence of the Maldives pushing to remove the Maldives from the agenda of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). Speaking at the inauguration of the H.A. Utheem Harbour, the President said that India and Pakistan talked in favour of the Maldives at the CMAG session. He said that the decision to remove the Maldives from the CMAG agenda was by the work of those two countries. The President said that the Indian and Pakistani prime ministers talked with him at length on the issue of the Maldives being on the CMAG agenda. The Extraordinary Meeting by the CMAG on February 24 ended after giving the Maldives a reasonable timeframe to do certain things. Another meeting to discuss the progress of the country was set for April.¹⁹

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dunya Maumoon and Attorney General, Mohamed Anil met with the Chair of Delegation for Relations with countries for South Asia, Jean Lambert on March 3, 2016. At the meeting, held at the European Parliament both minister and the AG updated Mme Lambert on the political situation of Maldives and President Abdulla Yameen's initiative to reconvene the all-party political dialogue. Minister and Attorney General further updated Mme Lambert on the aspirations of the Government to maintain peace and stability and strengthening various institutions of the country. The Minister also expressed readiness of the government to constructively engage with the international community including the European Parliament. Ambassador of Maldives to Brussels and EU Ahmed Shiaan, Counsellor at the Maldives Mission in Brussels Fathimath Ghina and Director General of the Ministry Khadeeja Najeeha also attended the meeting.²⁰

Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) has said that State income for December 2015 went down, and that State reserve depleted by end of January 2016. In MMA's economic review for February, it was stated that State reserve by end of January was at US\$ 591.9 million. The amount is a 4 per cent decrease when compared to January 2015; and a 5 per cent decrease when compared to December 2015. Looking into statistics related to State expenses and income, State received MVR 1.3 billion – minus non-reimbursable financial aid – as income in December 2015 – which is MVR 125.9 million short of income received in December 2014. MMA identified the main factor leading to the fall in income level to the decrease in income received from taxation. As such, MMA noted that tax on goods and services in tourism industry – TGST – and tax on regular goods and services – GST – has gone down. State expenditure in December 2015 was MVR 2 billion – a MVR 1.1 billion increase when compared to December 2014. MMA identified the rise in recurrent and capital expenditure as the driving factors for the rise in State expenditure in December 2015. MMA) said that inflation rate

¹⁸ “Dunya: Will Change Maldives into a Democracy That Protects the Rights of Everyone”, *SunOnline*, March 1, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36511>.

¹⁹ “President: India and Pakistan Pushed To Remove Maldives from CMAG Agenda”, *SunOnline*, March 1, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36509>.

²⁰ “Foreign Minister and the Attorney General meet with the Chair of European Parliament Delegation for South Asia”, *SunOnline*, March 4, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36555>.

on goods and services in Male' City on January rose 1.4 per cent compared to that in January 2015. In MMA's economic review report for February, the institution identified the main factors leading to the inflation rate rise to increase in price of household items and education. MMA noted that there was also a slight increase in inflation rate of goods and services in Male' City when compared on a monthly basis.²¹

B. East Asia

China

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Li calls for economic momentum; Xi Jinping against any form of Taiwanese Independence; CPPCC starts annual meeting; China will follow UN sanctions against North Korea if ratified; Vice President meets Singaporean minister; Chinese Vice Premier meets Jacob Lew; Wang Yang meets Turkish Vice-Premier.**

On the second day of Chinese national legislature's annual session, Li Keqiang asserted the need for new momentum to promote economic growth. During the meeting Li said that, "We will continue with structural reform, in particular supply-side structural reform, and implement the innovation-driven strategy".²²

On the first day of the Chinese legislature's annual session the Chinese President Xi Jinping asserted against any form of secession activities on Taiwan. He said that, "Our policy toward Taiwan is clear and consistent, and it will not change along with the change in Taiwan's political situation".²³

The National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) started its annual meeting on March 3. This meeting is scheduled to continue till March 14. According to China Daily, "The CPPCC is an organization in the patriotic united front of the Chinese people, an important organ for multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CPC, and an important means of promoting socialist democracy in China's political activities. The main functions of the CPPCC are to conduct political consultation, exercise democratic supervision and participate in the discussion and the handling of state affairs". All the top leaders are scheduled to attend the meeting.²⁴

The Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that China is ready to follow the sanctions imposed by the United National Security Council with respect to North Korea, if the resolution is adopted. According to the Foreign Ministry, "the resolution should also encourage various parties to work

²¹ "State Income, State Reserve Goes Down", *SunOnline*, March 5, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36567>. "1.4 Percent Inflation Rise in January", *SunOnline*, March 5, 2016, at <http://english.sun.mv/36566>.

²² "Premier Li Says New Momentum Will Promote Economic Growth", *China Daily*, March 6, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016twosession/2016-03/06/content_23761252.htm, accessed on March 7, 2016

²³ "President Xi Warns against 'Taiwan Independence' In Any Form", *China Daily*, March 6, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016twosession/2016-03/06/content_23761178.htm, accessed on March 8, 2016

²⁴ "China's Top Political Advisory Body Starts Annual Session", *China Daily*, March 3, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016twosession/2016-03/03/content_23725973.htm, accessed on March 4, 2016

together to get the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue back on the track of dialogue and negotiation as soon as possible and restart the Six-Party Talks".²⁵

Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao met the Foreign Minister of Singapore Vivian Balakrishnan on February 29. During the meeting Li said that, "China is ready to work with Singapore to "boost political mutual trust, promote practical cooperation and expand cultural exchanges".²⁶

Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang met the US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew in Beijing on February 28. Both sides discussed ways to improve the bilateral and economic relations.²⁷ Wang Yang also met his Turkish counterpart Mehmet Simsek on February 28 and discussed ways to improve the already existing relationship.²⁸

Japan

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Japan has welcomed Resolution 2270 on North Korea; G4 director-general level meeting on UNSC reforms held in Delhi; Japan-Egypt summit meeting held in Tokyo.**

Japan has welcomed fresh unanimously adopted UNSC sanctions on North Korea- Resolution 2270 on March 2, 2016. The sanction comes against the backdrop of North Korea's nuclear test in January and ballistic missile in February. Earlier, Japan has adopted independent measures against North Korea. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe strongly called upon North Korea to honestly note the strong warnings and condemnation frequently articulated by the international community and to comply with Resolution 2270 without undertaking more provocative actions, such as nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches. Abe further argued that as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Japan has backed the embracing of this resolution in close coordination with concerned nations, including the United States and the South Korea. In his statement, Abe said that he will continue to make all possible efforts for the complete resolution of outstanding issues of concern regarding North Korea, including abductions, nuclear and missile issues.²⁹

Director Generals of the G4 nations including India, Germany, Brazil, and Japan met in Delhi on March 4. All sides exchanged assessments about UNSC reforms, discussed lively participation in the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) on UNSC reform in New York, and cooperation with the reform-oriented member countries. The preceding director-general level meeting was hosted in Brasilia on July 10, 2015. The G4 nations decided to carry on discussions towards this year's UNGA, and Japan suggested hosting the next director-general level meeting in Japan.³⁰

²⁵ "China will Implement UN Security Council Resolution on DPRK If Adopted", By Wang Qingyun, *China Daily*, March 1, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-03/01/content_23703267.htm, accessed on March 4, 2016

²⁶ "Vice-President Praises Singapore Ties", By Zhang Yunbi, *China Daily*, February 29, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/29/content_23687582.htm, accessed on March 4, 2016

²⁷ "Chinese vice Premier Meets US Treasury Secretary on Economic Ties", *China Daily*, February 29, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/29/content_23675299.htm, accessed on March 4, 2016

²⁸ "Chinese Vice Premier Meets Turkish Counterpart", *China Daily*, February 29, 2016 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/29/content_23675298.htm, accessed on March 4, 2016

²⁹ "Comment by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, on the Adoption of a Resolution by the United Nations Security Council on the Nuclear Test and the Ballistic Missile Launch conducted by North Korea", *MOFA Japan*, March 3, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001061.html

³⁰ "Director-General Level Meeting of G4 Officials on UN Security Council Reforms", *MOFA Japan*, March 4, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001064.html

On February 29, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a summit meeting with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi in Tokyo. The Joint Statement valued the first political and security dialogue among foreign ministries and security authorities, and defence dialogue which were held in October 2015, and confirmed the importance of regular dialogues. Both countries agreed that endorsing cooperation in the education sector by framing the Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) founded on their trust that the education and development of human resources are the basis of a nation building and the most essential project for building a prosperous society. They applauded the signing of MOUs in areas like private investment in electricity, energy and the Suez Canal area development, and further reiterated their aim to endorse and support projects worth \$20 billion in which Japanese businesses join in. Moreover, the signing of MOU between Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the Ministry of International Cooperation of Egypt for backing export and investment in Egypt by Japanese companies was welcomed. President El-Sisi appreciated the interests articulated by Japanese businesses in fields like electricity and water in the Suez Canal Area Development. During the summit meeting, both leaders exchanged assessments on the wider security environment in East-Asia and reiterated the standing of respect for international law, maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.³¹

C. Southeast Asia & Oceania

ASEAN

(February 29 – March 6, 2016)

- **Mega military exercise of ASEAN plus countries starts in Pune; South China Sea dispute: Singapore leads ASEAN talks with Beijing.**

A week-long multinational Field Training Exercise, involving military personnel from ASEAN plus countries, commenced in Pune on March 2. Christened "Exercise Force 18", the largest ground forces operation ever conducted on Indian soil, being held from March 2 - 8 at Aundh Military Station, will focus on the theme "Peacekeeping operations and humanitarian mine action", a defence release said. Playing of national anthems of participating nations and a fly past marked the grand opening ceremony in the presence of 80 foreign dignitaries from various countries. Speaking on the occasion, Lt Gen Bipin Rawat, Army Commander of the city-based Southern Command, said that 'Exercise 18' would build common understanding and achieve inter-operability among 18 ASEAN plus countries. A 40-member Indian Army contingent at the ceremony was led by a woman officer, Lt Col Sophia Qureshi.³² Countries include nine members of the Association of South East Asian Nations and eight observer States that include India, Japan, Korea, China, Russia, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Myanmar was compelled to back out owing to elections and security issues pertaining to border infiltration.³³

Singapore's foreign minister said on February 29 after talks in Beijing that China had agreed to explore ways of limiting the risks of armed encounters in the disputed South China Sea. While

³¹ "Japan-Egypt Joint Statement, Cooperation for the Leap Towards a New Stage in Bilateral Relations", *MOFA Japan*, February 29, 2016 at http://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me1/eg/page4e_000386.html

³² "Mega Military Exercise of ASEAN Plus Countries Starts in Pune", *Business Standard*, March 2, 2016, at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/mega-military-exercise-of-asean-plus-countries-starts-in-pune-116030201116_1.html

³³ Banerjee, Shoumojit, "ASEAN-Plus Military Drill Begins in Pune", *The Hindu*, March 4, 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/aseanplus-military-drill-begins-in-pune/article8310954.ece>

Singapore does not claim any part of the South China Sea, it is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) coordinator for China relations. "We both reaffirmed the importance of peace and stability and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. This is an essential lifeline for China and for all ASEAN countries because so much of our trade and energy flows through this area," Mr. Balakrishnan said after meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. Wang said that China's position on the dispute remained unchanged, but stressed that Beijing was ready to work with ASEAN to implement the code of conduct. He said "specific disputes should be settled by the countries directly involved through dialogue and negotiation" as stipulated under the code. "At the same time, China and ASEAN countries ... will continue to maintain peace, stability and that includes the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea," Wang said.³⁴

Southeast Asia

(February 29 – March 6, 2016)

- **Philippines to China: respect coming decision on sea feud; Japan signs pact to supply defense equipment to Philippines; Mahathir quits Malaysia's ruling UMNO party, protesting corruption; Malaysia calls in Philippine envoy over claim on Sabah; China's Xi says shares 'common destiny' with Vietnam, looks to repair ties; Singapore, Vietnam reaffirm defence relations through policy dialogue; Vietnam, Laos review border cooperation; Philippines: No involvement in joint patrols in disputed seas**

The Philippines asked China to respect an upcoming decision by an international arbitration tribunal on Beijing's claim to most of the South China Sea to show it did not regard itself as "above the law." Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario said on February 29 that Beijing should foster a world order based on international law by heeding the expected decision. The Philippines asked the tribunal to rule on the validity of China's vast claims in the South China Sea. Mr. Del Rosario said, "If China does not heed our collective call, does it mean that China considers itself above the law?"³⁵

Japan signed an agreement on February 29 to supply defence equipment to the Philippines, the first such Japanese defence pact in a region. Defence Secretary of The Philippines Voltaire Gazmin said that the agreement he signed with the Japanese ambassador to Manila, Kazuhide Ishikawa, provided a framework for the supply of defence equipment and technology and would allow the Asian countries to carry out joint research and development projects. "This agreement would really substantiate the Philippines and Japan being strategic partners," Gazmin said in remarks during the signing ceremony at the Department of Defence in metropolitan Manila. "Let me stress that what underpins this agreement is not only our desire to enhance our respective defence capabilities but also to contribute to regional peace and stability." Neither side mentioned China's increasingly assertive behaviour in disputed areas but that had been a major security concern for

³⁴ "South China Sea Dispute: Singapore Leads ASEAN Talks With Beijing", *International Business Times*, March 1, 2016, at <http://www.ibtimes.com/south-china-sea-dispute-singapore-leads-asean-talks-beijing-2327692>

³⁵ "Philippines to China: Respect Coming Decision on Sea Feud", *The Hindu*, February 29, 2016, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/philippines-to-china-respect-coming-decision-on-sea-feud/article8295814.ece>

both countries, which were close American allies. "It's not directed against any country," Gazmin said.³⁶

Malaysia's former premier Mahathir Mohamad said on February 29 that he was quitting the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party, as it was being seen as "supporting corruption" under Prime Minister Najib Razak's leadership. Mahathir, Malaysia's longest-serving leader, remains a highly respected and influential figure and has become the fiercest critic of Najib, who is facing pressure over a graft scandal surrounding state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). "I won't call it UMNO anymore, this is Najib's party. I feel embarrassed that I am associated with a party that is seen as supporting corruption - it had caused me to feel ashamed," he said. But he added that he would not set up a new party or join any other party.³⁷

Wisma Putra (Malaysia's Foreign Ministry) called in a Philippine envoy on March 1 over a statement on a Sabah territorial claim made by a Philippine presidential candidate. Malaysia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it had called in the Philippine Embassy's Charge d'Affaires, Maria Antonina M. Mendoza-Oblena, over the statement made by Vice President Jejomar Binay, who was running for the country's top post. Binay had reportedly vowed to pursue a territorial claim over Sabah if elected president in the elections scheduled for May 9. Wisma Putra said, "The Government of Malaysia wishes to reiterate its position that Malaysia does not recognise and will not entertain any claims by any party on Sabah." The ministry said Sabah had been recognised by the United Nations and the international community as part of Malaysia since the formation of the federation on September 16, 1963.³⁸

Chinese President Xi Jinping told a visiting Vietnamese envoy that China and Vietnam shared a "common destiny", as the two continued to repair ties damaged by their competing claims in the disputed South China Sea. "China and Vietnam share a common destiny, so do the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Vietnam," Xi told Hoang Binh Quan, a special envoy of Vietnam's communist party chief Nguyen Phu Trong. "Developing bilateral ties conforms to the fundamental interests of the two countries and their people," Xi added. Xi also called for the proper handling of differences between the two nations in order for their "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership to develop in a sustained, healthy and steady way". Xi added that China was willing to work with Vietnam to maintain the frequency of high-level visits and to carry on the two countries' important tradition of the party chiefs sending special envoys to communicate with each other.³⁹

The Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) of Singapore said that the bilateral defence relationship between Singapore and Vietnam was reaffirmed during the 7th Singapore-Vietnam Defence Policy Dialogue (DPD) on February 29 in Singapore. Vietnam's Deputy Minister of National Defence and Senior Lieutenant General Nguyen Chi Vinh co-chaired the dialogue with Permanent Secretary (Defence) Mr Chan Yeng Kit at MINDEF. Views were also exchanged on international and regional security issues of mutual interest, such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). As part of

³⁶ Gomez, Jim, "Japan Signs Pact To Supply Defence Equipment To Philippines", *Yahoo News*, February 29, 2016, at <https://www.yahoo.com/news/japan-signs-pact-supply-defense-equipment-philippines-111427612.html?ref=gs>

³⁷ "Mahathir Quits Malaysia's Ruling UMNO Party, Protesting Corruption", *CNBC*, February 29, 2016, at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/29/mahathir-quits-malaysias-ruling-umno-party-protesting-corruption.html>

³⁸ "Malaysia Calls in Philippine Envoy Over Claim on Sabah", *Malaymail Online*, March 1, 2016, at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/malaysia-calls-in-philippine-envoy-over-claim-on-sabah>

³⁹ "China's Xi Says Shares 'Common Destiny' With Vietnam, Looks To Repair Ties", *Reuters*, February 29, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-vietnam-idUSKCN0W338S>

the visit programme, Mr Vinh called on Minister for Defence Ng Eng Hen and visited the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre.⁴⁰

The Vietnamese and Lao chairpersons of the two countries' joint committee for border marker planting held a meeting in Hanoi on March 1 and March 2. The two sides lauded the completion of the Vietnam-Laos project on increasing and upgrading national markers along their shared border line as scheduled. The project had established a system of 1,002 markers and stakes, defining a stable, clear and easy-to-recognise border line between the two countries. They agreed to ask the two governments to early organise a ceremony to mark the completion of the project and sign a protocol on the borderline and national border markers of Vietnam and Laos and an agreement on regulations of managing the borderline and border gates on land. The two sides noted the encouraging outcomes of both countries' border management, as seen in the political-security situation and social order and safety in border areas, the friendly and cooperative ties between ministries, central agencies and local authorities of border areas. They discussed and reached agreement on border-related tasks for 2016, including speeding up the implementation of a governmental agreement on handling unplanned migration and unregistered marriages in border areas. On March 2, head of the Vietnamese sub-committee Deputy Foreign Minister Ho Xuan Son and his Lao counterpart Saleumxay Kommasith signed addenda to the protocol on Vietnam-Laos borderline and national border markers.⁴¹

Malacañang declared on March 6 that it has nothing to do with the planned joint naval exercises of allies US, Japan and India in the disputed West Philippine Sea. "The reported joint naval exercises near the South China Sea, however, do not involve the Philippines in any way. It will, thus, be speculative on its possible impact to the concerns regarding the South China Sea," said Presidential Communications Operations Office Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. "The Philippines believes that regional stability is achieved when the rule of law is upheld. Hence, we have joined cause with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in advocating the adoption of a legally binding Code of Conduct on the South China Sea," Coloma stressed.⁴²

Oceania

(February 29 – March 6, 2016)

- **PM Malcolm Turnbull disappoints East Timor on talks on maritime boundary; Papua New Guinea says 'damaged' by Australia asylum seeker camp.**

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull offered to hold "frank and open" discussions with East Timor about the unresolved maritime boundary between the two countries but stopped short of the fledgling state's request for formal and discrete talks to settle the impasse. East Timor's Prime Minister Rui Araujo wrote to Mr Turnbull on February 1 asking that the two leaders meet to discuss a permanent maritime boundary in the Timor Sea, rich in oil and gas. Dr Araujo told Mr Turnbull

⁴⁰ "Singapore, Vietnam Reaffirm Defence Relations Through Policy Dialogue", *Channel News Asia*, March 1, 2016, at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-vietnam/2562012.html>

⁴¹ "Vietnam, Laos Review Border Cooperation", *Vietnamnet*, March 3, 2016, at <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/government/152004/vietnam--laos-review-border-cooperation.html>

⁴² Porcalla, Delon, "Philippines: No Involvement in Joint Patrols in Disputed Seas", *Philstar*, March 7, 2016, at <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/03/07/1560400/philippines-no-involvement-joint-patrols-disputed-seas>

that the current arrangement, where the two countries shared oil and gas revenue in a joint development area, did not reflect East Timor's entitlements under international law.

As a result, East Timor believed it had lost some \$US5 billion in royalties and tax revenue since independence, enough to fund its entire budget for three years. In his response to Dr Araujo, Mr Turnbull highlighted the importance of the relationship and said that there was a genuine need for "frank and open" discussions about the border. However, he said those talks should take place only within the context of the broader bilateral relationship and alongside "other issues".

Further deflating hopes in Dili, Mr Turnbull said that Australia's long-held position was to support the treaty arrangements that underpinned the current resource sharing in Timor Sea and were negotiated in "good faith" and "consistent with international law".⁴³

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Peter O'Neill said on March 3 that Australia's detention of asylum seekers on Papua territory had severely damaged the archipelago's reputation and that the camp would have to close eventually. Everyone who arrives by boat is detained and sent to the tiny island of Nauru or Papua New Guinea's Manus Island. The government also conducts tow-backs, or turning a boat back to its origin. O'Neill said that the country did not have the resources to resettle detainees, but that the decision rested with Australia. "When we saw women and children dying at sea, we stepped up our offer to help, and that's what we have done... At some stage, of course, we need to close the centre. These people cannot remain in Manus forever... But it is entirely up to the Australian government." Australia's policy to house asylum seekers offshore has attracted international criticism from human rights groups including the United Nations.⁴⁴

India and Southeast Asia

(February 29 – March 6, 2016)

- **Suspend border fencing with Myanmar in Manipur: Ibobi; SBI among 4 new foreign banks allowed to operate in Myanmar; Sharp rise in allocation for Myanmar in Indian Budget.**

Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh on March 4 sought the suspension of fencing along the India-Myanmar border in the state and suggested an all-party delegation should meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and others on the issue. The chief minister stated his view on the last day of the assembly budget session in reply to a calling attention motion moved by I. Ibohanbi of the Trinamool Congress and Khumukcham Jaikishan of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The two legislators said they were concerned over reports that the border fencing would lead to a loss of at least 1,000 square km of Manipur land, a significant chunk given the fact that the north-east state's total area is just 22,327 square km. Ibobi said, "There is no problem in areas covered by 19 boundary pillars. However, there is dispute in areas covered by nine pillars." He said that Manipur would never compromise on its territory.⁴⁵

⁴³ Allard, Tom, "PM Malcolm Turnbull Disappoints East Timor on Talks on Maritime Boundary", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 1, 2016, at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/pm-malcolm-turnbull-disappoints-east-timor-on-talks-on-maritime-boundary-20160301-gn798f.html>

⁴⁴ "Papua New Guinea Says 'Damaged' By Australia Asylum Seeker Camp", *Reuters*, March 3, 2016, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-asylum-png-idUSKCN0W50P9>

⁴⁵ "Suspend Border Fencing With Myanmar in Manipur: Ibobi", *The Sentinel*, March 4, 2016, at <http://www.sentinelassam.com/northeast/story.php?sec=2&subsec=9&id=259289&dtP=2016-03-05&ppr=1>

The State Bank of India was among four new foreign banks given preliminary approval to open 100 per cent-owned branches in Myanmar, to woo investment to the country long ruled by the military and hit by Western sanctions. The four new banks that had been given initial approval by the Central Bank of Myanmar were Vietnam's Bank for Investment and Development, Taiwan's E.SUN Commercial Bank, South Korea's Shinhan Bank and the State Bank of India.

“After due consideration, the Licensing Committee has decided to grant preliminary approval to prepare for commencement of banking operations in Myanmar to four Foreign Banks,” the apex bank said. The Central Bank of Myanmar said that the preliminary approval was valid for 12 months during which the successful applicants would had to fulfil commitments made, take all necessary measures to ensure functional banking operation from day one of business and would had to comply with requirements laid down by the Central bank of Myanmar. "Upon fulfilment of the above-stated requirements the Central Bank of Myanmar will grant the final license (to the winners) to operate in Myanmar," the apex bank said.⁴⁶

The proposed Union budget of 2016-17 saw the sharpest increase in assistance to Myanmar as compared to other regions of the world. The budgetary allocation saw a jump from Rs 165 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 400 crore in 2016-17. This was major support from India to CLMV countries under growing linkages with ASEAN. Most of India's development assistance to countries goes to her neighbours. In terms of quantum, the highest proposed flow of assistance during 2016-17 was earmarked for Bhutan (Rs 5,490 crores - 72.5 per cent of total development assistance given to countries), followed by that to Afghanistan (Rs 520 crores, around 7 per cent) and Myanmar (Rs 400 crores, a little more than 5 per cent). The annual growth of flow of development assistance to Myanmar between 2010-11 and 2016-17 was around 20 per cent.⁴⁷

D. West Asia

Iran

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Iran, Oman set to bolster economic ties; Zarif calls on Iranians to participate massively in elections.**

In the visit of a high-ranking Omani delegation to Iran, led by the country's Foreign Affairs Minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah and Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, the Iranian and Omani officials stressed bolstering of bilateral economic ties. In a meeting between Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh and the two visiting Omani ministers, the both sides emphasized the need to expand bilateral economic ties especially in the fields of oil and gas, according to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). After the meeting, Zanganeh told reporters that his negotiations with the Omani officials have been fruitful, adding that Iran and

⁴⁶ “SBI Among 4 New Foreign Banks Allowed To Operate in Myanmar”, *The Economic Times*, March 6, 2016, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2016-03-06/news/71246558_1_myanmar-aung-san-suu-kyi-state-bank

⁴⁷ Chaturvedi, Sachin, “Sharp Rise in Allocation for Myanmar in Indian Budget”, *Business World*, March 5, 2016, at <http://www.businessworld.in/article/Sharp-Rise-In-Allocation-For-Myanmar-In-Indian-Budget/05-03-2016-91675/>

Oman are keen to expand their economic ties and make joint investment, and are taking the necessary steps to do so.⁴⁸

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has called on the Iranian people to participate in large numbers in the elections. Participation in the elections will guarantee the country's future success, he said in an interview. He asked people to use the elections as an opportunity, which many people in the Middle East countries do not have, to determine their destiny. He added that the participation at the elections will boost the country's political stability. "What made us to enter the (nuclear) negotiations (with great powers) powerfully was the massive turnout of people in the 2013 (presidential) election, a participation which was both huge and vigilant."⁴⁹

Iraq and Syria

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Masum receives official invitation to visit Armenia; Foreign Ministry: Statements of Saudi foreign minister violate Security Council resolution no. 2268; Syrian, Cuba to Boost Health Cooperation.**

President Fuad Masum said that he has received an official invitation from the Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan to visit Armenia, while emphasized the need to strengthen the relations between the two countries. The presidency said in a statement received by *IraqiNews.com*, "Today the President received the Armenian Ambassador Karen Krikorian at the Peace Palace in Baghdad," indicating that, "The latter passed an official invitation of the Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan to visit Armenia and expressed hope in the development of bilateral relations between the two countries in industrial, commercial and cultural fields."⁵⁰

An official source at the Foreign and Expatriates Ministry said that the statements made by Saudi foreign minister Adel al-Jubeir are nothing more than an echo of what his masters in Israel and the United States say, and that his talk of a "plan B" regarding the current developments in Syria is a mere delusion in the heads of the Saudi regime, because the presence of such a plan would imply that the Saudi kingdom can think and plan, while Al Saud are known to be unthinking tools in the hands of Israel and the United States who do as they are told. The source went on to stress that al-Jubeir's statements constitute a violation of Security Council resolution no. 2268 and an attempt to derail the cessation of combat activities, in addition to being a dose of lies meant to raise the flagging morale of his failed pawns in Syria and a prelude to undermining the efforts for resolving the crisis in Syria. The leaders of the Saudi regime, which is committing massacres against the Yemeni people, and after all it did in Syria for five years, should be tried at the International Criminal Court, the source said, adding that the same goes for the Israeli war criminals who had visited Saudi Arabia recently. The source said that Syria requests that the UN Secretary-General form an international committee to look into the crimes that were committed and are still being committed by the Saudi regime and in the Arab world, because it has become clear to everyone that the Saudi regime's role

⁴⁸ "Iran, Oman Set To Bolster Economic Ties", *Tehran Times*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/300083/Iran-Oman-set-to-bolster-economic-ties>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁴⁹ "Zarif calls on Iranians to Participate Massively in Elections", *Tehran Times*, March 5, 2016 at <http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/300102/Zarif-calls-on-Iranians-to-participate-massively-in-elections>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁵⁰ "Masum Receives Official Invitation To Visit Armenia", *Iraqi News*, March 2, 2016 at <http://www.iraqinews.com/baghdad-politics/masum-receives-official-invitation-visit-armenia/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

is to cause defeats and deterioration to the Arab nation and undermine its stability, which makes it a threat to Arab national security and existence as well as world peace and stability.⁵¹

Health Minister Nizar Yazigi and Cuba's Ambassador to Syria Rogerio Manuel Santana Rodriguez discussed methods of enhancing health cooperation particularly in the domain of ensuring qualitative medicines. Yazigi stressed the need to put a mechanism as to provide Syria with qualitative medicines and vaccines from Cuba in order to contribute to meeting Syria's needs of medicines and healthcare technologies in accordance with the agreement signed between the two countries. He asserted the importance of benefiting from the Cuban medical and scientific centres and transferring the Cuban expertise to Syria which is under unjust economic siege that notably affected the health sector. On his part, the Cuban ambassador affirmed his government's keenness on deepening cooperation between the two countries especially in the health field.⁵²

Israel and Palestine

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Netanyahu rebuffs claims of rift with US ahead of Biden visit; Hamas Blasts Fatah Comments about 'Retaking' Gaza**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of "strong" ties with the United States ahead of a visit by Vice President Joe Biden, despite deep disagreement over the nuclear accord with Iran. "This visit expresses the strong relations between Israel and our ally the US," Netanyahu said at the start of a cabinet meeting that, "There are those who have predicted the collapse of these relations. It is not so. The relationship is strong in all areas, including in the face of the challenges that we are standing together against in our region." Biden is set to arrive for talks with Netanyahu as well as Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.⁵³

Palestinian resistance group Hamas blasted statements made by the Fatah movement's revolutionary council in which it said it was mulling its "options" to retake the Hamas-run Gaza Strip in the event that upcoming reconciliation talks between the two groups fail. "Fatah's threats to 'retake' Gaza betray the truth of its intentions," Hamas said in a statement. Hamas went on to urge Fatah, which leads the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority (PA), to "leave custodianship [of the Gaza Strip] up to the Palestinian people, respect election results, and adopt the principle of partnership". Fatah's revolutionary council stated that – should upcoming reconciliation talks in Doha between the two groups fail – "other options" for retaking the strip from Hamas would be considered.⁵⁴

⁵¹ "Foreign Ministry: Statements of Saudi Foreign Minister Violate Security Council Resolution No. 2268", *Syria News*, February 29, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/22505-foreign-ministry-statements-of-saudi-foreign-minister-violate-security-council-resolution-no-2268>

⁵² "Syrian, Cuba to Boost Health Cooperation", *Syria News*, March 6, 2016 at <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/local/22600-syrian-cuba-to-boost-health-cooperation>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁵³ "Netanyahu Rebuffs Claims of Rift with US Ahead of Biden Visit", *Times of Israel*, March 6, 2016 at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-rebuffs-claims-of-rift-with-us-ahead-of-biden-visit/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁵⁴ "Hamas Blasts Fatah Comments about 'Retaking' Gaza", *Palestine Chronicles*, March 6, 2016 at <http://www.palestinechronicle.com/hamas-blasts-fatah-comments-about-retaking-gaza/>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

The Gulf

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Arab ministers condemn Iran's hegemony drive; GCC declares Hezbollah a terrorist organisation**

Shaikh Rashid Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, Bahrain Interior Minister, said that the aim of the Iranian interference in the Arab countries is to achieve Persian hegemony in the region and warned that those who endorsed the Guardianship of the Jurist (Juristocracy) should move out. “The Iranian interference is considered to be a threat to a number of countries in the region,” Shaikh Rashid Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa said. “Their interference includes support for terrorism, promoting chaos, and political interference. The goal is to achieve Persian domination over Arabism with the use of the Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah. Even Iran's media groups play a role,” Shaikh Rashid said as he chaired the 33rd session of Arab Interior Ministers in the Tunisian capital Tunis. Despite all calls for Iran to stop its interference and to respect the sovereignty of states, it continued to support terrorism, he added.⁵⁵

The six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) named Hezbollah a terrorist organisation, opening up the possibility of further sanctions against the Iran-allied group that wields influence in Lebanon and is fighting in Syria. The council – representing Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar – first imposed sanctions on the group in 2013 after it entered Syria’s war in support of President Bashar Al Assad. GCC Secretary-General Abdul Latif Al Zayani said: “The GCC countries see the practices by the Hezbollah militia within the Gulf and its terrorist acts and incitement in Syria, Yemen and Iraq as against international values, moral and human principles and laws and as a threat to Arab security.” He said the council would “take the necessary measures to implement its decision ... based on anti-terrorism laws applied in the GCC and similar international laws”. Al Zayani did not specify what action might follow, but Saudi Arabia last week said it had blacklisted four companies and three Lebanese men for having links to Hezbollah.⁵⁶

E. The United State of America

National

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **DTRA scientists develop cloud-based bio-surveillance ecosystem; Importance of distribution, investment and private industry collaboration; DoD, private-sector tech innovation keep U.S. ahead; Technology showcase hosted; Civilian and military personnel working on cutting-edge technologies to maximize human performance.**

The Departments of Defence and Homeland Security are developing a system that lets epidemiologists scan the planet for anomalies in human and animal disease prevalence, warn of

⁵⁵ “ Arab Ministers Condemn Iran's Hegemony Drive”, *Gulf News*, March 3, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/iran/arab-ministers-condemn-iran-s-hegemony-drive-1.1683468>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

⁵⁶ “GCC Declares Hezbollah a Terrorist Organisation”, *Gulf News*, March 3, 2016 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/gcc-declares-hezbollah-a-terrorist-organisation-1.1683460>. Accessed on 1 April 2016

coming pandemics and protect war fighters and others worldwide. The Bio-surveillance Ecosystem, or BSVE, is a programme of DoD's Defence Threat Reduction Agency's Joint Science and Technology Office for Chemical and Biological Defence, or JSTO-CBD, the Joint Programme Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defence and Homeland Security's National Bio-surveillance Integration Centre. DTRA scientists Dr. Christopher M. Kiley and Dr. John Hannan discussed the BSVE in a recent interview with *DoD News*. The BSVE is a virtual, customizable, collaborative system that uses commercial and government technologies to aggregate and analyse data streams, Kiley said.⁵⁷

As cyber and data security remain among the Pentagon's top priorities, the undersecretary of defence for acquisition, technology and logistics underscored the importance of distribution, investment and private industry collaboration at the D3 Innovation Summit in Washington on March 2. At the half-day interagency event hosted by the State Department, Frank Kendall noted the speed of innovation, research and development in industry and outlined DoD's intent to tap into that expedience to more effectively steep U.S. missions in the cyber culture. Kendall described the emergence of DIUx, or Defence Innovation Unit Experimental, which primes the DoD to better leverage the infusion of non-traditional technical ideas and talent.⁵⁸

Defence Secretary Ash Carter said on March 2 at the RSA Conference in San Francisco that the Defence Department's mission to provide U.S. security and being up-to-date with technology-industry innovation enables the "great innovative engine of America". As part of the secretary's West Coast trip to discuss technology and cybersecurity with the nation's top innovative industries, Carter engaged in a "fireside chat" at the RSA Conference with moderator Ted Schlein, a partner at Silicon Valley's venture-capital company Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield & Byers. Carter discussed innovation programmes between DoD and the private sector, the department's innovation initiatives, data security, cyber security and the accelerated campaign to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Taking risks and being willing to fail to progress is imbued in the innovative community. DoD can't keep doing what it's doing "because the world changes too fast," Carter said.⁵⁹

Five tech organizations pitched their technologies to Defence Secretary Ash Carter this week during a technology showcase hosted by DoD's six-month-old forward operating unit, the Defence Innovation Unit Experimental (DIUx) in Silicon Valley. DIUx officials said in a statement that so far, the unit has identified 22 pilot projects with tech companies and start-ups that have never before worked with the Pentagon. Five projects are being executed, and 17 others are in various acquisition phases. Carter visited DIUx as part of a trip to Silicon Valley, his third as defence secretary, and to Seattle to discuss technology and cybersecurity initiatives with officials at some of the region's top

⁵⁷ Pellerin, Cheryl, "DTRA Scientists Develop Cloud-Based Biosurveillance Ecosystem", *DoD News*, February 29, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/681832/dtra-scientists-develop-cloud-based-biosurveillance-ecosystem>

⁵⁸ Lyle, Amaani, "Pentagon Technology Official Aims to Hasten Innovation Processes", *DoD News*, March 2, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/684805/pentagon-technology-official-aims-to-hasten-innovation-processes>

⁵⁹ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Carter: DoD, Private-Sector Tech Innovation Keep U.S. Ahead", *DoD News*, March 3, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/685675/carter-dod-private-sector-tech-innovation-keep-us-ahead>; and, Collins, Shannon, "Carter Stresses Need for DoD Innovation During Seattle Event", *DoD News*, March 3, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/685351/carter-stresses-need-for-dod-innovation-during-seattle-event>

tech companies. The technologies range from cyber and intelligence analysis to drones and new ways to bring DoD and Silicon Valley together, DIUx Director George Duchak said.⁶⁰

The civilian and military personnel at the laboratories in Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, working on cutting-edge technologies to maximize human performance, protect the war fighter, and secure the nation. Deputy Defence Secretary Bob Work made a number of stops during a one-day visit, including to the 711th Human Performance Wing and the National Air and Space Intelligence Centre. The visit was focused on the technologies that would support the department's third offset strategy, intended to deter and protect against emerging and new threats, he said. That strategy includes the development of learning systems, human-machine collaboration and combat teaming, and network-enabled and cyber-hardened autonomous weapons. Research and development and readiness are deeply connected, Work said. The department has achieved a good balance between future readiness and current readiness.⁶¹

International: Asia

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Afghanistan has made tremendous progress; Integration of lessons learned from operations will make the Afghan army and police more effective; Afghan security forces had to provide protection; Cessation of hostilities in Syria could be a "first step" in ending Syria's civil war: Carter; United States will increase support to Iraqi forces; Iraqi security forces are preparing for the assault to reclaim the key city of Mosul; US and coalition military forces have continued to attack ISIL terrorists; JCSSG conducting routine operations in the South China Sea; US-Japan exercise Iron fist 2016.**

Afghanistan has made tremendous progress over the years, and it remains a “very, very worthy” security investment, the commander of U.S. Central Command said in Kabul on March 2. Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III stressed the progress Afghanistan has made and praised the team of Afghan, coalition and American personnel that made it possible. Austin spoke during the change-of-command ceremony where Army Gen. John F. Campbell passed the U.S. and NATO colours to Army Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr.⁶²

While the highlight of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s visit to Afghanistan was the change of command in Kabul, he also took advantage of the visit to check on operations in the eastern part of the country. Overall, the Chairman, Joseph F. Dunford, said he was pleased with what he saw and believes integration of lessons learned from operations last year will make the Afghan army and police more effective forces going forward. He said, afghan security forces went through tough tests in 2015. Enemy forces tested them in many areas and many ways. Last year, the Afghans assumed control of their security with very little coalition back-up, he said. Afghan forces need more

⁶⁰ Pellerin, Cheryl, “Carter Reviews New Technologies From DoD’s Silicon Valley Unit”, *DoD News*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/686507/carter-reviews-new-technologies-from-dods-silicon-valley-unit>

⁶¹ Ferdinando, Lisa, “Work: Exciting Technology Under Development”, *DoD News*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/685979/work-exciting-technology-under-development>

⁶² Garamone, Jim, “Afghanistan’s Security Forces Making Progress, Centcom Chief Says”, *DoD News*, March 2, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/684146/afghanistans-security-forces-making-progress-centcom-chief-says>

capabilities in some complex areas -- ministerial capacity, aviation, logistics, special operations and the intelligence enterprise, he noted.⁶³

Delaying some of these capabilities was the fact that Afghan security forces had to provide protection for two elections.⁶⁴

Defence Secretary Ash Carter said on February 29 during a Pentagon news conference that the cessation of hostilities in Syria could be a "first step" in ending Syria's civil war. Carter said the agreement, which went into effect over the weekend, could also be a move toward helping the Syrian people. Brokered by the U.S. and Russia, the cessation of hostilities includes the Syrian government, Russia and several rebel factions. He said "If properly implemented and adhered to, we believe this cessation can lead to an overall decline in violence and hasten the delivery of humanitarian aid". "It could be a first step towards an end of the civil war and the suffering of the Syrian people."⁶⁵

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph F. Dunford Jr. said on February 29 during a news briefing at the Pentagon that operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have begun in Mosul, Iraq, and the United States will increase support to Iraqi forces. Mosul is the largest city under ISIL control in either Syria or Iraq. With a population of around 665,000 people, the operation against the group will be much more complicated than the successful operation against ISIL in Ramadi late last year, Dunford said. "Operations against Mosul have already started," he said. "We're isolating Mosul, even as we speak. The same thing with Raqqa," the chairman added, referring to an ISIL-controlled city in Syria. These shaping operations are both kinetic and cyber, Dunford said.⁶⁶

Army Col. Christopher Garver, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman said on March 4 that with coalition support, Iraqi security forces are preparing for the assault to reclaim the key city of Mosul from the ISIL. Speaking to Pentagon reporters via teleconference from Baghdad, Garver said the Mosul assault will happen in the coming months on the timeline of the Iraqis, as they are the ones planning the operation. The battle for the city already has started, he said, noting that shaping operations have been going on for several months. The coalition has been training and equipping the Iraqi security forces who will conduct the assault, Garver said.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on March 6 that U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq.

⁶³ Garamone, Jim, "Dunford Says Afghans Applying Security Lessons Learned in 2015", *DoD News*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/686454/dunford-says-afghans-applying-security-lessons-learned-in-2015>

⁶⁴ Garamone, Jim, "Dunford Says Afghans Applying Security Lessons Learned in 2015", *DoD News*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/686454/dunford-says-afghans-applying-security-lessons-learned-in-2015>

⁶⁵ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Carter: Cease-Fire in Syria Could Be 'First Step' in Ending Civil War", *DoD News*, February 29, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/682177/carter-cease-fire-in-syria-could-be-first-step-in-ending-civil-war>; and, "Carter Highlights Momentum in ISIL Fight", *DoD News*, February 29, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/682010/carter-highlights-momentum-in-isil-fight>

⁶⁶ Garamone, Jim, "Dunford: Counter-ISIL Shaping Operations Have Begun in Mosul", *DoD News*, February 29, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/681899/dunford-counter-isil-shaping-operations-have-begun-in-mosul>

⁶⁷ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Iraqi Forces Preparing for Mosul Assault, OIR Spokesman Says", *DoD News*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/686365/iraqi-forces-preparing-for-mosul-assault-oir-spokesman-says>

Fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted six strikes in Syria and thirteen strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government.⁶⁸

The John C. Stennis Strike Group (JCSSG) is conducting routine operations in the South China Sea. The ships transited the Luzon Strait on March 1 and have maintained a location in the eastern half of these international waters for four days. USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), USS Chung-Hoon (DDG 93), USS Stockdale (DDG 106) and USS Mobile Bay (CG 53) all conducted a replenishment-at-sea today receiving advanced biofuel, aviation fuel and supplies from USNS Rainier (T-AOE 7). Flight operations have occurred daily with Carrier Airwing (CVW) 9 conducting 266 sorties. Numerous People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA(N)) vessels have remained in JCSSG's vicinity during this time period.⁶⁹

Forged in the wake of World War II, the U.S.-Japan security alliance has served as one of the Asia-Pacific Region's most important military relationships and as an anchor of U.S. engagement in the Pacific. Revised in 1960, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security grants the United States the rights to military bases in the Japanese archipelago in exchange for a U.S. pledge to defend Japan in the event of an attack. Exercise Iron Fist 2016 started on January 22, and concluded with a closing ceremony on March 1, 2016. Throughout the last five weeks, the Marines of 11th MEU worked alongside the soldiers of the Western Army Infantry Regiment, Japan Ground Self-Defence Force, to complete an aggressive training schedule.⁷⁰

India-US Relations

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **India-US can pool capabilities to build the region's security and strengthen dialogues: Adm Harris.**

Strengthening conversations, advancing relationships, and ambitiously realizing a joint strategic vision were a few of the goals the leader of U.S. Pacific Command shared with an international audience at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi this week. Navy Adm. Harry Harris Jr. was a keynote speaker at the inaugural conference, held March 1 to March 3, was billed as India's flagship geopolitics and geo-economics conference. The event drew high-level government, industry, media and academic delegates from throughout the region and around the world, including many from the Pacom area of responsibility, which covers territory stretching from the western United States to India's western border and from Antarctica to the North Pole. Harris said that, in his opinion, since President Barack Obama and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year outlined a joint

⁶⁸ "Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq", *DoD News*, March 6, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/686772/military-strikes-continue-against-isil-in-syria-iraq>; and, "Coalition Strikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq", *DoD News*, March 5, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/686639/coalition-strikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq>

⁶⁹ "The Great Green Fleet Operates in the South China Sea", *US PACOM*, March 04, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/686331/the-great-green-fleet-operates-in-the-south-china-sea.aspx>

⁷⁰ "Exercise Iron Fist 2016: Two Cultures, One Warrior Spirit", By Cpl. April Price, *US PACOM*, March 2, 2016 at <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/tabid/5693/Article/684774/exercise-iron-fist-2016-two-cultures-one-warrior-spirit.aspx>

strategic vision, the two nations can pool their capabilities to build the region's security and strengthen dialogues.⁷¹

II. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Three Hizbul militants killed in encounter in Kashmir; Fugitive constable, who joined HM, arrested in south Kashmir; Army foils an infiltration bid in J&K, killed militant; India lodges 'strong protest' with Pak over tunnel issue in J&K; Militant killed in South Kashmir encounter.**

Three local Hizbul Mujahideen militants were killed in an overnight encounter in Dadsara area of Tral in South Kashmir's Pulwama district, an Army official said on March 3. The slain militants have been identified as Ashiq Hussain Bhat, Mohammad Isaq Parray and Asif Ahmed Mir, the official said, adding that Bhat was involved in providing shelter to militants involved in Udhampur attack on a BSF convoy last year. Three AK rifles have been recovered from the scene of the gun battle, where search and sanitisation operation are in progress, the official added.⁷²

The policeman, who had run away with four AK 47 rifles and joined militant outfit Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) in mid-January, was arrested on March 3. Constable Shakoor Ahmed Parray, posted as personal security officer (PSO) to sub-divisional police officer Bijbehara in south Kashmir before escaping, was arrested in the region's Kulgam district. "He was arrested along with a pistol and two grenades," said Mumtaz Ahmad, the superintendent of police, Kulgam. Since March 2015, four policemen have left the force to join militants. While two cops, including Parray, have been arrested, one was killed in an encounter with government forces in first week of February.⁷³

An armed militant was gunned down by the Army while he was trying to sneak in from the Pakistani side of the Line of Control, thus foiling an infiltration bid in Keran sector of the Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district on March 3, police said. "One terrorist has been killed in this operation. But our two soldiers also sustained injuries. We also recovered a weapon," a defence source told IANS.⁷⁴

India, on March 4, lodged a strong protest with Pakistan over the digging of a tunnel from across the international border into its territory in the R S Pura sector of Jammu and Kashmir. A 3 X 4 ft tunnel, dug up 10 ft below the ground, was detected nearly 30 m inside the Indian territory in R S Pura's Allah Mai De Kothey area on March 3. This tunnel was the fourth one emanating from the

⁷¹ Parrish, Karen, "'Let's be Ambitious Together' Pacom Commander Urges in India", *DoD News*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/686250/lets-be-ambitious-together-pacom-commander-urges-in-india>

⁷² "Three Hizbul Militants Killed in Encounter in Kashmir", *The Times of India*, March 3, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Three-Hizbul-militants-killed-in-encounter-in-Kashmir/articleshow/51233748.cms>

⁷³ Hussain, Ashiq, "Fugitive Constable, Who Joined Hizb, Arrested in South Kashmir", *Hindustan Times*, March 3, 2016 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/fugitive-constable-who-joined-hizb-arrested-in-south-kashmir/story-6ZbRj01i3Z6PR50W0as3QM.html>

⁷⁴ "Kashmir Infiltration Bid Foiled, Militant Killed", *Business Standard*, March 3, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/kashmir-infiltration-bid-foiled-militant-killed-116030301005_1.html

Pakistan side which was detected in border areas in Jammu and Samba districts in the past four years. Claiming to have foiled a major terror plan to strike ahead of the Amarnath pilgrimage, Rakesh Sharma, IG BSF said it was to be used by terrorists for infiltration and to carry arms.⁷⁵

A militant was killed and a soldier was injured in an encounter in Buchroo village in South Kashmir's Kulgam district on March 5, an Army official said. The encounter is still going on, the official added.⁷⁶

Northeast India

(February 29- March 6, 2016)

- **Centre sets up committee to consider ST status for six communities of Assam; Operation Hillstorm: Five more IEDs recovered, GNLA militant killed in West Khasi Hills; Militants attack designated camp of URF(C) in Manipur.**

A Committee headed by Shri Mahesh Kumar Singla, Special Secretary (Internal Security), Ministry of Home Affairs, has been set up by the Union government to recommend the modalities for granting of Scheduled Tribe status to six communities namely Koch Rajbongshi, Moran, Matak, Tai Ahom, Chutia and Adivasi (Tea Tribes) in Assam. The Committee shall in consultation with the government of Assam suggest the modalities for the required reservations, of shifting the existing reservation for these communities from OBC to ST, protecting the interests of existing tribes, a mechanism to ensure fairness of reservations within these six communities and related security considerations. The Committee shall submit its report by May 31, 2016.⁷⁷

The arrest of an alleged over ground worker of the banned Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) has led to the recovery of five more IEDs bringing the total number of IEDs recovered so far to 67 in the ongoing third phase of Operation Hillstorm on February 28. Later, the arrested GNLA worker confessed that the IEDs were planted in a school to target policemen who generally take shelter in schools during their campaigns against the GNLA militants. Based on information, the East Garo Hills police arrested a hardcore GNLA civilian cadre Enison Ch Momin from Adugre in Durama region under EGH. Police sources claimed that Enison was entrusted to detonate five high intensity IEDs placed in Adugre School. These were later recovered and defused by the police team. The arrested cadre allegedly confessed that the IEDs were planted on the orders of GNLA commander-in-chief Sohan D Shira.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, another success against GNLA militants was recorded by the West Khasi Hills (WKH) police on March 2 when an unidentified militant was gunned down in an encounter in Rongtok village in WKH. The GNLA cadres had allegedly come to the village to collect extortion money. Police later recovered the body of an unknown GNLA cadre along with one AK 47 rifle, two magazines, 12 live rounds, one .32 pistol with two live rounds and id card of GNLA area commander Megam from the spot.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Sharma, Arun, "Tunnel to Pak: India Lodges Strong Protest", *The Indian Express*, March 5, 2016 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/bsf-protest-r-s-pura-sector/>

⁷⁶ "Militant Killed in South Kashmir Encounter", *The Hindu*, March 6, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/militant-killed-in-south-kashmir-encounter/article8321002.ece>

⁷⁷ "Committee Set Up To Consider ST Status To Six Communities of Assam", *PIB*, Release ID: 137037, February 29, 2016 at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx>

⁷⁸ "Operation Hillstorm: Six More IEDs Recovered", *The Assam Tribune*, February 29, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2916/oth061>

⁷⁹ Dey, Biplab Kr, "Operation Hillstorm: GNLA cadre killed", *The Assam Tribune*, March 3, 2016 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0316/oth051>

Suspected militants attacked a designated camp of the United Revolutionary Front (Chingkheinganba), which had suspended operation in an agreement with the Manipur state government, at Napet Pali in Imphal East district, police said. About ten suspected militants fired from sophisticated weapons and hurled bombs during the 30-minute operation at the camp on March 2, a police officer said. Although nobody was injured, property worth around Rs 1.5 lakh was damaged. Police later recovered from the spot an unexploded hand grenade along with forty empty cases, seven projectiles of AK-57, a plastic AK-57 magazine with eight rounds and three projectile of M 16, he said. Meanwhile, the Maoist Communist Party, Manipur, in a statement on March 4 claimed that it had carried out the attack.⁸⁰

Left-wing Extremism

(February 29-March 6, 2016)

- **Hyderabad court to hear PIL on Maoist encounter in Chhattisgarh; Twenty-three Maoists surrender in Chhattisgarh; Police; Minors recruited by Maoists held in Bokaro; Three CRPF commandos killed, fifteen hurt in gunfights with Maoists in Chhattisgarh.**

A major controversy erupted in the alleged encounter of eight Maoists, including five women, which were killed by the Greyhounds of Telangana police in a forest in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh close to Telangana's Khammam district on March 1. Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, SRP Kalluri had claimed to have recovered the bodies of eight rebels along with an AK-47 rifle, one SLR, three Insas rifles and a .303 rifle from the encounter spot. According to police sources, majority of the cadres killed in the face-off belonged to north Telangana. Meanwhile, Hyderabad HC, taking cognizance on a complaint by a human rights group which claimed the encounter to be fake, asked Telangana government to preserve the bodies of the deceased and submit the report of detailed operation in the court in the next hearing scheduled on March 3.⁸¹

The Chhattisgarh Police claimed to have busted a local Maoist network created by "leaders from outside" in Kumakuleng area of Jagdalpur, with the surrender of 23 cadres on March 1. Three of the Maoists carried rewards of Rs one lakh each. Senior police officers said each of the surrendered Naxals had ration cards and Aadhaar cards. Most of them had election cards as well. "The police have been working towards getting local Naxals to surrender to break the back of the Naxal organisation. We want that local Naxals surrender and work with the police against those from outside," a press statement issued by the police said. It added that the Maoist leadership allows locals to get official documents so that "they can take cover as poor villagers, adivasis or labourers".⁸²

Jharkhand Police on March 2 held two minors, who allegedly belonged to Maoists' children squad (bal dasta), following an encounter at Luggu Hill under Lalpania police station in Bokaro district. The squad is said to be of Santosh Mahto. The minors in police custody are 10 and 11-year-old and are residents of Jhumra and Parasnath villages. A police officer said the minors told them that

⁸⁰ "Militants Attack Designated Camp of URF(C) in Manipur", *Business Standard*, March 4, 2016 at http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/militants-attack-designated-camp-of-urf-c-in-manipur-116030401308_1.html

⁸¹ Mishra, Ishita, "Hyderabad Court To Hear PIL on Maoist Encounter in Chhattisgarh", *The Times of India*, March 2, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/Hyderabad-court-to-hear-PIL-on-Maoist-encounter-in-Chhattisgarh/articleshow/51229343.cms?>

⁸² "23 Maoists Surrender in Chhattisgarh", *The Indian Express*, March 3, 2016 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/23-maoists-surrender-in-chhattisgarh/>

Santosh Mahto had forcibly kept them in the squad. He used to threaten to kill them if they tried to escape, said the officer. They would be made to carry arms and prepare food in the jungles. The minors also disclosed there are two more girls in the squad besides a 14-year-old boy. The Mahto squad comprises 20 members.⁸³

Three CRPF commandos were killed and over a dozen injured after multiple encounters took place between security forces and Naxals in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on March 3-4. The patrol squad that came under fire on March 3 in the jungles of the district has been brought to the Kistaram police station from the encounter site of Dabbanarka in Sukma early on March 4 by multiple Mi-17 helicopter sorties, officials said. The encounter began when personnel of CRPF's exclusive jungle warfare unit CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) had the first exchange of fire with Maoists in the jungles of Bastar area. The CoBRA team encountered multiple ambushes and fire fights beginning 12.30 pm on March 3 and while evacuating the area, heavily armed Maoists engaged them in intermittent gunfire, till late in the night. "The operation is underway to retrieve the injured jawans. Around 600 personnel (of CRPF and state force) have been pressed into service," Chhattisgarh's Special Director General of Police (Anti-Naxal Operations) D M Awasthi told *PTI*.⁸⁴

⁸³ "2 Minors Recruited by Maoists Held in Bokaro", *The Times of India*, March 3, 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ranchi/2-minors-recruited-by-Maoists-held-in-Bokaro/articleshow/51238115.cms>

⁸⁴ "Three CRPF Men Killed, 15 Hurt in anti-Naxal Attack in Chhattisgarh", *The Hindu*, March 4, 2016 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/three-crpf-men-killed-15-hurt-in-antinaxal-attack-in-chhattisgarh/article8314213.ece>