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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Bangladesh

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Indian Foreign secretary visits Bangladesh; Foreign diplomats based in Dhaka meet the foreign minister and BNP chairperson; Trade deficit doubled; Bangladesh is going to purchase ten ships.**

Indian Foreign Secretary Dr. Subramanyam Jaishankar visited Dhaka on March 2 for less than a 24-hour visit. During the visit Jaishankar handed over Modi's letter to Hasina when he called on her at her parliament office. In that letter, Modi also invited Hasina to visit India at her earliest convenience. The foreign secretary said India will remove all the trade barriers and will soon give their feedback on the list of para-tariff barriers given to the Indian side. After his meeting with the Bangladesh foreign minister, Jaishankar told reporters that he had a very successful and constructive meeting and they wanted more cooperation from India. Earlier emerging from meeting with the foreign secretary, Jaishankar said he discussed a wide range of issues.¹

Calling for an end to the ongoing violence, top diplomats of different countries in Dhaka have encouraged confidence building measures, including de-escalation of political conflict, in the interest of fostering safety, stability, human rights and democracy in the country. The envoys made the call at a briefing for diplomats by Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali at the State Guesthouse Padma on March 1. Recalling their previous statements on events in Bangladesh, and those by the UN, the envoys said as friends and partners of Bangladesh they would continue to express their common hopes to all sides. Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Charges d' Affairs of the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey attended the briefing.² Foreign diplomats also met with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office on March 3.³

Trade deficit more than doubled in the first seven months of the fiscal year from a year ago on the back of high import growth. At the end of January, the trade deficit stood at \$5.72 billion, up from \$2.79 billion recorded a year ago, according to central bank statistics. During the period, imports soared 16.43 percent, while exports crept up 2.07 percent. According to the central bank, imports

¹ "Modi 'Eagerly Waiting' To Visit Dhaka", *The Daily Star*, March 3, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/modi-eagerly-waiting-to-visit-dhaka-67433>.

² "Foreign Envoys Call for End to Violence", *The Daily Star*, March 2, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/foreign-envoys-call-for-end-to-violence-67351>.

³ "Envoys Meet Khaleda: Want De-Escalation of Conflicts", *The Daily Star*, March 4, 2015 at <http://bd.thedailystar.net/envoys-meet-khaleda-67632>.

dropped 7 percent year-on-year in January and in the first two weeks of February, it declined 6.94 percent. During the period, net FDI rose 5 percent to \$850 million and medium- and long-term loans 12 percent to \$1.4 billion.⁴

The government is going to purchase 10 ships from China and Italy at a cost of Tk 2,777 crore under state arrangement. Of the ships, four will be bought from Italy at a cost of Tk 965 crore to improve naval capability of Bangladesh Coast Guard. Six other ships will be purchased from China National Machinery Import & Export Corporation (CMC) for Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) at a cost of Tk 1,812 crore. The cabinet committee on purchase approved two separate proposals for purchasing the ships. Of the four ships, two will be delivered within one year while the rest in two years' time from the date of signing of an agreement, according to the home ministry proposal. The payment for ships will be made from the government's own fund in nine instalments within four years' time. All the four ships, used by the Italian Navy, will be turned into Off-shore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) before purchasing them. Of the six ships to be purchased for BSC, three are oil tankers valued at \$36.20 million per tanker and three bulk carriers valued at \$25.30 million per carrier, according to the shipping ministry proposal. These ships are being procured under Chinese concessional loans financed by Chinese Exim Bank at 2 percent interest rate and under a repayment period of 20 years with a five-year grace period.⁵

Sri Lanka

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Sushma Swaraj visits Sri Lanka; Sri Lanka was discussed at the 28th session of the UNHRC; UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman visits Jaffna; President Sirisena visits Jaffna; Sri Lankan Cabinet approves the suspension of the Port City project in Colombo; The IMF rules out a fresh bail-out for Sri Lanka; Indian coastguard releases Sri Lankan fishing boats detained last year; arrests fresh batch of Sri Lankan fishermen for poaching in Indian waters.**

India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj went to Sri Lanka on March 6 on a two day official visit to pave way for a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 13.⁶ During the visit, Minister Swaraj called on President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and senior leaders of various political parties representing the Tamil and Muslim minorities. In addition to discussing agreements to be inked during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit, the possible resumption of ferry services between India and Sri Lanka were discussed during the bilateral meeting between Sushma Swaraj and her Sri Lankan counterpart.⁷

⁴ Byron, Rejaul Karim, "Trade Deficit Widens After Racing Imports", *The Daily Star*, March 6, 2015 at <http://bd.thedailystar.net/trade-deficit-widens-after-racing-imports-67957>.

⁵ Byron, Rejaul Karim, "Govt To Purchase 10 Vessels: Tk 2,777cr Proposal Okayed", *The Daily star*, March 5, 2015 at <http://bd.thedailystar.net/govt-to-purchase-10-vessels-67824>.

⁶ "Indian Foreign Minister in Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, March 6, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/category/news/page/4/>.

⁷ "India, Lanka Mull Ferry Services", *Colombo Gazette*, March 7, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/07/india-lanka-mull-ferry-services/>.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein warned the Sri Lankan Government not to repeat the failures of the past. Speaking at the 28th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, after presenting his annual report, al-Hussein urged the authorities in Sri Lanka to consult deeply with the people, especially the victims, in order to design mechanisms that will work and not repeat the failures of the past. He told the UN Human Rights Council on March 5 that a report on Sri Lanka was to be presented during the ongoing session but he had recommended that the report be postponed till September. The High Commissioner said the decision was taken after serious reflection and acting upon the suggestion of the investigations group of experts.⁸ The Sri Lankan Government informed the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 2 that the report compiled by the team appointed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate the war in Sri Lanka, will be used in the domestic investigations. Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera said that the Government has already begun discussions regarding the nature of local mechanisms that should be put in place for this purpose including amendments to existing laws.⁹

The Japanese Government said it hopes to see genuine reconciliation in Sri Lanka and added that it will offer support in that regard. Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Takashi UTO, speaking at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 2, said that Japan supports efforts being made towards national reconciliation by the new Government of President Maithripala Sirisena. Speaking during the High Level segment of the 28th session of the UNHRC in Geneva on March 2, Takashi UTO welcomed the constructive dialogue between Sri Lanka and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. He said Japan expects such actions to lead to genuine national reconciliation in Sri Lanka.¹⁰ US Secretary of State John Kerry hailed the role played by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on Sri Lanka. In his speech during the High Level segment of the 28th session of the UNHRC on March 2, Kerry noted that there is an opportunity for change in Sri Lanka.¹¹

UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, who visited Jaffna on March 2, had assured the Chief Minister of the Northern Province C. V. Wigneswaran that the report compiled by a UN-led team following investigations on the war in Sri Lanka, will be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in September. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Wigneswaran said that he had raised concerns with the visiting UN official over the decision to postpone the report from the March session of the UN Human Rights Council to the September session. Feltman had responded by saying that the UN body felt the new Sri Lankan Government must be given time to address the human rights issue and that the report will not be postponed for a second time. Wigneswaran also handed over a copy of the resolution adopted by the Northern Provincial Council recently demanding an international investigation on the war. Feltman, who arrived in

⁸ "Zeid Warns Lanka on Rights Probe", *Colombo Gazette*, March 5, 2015 <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/05/zeid-warns-lanka-on-rights-probe/>.

⁹ "Sri Lanka To Use UN Probe Report", *Colombo Gazette*, March 2, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/02/sri-lanka-to-use-un-probe-report/>.

¹⁰ "Japan for Genuine Reconciliation", *Colombo Gazette*, March 2, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/02/japan-for-genuine-reconciliation-2/>.

¹¹ "Kerry Hails UNHRC on Sri Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, March 2, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/02/kerry-hails-unhrc-on-sri-lanka/>.

Sri Lanka on February 27, already had separate talks with President Maithripala Sirisena and Deputy Foreign Minister Ajith Perera as well as the Tamil National Alliance in Colombo.¹²

President Maithripala Sirisena visited Jaffna on March 3, his first visit to the North since he won the Presidential elections in January. The President was in Jaffna to attend the District Coordinating Committee meeting and he was welcomed for the meeting by Northern Province Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran.¹³

The Sri Lankan Cabinet, on a proposal made by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, has approved to temporarily and immediately suspend the implementation of the Port City project in Colombo. The Interim Report submitted by committee appointed to review and submit recommendation to the Cabinet Sub Committee on the project has noted that the project was launched and was being implemented without relevant approvals from the concerned institutions.¹⁴ China Communications Construction Company Limited (CCCC), the Chinese company involved in the Colombo Port City project, said that it will abide by the decision of the Cabinet to order work on the project to be suspended.¹⁵ Following the Cabinet's decision, China has urged Sri Lanka to respect bilateral agreements and business contracts, and protect the interests of its investors following the suspension of a multi-billion-U.S. dollar project, the Chinese Embassy said. At emergency meetings with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera, Chinese Ambassador Yi Xianliang also asked the Sri Lankan side to cherish the results of mutually-beneficial cooperation between the two countries. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan government has said that it attaches great importance to relations with China and is willing to consolidate and deepen bilateral ties and cooperation in all areas.¹⁶

The IMF on March 4 ruled out a fresh bail-out for Sri Lanka, which had hoped to secure loans of more than US\$4.0 billion to restructure expensive debt taken on by the previous regime. Much of the country's post-war infrastructure under the administration of former president Mahinda Rajapakse was funded with Chinese debt and the new government had hoped to retire some of those loans. Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake travelled to Washington last month to try to secure loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But IMF experts who reviewed Sri Lanka's economy during a nine-day visit said the Indian Ocean Island was not facing an immediate crisis. Delegation leader Todd Schneider said Sri Lanka's foreign reserves were comfortable compared to 2009, when it obtained a US\$2.6 billion bailout at the height of a civil war.¹⁷

¹² "UN Assures North CM On Report", *Colombo Gazette*, March 2, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/02/un-assures-north-cm-on-report/>.

¹³ "MS on First Jaffna Visit after Poll", *Colombo Gazette*, March 3, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/03/ms-on-first-jaffna-visit-after-poll/>.

¹⁴ "Cabinet Suspends Port City Work", *Colombo Gazette*, March 5, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/05/cabinet-suspends-port-city-work/>.

¹⁵ "Chinese Suspend Port City Work", *Colombo Gazette*, March 7, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/07/chinese-suspend-port-city-work/>.

¹⁶ "China Wants Respect from Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, March 8, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/08/china-wants-respect-from-sri-lanka/>.

¹⁷ "IMF Rejects Bailout for Sri Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, March 4, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/04/imf-rejects-bailout-for-sri-lanka/>.

Five Sri Lankan fishing boats, seized by the Indian Coast Guard personnel last year on the charge of undertaking illegal fishing in Indian waters, were released from Tuticorin based on a release order. With the aid of Coastal Security Group police, the detained boats were handed over to Coast Guard personnel in Tuticorin for further formalities. According to Inspector of Tuticorin Thermal Nagar Police, L. Raju, three of these Lankan boats were detained on May 20, 2014 and the other two on September 30 last year. Along with these boats, a crew of 16 Sri Lankan fishermen were also detained. But, the crew were freed on June 14 and December 22 last year, he said.¹⁸ Meanwhile, The Indian Coast Guard has detained six Sri Lankan fishermen on the charge of poaching into Indian waters, 128 nautical miles off Nagapattinam coast on March 6.¹⁹

B. East Asia

China

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Chinese leaders call for increased efforts towards poverty eradication; Chinese “Belt and Road” initiative is not similar to the United States Marshall Plan; Chinese top legislature delivers the NPC Standing Committee work report; China-Japan to hold security dialogue; Chinese defence budget to increase by 10 percent; Chinese military parade not a show of strength; Chinese loans to Sri Lanka based on mutual consensus.**

Chinese President with other leaders made increased assertions on March 8 to undertake ways and means to eradicate poverty faster. They also asserted increased development in areas of ethnic minorities. During the annual session of the National People’s Congress (NPC). Xi said that, “targeted measures should be taken to help people lift themselves out of poverty and poverty alleviation work should be done in a timely and down-to-earth manner”.²⁰

On March 8, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi asserted that the Chinese “Belt and Road” initiative is not like the Marshall Plan of the United States. Wang said that, “comparing the two will be like comparing apples and organs”. He made the remarks on the side-lines of the National People’s Congress.²¹

Zhang Dejiang the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) said on March 8, that the, “CPC leadership is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese

¹⁸ “India Frees Five Sri Lankan Boats”, *Colombo Gazette*, March 8, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/08/india-frees-five-sri-lankan-boats/>.

¹⁹ “Six Lankan Fishermen Arrested”, *Colombo Gazette*, March 7, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/07/six-lankan-fishermen-arrested/>.

²⁰ “Chinese leaders stress efforts on poverty eradication” *China Daily*, March 8, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015twosession/2015-03/08/content_19751802.htm accessed on March 10, 2015

²¹ Mengwei, Chen, “Chinese FM Says ‘Belt And Road’ Initiatives Not Marshall Plan”, *China Daily*, March 8, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015twosession/2015-03/08/content_19750300.htm, accessed on March 10, 2015

characteristics". He added that, "we must improve the system on the basis of upholding the Party's leadership and develop it through practice to ensure it advances with the times".²²

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, "China and Japan will hold a security dialogue later in March 2015 in Japan". She made the announcement on March 6. She added that, "The Sino-Japan security dialogue and the regular talk mechanisms are an important bridge for the countries' foreign affairs and defence departments to communicate".²³

According to a Senior Chinese official the Chinese government will raise the Chinese defence budget by 10 percent. This step is undertaken to support the Chinese military modernization plan. Fu Ying, spokeswoman for the top legislature asserted that China needs a strong army which can safeguard its national interests.²⁴

As per a statement made by the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, the "China's first military parade marking the end of the World War II will not be an exercise in "muscle flexing"". However "the goal is to show that China and the people around the world have the capability and determination to defend peace".²⁵

As a response to the interest rate concerns, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said that the loans extended to Sri Lanka by China are based on mutual consultations between the two countries. She further added that. "The loan arrangements are for the whole nation and people and have played a positive role in the economic and social development of Sri Lanka".²⁶

Japan

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Japan and Laos to upgrade their ties to 'strategic partnership'; Japan eyes law to reflect 3 new conditions for collective self-defence.**

Laos Prime Minister recently visited Tokyo and held talks with his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Ae. During their meeting on March 6, both the leaders agreed to deepen the bilateral economic ties. Japan assured to provide Laos assistance in developing the latter's infrastructure. Most

²² "Top Legislator Delivers NPC Standing Committee Work Report", *China Daily*, March 8, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015twosession/2015-03/08/content_19750883.htm, accessed on March 10, 2015

²³ Zhenghua, Wang, "Sino-Japan Security Dialogue To Be Held", *China Daily*, March 7, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/07/content_19747291.htm, accessed on March 10, 2015

²⁴ Lei, Zhao, "Defence Budget To Rise About 10%", *China Daily*, March 5, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/05/content_19721390.htm

²⁵ Shengnan, Zhao, "Military Parade To Highlight Peace Commitment", *China Daily*, March 3, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015twosession/2015-03/04/content_19709890.htm, accessed on March 10, 2015

²⁶ "China Says Loans To Sri Lanka 'Based On Consensus'" *China Daily*, March 2, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-03/02/content_19696863.htm, accessed on March 10, 2015

importantly in the joint statement released after the meeting, the two leaders expressed their agreement to upgrade the current bilateral relationship to a 'strategic partnership'.²⁷

On March 6, the Japanese government put forward the outline of a security plan that could help the country in engaging in collective self-defence in the future. The outline also talked about the possibility of the incorporation of three new conditions for exercising that right. While exercising the right to collective self-defence, Japan could help its allies even when Japan itself is not threatened. In July last year, the Japanese cabinet put forward three conditions under which the Japanese self-defence force (SDF) could use force in collective self-defence. They are: if "the country's existence is threatened, and there are clear dangers" that the people's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is imperilled due to an armed attack on Japan or countries it has close ties with; if there are "no other appropriate means" than using force and that the use of force is minimal. The government's recent security outline says that those three conditions should be written into the current law that deals with Japan's response to armed attacks.²⁸

South Korea

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **South Korea and US launch their annual joint military drills; South Korean President visits UAE, insists on joining hands on renewable energy; South Korean PM insists on bolstering South Korea-US ties in the wake of attack on US Ambassador in Seoul.**

On March 2, South Korea and the US kicked off their annual joint military drill-Key Resolve-despite repeated protests from North Korea. The two week long exercise would involve about 10,000 South Korean and 86,000 American troops.²⁹ However the two sides will also conduct Foal Eagle field exercise. That exercise is to continue till April 24. In that exercise, 3,700 American troops and 200,000 South Koreans troops will participate.³⁰

On March 5, South Korean President Park Geun hye reached Abu Dhabi (UAE) as part of her nine-day long visit four-nation trip to the Middle East. On that day itself, a MoU was signed between the two countries in which both South Korea and the UAE vowed to cooperate with each other in penetrating promising renewable energy markets, such as Egypt. According to the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, the MoU could be instrumental in harnessing South Korea's technical know-how in the energy and industrial sectors with the UAE's financial clout and understanding of regional markets. It needs to be noted that both the countries have

²⁷ "Japan, Laos Agree To Promote Economic aid", *The Yomiuri Daily*, March 7, 2015, at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001986111>

²⁸ "Japan Eyes Law To Reflect 3 New Conditions For Collective Self-Defence" *The Mainichi Daily*, March 7, 2015, at <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150307p2g00m0dm045000c.html>

²⁹ "S. Korea, US Set To Begin Nannual Joint Military Drills", *The Korea Herald*, March 1, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150301000086>

³⁰ "Tension Mounts Over Military Drills", *The Korea Herald*, March 2, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150302000842>

already been working with each other to enter solar energy sector, port development and ship repair works in North Africa.³¹

On March 6, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo called for boosting the South Korea-US ties further in the wake of attack on US ambassador to South Korea Mark Lippert by a progressive local activist in Seoul recently.³² After the incident, there have been serious concerns regarding the implications of the attack on public sentiments within Seoul and Washington. In order to turn around the public mood and contain the aftermath of the attack, both the countries are exploring the possibility of strengthening bilateral ties further, including exchanging high-level visits more frequently.³³

North Korea

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **North Korea launches two ballistic missiles.**

On March 2, North Korea launched two short range ballistic missiles into the East Sea in order to protest on going annual joint military drill between South Korea and the US. The missiles were reportedly of Scud C kind with a range of 100 kms. South Korea has reacted strongly to this and termed it as “foolhardy and provocative”. Seoul further stated that the launched violated the UN Security Council’s Resolutions against North Korea’s use of ballistic missile technology. Over the last month, North Korea has repeatedly called for cancelling the military drill. But both the US and South Korea rejected such calls while stating that they were of defensive nature and proceed transparently.³⁴

C. Southeast Asia

ASEAN

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Protesters jailed by court in Thailand for disrupting ASEAN Summit; Meeting of Chief Justices of ASEAN held in Philippines; New agreement on ASEAN Single Window signed in Myanmar; ASEAN Secretary General backs official position of Philippines on sea dispute**

³¹ “Korea, UAE To Jointly Penetrate New Renewable Energy Markets”, *The Korea Herald*, March 6, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150306000786>

³² “PM Calls For Tighter Ties With US After Envoy Attack”, *The Korea Herald*, March 6, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150306000800>

³³ “Korea, US Seek Talks After Attack”, *The Korea Herald*, March 6, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150306001017>

³⁴ Ibid.

during interview; ASEAN Crime Data centre to be set up in Phuket, says top Thai police official.

Party members of the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship were sentenced by a court in Thailand to four years in prison on charges of disrupting the ASEAN Summit in Pattaya back in 2009. The court in Thailand sentenced the defendants who were fifteen in total and these defendants also included controversial former Thailand MP Worachai Hemma and a former fugitive Arisman Pongruangrong³⁵. In April 2009, the members of United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship staged a protest in Bangkok to press the then-Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Gen Prem Tinsulanonda, the top adviser to His Majesty the King, to resign; when their demands were not met, the members of the party staged a massive protest in Pattaya where representatives from ASEAN member states were meeting for a summit and later clashes between security forces and members led to the cancellation of summit³⁶.

Chief Justices from ASEAN member states had their 3rd ASEAN Chief Justices Meeting on March 2. Besides the Chief Justices of ASEAN member states, the chief justice of Guam also attended the conference.³⁷ In the two day conference, Chief Justice of Philippines Maria Lourdes Sereno served as the host of the conference and it was said by one spokesperson that the Supreme Court of Philippines would “showcase our electronic trial court launched recently in Quezon City, among others.”³⁸ The participants of the conference were expected to discuss cross-border judicial issues and improve information-sharing and best practices in the use of technology.³⁹

The ASEAN Single Window Steering Committee which had been working to simplify custom procedures of ASEAN member states reached a new agreement in a meeting in Myanmar regarding which U Tun Thein, Director General of Finance Department of Government of Myanmar said that a detailed design of the system would be tested by the fourth quarter of 2015 which would involve the use of Myanmar Automated Cargo Clearance system (MACCS) to facilitate the issuance of trading licences.⁴⁰ The new system aims to expedite cross border trade across member states of ASEAN to fulfil the objectives of ASEAN integration by end of 2015.⁴¹

³⁵ “Jail For Storming 2009 ASEAN Summit,” *Bangkok Post*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/politics/489805/jail-for-storming-2009-asean-summit>

³⁶ “Phuket: Redshirts Jailed For Disrupting ASEAN Summit in 2009”, *The Phuket News*, March 7, 2015 at <http://www.thephuketnews.com/phuket-redshirts-jailed-for-disrupting-asean-summit-in-2009-51295.php>

³⁷ “ASEAN Chief Justices Meeting Starts”, *Panay news*, March 2, 2015 at <http://panaynewsphilippines.com/2015/03/02/asean-chief-justices-meeting-starts/>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Sereno Hosts ASEAN Chief Justices Meeting In Boracay”, *Philstar.com*, March 2, 2015 at <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/03/02/1429247/sereno-hosts-asean-chief-justices-meeting-boracay>

⁴⁰ “Agreement Inked On ASEAN Single Window”, *Myanmar Times*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/business/13378-agreement-inked-on-asean-single-window.html>

⁴¹ For information on ASEAN Single Window, see the Agreement on ASEAN Single Window signed on December 9, 2005 at <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-economic-community/item/agreement-to-establish-and-implement-the-asean-single-window-kuala-lumpur-9-december-2005-2>

In an interview to *The Manila Times*, ASEAN Secretary General Le Luong Minh told that ASEAN backed Philippines' official position on peaceful resolution of island dispute in South China Sea as well stance of other Southeast Asian countries that rejected "Dotted Line"⁴² policy of China in its assertion of sovereignty.⁴³ Deputy Police Commissioner of Thailand, Police General Dr Wuthi Liptapallop has said that Phuket would become ASEAN Crime Data centre and more attention required to be paid to the increasing number of foreign tourists in Phuket.⁴⁴

Southeast Asia

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Commander of Royal Brunei Land Forces (RBLF) visits Singapore; Cambodian government reports annual loss of \$400 million; American national detained in East Timor heads home; Indonesia rejects Australia's proposal for prisoner swap; Laos vows to develop ties with Japan; Malaysian defence minister visits Singapore; Myanmar being sought by Taiwan for meeting labour demands; First ever C-295 aircraft of Philippines Air Force to arrive in March; Singapore sounds caution on Ukraine crisis; Thailand's permanent mission to UN participates in high level dialogue on illegal wildlife trade; Vietnam expands defence cooperation with Cambodia.**

Commander of the Royal Brunei Land Forces (RBLF), Brigadier General Dato Paduka Aminan bin Pg Haji Mahmud visited Singapore to meet the Defence minister of Singapore Dr Ng Eng Hen from March 5 to March 7 2015.⁴⁵ As a part of his visit, he met Chief of Singapore Army Major General Perry Lim and also visited a training facility. In a two day conference held by World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund) and Government of Cambodia, it was announced that malnutrition in Cambodia cost the government \$400 million on an annual basis out of which maternal and child malnutrition cost \$90 million while stunted growth and anaemia cost \$90 million.⁴⁶

Stacey Addison, an American woman detained in East Timor on charges of carrying illegal drugs was released and she would head for her home.⁴⁷ On March 5th, the government of Indonesia

⁴² For information on Nine Dash Line, see the following article at: <http://thediplomat.com/tag/nine-dash-line/>

⁴³ "ASEAN Backs Manila On Sea Row", *The Manila Times*, March 4, 2015 at <http://www.manilatimes.net/asean-backs-manila-on-sea-row/167241/>

⁴⁴ "Police Must Be Ready For AEC' Dep Police Commissioner", *The Phuket News*, March 4, 2015 at <http://www.thephuketnews.com/%CA%BBpolice-must-be-ready-fror-aec%CC%95-dep-police-commissioner-51250.php>; "Phuket To Become ASEAN Crime Data Centre, Says Top Thai Police Chief", *Phuketwan.com*, March 4, 2015 at <http://phuketwan.com/tourism/phuket-become-asean-crime-data-centre-says-top-thai-police-chief-21983/>

⁴⁵ "Commander of RBLF Calls On Minister of Defence, Singapore", *Ministry of Defence, Brunei Darussalam press release* at <http://www.mindef.gov.bn/Lists/News/DispForm.aspx?ID=3357&ContentTypeId=0x0100CAC0162585062A43B942A7BC2F0B9F04>

⁴⁶ "Poor Nutrition Costing Cambodia Hundreds Of Millions Of Dollars", *Voice of America*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.voacambodia.com/content/poor-nutrition-costing-cambodia-hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars/2667596.html>

⁴⁷ "Oregon Woman Detained In East Timor Is Headed Home", *CNN*, March 3, 2015 at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/03/world/asia/east-timor-stacey-addison/>

rejected a proposal of prisoner swap from Australian government to spare the lives of two Australian citizens convicted of drug smuggling. The convicts, Myuran Sukumaran, 33, and Andrew Chan, 31 were to face execution soon in front of a firing squad and this case ramped diplomatic tensions between Australia and Indonesia after repeated pleas of mercy were rejected by Indonesian government.⁴⁸

The prime minister of Laos visited Japan on March 6, 2015 and pledged for stronger bilateral ties with Japan. He said, "Friendly and cooperative bilateral relations have continued to develop and bear fruit in various fields". He also added, "Investment from Japan has increased year after year...We have more than 100 investment projects from Japan and the amount of investment grew."⁴⁹

Defence minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin visited Singapore and met Defence Minister of Singapore Ng Eng Hen. During his visit, the Malaysian defence minister signed a letter of intent to enhance cooperation between the defence establishments of both the nations and to reaffirm both countries' commitment to multilateral frameworks - such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus.⁵⁰

Taiwan would look towards Myanmar to meet demands for expatriate workers in the country after Indonesia decided to stop sending domestic workers overseas.⁵¹ Air Force of Philippines would receive a boost in their cargo and transportation capability with the arrival of first C-295 military transport aircraft this month. Defence Undersecretary for Finance Fernando Manalo said in an interview, "Our first C295 will be arriving this March."⁵²

Defence minister of Singapore Ng Eng Hen recently told that the Ukraine crisis and annexation of Crimea by Russia should be a wakeup call for Singapore to not take peace for granted. He said that the European countries reduced defence spending to "reap peace dividends" but the "unimaginable occurred"⁵³ with Crimea.

On March 3, 2015, Permanent mission of Thailand to the United Nations in coordination with permanent mission of other nations to the UN and other UN Agencies organized the High-Level

⁴⁸ "Indonesia Rejects Australian Proposal Of Prisoner Swap For Death Row Pair", *Channel NewsAsia*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-rejects/1696986.html>

⁴⁹ "Laos' Thongsing Meets With Abe, Vows To Deepen Ties With Japan", *The Japan Times*, March 6, 2015 at http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/06/national/politics-diplomacy/laos-thongsing-meets-with-abe-vows-to-deepen-ties-with-japan/#.VQ_SUunnMh8

⁵⁰ "Malaysian Defence Minister calls on Ng Eng Hen", *Today Online*, March 2, 2015 at <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/malaysian-defence-minister-hishammuddin-calls-ng-eng-hen>

⁵¹ "Taiwan Turns To Myanmar To Fill Labour Shortage", *Channel NewsAsia*, March 7, 2015 at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/international/taiwan-turns-to-myanmar/1700306.html>

⁵² "Air Force's First C 295 Aircraft Arriving March", *Philstar.com*, March 3, 2015 at <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/03/03/1429675/air-forces-first-c295-aircraft-arriving-march>

⁵³ "Ministry of Defence COS Debate: Ukraine Crisis A Wakeup Call For All, Says Ng", *The Straits Times*, March 6, 2015 at <http://www.straitstimes.com/the-big-story/budget-debate-2015/story/ukraine-crisis-wake-call-all-20150306>

Stakeholder Dialogue on Illegal Wildlife Trade at the Central Park Zoo in observance of World Wildlife Day.⁵⁴ Vietnam boosted defence cooperation with Cambodia when a Cambodian defence delegation led by when General Tia Banh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Cambodia visited Vietnam and met General Phung Quang Thanh, Vietnamese Minister of Defence.⁵⁵ The two governments signed a protocol and plan for cooperation in exchanges of military groups alongside a deal for repatriation of Vietnamese martyr remains.⁵⁶

D. Russia

Russia

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Russia and Egypt sign a protocol on military cooperation and discuss anti-terrorism efforts; Russian and American Foreign Ministers meet in Geneva; ‘Normandy Four’ leaders appreciate the progress made in withdrawal of heavy weapons in Donbas; Russia will explore ways of softening food embargo for Greece and Hungary; Russian Foreign Minister urges the US not to politicize Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty; US sanctions against Russia extended by a year; Russia and EU agree to resume trilateral negotiations on EU-Ukraine association agreement.**

Russia and Egypt have signed a protocol on military cooperation on March 4 during the first session of the joint commission on military and technical cooperation meeting held in Moscow. Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu and his Egyptian counterpart Sedki Sobhi presided over the session. It was also reported that Russia will supply the Antey-2500 anti-ballistic missile system to Egypt by the end of 2016 in a deal worth US\$ 1 billion.⁵⁷ Moreover, during a meeting, held on March 2, between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and visiting Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev the two sides discussed issues of ‘anti-terrorism efforts and closer cooperation in rebuffing this threat’.⁵⁸ Itar-Tass has also reported that Russia and Egypt have concluded a preliminary agreement on the construction of the first nuclear power plant in Egypt.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ “Press Releases: Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations in New York participated in the High-Level Stakeholder Dialogue on Illegal Wildlife Trade on the occasion of the second observance of World Wildlife Day” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release*, March 6, 2015 at <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/media-center/14/54214-Permanent-Mission-of-Thailand-to-the-United-Nation.html>

⁵⁵ “Vietnam, Cambodia Sign Protocol, Plan For Defence Cooperation”, *Touitrenews*, March 8, 2015 at <http://tuoitrenews.vn/politics/26556/vietnam-cambodia-sign-protocol-plan-for-defense-cooperation>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Russia To Supply Antey-2500 Missile System To Egypt By End Of 2016 – Source”, *Russia and India Report*, March 6, 2015 at http://in.rbth.com/news/2015/03/06/russia_to_supply_antey-2500_missile_system_to_egypt_by_end_of_2016_sourc_41827.html

⁵⁸ “Russian Security Council Secretary, Egyptian President Discuss Anti-Terrorism Efforts”, *Itar-Tass*, March 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/780579>

⁵⁹ “Russia To Construct Egypt’s First Nuclear Power Plant”, *Russia and India Report*, March 6, 2015 at http://in.rbth.com/world/2015/03/02/russia_to_construct_egypts_first_nuclear_power_plant_41695.html

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has held two meetings with his American counterpart John Kerry in Geneva on March 2. A key issue of discussion was the Middle East settlement apart from the ongoing Ukrainian standoff.⁶⁰

The spokesperson of the German government Steffen Seibert has said, in Berlin on March 3 that the leaders of the 'Normandy Four' countries comprising of Russia, Ukraine Germany and France have hailed progress in observance of the ceasefire regime and in the pull-out of heavy weapons from the areas of combat operation in south-eastern Ukraine. He also referred to the consensus on OSCE playing a more important role in supervision over the ceasefire and weapons pull-out.⁶¹

Russia's minister of economic development Alexey Ulyukayev has said, on March 2, that Russia will explore ways of softening food embargo for Greece and Hungary. In 2014, Moscow had initiated a food embargo on EU countries in retaliation against the EU sanctions.⁶²

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has urged the United States not to politicize the implementation of the treaty on the elimination of intermediate and shorter range missiles (INF) and to avoid using this topic for fanning tensions.⁶³

US President Barack Obama has extended for one year a number of sanctions previously imposed on Russia in connection with the Ukrainian crisis. In a statement published on the White House website, Obama said he was extending U.S. sanctions imposed on Russia last March and December in light of the continuing "unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."⁶⁴

Russian Minister of Economic Development Alexey Ulyukayev has said, after his meeting with EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom and Neighbourhood Policy Commissioner Johannes Hanh held in Brussels on March 4, that EU and Russia have agreed to resume trilateral negotiations on the implementation of the EU-Ukraine association agreement in the nearest future. He added that Russia will have to protect its market if no changes take place in the implementation process of the EU-Ukraine association agreement.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ "Lavrov Holds 2nd Meeting With Kerry In Geneva", *Itar-Tass*, March 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/780428>

⁶¹ "'Normandy Four' Leaders Hail Progress In Withdrawal Of Heavy Weapons In Donbass", *Itar-Tass*, March 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/780668>

⁶² "Russia will Explore Ways Of Softening Food Embargo for Greece and Hungary – Minister", *Itar-Tass*, March 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/780599>

⁶³ "Moscow Urges US Not To Politicize Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty – FM", *Itar-Tass*, March 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/780942>

⁶⁴ "Obama Extends Sanctions Against Russia, Citing Threat to 'National Security'", *The Moscow Times*, March 4, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/obama-extends-sanctions-against-russia-citing-threat-to-national-security/516961.html>

⁶⁵ "EU, Russia Agreed To Resume Trilateral Negotiations On EU-Ukraine Association Agreement", *Itar-Tass*, March 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/780837>

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **President Putin stresses on the necessity of developing Union State of Russia and Belarus; Agreement on eastern route for gas supplies to China approved by Russian government committee; Russia says Ukraine must pay for gas supplied to Donbas; Foreign Minister Lavrov says Asia-Pacific region crucial to building new architecture of world security; Russia conducting military drills in southern regions; Putin calls Italy Russia's privileged partner; Russia plans to induct a new aircraft carrier in the future; Russia to expand combat patrol flights of strategic bombers; Russia likely to lift limits for foreign ownership in its strategic mineral deposits.**

President Vladimir Putin has said in Moscow on March 3 that 'it is important to not only develop the common economic space of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, but also to step up cooperation in the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus adding that the Union State represents a more advanced stage of integration'. The two countries plan to sign a number of agreements including exchanging data on Russian and Belarusian citizens restricted from travelling, joint execution of court decisions on alimony and securing equal rights of citizens of the two countries for freedom of movement and residence.⁶⁶

The Russian government's Committee for legislative drafting activities has approved the draft law on ratification of the agreement between the governments of Russia and China on eastern route gas supplies. The agreement was signed by representatives of the Russian and Chinese governments on October 13, 2014. In May 2014, Gazprom and CNPC had agreed to the annual supply of 38 billion cubic meters of Russian gas to China via the eastern route over a period of 30 years in a deal worth US\$ 400 billion. In November 2014, Gazprom also signed a framework agreement on gas supplies to China via the western route that is likely to reach 30 billion cubic meters a year.⁶⁷

Energy Minister Alexander Novak has said, in Moscow on March 3, that Ukraine will have to pay for the Russian gas supplied to the Donbas region and this issues remains unresolved.⁶⁸

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during his talks with his Cambodian counterpart Hor Namhong, held in Moscow on March 4, has said that the 'Asia-Pacific Region is becoming an ever more important and influential region of the world for building a new edifice of security and cooperation'. He added that the two countries have 'agreed to coordinate efforts at international negotiating sites of the region'.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ "Putin Stresses Necessity Of Developing Union State of Russia and Belarus", *Itar-Tass*, March 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/780751>

⁶⁷ "Agreement On Eastern Route Gas Supplies To China Approved By Russian Government Committee", *Itar-Tass*, March 3, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/780687>

⁶⁸ "Russia's Energy Minister Says Kiev Must Pay For Russian Gas Supplied To Donbas", *Itar-Tass*, March 3, 2015 <http://tass.ru/en/world/780786>

⁶⁹ "Asia-Pacific Region Crucial To Building New Architecture Of World Security — Russia FM", *Itar-Tass*, March 4, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/780938>

Russia's Defence Ministry has said on March 5 that large-scale military exercises have started in southern Russia comprising of Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts and Russian military bases in Armenia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Crimea. The exercises involve more than 2,000 anti-aircraft troops and 500 items of weaponry and will continue till April 10.⁷⁰

During a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, President Vladimir Putin has said in Moscow on March 5 that Italy is Russia's key partner despite current problems in relations with the European Union. He added the two countries are successfully cooperating in the energy, nuclear, engineering, space, and other spheres. It was also reported that Russia's Direct Investment Fund will establish a joint fund worth 1 billion US\$ with Italy. Italy remains Russia's fourth largest trade partner.⁷¹

Russian Navy Commander Viktor Chirkov has said on March 2 that the navy plans to induct an aircraft carrier in the future. At present, Russia has one aircraft carrier in active duty - Admiral Kuznetsov. He also added that new nuclear-powered destroyers built in Russia will have the striking power of a cruise.⁷²

Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu has said on March 2 that roughly 70 per cent of strategic aviation unit's aircrafts will be modernized by 2020. He added that the strategic bombers will expand combat patrols to new regions in the future, taking into account cooperation with allies.⁷³

The Kommersant has reported that the Russian government may simplify the procedure for foreign investors' participation in Russia-based extraction projects. It pointed out that the Ministry of Natural Resources has suggested permitting foreigners to own a share of up to 25 per cent in strategic mineral deposits with no auditory coordination, and a share of up to 49 per cent by a decision of a government commission. Chinese companies are likely to be the first ones to make use of this change in policy, if and when it is implemented.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ "Defense Ministry Says Military Drills Underway in Southern Russia", *The Moscow Times*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/defense-ministry-says-military-drills-underway-in-southern-russia/517038.html>

⁷¹ "Putin calls Italy Russia's Privileged Partner", *Itar-Tass*, March 5, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/781240>

⁷² "Russian Navy To Receive New Aircraft Carrier – Navy Commander", *Itar-Tass*, March 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/780392>

⁷³ "Around 70% of Russian Strategic Aviation To Be Modernized by 2020 – Defence Minister", *Itar-Tass*, March 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/780371>

⁷⁴ "Media: Russia May Lift Limits For Foreign Ownership In Russia's Strategic Mineral Deposits", *Itar-Tass*, March 2, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/780355>

E. Iran, Iraq and Syria

Iran

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Iran TV says “Netanyahu speech at Congress insult to US”; Kerry allays Gulf concerns over Iran deal; Iran unveils new long-range cruise missile.**

The Press TV Newsroom director Hamid Reza Emadi said the speech showed that the Tel Aviv regime continues to hold hostage the American foreign policy. Netanyahu’s speech, which took place against the wishes of the White House, should be considered a great insult to the US administration in recent history, Emadi pointed out. He noted that the divisive speech has been an attempt on the part of the Israeli premier and his Republican allies in the United States to embarrass President Barack Obama.⁷⁵

US Secretary of State John Kerry sought to ease Gulf Arab concerns about an emerging nuclear deal with Iran and explore ways to calm instability in Yemen and other troubled nations in the Middle East. Kerry met in the Saudi capital of Riyadh with the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all of which are worried by Iran’s suspected pursuit of nuclear weapons and its increasing assertiveness throughout the region.⁷⁶

Israel’s newspaper Hareetz reported that Iran’s Defence Ministry, in an unusual public display, introduced a new cruise missile, the Soumar. The missile is very similar to the Russian Kh-55, which can carry nuclear or conventional warheads and has a range of 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles). This would enable the Iranians to hit targets not only throughout the Middle East but in eastern and southern Europe as well. Reports have said the Iranians were attempting to develop cruise missiles, but this is the first time they have unveiled such weapons publicly.⁷⁷

Iraq and Syria

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **ISIL fighters launch war on rare ancient sites in Iraq; Top Al-Nusra front leader killed in Syrian Airstrike; Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Boko Haram of Nigeria.**

The ISIS group elements have demolished the Mosul museum and smashed its ancient artefacts and sculptures, according to a video released by supporters of the group said Iraqinews.com. The

⁷⁵ “Hamid Reza Emadi: Netanyahu Speech at Congress insult to US” , *Presstv*, March 3 2015 <http://presstv.ir/Detail/2015/03/03/400103/Netanyahu-speech-insult-to-US>

⁷⁶ “Kerry Allays Gulf Concerns Over Iran Deal” , *Gulfnews*. Com , March 5, 2015 <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kerry-allays-gulf-concerns-over-iran-deal-1.1466985>

⁷⁷ “Iran Unveils New Long-Range Cruise Missile” , *Hareetz* , March 8 , 2015 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.645898>

video has shown a group of men attacking and destroying ancient statues and sculptures dating to the ancient Assyrian era in the Mosul museum.⁷⁸ Few days later *Aljazeera* reported that Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters have used a bulldozer to start destroying a 3,000-year-old Assyrian city near Mosul in Iraq.⁷⁹

An air strike by Syrian government forces has killed a senior commander of al-Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, the group and state media SANA claimed. It said Abu Hammam al-Shami, also known as al-Farouq al-Suri, was killed in a special army operation in Idlib province. Al-Shami, a veteran al-Qaeda leader from Damascus, held the title of general military commander for al-Nusra Front.⁸⁰

Nigeria's armed group Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The pledge, attributed to Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, was made in an audio recording posted on the group's *Twitter* page. Baghdadi has already accepted pledges of allegiance from other armed groups in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan and North Africa.⁸¹

F. The United State of America

National

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **21st-century DARPA tool could work against ISIL; Navy Adm. Rogers discusses cyber operations, ISIL, deterrence; Navy Secretary explains significance of sea power; Carter: It's time to seize 'bright opportunities'; Reforms just as important as budget increase, Dempsey says; Greenert: sequestration threatens readiness, modernization; Cybercom Chief: cyber threats blur roles, relationships; Economic disparity persists on old civil rights battleground; Marine Commandant outlines budget-based priority shifts; Shooting of unarmed teen in Wisconsin leads to protests; The US reflects on civil rights.**

Today's national security landscape challenges the Defence Department with threats ranging from low-tech, lone-wolf terrorists and high-tech peer adversaries to extremist groups that use both approaches, like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) prepares for them all. DARPA Director Dr. Arati Prabhakar spoke here recently with *CNN* defence correspondent Barbara Starr at the First Annual Future of War Conference. "My first tour at DARPA was in the Cold War, and at that time [we] worked against the one

⁷⁸ "ISIS Militants Destroy Artifacts From Ancient Assyrian Era" , *Iraqinews.com* , February 27, 2015 <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/isis-militants-destroy-artifacts-ancient-assyrian-era/>

⁷⁹ Arraf, Jane, "ISIL Fighters Bulldoze Ancient Assyrian Palace In Iraq" , *Aljazeera* , March 5, 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/isis-fighters-bulldoze-ancient-assyrian-palace-iraq-150305195222805.html>

⁸⁰ "Senior Nusra Front Commander Killed In Syria Air Strike", *Aljazeera* , March 6, 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/03/syria-nusra-front-commander-killed-air-strike-150305230517103.html>

⁸¹ "Boko Haram Pledges Allegiance to ISIL, Reports Say", *Aljazeera* , March 8, 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/nigeria-boko-haram-pledges-allegiance-isis-150307201614660.html>

monolithic existential threat and everything else was just sort of backseat,” Prabhakar said. The spread and violence of ISIL is what she called a “today issue,” as is the historic West African outbreak of Ebola virus disease. Such crises will flare up and be part of the national security environment, “and how we deal with them as technology changes and what those kinds of actors are able to do – that’s part of the national security landscape but it’s not the whole story,” the director said.⁸²

Navy Adm. Michael S. Rogers, commander of U.S. Cyber Command, took questions recently on many topics – cyber defence and offense, finding the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant on the dark Web and cyber deterrence – during a New America Foundation cybersecurity conference. Rogers, who’s also director of the National Security Agency, spoke with CNN national security correspondent Jim Sciutto and took questions from the audience and from Twitter and other social media outlets. Rogers often says, as he did at this conference, that he believes in appearing publicly and putting no restrictions on questions asked of him. On a question about whether the United States is positioned effectively to address cyberspace as a domain of warfare, Rogers said the nation is in a better position in many ways than most of its counterparts around the world.⁸³

National security interests face heightened threats and demands as budget woes grow more challenging and complex, but the Navy and Marines Corps remain the best value to advance global security and presence, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus told a Senate panel on March 4. The secretary testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee’s defence subcommittee to reinforce the significance of the naval forces’ rapid, self-contained response and latitude to execute missions. “Uniquely, the Navy and Marine Corps provide presence around the world, around the clock,” Mabus said. “We are the nation’s first line of defence, ready for anything that might come over the horizon.”⁸⁴

Focusing on the difficulties that lie ahead of the Defence Department is easy, but now is also the time to embrace opportunity, Defence Secretary Ash Carter said at his ceremonial swearing in as the 25th secretary of defence, an event hosted by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey at the Pentagon on March 6. “Being back, I’m reminded how easy it is in Washington – and in this building – to focus solely on our challenges,” Carter said. “And it is indeed a turbulent, rough world out there. But as a nation and as a department, this is also a moment to continue to shine the beacon of American leadership and to seize the many bright opportunities in front of us.”⁸⁵

Internal reforms are just as important to the Defence Department as an increase to its budget, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the House Appropriations Committee’s defence

⁸² Pellerin, Cheryl, “21st-century DARPA Tool Could Work Against ISIL”, *DoD News*, March 2, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128275>

⁸³ Pellerin, Cheryl, “Rogers Discusses Cyber Operations, ISIL, Deterrence”, *DoD News*, March 2, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128278>

⁸⁴ Lyle, Amaani, “Navy Secretary Explains Significance of Sea Power”, *DoD News*, March 4, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128296>

⁸⁵ Roulo, Claudette, “Carter: It’s Time to Seize ‘Bright Opportunities’”, *DoD News*, March 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128312>

subcommittee on March 4. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey told the subcommittee that the department requires the flexibility to trim its excess infrastructure; re-examine its pay, benefits and retirement systems; and retire unneeded weapon systems in this fiscally constrained time. All members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he said, are convinced that this flexibility is crucial to the long-term health of the force.⁸⁶

As the Navy faces a projected shortfall of about \$25 billion below the president's fiscal year 2016 budget request, sequestration and the continuing funding resolution have degraded the service's readiness and capabilities, the chief of naval operations told Congress on March 4. In testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee, Navy Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert praised the resilience of more than 600,000 active and reserve sailors, Navy civilians and their families, including some 41,000 sailors who are underway and deployed, but he expressed concern about the inevitable toll on people and assets.⁸⁷

Over five years of U.S. Cyber Command operations, global movement of threat activity through cyberspace has blurred roles and relationships among government agencies, as well as between the public and private sectors and the real and virtual worlds, the Cybercom commander told a House panel. Navy Adm. Michael S. Rogers testified March 4 before the House Armed Services Committee on cyber operations and improving the military's cybersecurity posture. "There is no Department of Defense solution to our cybersecurity dilemmas," Roger said in written testimony. "The global movement of threat activity in and through cyberspace blurs the U.S. government's traditional understanding of how to address domestic and foreign military, criminal and intelligence activities." Similarly, he said, the public and private sectors need each other's help.⁸⁸

Thousands of people are gathering on March 7 in the small U.S. Southern City of Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of a historic voting rights march. The 1965 event, known as "Bloody Sunday," cast a spotlight on racial discrimination and the plight of millions of African-Americans denied the right to vote in parts of the South. Decades after civil rights battles in Selma and surrounding communities the focus has shifted to economic priorities.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, the Marine Corps has adjusted to budget constraints by prioritizing the readiness of forward deployed forces, the service's top officer told Congress on March 4. Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. told the Senate Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee that amid budget uncertainty, the Marine Corps will strive to meet America's expectations to successfully operate forward, engage with partners, deter potential adversaries

⁸⁶ Garamone, Jim, "Reforms Just as Important as Budget Increase, Dempsey Says", *DoD News*, March 4, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128295>

⁸⁷ Lyle, Amaani, "Greenert: Sequestration Threatens Readiness, Modernization", *DoD News*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128298>

⁸⁸ Pellerin, Cheryl, "Cybercom Chief: Cyber Threats Blur Roles, Relationships", *DoD News*, March 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128305>

⁸⁹ Simkins, Chris, "Economic Disparity Persists on Old Civil Rights Battleground", *VOA News*, March 07, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/african-americans-seek-economic-opportunities-in-former-civil-rights-battle/2671425.html>

and respond to crises, with 31,000 Marines currently forward deployed and engaged. Recent Marine Corps missions, Dunford reported, include support to U.S. citizen evacuations in Sudan, Libya and Yemen, ongoing strikes in Syria and Iraq, Iraqi army training and U.S. Embassy protection in Baghdad. Concurrently, 22,500 Marines remain west of the International Date Line in support of the U.S. rebalance to the Pacific region, the general said.⁹⁰

Protesters took to the streets in a Midwest college town over the weekend with chants of “Black Lives Matter” following the fatal shooting of an unarmed, African American teenager by a white police officer on March 6. Madison, Wisconsin, Police Chief Mike Koval said 19-year-old Tony Robinson was shot in his apartment Friday night after Officer Matt Kenny, who was responding to emergency telephone calls about battery and someone jumping in and out of traffic, heard a disturbance in Robinson’s apartment.⁹¹

U.S. President Barack Obama and former president George W. Bush participated on March 7 in the 50th anniversary observance of the beating of peaceful civil rights demonstrators by police in Selma, Alabama. The incident came to be known as “Bloody Sunday.” The anniversary served as an opportunity to reflect on a half-century of civil rights progress. It was also an occasion to take stock of inequality that continues to exist. The marchers in 1965 demanded an end to discrimination against African-American voters. Scenes of police violence shocked Americans and built support for laws forbidding voter discrimination.⁹²

International: Asia

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Campbell: Taliban overmatched by Afghan forces; Winnefeld, USO tour stars visit troops in Afghanistan; Officials outline policy, posture in Middle East; Obama, Netanyahu spar over Iran nuclear negotiations; Iraqi forces eject ISIL terrorists from Baghdadi; Coalition continues airstrikes against ISIL in Syria, Iraq; The vice chairman Winnefeld visits American diplomat who was attacked in Seoul.**

While Afghanistan remains a dangerous place with many challenges ahead, it’s unlikely the Taliban have the ability to best Afghan forces on the battlefield or topple the government, the top U.S. general in the country said on March 4. Army Gen. John F. Campbell, commander of Operation Resolute Support and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, said in prepared remarks to the House Armed Services Committee that while the Taliban has shifted tactics to high-profile attacks against soft targets, it is not capable of overthrowing the Afghan government in Kabul. While they will continue to test Afghan security forces, “it’s unlikely that the Taliban will be able to overmatch the Afghan national defence and security forces on the battlefield in 2015,” Campbell said. He predicted that

⁹⁰ Lyle, Amaani, “Marine Commandant Outlines Budget-based Priority Shifts”, *DoD News*, March 5, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128300>

⁹¹ “Shooting of Unarmed Teen in Wisconsin Leads to Protests”, *VOA News*, March 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/unarmed-black-teen-killed-by-white-officer-in-wisconsin/2671985.html>

⁹² Harton, Marcus, “US Reflects on Civil Rights”, *VOA News*, March 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-reflects-on-civil-rights/2672334.html>

indirect fire, insider attacks and other Taliban offensives will increase during the upcoming fighting season, but “these are not the tactics of an insurgent movement capable of overthrowing the Afghan government.”⁹³

Service members assigned in Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan enjoyed a brief reprieve from their Resolute Support mission on March 6, thanks to the USO and a group of celebrities who wanted to say, “Thank you for your service.” Navy Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr., the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, led the delegation of USO tour stars as part of a global trip to entertain the troops and show gratitude for their service and sacrifice. The U.S. service members in Afghanistan serve in a train, advise and assist role and conduct counter-terrorism missions as Afghan forces take responsibility for their country’s security.⁹⁴

Defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorist organization and preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon are the top two issues that must be addressed in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, the undersecretary of defence for policy told Congress on March 3. Speaking to the House Armed Services Committee alongside Centcom commander Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, Christine E. Wormuth said new realities have forced the Defence Department to take a hard look at its near and long-term goals for engagement in the Middle East. Centcom’s area of responsibility is today more volatile and chaotic than ever before, Austin said, “and the stakes have never been higher.”⁹⁵

U.S. President Barack Obama says American and Iranian negotiators have narrowed their differences over Iran’s suspect nuclear programme, but says he is prepared to end negotiations if no acceptable deal can be reached. Obama spoke in a pre-recorded interview aired on March 8 on CBS television. He said any deal must permit Western inspectors to verify that Tehran is not working to develop a nuclear weapon. With a target date of late March for an agreement, Obama – who taped the interview on March 7 – said “if there is no deal, then we walk away.”⁹⁶

Iraqi security forces and tribal fighters from the Anbar region supported by coalition airstrikes have successfully cleared the Iraqi city of Baghdadi of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists, retaking both the city police station and three Euphrates River bridges, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on March 6. The Euphrates River bridges have been held by ISIL since September, officials said, adding that Iraqi security forces with coalition airstrike support also succeeded in pushing ISIL from seven villages northwest of Baghdadi on the road to Hadithah. Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve delivered precise and effective airstrikes on enemy positions in and around Baghdadi in support of the Iraqi

⁹³ Simeone, Nick, “Campbell: Taliban Overmatched by Afghan Forces”, *DoD News*, March 4, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128293>

⁹⁴ Ferdinando, Lisa, “Winnefeld, USO Tour Stars Visit Troops in Afghanistan”, *DoD News*, March 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128311>

⁹⁵ Roulo, Claudette, “Officials Outline Policy, Posture in Middle East”, *DoD News*, March 3, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128284>

⁹⁶ “Obama, Netanyahu Spar Over Iran Nuclear Negotiations”, *VOA News*, March 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/obama-netanyahu-spar-over-iran-nuclear-negotiations/2672375.html>

government's fight against ISIL, officials said.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, the U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria and Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported on March 6.⁹⁸

The top U.S. military officer said Iraqi forces will take back the city of Tikrit from Islamic State militants, but only because of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes. General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on his way to Baghdad that the number of Iraqi forces fighting the extremists was overwhelming. But he said he didn't think the Iraqis could have made progress in Tikrit had the militants not been slowed down by the U.S.-led airstrikes. Tikrit, a major city near Baghdad, is the birthplace of the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Iraqi officials said they were meeting strong resistance from Islamic State fighters near Tikrit, but Dempsey said it was only a matter of time before the extremists were beaten.⁹⁹

The vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff visited the U.S. Ambassador to Korea, Mark Lippert, in the hospital in Seoul on March 7. Lippert was attacked on March 5 during a morning event in Seoul. He underwent surgery to treat wounds to his face and hand. The ambassador tweeted out later that day he is doing well and in great spirits. A suspect is in custody.¹⁰⁰

Indo-US Relations

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Forward base in Indian Ocean gets first-class USO visit; US Congressman Ed Royce says unique opportunity to strengthen Indo-US ties; Technological advances influence global relations.**

On a small, isolated atoll in Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean sits an obscure forward base nicknamed the "footprint of freedom" that supports two theatres of operation. "If there is a crisis in the Indian Ocean, Pacific, or the Middle East, we're here to support," said Navy Capt. Jason Jorgensen, commander for the Navy Support Facility Diego Garcia. Service members are unaccompanied on this highly restricted British Indian Ocean Territory that got its nickname because its aerial profile resembles a footprint. Some members of the military have admitted they never heard of Diego Garcia until they received orders to the site, located south of the equator. Because the service members are separated from loved ones and far from home, getting a piece of

⁹⁷ "Iraqi Forces Eject ISIL Terrorists From Baghdadi", From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, *DoD News*, March 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128314>

⁹⁸ "Coalition Continues Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq", From a Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve News Release, *DoD News*, March 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128309>

⁹⁹ "US Military Head: Iraqi Forces Will Prevail in Tikrit", *VOA News*, March 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/iraqi-forces-will-prevail-tikrit-joint-chiefs-chairman/2671634.html>

¹⁰⁰ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Winnefeld Visits American Diplomat Who Was Attacked in Seoul", *DoD News*, March 7, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128318>

America, like the USO show in Diego Garcia on March 7 with A-list celebrities, is especially meaningful, Jorgensen said.¹⁰¹

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the helm in India, there is a unique opportunity to strengthen India-US ties especially in the economic and security sphere, an influential American lawmaker has said. "Our trade ties have made great strides in recent years, but we have yet to tap into our true potential," said US Congressman Ed Royce, Chairman of powerful House Foreign Relations Committee. Mr Royce is leading a bipartisan congressional delegation visiting India starting this weekend. In India, the delegation will visit New Delhi, Mr where Royce will seek to further strengthen the US-India partnership, including encouraging stronger trade ties and counter-terrorism cooperation, a statement said. "Having played a key role in the passage of the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, I'd also like to see steps taken towards the implementation of this important agreement. I'll be stressing all of these issues in our meetings with top Government of India officials," Mr Royce said.¹⁰²

Technological advances, notably in information and communication sectors, have exerted transformational influence across all domains of international relations, former Ambassador C.P. Ravindranathan, said in Tiruvarur on March 2. Speaking to students of the Central University of Tamil Nadu on "Tasks for India's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century" under the aegis of the Ministry of External Affairs' outreach programme, Mr. Ravindranathan opined that the world seems set towards an economic order where diverse forces were at work including a shift of economic power towards Asia. "The outlook for US-China relations is a critical factor in determining the possibilities of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region, which is the geopolitical context for the Century's defining development: the rise of India and China," Mr. Ravindranathan stated.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ferdinando, Lisa, "Forward Base in Indian Ocean Gets First-class USO Visit", *DoD News*, March 7, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128317>

¹⁰² "Unique Opportunity to Strengthen Indo-US Ties: US Congressman Ed Royce", March 07, 2015 at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/unique-opportunity-to-strengthen-indo-us-ties-us-congressman-ed-royce-744761>

¹⁰³ "Technological Advances Influence Global Relations", *The Hindu*, March 3, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/technological-advances-influence-global-relations/article6953529.ece>

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Joint Indo-Nepal exercise Surya Kiran VIII Concludes; India helps Nepal to clear blocked runway.**

Eighth India-Nepal Combined Exercise, Surya Kiran VIII, which commenced on February 23, 2015, concluded at Salijhandi, Nepal on March 7, 2015. The exercise was conducted under the aegis of Nepalese Army. The exercise aimed to create a greater understanding between Indian & Nepalese Army and develop interoperability in Jungle Warfare and Counter Terrorism operations in mountainous terrain. It also focussed on the basics of Disaster Management with special reference to Pandemic/ Epidemic control and aviation aspects. Over the years, the two countries have decided to progressively increase the scope and content of the combined exercise. The exercise is expected to further strengthen the military bond between the two Armies and also in understanding each other's organisational concepts and methodology of conducting Counter Terrorism operations. Cooperation in the field of disaster management will also be enhanced.¹⁰⁴

In a display of excellent coordination and synchronization between the Indian Air Force Ministry of Defence and Directorate General of Civil Aviation, an Accident Recovery Kit was airlifted from Delhi to Kathmandu to remove the Turkish Airlines airbus that blocked the runway at Kathmandu following a landing accident. The request for assistance was received on March 4, 2015. The synchronization between the various elements of the government machinery worked well and the C-130J was airborne for Kathmandu very quickly, with 7.5 Tone of load and 11 technical crew from Air India. The C-130J was chosen for the mission not only because of its load carrying capacity and range but also its capability to land on restricted surfaces. The usable runway length at Kathmandu had been reduced to only about 5000 ft, which made it impossible for any commercial aircraft to land. Significantly, the operation not only highlights the efficiency of the government machinery but also the government's resolve to help friendly foreign nations in distress.¹⁰⁵

International

(March 2-8, 2015)

- **Russian dismisses United States claim that it has sent thousands of troops to fight alongside pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine; Saudi Arabia's foreign minister urges US-led coalition**

¹⁰⁴ "Exercise Surya Kiran VIII: Joint India Nepal Exercise Concludes," *PIB*, March 08, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=116537>

¹⁰⁵ "India Reaches out to Nepal to Help Clear Blocked Runway," *PIB*, March 05, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=116502>

conducting airstrikes against the IS in Syria and Iraq to wage a ground war against the jihadists.

Reports say that Russian officials have dismissed a claim by the United States that Russia has sent thousands of troops to fight alongside pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland had recently told a U.S congressional foreign affairs committee that Russia had deployed thousands and thousands of troops to Ukraine, although she said she could not give a precise number. She also accused Russia of sending hundreds of pieces of military equipment to the rebel-controlled zone since December, including tanks and rocket systems.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, according to reports, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister on March 05 urged the US-led coalition conducting airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq to wage a ground war against the jihadists. However, US President Barack Obama, anxious to avoid a drawn-out ground war, has backed an air campaign, but ruled out deploying infantry. The kingdom, part of that coalition stresses the need to provide the military means needed to face this challenge on the ground. Several Arab countries have joined the air campaign against IS.¹⁰⁷

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Army recovers IEDs, ammunition in Kupwara; Militant hideout busted in Kashmir's Kishtwar district; Pakistan violates ceasefire, targets border outpost in Jammu; 2 Hizb militants killed in Tral encounter; PDP- BJP iron out differences, form Coalition government in J & K.**

A search party of Army operating in the area of Warson, 5 Kms from Trehgam Town, detected three IEDs hidden in the hollow trunk of a tree along with other war like stores in the fringes of Gazrial Forest near Khazan Mati Ridge on February 21. In a statement, a defence spokesman said that the search resulted in the recovery of three IEDs, two weighing 5 Kgs and one weighing 1 Kg approximately along with 3 Mortar Bombs, 3 UBGL grenades, 61 rounds of AK-47 and one Chinese Pistol with magazine. The IEDs were kept in ready to be used position with complete circuitry".¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ "Russia Denies US Claim of 'Thousands' of Troops in Ukraine," *Defence News*, March 5, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/03/05/russia-troops-ukraine-us/24442787/>

¹⁰⁷ "Saudi Diplomat Urges Allies To Face IS 'On the Ground,'" *Defence News*, March 5, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/2015/03/05/saudi-diplomat-urges-allies-to-face-is-on-the-ground/24448801/>

¹⁰⁸ "3 IEDs Recovered In Kupwara: Army", *Kashmir Times*, February 23, 2015 at <http://www.kashmirtimes.com/newsdet.aspx?q=38312>

Government forces on February 25 busted a militant hideout in Dachhin area of mountainous Kishtwar district and seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition. "The recovery include one 12 bore gun, two UBGL grenades, two Chinese grenade, one hand grenade HE 36, two walky talky sets, one wireless sets, seven 7.62 mm SLR rounds, one Pika round, six AK-47 rounds along with some utensils and medicines," Jammu-based defence spokesman Lt Col Manish Mehta said. He said that in another success in Kishtwar district on the same day, army recovered a cache of arms, ammunitions and communication equipment in Tandar forests of Dachhin area in a joint operation along with Jammu and Kashmir Police.¹⁰⁹

After a weeklong lull in firing from across the International Border, Pakistan Rangers on February 26 night violated ceasefire and targeted a border outpost (BoP) in the R.S. Pura sector of Jammu. "The Pakistan Rangers fired three rounds of small arms fire at the Nawapind BoP in the R.S. Pura sector. The firing came from the Thathi area of the Pakistani side. The BSF exercised restraint and did not retaliate to the Pakistani fire," said a police officer. Apprehending that the latest incident of ceasefire violation could be aimed at facilitating infiltration from across the border, BSF has sounded a high alert along the IB.¹¹⁰

Two militants of Hizbul Mujahideen were killed in an overnight encounter with the forces in Ratsuna village of Tral in the south Kashmir district on February 27. The deceased militants were identified as Shabir Ahmad Mir alias Suhail of Dadsara village, Tral and Idrees Shah of Noorpaora area of Awantipora. "2 AK-47 rifles, 6 AK-47 magazines, 80 rounds, 2 pouches, HM letter pad, 1 matrix sheet and a diary was recovered from the encounter site," the police spokesman said. This was the second encounter in South Kashmir in last three days. Earlier on February 25, two Hizb militants were killed and 4 army men including a Major injured during a 28 hour long gunfight in Heff- Shirmal village of Shopian district.¹¹¹

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leader Mufti Mohammad Sayeed on March 1 took oath as the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in a ceremony that was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The alliance, which has been termed by Mr. Sayeed as meeting of "North Pole and South Pole", saw senior BJP leader Nirmal Singh being sworn in as the Deputy Chief Minister of the PDP-BJP alliance government. BJP and PDP, which have been in negotiations for nearly two months now, have ironed out all the differences over contentious issues including Article 370, Armed Forces Special Powers Act, resettlement of West Pakistan Refugees and holding talks with Pakistan and separatist leaders of the state.¹¹² The PDP seems to have diluted its stand on controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) whereas the BJP has taken a complete U-turn on Article

¹⁰⁹ "Militant Hideout Busted in Kishtwar", *Kashmir Times*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-militant-hideout-busted-in-kishtwar-73413.aspx>

¹¹⁰ "Pakistan Violates Ceasefire, Targets Border Post Near Jammu", *The Hindu*, February 27, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pakistan-violates-ceasefire-targets-border-post-near-jammu/article6940044.ece>

¹¹¹ Suhail, Muhammad, "2 Hizb Militants Killed In Tral Encounter", *Rising Kashmir*, February 28, 2015 at <http://www.risingkashmir.com/2-hizb-militants-killed-in-tral-encounter/>

¹¹² Zahid, Rafiq, "Mufti Sayeed Takes Oath As J&K Chief Minister", *The Hindu*, March 1, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/mufti-sayeed-takes-oath-as-jk-chief-minister/article6948272.ece?ref=relatedNews>

370 which grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir and both the parties have left open the issue of rehabilitation of West Pakistan refugees while chalking out a common agenda for the alliance.¹¹³

Northeast India

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **Land survey begins at Assam-Nagaland border; Prabrajan Birodhi Mancha alleges lacunae in National Register of Citizens update process; No talks with any more ultra-outfits: Centre; GNLA cadre surrenders in Garo Hills; Army recovers powerful IED from Assam railway track.**

A day after alleged attempts by some people of Nagaland to occupy land belonging to villagers of Assam in the D-Sector of the Assam-Nagaland border at the Merapani area of Golaghat district on February 21, the process of demarcation of land was started on February 22 in the same area by the Golaghat Forest Division under the direction of the district Deputy Commissioner Nitin Khade. The survey, which is likely to take five days to be completed, is being carried out using the Global Positioning System (GPS). The survey will soon be extended to the Mariani- Dimapur road, which was constructed last year through the inter-State boundary.¹¹⁴

Bringing the NRC updating process under the scanner, the Prabrajan Birodhi Mancha, on February 22 alleged that the existing process of NRC update clubbed with 'glaring illegalities', would facilitate grant of citizenship to a large number of illegal migrants from Bangladesh if steps are not taken to rectify it. The forum against infiltration argued that under the clauses of the Citizenship Act, the offspring of illegal migrants are entitled to get Indian citizenship up to December 3, 2004, even if the cut-off date for granting citizenship to such migrants from Bangladesh is March 25, 1971. The forum has given a memorandum to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding immediate steps to protect the interest of the people of Assam and ensure that the NRC does not become a means to legalise the illegal migrants.¹¹⁵

The Government of India has closed its doors for talks with any more militant outfits and the ongoing process of talks with the ultra-groups, which have already signed cease-fire pacts to solve their problems through discussions, will be expedited so that those are taken to a logical conclusion as soon as possible. Talking to *The Assam Tribune*, highly placed sources in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) asserted that no more effort would be made to bring the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent), Paresh Baruah to the negotiation table.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ "Agenda for Alliance: PDP, BJP Play Give And Take On AFSPA, Article 370", *The Hindu*, March 1, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/pdpbjp-government-to-examine-need-for-denotifying-disturbed-areas-cmp/article6948447.ece?ref=relatedNews>

¹¹⁴ "Land Survey Begins At Assam-Nagaland Border", *The Assam Tribune*, February 23, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2315/at051>

¹¹⁵ "Lacunae in NRC Update Process Alleged", *The Assam Tribune*, February 23, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2315/city053>

¹¹⁶ Choudhury, R Dutta, "No Talks With Any More Ultra Outfits: Govt", *The Assam Tribune*, February 26, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2615/at050>

A hard-core cadre of the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) surrendered before the West Garo Hills police with one AK 81 rifle, three magazines and 27 live rounds on February 25. The cadre then led a police team to a place where some crude bombs and IED were kept hidden. Upon his leading the West Garo Hills police team and the CRPF men, the latter were able to recover one crude bomb from near Kherapara Nokat, about 35 kms from Tura.¹¹⁷

A major catastrophe was averted when a liquid petroleum cylinder-based powerful improvised explosive device (IED) was recovered and destroyed on the busy Goalpara-Dudhnoi/Mendipather-Guwahati railway track at Barigaon near Dudhnoi by the Goalpara-based Army troops of Red Horn Division on February 27. The IED was found well camouflaged and entrenched under the railway track, the only railway connectivity to Meghalaya and the alternate rail route connecting Guwahati with the rest of India. "The activation of the IED would have disturbed the ethnic-sensitive and fragile peace in Goalpara district and the adjoining hills of Meghalaya," an Army source said.¹¹⁸

Left-wing Extremism

(February 23-March 1, 2015)

- **States set to launch joint anti-Maoist operation; Security Forces recover cache of arms in Sonbhadra jungle; 2 killed as Maoists blow up CRPF Vehicle; CRPF seeks tribal support to thwart Maoist designs.**

In a crucial meeting to combat Maoist menace, held at Jagdalpur, the divisional headquarters of Bastar on February 23, police, CRPF and intelligence officials of five states have decided to launch an intensified joint operation on the border areas of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. It was indicated in the meeting that anti-Maoist operations would begin on bordering regions targeting Khammam at Telangana, Koraput at Odisha, East Godavari region in Andhra Pradesh, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh's areas of Kanker, Bijapur, Sukma and Dantewada and those connecting to Abujmad in Narayanpur region.¹¹⁹

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and police recovered a large quantity of arms and ammunition from a cave in the jungles of Sonbhadra bordering Bihar on February 23. The recovery, which includes two guns, two country-made revolvers, live cartridges, 12 detonators and six gelatine rods hidden in a plastic bag, was made during a combing operation launched after detection of an armed group of Maoists on February 15.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ "GNLA Cadre Surrenders In Garo Hills", *The Assam Tribune*, February 27, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2715/oth051>

¹¹⁸ "IED Recovered Off Dudhnoi", *The Assam Tribune*, February 28, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=feb2815/at053>

¹¹⁹ Drolia, Rashmi, "Five States Including Chhattisgarh Set To Launch Joint Anti-Maoist Operation", *The Times of India*, February 24, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/Five-states-including-Chhattisgarh-set-to-launch-joint-anti-Maoist-operation/articleshow/46359047.cms>

¹²⁰ Dikshit, Rajeev, "Cache Of Arms Recovered From Cave In Sonbhadra Jungle", *The Times of India*, February 24, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/Cache-of-arms-recovered-from-cave-in-Sonbhadra-jungle/articleshow/46348764.cms>

Maoists blew up the vehicle of the Cobra battalion near Thakthakwa village under the Dumaria police station, about 80km away from Gaya district headquarters on February 24 evening. Two Cobra battalion jawans were killed, while 13 sustained injuries in the powerful blast. The incident happened just a few hours after chief minister Nitish Kumar held a law and order review meeting in Patna to tone up administration. This is the first major attack of Maoists on forces this year.¹²¹

With an aim of countering the 'anti-developmental' propaganda of Maoists, CRPF has devised a new strategy of putting up hoardings in local dialect seeking tribal support near a construction site of a national highway in insurgency-hit Sukma district in tribal Bastar region. Tasked to ensure security for the widening and relaying of 76 km long Sukma-Konta road- a patch on NH 30 that connects Jagdalpur (district headquarters of Bastar) to Vijaywada in Andhra Pradesh- CRPF is leaving no stone unturned to avoid any untoward incident during the ongoing project. "For the first time such an initiative has been taken. The objective is to make people aware of how construction of this road will be fruitful for them and their future generations," CRPF's 2nd Battalion Commandant VVN Prasanna said. The unit is among five battalions of the paramilitary force tasked to ensure security for the construction of the Sukma-Dornapal-Konta route in self-proclaimed 'liberated zone' of Maoists.¹²²

¹²¹ "Maoists Blow Up Cobra Vehicle, Two Killed", *Hindustan Times*, February 25, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/maoists-blow-up-cobra-vehicle-two-killed/article1-1320415.aspx>

¹²² "CRPF Seeks Tribal Support To Thwart Maoist Designs", *The Times of India*, February 28, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/CRPF-seeks-tribal-support-to-thwart-Maoist-designs/articleshow/46407063.cms>