

# THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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## I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

### A. South Asia

#### Bangladesh

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Fifth meeting of BIMSTEC Task Force on Trans Power Exchange held in Dhaka; Danish Minister for Trade and Development Cooperation visits Dhaka; Permanent secretary for the Department for International Development of the UK visits Dhaka; a top Bangladeshi criminal arrested in India.**

A BIMSTEC meeting on March 16 finalised a draft deal to set up power grid connections for electricity trade among its seven member countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Senior officials of the member countries at the 5th meeting of the BIMSTEC Task Force on Trans Power Exchange finalised the MoU at Hotel Sonargaon in Dhaka. The meeting highlighted the rich hydropower potential of the BIMSTEC member nations, especially India, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal.<sup>1</sup>

Danish Minister for Trade and Development Cooperation Mogens Jensen came to Dhaka on March 17 on a three-day visit to promote development cooperation with government officials and political leaders. This was his first visit to Bangladesh after he assumed his current role. He will be accompanied by the permanent secretary of the Danish Ministry of Employment, and senior officials from the Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Mark Lowcock, permanent secretary for the Department for International Development of the UK, arrived in Dhaka on March 15 to observe UK aid's contribution to economic growth and poverty reduction in Bangladesh. This is Lowcock's second visit to Bangladesh. He last toured the country in 2011, the British High Commission in Dhaka said in a statement. The UK government is the largest bilateral donor of Bangladesh with an aid programme directly helping millions of the poorest people in the country.<sup>3</sup>

Mollah Masud, a top Bangladeshi criminal for whom Interpol issued red notice, has been arrested in India. The Criminal Investigation Department of West Bengal arrested Masud on February 8 in a case filed with Barrackpore Police Station under Section 14 of Foreigners Act relating to illegal stay in the country. Masud fled to India in 2001 as Dhaka Metropolitan Police put him on

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<sup>1</sup> Karim, Rezaul, "Bimstec Members Finalise Plan on Sharing Their Surplus Electricity with Each Other", *The Daily Star*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/target-7-nation-power-grid-72027>.

<sup>2</sup> "Danish Minister for Trade in Dhaka", *The Daily Star*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/danish-minister-trade-dhaka-72011>.

<sup>3</sup> "DFID Boss in Dhaka", *The Daily Star*, March 16, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/dfid-boss-dhaka-71875>.

a list of 23 most-wanted criminals and announced bounty for his capture. He, however, sneaked back into the country on several occasions until 2004.<sup>4</sup>

## Sri Lanka

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Swiss Foreign Minister visits Colombo; Government allows protective work on the Colombo Port City project; Sarath Fonseka receives the highest rank of 'Field Marshal', Government expands the Cabinet; Sri Lankan navy arrests 54 Indian fishermen.**

Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter says Switzerland is willing to open a new chapter in bilateral relations with Sri Lanka following presidential elections in January. On a visit to Colombo on March 17, Burkhalter praised the new Sri Lankan government for its political reforms and its reconciliation efforts with ethnic minorities in the country. In talks with President Maithripala Sirisena and other top government representatives Burkhalter also discussed possibilities of boosting bilateral trade between Sri Lanka and Switzerland.<sup>5</sup>

China Communications Construction Company Pvt Ltd (CCCC) says it has received written approval from the Sri Lanka Government in a letter dated March 20, 2015 by the Secretary to the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Aviation to commence protective work on the temporarily suspended Colombo Port City Project. All construction work on the Colombo Port City came to a halt following the Sri Lankan Government's official communication on March 6, 2015 to temporarily suspend ongoing work of the project, with immediate effect. As a result of the immediate suspension, over 200 meters of the breakwater constructed for the project, was damaged and the company was unable to take measures to protect the reclaimed land area. The permission to carryout protective work on the site was granted following a request made by CCCC to the Sri Lankan Government.<sup>6</sup>

President Maithripala Sirisena awarded former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka with the highest rank of 'Field Marshal', the first military officer to receive such a rank in the island nation's history. General Sarath Fonseka was awarded the highest military rank for the service rendered by him, achieving the victory over terrorism, the government said.<sup>7</sup>

More cabinet and state Ministers were appointed by President Maithripala Sirisena on March 22 and this included several Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) members. The President's office said

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<sup>4</sup> "Top Criminal Masud Caught in India", *The Daily Star*, March 16, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/top-criminal-masud-caught-kolkata-71829>.

<sup>5</sup> "Swiss seek fresh ties with Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, March 17, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/17/swiss-see-fresh-ties-with-lanka/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Port City Given Written Approval", *Colombo Gazette*, March 20, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/20/port-city-given-written-approval/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Fonseka Appointed Field Marshal", *Colombo Gazette*, March 22, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/22/fonseka-appointed-field-marshal/>.

that 11 Parliamentarians took oaths as cabinet Ministers, 5 as State Ministers and 10 Deputy Ministers.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Lankan navy arrested 33 Indian fishermen and seized five boats from north of Talaimanner and 21 fishermen were arrested and 5 boats seized from the north of Kankesanthurai, both in the northern province of the island, while they were illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters.<sup>9</sup>

## Maldives

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **President visits Saudi Arab; UN, Australia express concerns about Nashhed's arrest; Dunya Maumoon defends government's decision to arrest Nasheed; Chief of Defence Force visits Malaysia; Maldivian companies takes part in the Moscow International Travel and Tourism Exhibition.**

The Government of Maldives and Saudi Arabia have held official talks, led by President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom and His Royal Highness Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, King of Saudi Arabia and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The discussions were focused on further expanding and diversifying the long existing bilateral relations between the two countries in various areas of development. Underscoring the Maldives Government's initiatives to transform the Maldivian economy, discussions were also held on increasing the number of Saudi investments in the Maldives. Further, both the Maldivian and Saudi Governments reiterated their commitments to increasing cooperation to preserve the Islamic identity and values. King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud expressed his interests in establishing a Saudi Embassy in the Maldives, which would enhance the brotherly ties between the Maldives and Saudi Arabia.<sup>10</sup>

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom went to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on the invitation of Saudi King. President Yameen is accompanied by a high-level delegation that includes leader of the Maldives Development Alliance Ahmed Siyam Mohamed, Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture Dr. Mohamed Shainee, and Minister of Islamic Affairs Dr. Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed.<sup>11</sup> President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, and Minister of Education of Saudi Arabia, Dr. Azzam bin Mohammed Al-Dhakhil, have held discussions on increasing Saudi Arabia's assistance in providing higher education opportunities for Maldivian students. The discussions were held during a courtesy call paid on President Yameen, by the Saudi Arabian Education Minister. The President was also called on by Minister of Defence and Chief of Royal Court, His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdulaiz Al Saud, Minister of Petroleum

<sup>8</sup> "More Cabinet And State Ministers", *Colombo Gazette*, March 22, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/22/more-cabinet-and-state-ministers/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Navy Arrests 54 Indian Fishermen", *Colombo Gazette*, March 22, 2015 at <http://colombogazette.com/2015/03/22/navy-arrests-29-indian-fishermen-2/>.

<sup>10</sup> "Maldives and Saudi Arabia Hold Official Talks", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15391>.

<sup>11</sup> "President Yameen and First Lady Arrive in Saudi Arabia", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15387>.

and Mineral Resources, H.E. Ali Bin Ibrahim Al-Naimi, Minister of Finance, Dr. Ibrahim bin Abdulaziz Al-Assaf, and the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call and Guidance, H.E. Sheikh Saleh bin Abdulaziz Al Ash-Sheikh.<sup>12</sup>

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has said that the trial of the former president of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed was flawed and unfair. In a statement issued on March 18, the High Commissioner said the sentence handed down by the criminal court in Male, the Maldivian capital, was part of "a rushed process" that prevented Nasheed's defense from calling witnesses.<sup>13</sup>

Australia has expressed their concerns after the former president Mohamed Nasheed was sentenced to 13 years in prison. The Australian High Commission on Colombo issued a press release on March 17 saying that they have been monitoring the situation since the former president's arrest on February 22. And while the situation is being monitored, concerns about the legal proceedings have been shared directly with the Maldivian government through the Maldivian ambassador for Australia. "As a fellow member of the Commonwealth and signatories to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Australia and the Maldives share a commitment to fundamental rights and freedoms, including those of due process, judicial fairness and rule of law." The statement said. The Australian government urged the Maldivian government to ensure that any appeal process for the former President to be handled transparently.<sup>14</sup>

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dunya Maumoon has defended the 13 year sentence against the former president Mohamed Nasheed, responding to the international community.

The former president was sentenced to 13 years in prison last on March 7 for the unlawful arrest of the then chief judge of the Criminal Court Abdulla Mohamed on 2012. *Reuters* said today that the Maldivian is in a political turmoil after Nasheed's sentencing. The foreign minister told the press in Colombo on March 16 that the trial was conducted in accordance with the relevant laws and criminal procedures prevailing in the Maldives. Due process was followed and president Nasheed was accorded his rights fully.<sup>15</sup>

Chief of Defence Force Major General Ahmed Shiyam has departed on an official visit to Malaysia. Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) said that during this visit, Shiyam will attend the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition 2015.

The exhibition has been scheduled for 17 to 25 March 2015.<sup>16</sup> The Deputy Director of the Maldives

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<sup>12</sup> "President Yameen and Saudi Arabian Education Minister Discuss Increasing Saudi Arabia's Assistance In Providing Higher Education Opportunities for Maldives", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15392>.

<sup>13</sup> "UN: Conduct of Trial of Maldives' Ex-President Raises Serious Concerns", *SunOnline*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28506>.

<sup>14</sup> "Australia Expresses Concerns About Nasheed's Sentence", *SunOnline*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28466>.

<sup>15</sup> "Foreign Minister Defends Nasheed's Sentence", *SunOnline*, March 16, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28437>.

<sup>16</sup> "Chief of Defence Force Shiyam Departs on Official Visit to Malaysia", *SunOnline*, March 16, 2015, at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28425>.

Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), Ibrahim Asim said that 41 exhibitors from 23 companies of Maldives is taking part in the biggest tourism fair in the Russia, the Moscow International Travel and Tourism Exhibition that started on March 18.<sup>17</sup>

## B. East Asia

### China

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Chinese Discipline watchdog punished 151 officials in the year 2014; China signs treaty of extraditions with 39 countries; China and Japan to hold security dialogue after a gap of four years; Chinese Army organizes the first open bidding for military equipment's; Xi Jinping will be addressing the Boao Forum; China ready to sell missiles to Turkey; China, Japan and South Korea to hold meeting of foreign ministers; China wants Sri Lanka to protect the rights of the investors.**

According to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the Communist Party of China (CPC), it was reported on March 22 that the “discipline watchdog handed out punishment to 151 officials last year”. It was also reported that the, “State Organs Work Committee of the CPC and its discipline committee have concluded around 208 cases against officials violating the Party discipline and rules”.<sup>18</sup> The CCDI website also reported that, “China has signed extradition treaties with 39 countries and criminal and judicial assistance treaties with 52”. It also asserted that China has managed to bring back 500 overseas fugitives and recovered around 3 billion yuan.<sup>19</sup>

After almost four years, foreign and defence officials from China and Japan began a high-level security meeting on March 19. According to China's assistant foreign minister, Liu Jianchao, “the international security situation has changed dramatically in the four years and the situation around China and Japan is also getting more sophisticated during the period”.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Chinese military sources, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) concluded an open bidding on March 19<sup>th</sup> for 35 pieces of army equipment in Shijiazhuang. It was reported that more than 20 bidders took part, including private enterprises.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Maldives Take Part In The Biggest Tourism Fair In Russia Starting Today”, *SunOnline*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/28500>.

<sup>18</sup> “Discipline Watchdog Punishes 151 Officials in 2014” *China Daily*, March 22, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/22/content\\_19876379.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/22/content_19876379.htm), accessed on March 23, 2015

<sup>19</sup> “China Signs Extradition Treaties with 39 Nations” *China Daily*, March 20, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/20/content\\_19865295.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/20/content_19865295.htm), accessed on March 20, 2015

<sup>20</sup> “China, Japan Hold First Security Meeting in 4 Years” *China Daily*, March 19, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/China-Japan-Relations/2015-03/19/content\\_19855190.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/China-Japan-Relations/2015-03/19/content_19855190.htm), accessed on March 20, 2015

<sup>21</sup> “PLA Organizes Open Bidding for Military Weaponry Procurement” *China Daily*, March 19, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/China-Military-Watch/2015-03/19/content\\_19860418.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/China-Military-Watch/2015-03/19/content_19860418.htm), accessed on March 20, 2015

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the Chinese President Xi Jinping will be delivering the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA). This Forum is scheduled to take place from March 26 to March 29, 2015 in the island province of Hainan.<sup>22</sup>

On March 17 China confirmed that it had agreed to sell HQ-9 air defence missile system to Turkey.<sup>23</sup>

It was announced on March 17<sup>th</sup> that after a gap of two years, China, Japan and South Korea would be resuming their trilateral foreign ministers' meeting. It is scheduled to take place towards the end of March 2015. The meeting will be attended by Wang Yi, Fumio Kishida and Yun Byung-se.<sup>24</sup>

On March 17<sup>th</sup> China urged Sri Lanka to protect the interest of the Chinese investors. According to the spokesperson of the Ministry of Commerce, Shen Danyang, "We hope the Sri Lankan government will resolve the issue and protect the legitimate interests of Chinese investors according to the law for healthy development of economic and trade ties".<sup>25</sup>

## Japan

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Officials from Japan and China hold first security talks after a hiatus of four years; Japan joins EU in drafting a resolution on North Korea; The ruling coalition in Japan agree on the new national security legislation.**

On March 19, officials from Japan and China held a high level security talks at Tokyo. The talks took place after a hiatus of four years. The last round of bilateral security talk of such kind took place in 2011 just before their relationship turned sour over the disputed islands of Senkaku/Diaoyu. The recent meeting was treated by many as a step taken by both the countries towards improving their ties. During the meeting they primarily talked about the establishment of a maritime communication hotline in order to avoid a clash between the paramilitary vessels of both countries while patrolling the waters around the disputed islands.<sup>26</sup>

On March 19, Japan joined the European Union (EU) while submitting a draft resolution on North Korea to the UN Human Rights Council. The said resolution basically condemns North Korea for involvement in systemic human rights violation and urges Pyongyang to resolve as early as

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<sup>22</sup> "Chinese President to Address Opening Ceremony of 2015 Boao Forum" *China Daily*, March 19, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/19/content\\_19859625.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/19/content_19859625.htm), accessed on March 20, 2015

<sup>23</sup> Yining, Peng, "Missile Sale to Turkey Confirmed", *China Daily*, March 19, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/19/content\\_19850713.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/19/content_19850713.htm), accessed on March 20, 2015

<sup>24</sup> Yunbi, Zhang, "3-Way Meeting Of Foreign Ministers Set with Japan, S. Korea", *China Daily*, March 18, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/18/content\\_19839947.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/18/content_19839947.htm), accessed on March 20, 2015

<sup>25</sup> "China Calls on Sri Lanka to Protect Interests Of Investors", *China Daily*, March 17, 2015 at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/17/content\\_19834258.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/17/content_19834258.htm) accessed on March 20, 2015

<sup>26</sup> "China and Japan Hold First Security Talks In Four Years", *BBC News*, March 19, 2015, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31957664>

possible the issue of abduction of Japanese nationals by the North. The draft is expected to be adopted at the UN Human Rights Council on March 26 or 27.<sup>27</sup>

On March 20, the ruling coalition of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Komeito in Japan agreed on a basic policy for national security. The new law aims at expanding the scope of Japanese Self Defence Force (SDF) abroad. It is in line with the Japanese government's attempt at offering a new interpretation to the Japanese Constitution in July 2014 which could allow Japan in exercising the right of collective self-defence. The government is to submit the new security bills to the Diet in mid-May this year. On March 22, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has expressed his resolve in acquiring parliamentary approval for the said bills.<sup>28</sup>

## South Korea

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Foreign Ministers of South Korea, Japan and China hold three-way talks in Seoul; Seoul urges East Asian states not to interfere in its decision over the deployment of THAAD.**

On March 21, the foreign ministers of South Korea, Japan and China held a trilateral talk for the first time after a hiatus of nearly three years. The talk took place in Seoul. During the talk, the three leaders agreed to work together towards holding as early as possible a trilateral summit that was suspended since May 2012. In the joint statement released after the talk, they expressed hope regarding restoring a trilateral cooperative system that should remain and be developed as a crucial mechanism in order to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Northeast Asian region.<sup>29</sup>

Amid the ongoing tension in the East Asian region over the possible deployment of the US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) in South Korea, on March 17, the South Korean Defence Ministry urged the neighbouring states in East Asia to abstain from influencing Seoul's decision on the issue. While stating that each of those states have their own stance on the said deployment, Seoul's defence ministry spokesman Kim Min-seok insisted that South Korea would try to take a decision keeping in mind military utility and its own national interest.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Japan, EU Draft N. Korea Resolution", *The Yomiuri Daily*, March 20, 2015, <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0002020559>

<sup>28</sup> "Abe Shows Resolve To Have Natl Security Bills", *The Yomiuri Daily*, March 22, 2015, at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0002025892>

<sup>29</sup> "Korea, China, Japan Agree To Hold Summit", *The Korea Herald*, March 22, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150322000236>

<sup>30</sup> "S. Korea Urges China Not To Try To Influence Seoul's Decision On Missile Defence System", *Dong-a-Ilbo*, March 18, 2015, at <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?biid=2015031856698>

## C. Russia

### Russia

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Trilateral meeting of Presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus takes place in Astana; Syrian President praises Russia's efforts to resolve the Syrian dispute; Indian President to attend Victory Day celebrations in Moscow; Iraqi Foreign Minister visits Moscow; Cyprus invites Russian companies to take part in hydrocarbons development projects; Russia likely to reduce gas price for Ukraine; Putin meets the Director of General Office of Chinese Communist Party; Putin to visit Beijing in September for World War II victory celebrations; Putin has a telephonic conversation with the President of Turkey; Moscow expresses concern over growing NATO drills near Russia's borders; Russia expects NATO's new mission in Afghanistan to be more responsible; Russian Pacific Fleet ships visit Malaysia; Russia starts missile delivery for Sukhoi-30 MKM jets designed for Malaysia.**

A trilateral meeting between Presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus has taken place in Astana on March 20. The leaders discussed 'trade and economic cooperation between the three countries, development of the Eurasian integration process in the context of current global economic trends and their impact, and the situation in Ukraine'.<sup>31</sup>

Syria's President Bashar Assad has commended, on March 22, Russia's efforts to settle the Syrian crisis. He also stressed upon the necessity to coordinate Moscow's and Damascus' efforts towards establishing an intra-Syrian dialogue. The second round of intra-Syrian consultations is scheduled to be held in Moscow from April 6-9, 2015.<sup>32</sup>

India's President Shri Pranab Mukherjee will participate in the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of Victory Day in Moscow. Apart from him, twenty five head of states have confirmed their participation including the leaders from China, Vietnam, South Africa and North Korea.<sup>33</sup>

Iraq's Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari visited Moscow during March 19<sup>th</sup>20. During the meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, the two ministers 'focussed on the development of traditional relations of Russian-Iraqi friendship' apart from developments in Syria and the fight against the Islamic State. Mr. Jaafari also co-chaired the Russian-Iraqi Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Research and Technological Cooperation with Russian Deputy

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<sup>31</sup> "Meeting of the Presidents of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan", *President of Russia*, March 20, 2015 at <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/23738>

<sup>32</sup> "Bashar Assad Commends Russia's Efforts On Syrian Settlement", *Itar-Tass*, March 22, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/784259>

<sup>33</sup> "Indian President To Attend V-Day Celebrations in Moscow", *Itar-Tass*, March 22, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/784252>

Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin. Mr. Rogozin stated that Russian companies operating in the energy, industry and transportation sectors are ready to return to Iraq.<sup>34</sup>

Cyprus's minister of energy, trade, industry and tourism Yiorgos Lakkotrypis has said, on March 20, that Nicosia invites Russian companies to take part in hydrocarbons development projects within the exclusive economic zone of the country. This comes at a time when preparations are under way to announce the profitability of Aphrodite natural gas field.<sup>35</sup>

Energy Minister Alexander Novak has said, on March 20, that non-discounted price for Russian gas for Ukraine in the second quarter of 2015 is likely to total US\$ 348 per one thousand cubic meters from the peak of US\$ 378 in the fourth quarter of 2014. He added that Ukraine's debt for Russian gas stands at US\$ 2.47 billion.<sup>36</sup>

Russian President Vladimir Putin has met the Director of the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Li Zhanshu in Moscow on March 19. Apart from discussing bilateral ties, it was announced that China's President Xi Jinping will visit Moscow to take part in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of Victory in World War II.<sup>37</sup>

Kremlin Administration Chief Sergey Ivanov has said, on March 19, that President Vladimir Putin will visit Beijing in September to take part in the celebrations of Victory in World War II. He was quoted as saying 'Our joint struggle against fascism and militarism gives us the moral right to remember history once again, including the fact that four countries – the Soviet Union, Britain, the United States and China – formed the nucleus of the anti-Hitler coalition'.<sup>38</sup>

Russian President Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan on March 17 on the Turkish side's initiative. They discussed various aspects of bilateral cooperation and progress in implementing important decisions of the fifth session of the High-Level Russian-Turkish Cooperation Council (December 1, 2014 in Ankara) with a focus on joint projects in energy, including Turkish Stream.<sup>39</sup>

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexey Meshkov has said, on March 16, that the growing number of NATO drills near Russia's borders leads to destabilization of the situation in north-eastern

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<sup>34</sup> "Comment by the Information and Press Department on Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari's visit to Russia", *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, March 18, 2015 at [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/4348751ECE42F7F243257E0C0037FA2F](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/4348751ECE42F7F243257E0C0037FA2F)

<sup>35</sup> "Oil and Gas Projects Offered To Russian Business – Cyprus Energy Minister", *Itar-Tass*, March 20, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/784070>

<sup>36</sup> "Russia May Reduce Gas Price For Ukraine To \$348 Per Thousand Cubic Meters – Minister", *Itar-Tass*, March 20, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/784048>

<sup>37</sup> "Meeting with Director of General Office of Chinese Communist Party Li Zhanshu", *President of Russia*, March 19, 2015 at <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/23734>

<sup>38</sup> "Putin to Visit Beijing In September For Celebrations of WWII Victory", *Itar-Tass*, March 19, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/783894>

<sup>39</sup> "Telephone Conversation with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan", *President of Russia*, March 19, 2015 at <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/23723>

Europe. His comments were in response to NATO naval drills in the Black Sea that witnessed participation of seven members of the group.<sup>40</sup>

Russia's Deputy UN Ambassador Vladimir Safronkov has said, on March 17, that Moscow hopes for NATO's new assistance and training mission in Afghanistan to be more capable to deal with the tasks it faces than the US-led international force that formally ended its combat mission in December 2014. He added that Russia remains 'concerned about the rise of the terrorist threat in Afghanistan and the broadening of the Islamic State group's geographical activities'.<sup>41</sup>

A squadron of the Russian Pacific Fleet's ships have arrived at the Malaysian island of Langkawi on March 16 with Russian servicemen expected to take part in an international naval show in the country.<sup>42</sup>

Russia has started delivering missiles for Malaysia's Sukhoi Su-30MKM fighters, manufactured by Russia's Irkut Corporation. Malaysia had signed a US\$ 900-million contract with the Irkut Corporation for the delivery of 18 SU-30MKMs in August 2003 and received the jets by 2011.<sup>43</sup>

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Putin supports Nazarbayev's candidacy at upcoming Kazakhstani presidential elections; Moscow exchange launches trading in futures contract on yuan-rouble currency pair; Russia accuses Kiev of economic blockade of Transnistria; Russia terms Ukraine's decision on Donbas special status gross violation of Minsk agreements; Russia signs treaty with South Ossetia; Japan's Prime Minister says Tokyo and Moscow seek to solve the peace treaty issue; CSTO ready to send peacekeepers to Ukraine; Britain creates fund to curb Russian influence; Russia and US unlikely to agree on new START treaty in the near future; Elections take place in Gagauzia; Finance Minister says rouble has reached equilibrium; Russian oil and gas production expected to decline by 2035; Russia extends deadline for overseas tax avoidance law; Russia launches an Arctic Commission; Russia orders massive snap military exercises; Russia to upgrade strategic bombers and build 5<sup>th</sup> Yasen class nuclear submarine.**

During his visit to Astana on March 20, President Putin has supported the candidacy of incumbent Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev for the upcoming Presidential elections scheduled for April 26. He was quoted as saying 'For all those who love Kazakhstan, for those who value its stable, gradual and very significant development, it is, of course, important for everyone to support the president of Kazakhstan'. Mr. Nazarbayev has been the leader of Kazakhstan since 1989.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> "Moscow Concerned About Growing Number of NATO Drills Near Russian Borders – Diplomat", *Itar-Tass*, March 16, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/782916>

<sup>41</sup> "Moscow Expects NATO New Mission In Afghanistan To Be More Responsible", *Itar-Tass*, March 17, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/783170>

<sup>42</sup> "Russian Pacific Fleet Ships Visit Malaysia", *Itar-Tass*, March 16, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/782959>

<sup>43</sup> "Russia Starts Missiles Delivery for Su-30MKM Jets Designed for Malaysia", *Sputnik News*, March 17, 2015 at <http://sputniknews.com/military/20150317/1019603029.html#ixzz3VDgqfo2D>

<sup>44</sup> "Putin Supports Nazarbayev's Candidacy At Upcoming Kazakhstani Presidential Elections", *Itar-Tass*, March 23, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/783956>

The Moscow Exchange has started trading in a futures contract on the currency pair Chinese yuan - Russian rouble. The launch has been driven by a substantially increasing yuan turnover on the Exchange, growing volume of settlement in the currency between Russia and China as well as newly arising demand for hedging of such transactions.<sup>45</sup>

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on March 18, that Ukraine has imposed an economic blockade on Transnistria and termed the approach 'unacceptable'.<sup>46</sup>

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, on March 18, that Kiev's decision on Donbas special status grossly violates and rewrites the Minsk agreements. He called upon Germany and France to make a joint demarche to Kiev for violating the agreements.<sup>47</sup>

Russia has signed an "alliance and integration" treaty with South Ossetia on March 18. Under the deal, the region's security forces, military, economy, customs service and border guards will be deeply integrated with those of Russia.<sup>48</sup>

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said, on March 19 in Tokyo, that Moscow and Tokyo are united in seeking to remedy 'the abnormal situation' that the two countries do not have a peace treaty after World War II. He added that efforts will be made for the return of Northern Territories.<sup>49</sup>

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha has said, on March 19, that the organisation is ready to send its peacekeepers to Ukraine if necessary.<sup>50</sup>

It was reported, on March 20, that British Prime Minister David Cameron is establishing a fund ("Good Governance Fund worth £20 million in 2015 and 2016) to help Eastern European states, including Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, resist pressure from Russia.<sup>51</sup>

Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov has said, on March 17, that Russia and the United States are unlikely to reach new agreements on reduction of strategic offensive arms in the near

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<sup>45</sup> "Moscow Exchange Launches Trading In Futures Contract On Yuan-Ruble Currency Pair", *Itar-Tass*, March 17, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/783214>

<sup>46</sup> "Russian FM: Kiev Contributes To Economic Blockade of Transnistria", *Itar-Tass*, March 18, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/783446>

<sup>47</sup> "Lavrov Calls Kiev's Decision On Donbas Special Status Gross Violation Of Minsk Agreements", *Itar-Tass*, March 18, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/783440>

<sup>48</sup> "Russia Signs Treaty With Georgia's Breakaway South Ossetia Region", *The Moscow Times*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-signs-treaty-with-georgias-breakaway-south-ossetia-region/517621.html>

<sup>49</sup> "Moscow, Tokyo Seek To Solve Problem Over Peace Treaty — Japan's PM", *Itar-Tass*, March 19, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/783689>

<sup>50</sup> "Post-Soviet Security Bloc Ready To Send Peacekeepers To Ukraine", *Itar-Tass*, March 19, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/783808>

<sup>51</sup> "British PM Creates Fund To Curb Russian Influence: Reports", *Business Recorder*, March 20, 2015 at <http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/108-pakistan-top-news/233481-british-pm-creates-fund-to-curb-russian-influence-reports.html>

future. He added that 'Russia's security now depends not only on the balance of strategic nuclear weapons of Russia and the United States, it depends on many other factors, such as US global missile defence plans, the situation in the area of sea-based long-distance cruise missiles and other types of long-distance high-precision systems. Nuclear weapons of Washington's NATO allies should also be taken into account and the other important aspects are the balance of conventional forces and numerous military bases with developing military infrastructure in the proximity of the Russian borders'.<sup>52</sup>

Independent candidate Irina Vlakh has been elected new head of Gagauzia, an autonomous region in Moldova, after winning 51 per cent of the votes polled. In her election programme, Ms. Vlakh had called for rapprochement with Russia and the European development vector. The Gagauz people live primarily in southern Moldova and in areas adjacent to Ukraine. They speak the Gagauz language and are Orthodox Christians. Some theories suggest that the Gagauz people descended from the Turks who settled in the Eastern Balkans. Gagauzia received the status of an autonomous region in 1994. In February 2014, Gagauzia had held a referendum wherein 98 per cent of voters spoke in favour of integration into the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia. Chisinau, in turn, had declared the referendum illegal.<sup>53</sup>

Russia's Finance Minister Anton Siluanov has observed, on March 21, that the rouble is no longer being affected by change in oil prices. He added that no major changes in the rouble exchange rate should be expected in the short term and felt that the currency is undervalued by ten percent.<sup>54</sup>

Russia's Energy Ministry has predicted a 2 per cent decline in the country's oil production by 2020 with a risk of a 10 per cent decline by 2035. The natural gas production forecasts have been downgraded due to dwindling prospects for LNG projects, at the same time officials are ready to admit independent producers to exports, maintaining the single sales channel represented by the natural gas monopoly Gazprom. This was revealed by Kommersant that had seen excerpts of Russia's draft energy strategy till 2035. The Ministry expects oil exports to grow by 15-17 per cent by 2025 due to the curtailment of downstream refining.<sup>55</sup>

President Vladimir Putin has, on March 19, supported extending a deadline for Russians to register ownership of overseas companies under a law targeting tax avoidance that was passed last year. The "deoffshorization" law demanded that Russians inform authorities of ownership of any stake of over 10 per cent in a foreign company by April 1 and provide information on companies they control by March 20, 2016. The date has now been pushed back to October 1, 2015.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Russia, US Unlikely To Agree On New START Treaty Soon", *Itar-Tass*, March 23, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/783381>

<sup>53</sup> "Independent Candidate Irina Vlakh Elected Head of Gagauzia", *Itar-Tass*, March 23, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/784280>

<sup>54</sup> "Rouble has Reached Equilibrium, Says Finance Minister", *Itar-Tass*, March 21, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/784184>

<sup>55</sup> "Russian Oil, Gas Production Expected To Decline by 2035 – media", *Itar-Tass*, March 17, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/783175>

<sup>56</sup> "Putin Extends Deadline on Overseas Tax Avoidance Law", *The Moscow Times*, March 19, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-extends-deadline-on-overseas-tax-avoidance-law/517751.html>

The Russian government has set up a federal commission for developing the Arctic. It will coordinate all other bodies involved in the region to evaluate the effectiveness of resource use, make decisions regarding regional development and ensure the realization of priority investment projects. The Commission will be headed by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin and its mandate will include jurisdiction over socio-economic, political and military issues.<sup>57</sup>

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered to put the Northern Fleet, certain units of airborne forces and the Western Military District on full combat alert from March 16 to March 21 as part of snap checks. This will involve 38,000 military, 3,360 units of equipment, 41 warships, 15 submarines, and 110 planes and helicopters. The military will practice long-distance relocation of troops of special purpose. Since the beginning of 2015, Russia has organized 29 training exercises in the country.<sup>58</sup>

Russia will upgrade at least ten strategic bombers Tu-95MS in 2015-2016. Around 70 per cent of strategic aviation sector is expected to be modernized by 2020.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, the fifth nuclear-powered multipurpose attack submarine of the Yasen class was laid down at the Sevmash shipbuilding company based in Severodvinsk on March 19. According to Russia's naval doctrine, Yasen-class subs will become the main multipurpose nuclear-powered submarines in the Russian military. Sevmash will build eight Yasen-class subs with cruise missiles by 2020.<sup>60</sup>

## D. Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Gulf

### Iran

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **On the eve on Nowruz, Obama Appeals to Iranian Youth on Nuclear Deal; Ayatollah Khamenei says Removal of sanctions should be part not as outcome of any nuclear deal.**

President Obama has issued a video directed at Iran's young people, urging them to pressure their leaders to accept the deal on the table. The apparent reason for the video was a greeting for Nowruz, the Persian New Year celebration that Mr. Obama has used before to deliver messages to the Iranian populace. But after mentioning a celebration held at the White House, he emphasised case that an agreement that freezes Iran's nuclear programme could open the way to a far larger relationship. He described such a relationship in terms meant to appeal to a young Iranian population that the White House believes cares little about Iran's nuclear capability and

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<sup>57</sup> "Russia Launches Arctic Commission With Military Overlord at Helm", *The Moscow Times*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-launches-arctic-commission-with-military-overlord-at-helm/517569.html>

<sup>58</sup> "Russia's Western Military District, Northern Fleet on Combat Alert Amid Snap Check", *Itar-Tass*, March 16, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/782905>

<sup>59</sup> "Russia to Upgrade Ten Strategic Bombers Tu-95MS in 2015-2016", *Itar-Tass*, March 17, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/783192>

<sup>60</sup> "Russia Begins Construction Of Fifth Yasen Class Nuclear Sub", *Itar-Tass*, March 19, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/783697>

desperately wants access to the West, its culture and its universities.<sup>61</sup>

Addressing the nation at a speech delivered on the occasion of the Iranian new year in the north-eastern Iranian city of Mashhad, the Supreme Leader mentioned “Obama’s Nowrouz message included dishonest assertions and his claim of friendship for Iranian people was not sincere,” the Leader said, noting that Obama’s claim that there are people in Iran who do not want nuclear case to be resolved through diplomacy is a lie. Ayatollah Khamenei added, “America says ‘we sign the agreement and monitor Iran’s behaviour and then remove the sanctions’. This is erroneous and unacceptable and Iran will never accept this. This is the Americans’ ploy. Removal of sanctions should be part of any agreement.”<sup>62</sup>

## Iraq and Syria

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **UN say IS may have conducted genocide against Iraqi Yazidis; Syria shots down US drone over fear of spying; Seventy Syrian Army personnel killed in central Syria amid ISIS-led attacks; Petraeus says Iran not ISIS is the biggest threat to Iraq.**

The United Nations human rights office said that IS terrorists may have committed genocide against the minority Yazidi community in Iraq as well as crimes against humanity and war crimes against civilians including children. In a report based on interviews with more than 100 alleged victims and witnesses, it urged the UN Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for prosecution of perpetrators.<sup>63</sup>

The Syrian air defences recently shot down a US drone on suspicion that the unmanned aerial vehicle was snooping around an area where the ISIL terrorists are not present, according to a military source. The drone over the north-western coastal province of Latakia was not immediately identified as belonging to the US Army, but the aerial vehicle was downed as a hostile target. Later the US military confirmed that communication with an unarmed predator drone over north-western Syria was lost on March 17.<sup>64</sup>

On March 20, at least 70 pro-Assad army forces were killed during attacks by militants of the Islamic State in the provinces of Hamah and Homs, central Syria. The IS operations have reportedly targeted security checkpoints of forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> “President Obama’s Nowruz Message to the Iranian People”, *Whitehouse.gov*, March 19, 2015 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2015/03/19/president-obama-s-nowruz-message-iranian-people-english>

<sup>62</sup> “Leader: Removal of Sanctions Should Be Part Of Any Nuclear Deal”, *Presstv*, March 21, 2015 <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/03/21/402818/Sanctions-removal-part-of-any-Ndeal>

<sup>63</sup> “Daesh May Have Committed Genocide Against Iraq’s Yazidis”, *Gulfnews.com*, March 23, 2015 at <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/iraq/daesh-may-have-committed-genocide-against-iraq-s-yazidis-1.1474412>

<sup>64</sup> “Syria Shot Down US Drone On Suspicion Of Spying: Military Source”, *Presstv*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/03/18/402405/hsn-Syria-shot-down-US-drone-for-spying>

<sup>65</sup> “Seventy Pro-Assad Forces Killed In Central Syria amid ISIS-Led Attacks”, *Aranews.com*, March 21, 2015 at <http://aranews.net/2015/03/70-pro-assad-forces-killed-in-central-syria-amid-isis-led-attacks/>

Former CIA Director Gen. David Petraeus, who commanded U.S. forces during the 2007-2008 surge in the Iraq war, said that Iran and the Shiite militias it backs pose “the foremost” strategic threat to Iraq, superseding the threat posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria terror group. He said while these Shiite militias helped stop ISIS’ advance toward Baghdad, they were responsible for “atrocities” against Sunni civilians and could later emerge to be the dominant power in Iraq outside the government’s control.<sup>66</sup>

## The Gulf

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Saudi Arabia to stop visas for Swedish citizens amid human rights row.**

An official said, Saudi Arabia will no longer issue business visas to Swedes or renew the current visas of Swedish nationals living in the country and the decision is in response to Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallstrom’s recent criticism of Saudi Arabia’s record on human and women’s rights. Sweden’s new left-wing government recently declined to renew a defence cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia, which has since recalled its ambassador to Sweden.<sup>67</sup>

## E. The United State of America

### National

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **CIA Chief Brennan: terrorism morphing into different threats; The vice chairman Winnefeld gives blunt assessment of budget options; DoD to boost modernization of weapons, capabilities; Destruction of WWII-era chemical stockpile set to begin; Defence Secretary Carter: sequestration will make the U.S. less secure; Missile Agency Director: budget request supports development; DoD works to build competition into space launches.**

Terrorism is morphing into different types of threats, including cyberattacks that can impact nations across the globe, the director of central intelligence said in New York last week. John Brennan told the Council on Foreign Relations that terror attacks in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia show the terror threat is changing. The CIA working with foreign partners is key to defeating the terror threat, he added. But the heartland of terror, the director said, now operates in Syria and Iraq where the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is waging a campaign of unspeakable brutality against the local population and anyone who does not share its ideology.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> “Petraeus: Iran, not ISIS, is Main Threat to Iraq” ,*Al-Arabiya*, March 20, 2015 at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2015/03/20/Petraeus-Iran-not-ISIS-is-main-threat-to-Iraq.html>

<sup>67</sup> “Saudi Arabia to Stop Visas For Swedish Citizens Amid Human Rights Row”, *The Guardian*, March 20, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/20/saudi-arabia-to-stop-visas-for-swedish-citizens-amid-human-rights-row>

<sup>68</sup> Garamone, Jim, “CIA Chief: Terrorism Morphing Into Different Threats”, *DoD News*, March 16, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128373>

The U.S. defence budget is strategy driven and the nation will be at greater risk if the budget is cut or if sequestration is triggered this year, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in Washington on March 17. Speaking at the McAleese/Credit Suisse Defence Programmes Conference held at the Newseum, Navy Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr. said the president's fiscal year 2016 budget proposal allows the DoD to defend America's national interests. The budget request is \$35 billion more than envisioned under sequestration, a law requiring major spending cuts that will take effect in October unless Congress changes it. Even at that number, the department will be at the edge of acceptable risk, the admiral said.<sup>69</sup>

This year, the Defence Department will move aggressively to reverse the trend of chronic underinvestment in weapons and capabilities, the deputy defence secretary Bob Work said in Washington on March 17. The bottom line, Work said in prepared remarks, is that "because of budget uncertainty and restrictions imposed by Congress, and because of our unrelenting focus on the readiness of forward deployed forces, we're chronically underinvesting in new weapons and capabilities." Work added, "That should give all of us pause because our technological dominance is no longer assured."<sup>70</sup>

The process of destroying the chemical stockpile at the U.S. Army Pueblo Chemical Depot is set to begin on March 17 on Colorado, defence officials said. Undersecretary of Defence for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Frank Kendall granted final approval to begin destroying 2,611 tons of World War II-era mustard agent stored near Pueblo. "After months of preparation, testing and scrutiny by oversight and regulatory agencies, the Pueblo team is ready to play its part in meeting our nation's commitment to the 100 percent destruction of the U.S. chemical weapons stockpile," Conrad F. Whyne said. Whyne is programme executive officer for Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives, the responsible government agency.<sup>71</sup>

The proposed defence budget is in line with fiscal year 2015 projections, halting the decline in defence spending and making available the resources needed to execute the nation's defence strategy, Defence Secretary Ash Carter told a House panel in Washington on March 18. Carter and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified this morning before the House Armed Services Committee, whose members include 23 veterans. The president is requesting a defence budget for fiscal year 2016 that is \$36 billion above the caps, or sequester levels, of the Budget Control Act, Carter said. "And as the chairman noted," he told the panel, "strategy comes first and that's the appropriate way to think about the budget. But -- and I want to be clear about this -- under sequestration, which is set to return in 197 days, our nation would be less secure."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Garamone, Jim, "Winnefeld Gives Blunt Assessment of Budget Options", *DoD News*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128379>

<sup>70</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "DoD to Boost Modernization of Weapons, Capabilities", *DoD News*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128382>

<sup>71</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Destruction of WWII-era Chemical Stockpile Set to Begin", *DoD News*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128383>

<sup>72</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter: Sequestration Will Make the U.S. Less Secure", *DoD News*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128394>

Meanwhile, Director of the Missile Defence Agency, Navy Vice Adm. James D. Syring told to the Congress on March 18 that the Agency's fiscal year 2016 budget request continues the development of defences for the nation, deployed forces and allies and international partners against increasingly capable ballistic missile threats. Syring told members of the Senate Appropriations Committee's defence subcommittee that the \$8.127 billion request will also continue his agency's support of the needs of warfighters and combatant commanders. The agency's budget request maintains its commitment to operate and sustain national defences, he said, including the planned deployment of ground-based interceptors: 40 to Fort Greely, Alaska, and four to Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, for a total of 44 by the end of 2017.<sup>73</sup>

Space capability is critical to national security, and the Defence Department is working to make its launch programme more competitive and end its long-time use of a Russian rocket engine on the Atlas launch system, the assistant secretary of defence for acquisition said earlier in March 2015. Katrina G. McFarland testified before the House Armed Services Committee's strategic forces subcommittee March 17 on options for assuring domestic space access. "Our defence space capabilities are central to our national security," McFarland said in written testimony. According to law, she added, the Defence Department must sustain at least two launch vehicles that can deliver any national security payload into space, and it must maintain a robust space-launch infrastructure and industrial base.<sup>74</sup>

## International: Asia

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **US to keep more troops in Afghanistan into 2016: US government officials; Afghanistan welcomes US move to drop drawdown plan; U.S., Afghan leaders to meet this week in Washington; Central Command updates Iraq-Syria target counts; Coalition continues airstrikes against ISIL in Syria, Iraq; Eagle Resolve exercise draws worldwide participation; Between US and China, S. Korea in bind over Missile Defence System; Multiple launch rocket system battalion to rotate to South Korea; US Lawmakers urge reunions of Koreans in US, families in N. Korea; The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dempsey opens exhibit on U.S., China's shared military history.**

The Obama administration is abandoning plans to cut the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to 5,500 by year's end, bowing to military leaders who want to keep more troops there, including many into the 2016 fighting season, U.S. officials said. While no final decision on numbers has been made, the officials said the administration is poised to slow withdrawal plans and probably will allow many of the 9,800 American troops to remain well into next year. There also are discussions about keeping a steady number of counterterrorism troops into 2015, including options under which some would remain in the country or be nearby beyond 2016. Currently, about 2,000 U.S. troops are conducting counterterrorism missions, and military leaders have argued that they

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<sup>73</sup> Roulo, Claudette, "Missile Agency Director: Budget Request Supports Development", *DoD News*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128395>

<sup>74</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "DoD Works to Build Competition Into Space Launches", *DoD News*, March 19, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128409>

will need to continue pursuing the remnants of al-Qaida and to monitor Islamic State militants looking to recruit in Afghanistan.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, Afghanistan has welcomed reports that the United States will drop plans to cut the number of its forces in Afghanistan to 5,500 by end of 2015, citing requests from military commanders to keep more troops there. Afghan representative to the United Nations Zahir Tanin told reporters in New York there is a need for the United States to better assess ground realities within the framework of its strategic partnership with Afghanistan to re-examine and readjust the details of the military withdrawal. "I think we are of the belief that the withdrawal plan should be readjusted in relation with the realities on the ground to enable Afghanistan in a better way to deal with the security challenges it faces," Tanin said.<sup>76</sup>

President Barack Obama, Defence Secretary Ash Carter and other U.S. leaders will discuss a range of issues this upcoming week with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who arrives on March 22 on his first official visit to the United States, senior administration officials said on March 20. Among the discussion topics for Ghani and Afghan Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah will be flexibility on troop drawdown in Afghanistan, concerns about the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant gaining a foothold there, and working toward stability in the region. Jeff Eggers, National Security Council senior director for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Dan Feldman, State Department special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, held a media call to preview the visit.<sup>77</sup>

U.S. Central Command officials released an update on March 19 on the number of targets hit by the United States and the international coalition in Iraq and Syria since Operation Inherent Resolve began, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters in Washington on March 19. During a daily briefing, Warren said that the international coalition had struck 5,314 targets since operations began August 8. The coalition has conducted 2,893 airstrikes – 1,631 in Iraq and 1,262 in Syria. Total U.S. airstrikes numbered 2,320 – 1,151 in Iraq and 1,169 in Syria. Warren said 2,875 U.S. forces were in Iraq as of March 18.<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, 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 22.<sup>79</sup>

Improving interoperability is often touted by exercise organizers and senior leaders as one of the benefits in bringing together a cross-section of militaries. With about 5,500 troops from 29 nations

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<sup>75</sup> "Officials: US to Keep More Troops in Afghanistan Into 2016", *Associated Press*, March 16, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/ap-officials-us-to-keep-more-troops-in-afghanistan-into-2016/2681567.html>

<sup>76</sup> "Afghanistan Welcomes US Move to Drop Drawdown Plan", *VOA News*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-to-scrap-afghanistan-drawdown-plan/2683105.html>

<sup>77</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "U.S., Afghan Leaders to Meet This Week in Washington", *DoD News*, March 21, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128422>

<sup>78</sup> Pellerin, Cheryl, "Central Command Updates Iraq-Syria Target Counts", *DoD News*, March 19, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128410>

<sup>79</sup> "Coalition Continues Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq", *DoD News*, March 22, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128424>

taking part in exercise Eagle Resolve in Kuwait this month, according to a U.S. Central Command news release issued on March 20, there are many opportunities to increase the ability of militaries to work together. “Everybody brings something different to the fight, but it’s only effective if you know how to use their skills and expertise,” said U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Rick Mattson, U.S. Central Command’s director of exercises and training and the U.S. exercise director for Eagle Resolve. Since its inception in 1999, Centcom’s release said, Eagle Resolve has been a venue for the U.S. and Arabian Gulf countries to partner with militaries from North and South America, Europe and Asia – all regions are represented at this year’s exercise – and address their collective security concerns in a relatively low-risk environment. The current exercise began March 8 and concludes March 31.<sup>80</sup>

The potential deployment of a sophisticated U.S. air defence system in South Korea to counter the North’s missile threat is proving a headache for Seoul as it tries to walk a fine line between its closest security ally Washington and its biggest trade partner China. Since June, U.S. military officials have said the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system was needed in South Korea given Pyongyang’s growing missile arsenal, although there has been no formal proposal from Washington. While China initially said little about such a deployment, it has begun to express opposition, prompting some lawmakers in Seoul to express concern over the possible fallout on ties. At the same time, other MPs have said basing THAAD batteries in South Korea would strengthen the country’s security alliance with Washington. The wrangle comes as Seoul also debates whether to join a Chinese-led development bank that the United States opposes.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, Defence Secretary Ash Carter has approved a nine-month rotation of an Army multiple launch rocket system battalion to South Korea, according to a DoD news release issued on March 20. The first rotational battalion of approximately 400 soldiers belongs to the 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery. Deploying from Fort Hood, Texas, the unit will join the 210th Field Artillery Brigade this June in Camp Casey, South Korea, the release said. This battalion will arrive fully manned, trained, equipped and at the highest level of readiness. The initial rotating unit will leave their equipment in place for future rotations. The addition of the MLRS battalion to the field artillery brigade is part of an Armywide reorganization that will raise the number of MLRS battalions from two to three in all field artillery brigades. The change will increase theatre readiness and manoeuvre capabilities, the release noted.<sup>82</sup>

U.S. lawmakers have sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to push for reunions between Korean Americans and their family members in North Korea. The letter, signed by Representative Charles Rangel and Senator Mark Kirk, called on Kerry to prioritize the reunions of Korean Americans who were separated from their families during the Korean War. “We write to encourage you to prioritize the reunions of Korean Americans separated from their families in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK),” the letter said. Since 2000, North and South Korea have

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<sup>80</sup> “Eagle Resolve Exercise Draws Worldwide Participation”, *DoD News*, March 20, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128420>

<sup>81</sup> “Between US and China, S. Korea in Bind Over Missile Defence System”, *Reuters*, March 17, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/south-korea-in-bind-over-missile-defense-system/2683305.html>

<sup>82</sup> “Multiple Launch Rocket System Battalion to Rotate to South Korea”, *DoD News*, March 20, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128416>

held 19 rounds of reunions of family members separated by Korean War. The letter to Kerry called for the U.S. government to intervene on behalf of Koreans living in the United States. "Unfortunately, an estimated 100,000 Korean Americans are excluded from these reunions due to our lack of diplomatic ties with the DPRK," the letter said.<sup>83</sup>

On March 18, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff opened a photo exhibit at the Pentagon that puts America's relations with China in a new light. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey praised the exhibit - titled "National Memories" - which shows American and Chinese service members working together during World War II. The United States and China were allies during the war, and more than 250,000 Americans served in the China-Burma-India Theatre under Army Gen. Joseph Stilwell. Retired Army Col. John Easterbrook, the grandson of that theatre commander, spoke at the opening ceremony about the campaign. Actions in Europe and in the Pacific overshadowed the scope of the effort in the region, he said, and many present-day Americans are surprised to learn of the U.S. effort against Japan in China. In China, too, the American effort in the country was forgotten, but for other reasons. Following the war, a civil war broke out in China, and with the victory of Mao Zedong's Communist party all mention of cooperation with America was stricken from the record. "Many photos, letters, memorabilia that might link someone to the defeated Nationalists were destroyed," Easterbrook said. "Anything that survived was destroyed in the anti-rightist campaigns and the Cultural Revolution."<sup>84</sup>

## Indo-US Relations

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Foreign Secretary Jaishankar: India-US relations have entered a new era; It is great time to be in India for American corporates: US diplomat.**

India and the United States have entered a "new era" in the field of doing business and the attention deficit which plagued the relations has now been done away with, S. Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary, said on March 16. Delivering a talk on 'India-US 2015: Partnership for peace and security', he said much of the obstructions, which prevented the two countries from engaging in the field of commerce, had now been done away with. The two-day conference has been jointly organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry and Vivekandana International Foundation, among others. Fast forwarding to present, Jaishankar said that if people were overly anchored in the past, then they will not see the opportunities which exist between the two countries but cautioned that if the expectations were overstated then there was the "risk of coming up short", he said, adding that this creates its "own backlash". He added that India needs to be careful as to how "position and manage" the relationship.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Sungwon, Baik, "Exclusive: US Lawmakers Urge Reunions of Koreans in US, Families in N. Korea", March 18, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/exclusive-us-lawmakers-urge-reunions-of-koreans-in-us-and-families-in-north-korea/2686454.html>

<sup>84</sup> Garamone, Jim, "Dempsey Opens Exhibit on U.S., China's Shared Military History", *DoD News*, March 18, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128397>

<sup>85</sup> Phadnis, Ashwini, "India-US Relations Have Entered A New Era: Foreign Secy", *The Hindu Business Line*, March 16, 2015 at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-us-relations-have-entered-a-new-era-foreign-secy/article6998834.ece>

In the wake of improved ties between India and US, it is a great time for American corporates to be in Asia's third largest economy, a diplomat said on March 20. Earlier, there was a sense of frustration among the US businessmen about challenges in the Indian market but things have improved after the Modi government expressed commitment to boost bilateral trade and took several initiatives to attract investments, Thomas Vajda, US Consul General in Mumbai, told reporters in Panaji, India. In the past, there were challenges in terms of regulatory mechanism, licencing, intellectual property rights, taxation and amount of ownership that US companies can have in India, Vajda said. "We have seen a year of deepening of bilateral ties that included Prime Minister Modi's successful visit to Washington, a steady stream of US Cabinet members coming to India, and President Obama's historic visit to New Delhi as the chief guest for Republic Day," the envoy said.<sup>86</sup>

## II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

### National

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **One incident of clash involving officers and jawans took place in last five years; India conducting regular joint military exercises with foreign countries.**

The Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar informed the Lok Sabha on March 20 that during the last five years, only one incident of clash took place on May 10/11, 2012 involving officers and jawans of 226 Field Regiment at Mahe Field Firing range in Ladakh. A Court of Inquiry instituted in the matter found internal functional issues within the unit as reasons for the incident. Disciplinary Action against four officers and 164 Junior Commissioned Officers / Other Ranks was directed by the Competent Authority. The minister enumerated measures initiated for maintaining better cordial officer-soldier relationship. Commanders at all levels have been directed to uphold dignity of the soldiers and institute measures towards improving officer-soldier relations. Steps have been taken to identify the causes of stress and adequate measures have been taken towards stress amelioration of personnel serving in difficult conditions.<sup>87</sup>

The Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar has given the details of joint military exercises held with foreign countries during the last three years and the current year in the Lok Sabha. The number of exercises conducted with various countries during the last three years and the current year are as follows:<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "It is Great Time To Be In India For American Corporates: US Diplomat", *PTI*, March 20, 2015 at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-20/news/60323228\\_1\\_convergence-indian-market-american-corporates](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-20/news/60323228_1_convergence-indian-market-american-corporates)

<sup>87</sup> "Clashes Between Soldiers and Officers," *PIB*, March 20, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=117492>

<sup>88</sup> "Military Exercises," *PIB*, March 20, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=117490>

Year	No. of Exercises
2012	26
2013	23
2014	28
2015	1
(till February 2015)	

## International

(March 16-22, 2015)

- **Russia doubles number of troops taking part in mass drills to 80,000; Sweden to order two new submarines to boost its armed forces.**

Reports say that Russia has doubled the number of troops taking part in mass drills ordered by President Vladimir Putin this week to 80,000. The drills are seen as a major show of strength by Russia amid tensions with the West over Ukraine. Putin had previously ordered drills for more than 40,000 troops in regions spanning the country, from the Arctic to the Far East to the volatile southern Caucasus, and ordered nuclear bomber jets to be deployed in Crimea a year after its annexation by Russia. The number of aircraft participating in the drill has also increased to 220. The drills are the latest in a succession of large-scale military manoeuvres that Russia has ordered as relations with the West have plunged to a post-Cold War low over the crisis in Ukraine.<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile, according to reports, Sweden would order two new submarines to boost its armed forces months after a futile hunt for a suspected Russian mini-sub in the Stockholm archipelago. Although no Swedish official ever identified the nationality of the elusive mini-sub – experts widely believed it to be Russian. The failure to locate the sub raised questions over the non-aligned country's military capabilities after years of cutbacks in the post-Cold War era. Underwater capacity is a central part of Sweden's defence in peace time, as well as during emergencies and war. The two new generation A 26 submarines to be produced by Swedish arms groups Saab have a maximum price tag of 8.2 billion kronor (\$945 million, •886 million). They are set to be delivered by 2022 at the latest. Significantly, last week the Swedish government announced a 6.2 billion-kronor hike in defence spending largely focused on upgrading its capacity to detect and intercept submarines.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> "Russia Expands Military Exercises To 80,000 Troops," *Defence News*, March 19, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/03/19/russia-expands-military-exercises-troops/25023979/>

<sup>90</sup> "Sweden To Boost Submarine Fleet," *Defence News*, March 19, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/03/19/sweden-boosts-sub-fleet-suspected-russian-incursion/25024225/>

### III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

#### Jammu & Kashmir

(March 9-15, 2015)

- **Pak High Commissioner meets Hurriyat leader Geelani; Masarat Alam's release; Centre issues a strong advisory to J&K; J&K government approves 3,000 posts for Kashmiri Pandits; Mufti government withdraws controversial circular on state flag; Centre seeks J&K views on interlocutors' report.**

Pakistan High Commissioner Abdul Basit on March 9 met Kashmir separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani. According to sources, Basit apprised Geelani on the issues discussed during the visit of Jaishankar last week, seven months after India had cancelled the Indo-Pak dialogue over the Pakistan High Commissioner's consultations with Kashmiri separatists. With BJP-PDP government in Jammu & Kashmir, they also discussed the political developments in the state. Basit also invited him for the Pakistan Day on March 23.<sup>91</sup>

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 9 denounced the release of hardline separatist leader Masarat Alam by the Jammu and Kashmir government of which BJP is a partner, saying he shared the "outrage" over the unacceptable decision and would take whatever action is required. Modi spoke in Lok Sabha as members from various political parties created an uproar over the development, terming it as "anti-national" and dangerous to the country's integrity, and dared BJP to pull out of the Mufti Mohammad Sayeed-led government. Asserting that the release of the separatist leader was not acceptable, he said the Centre has sought clarifications from the state government and will act after the response is received.<sup>92</sup> Unfazed by the controversy over the release of separatist Masarat Alam, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on March 10 said the decision to release hardline separatist leader Masarat Alam was taken during the Governor's rule in J&K.<sup>93</sup> Issuing a strong advisory to Jammu & Kashmir government in the context of separatist Masarat Alam's release, the Centre on March 14 has asked the state to put the leader of the 2010 protests in the valley under surveillance and detain him if anything adverse was found. It has also asked the state to vigorously pursue all the 27 criminal cases registered against him and challenge his bail orders.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> "Pakistan High Commissioner Meets Syed Ali Shah Geelani; FS Visit to Pak, J&K Discussed", *The Economic Times*, March 9, 2015 at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-09/news/59931961\\_1\\_foreign-secretary-s-jaishankar-pakistan-high-commissioner-syed-ali-shah-geelani](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-09/news/59931961_1_foreign-secretary-s-jaishankar-pakistan-high-commissioner-syed-ali-shah-geelani)

<sup>92</sup> "PM Modi Denounces Release Of Kashmiri Separatist Leader Masarat Alam", *Daily News and Analysis*, March 9, 2015 at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-pm-modi-denounces-release-of-kashmiri-separatist-leader-masarat-alam-2067191>

<sup>93</sup> "Alam Release: J&K Home Dept Claims Decision Taken During Guv's Rule", *The Tribune*, March 10, 2015 at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/decision-to-release-alam-taken-during-governor-s-rule-pdp/51757.html>

<sup>94</sup> "Centre Asks J&K Govt To Keep Tab On Masarat Alam", *The Times of India*, March 13, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Centre-asks-JK-govt-to-keep-tab-on-Masarat-Alam/articleshow/46548345.cms>

The Jammu & Kashmir government on March 10 approved 3,000 supernumerary posts to Kashmiri pandit migrants under the Prime Minister's package in the Valley. In this regard, Minister for law, justice and parliamentary affairs and relief and rehabilitation, Syed Basharat Bukhari has directed the relief commissioner to collect data of migrant unemployed youth who are registered as Kashmiri migrants in Jammu or outside the state besides enjoining the youth to submit their details within a period of 20 days. While taking stock of the relief and rehabilitation measures for Kashmiri migrants, the minister directed the reconstitution of the Apex Advisory Committee (AAC), an apex body of representatives of Kashmiri migrants, who migrated from the Valley.<sup>95</sup>

Under fire from political parties, the Mufti Mohammad Sayeed government on March 13 withdrew the controversial circular asking constitutional authorities to maintain the sanctity of the state flag, saying it was not approved by a "competent authority". The government said appropriate administrative action will be taken after enquiry into the circumstances leading to the issuing of this circular. Mufti government, on March 12, had issued a circular asking all constitutional authorities to maintain the sanctity of the state flag, at all costs, as is being done in respect of the Union Flag.<sup>96</sup>

The Centre has sent a reminder to the PDP-BJP government in J&K to clear its stand on the report by the three-member Interlocutors Group, which recommended special status to the state, amendment of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), release of political prisoners detained under the Public Safety Act and a judicial commission to supervise the identification of bodies buried in the unmarked graves. The move could upset ties between the PDP and BJP as they are not on the same page on many of the recommendations. The J&K Interlocutors Group, which had academician Radha Kumar, journalist Dileep Padgaonkar and former Information Commissioner M M Ansari as members, had submitted its report in May 2012.<sup>97</sup>

## Northeast India

(March 9-15, 2015)

- **Operations against NDFB(S) will continue: MHA; Four policemen killed in Meghalaya ambush; Three killed, 23 injured in Imphal Blast; 9 ultras arrested and 2 surrendered in Assam; Dimapur lynching case: Nagaland government report rules out rape; Mizoram chalks out roadmap for repatriation of Brus.**

The two-month deadline given by the Government of India to the police and security forces to "finish off" the Songbijit faction of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) has expired,

<sup>95</sup> "J&K Govt Approves 3,000 Posts For Kashmiri Pandits Under PM's Package", *The Times of India*, March 11, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/JK-govt-approves-3000-posts-for-Kashmiri-pandits-under-PMs-package/articleshow/46527426.cms>

<sup>96</sup> "J&K Government Withdraws Circular On State Flag", *The Economic Times*, March 13, 2015 at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-13/news/60086059\\_1\\_state-flag-jk-prevention-constitutional-authorities](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-13/news/60086059_1_state-flag-jk-prevention-constitutional-authorities)

<sup>97</sup> Singh, Vijaita, "Centre Seeks J&K Views on Interlocutors Report", *The Indian Express*, March 14, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/centre-seeks-jk-views-on-interlocutors-report/>

but the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has made it clear that there would be no slackening of the operations till the top leaders of the outfit fall in the security net. Highly placed sources in the MHA told *The Assam Tribune* on March 8 that though around 200 hardcore cadres, over ground workers and sympathizers of the NDFB(S) have been nabbed so far, the operations would continue till the top leaders of the militant group are arrested. The chairman of the outfit, IK Songbijit, along with several other leaders, are still in Myanmar and though some movements of the Myanmar Army were reported from the area, where most of the militants are taking shelter, no full-scale operation has yet been launched.<sup>98</sup>

In one of the biggest shocks for the Meghalaya Police, 4 policemen, including a Sub Inspector (SI), were killed in an ambush allegedly by cadres belonging to the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) led by its commander-in-chief Sohan D Shira. The incident happened at about 10.30 am on March 10 when the police team was on its way from Rongara to district headquarter Baghmara, about 135 kms from Tura town. SI Sombatsing Sangma and his team were attacked by about 25-30 GNLA cadres near the Panda Reserve Forest, about 12 kms from Rongara.<sup>99</sup> Meanwhile, a day after the killing of four policemen, the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) has welcomed the proposal for talks, on the condition that the Meghalaya Government is serious in its offer. Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi had in his first address to the State Assembly on March 9 made an offer for conditional talks to the outfit and HNLC on the condition that the outfits eschew violence and give up their anti-national stance.<sup>100</sup>

Three persons were killed on the spot and 23 others injured, when a powerful bomb exploded at Imphal market complex around 6 pm on March 11. The injured were taken to Regional Institute of Medical Science Hospital for treatment, where condition of some was stated to be serious. No individual or group has claimed responsibility for the blast so far, sources said, adding that two of the victims were non-Manipuri persons.<sup>101</sup>

The counter-insurgency operations in Assam gave another major jolt to the militant groups as nine militants belonging to the Songbijit faction of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), Karbi People's Liberation Tigers (KPLT) and Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) were arrested in different operations on March 11, while two members of the United Achik Liberation Army (UALA) surrendered.<sup>102</sup>

The Nagaland government has conveyed to the Centre that Syed Farid Khan, who was lynched by a mob in Dimapur last week, did not rape the girl who accused him of assaulting her, but they

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<sup>98</sup> Choudhury, R Dutta, "Operations Against NDFB(S) to Continue", *The Assam Tribune*, March 9, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar0915/at051>

<sup>99</sup> "4 Policemen Killed in 'GNLA Ambush'", *The Assam Tribune*, March 11, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1115/oth052>

<sup>100</sup> Dey, Biplob Kr., "Ampati Defies GNLA Bandh", *The Assam Tribune*, March 12, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1215/oth050>

<sup>101</sup> "3 Killed, 23 Injured In Manipur Blast", *The Assam Tribune*, March 12, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1215/oth052>

<sup>102</sup> "9 Ultras Nabbed, 2 Surrender", *The Assam Tribune*, March 12, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1215/at056>

had consensual sex twice, reports *PTI*. In a report to the Home Ministry, the Nagaland Government said Khan had given a statement to the police after his arrest on February 24 that he had paid Rs 5,000 to the alleged rape victim after they had sex twice. According to the report, Khan had also told the police that the girl went with him on her own free will and had demanded more money from him after the sexual encounters, which he had refused. An FIR of rape was filed soon after. "It appears on the basis of Khan's confession, that it was not rape but consensual sex," a Home Ministry official quoted the Nagaland government report as stating.<sup>103</sup>

Mizoram Government has chalked out a roadmap for resumption of repatriation of Brus lodged in the six relief camps in neighbouring North Tripura district and submitted a proposal for expenses of over Rs 68 lakh for the purpose, a senior official said. State additional secretary for Home Lalbiakzama said that Mizoram Government was ready to resume the repatriation process and was only waiting for the release of the fund from the Centre for the purpose.<sup>104</sup>

## Left-wing Extremism

(March 9-15, 2015)

- **Diseases, not Maoists, kill most CRPF men in Maoist areas; Maoists regrouping in Bengal's Junglemahal; Jharkhand Police claims to kill five Maoists in Gumla district; Turf war among Maoists likely to turn bloodier; Police arrested a hardcore Maoist, seized 3,000 gelatin rods in Bihar; Jharkhand gears up for psychological warfare against Maoists; 11 Maoists surrender in Chhattisgarh.**

For the largest security force fighting Naxalites in dense jungles of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar, the biggest enemy is not a gun-toting rebel, but various diseases. Latest government data shows that more CRPF men have died due to malaria and heart attack than have fallen to Maoist attacks in the 106 Naxal-affected districts in the country. According to data released by the home ministry, in 2014, while 50 CRPF men died in Maoist attacks, 95 died due to various diseases. Of these 27 fell to malaria, while 35 died due to heart attack. In 2015 too, nine CRPF men have lost the battle to various diseases as against two to Maoists. The data exposes the poor working conditions for jawans in Naxal areas and lack of medical care.<sup>105</sup>

Nearly four years after Maoist leader Kishenji was gunned down in an encounter in West Bengal's Junglemahal area, Maoists have started trickling back into the forest-covered terrain of the state. According to inputs by both Central and state agencies, a number of top Maoist leaders from Bengal and Jharkhand have been spotted making their way into villages. Security agencies have received inputs from ground-level sources that in the last few days, regional commanders and

<sup>103</sup> "Nagaland Govt Report Rules Out Rape", *The Assam Tribune*, March 12, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1215/at057>

<sup>104</sup> "Roadmap ready for repatriation of Brus", *The Assam Tribune*, March 15, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=mar1515/oth053>

<sup>105</sup> Tiwary, Deeptiman, "Diseases, Not Maoists, Kill Most CRPF Men In Red Zone", *The Times of India*, March 11, 2015, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Diseases-not-Maoists-kill-most-CRPF-men-in-Red-zone/articleshow/46522966.cms?>

leaders such as Bikash, Shyamal and Ranjit Pal have been spotted in the area. They have also been in touch with some known associates in villages along the Bengal-Jharkhand border. Sources further said that a group of rebels, under the leadership of Madan Mahato, commander of the Belpahari region in Purulia, was spotted in the Ranibandh area of Bankura three weeks back.<sup>106</sup>

At least one suspected Maoist was killed in an encounter with the security forces in Jharkhand's Gumla district on March 13. The police, however, claimed they have killed four-five rebels. Maoist sources said the man who was killed was part of a People's Liberation Guerrilla Army team, reportedly en route to provide assistance to a larger group fighting a pitched battle against the security forces since February 20. Jharkhand's most-wanted Maoist Deo Kumar Singh is reportedly injured. Police said they do not have any information on Singh alias Arvindji, CPI (Maoist) central committee and military commission member. The Maoist sources, however, confirmed that Singh suffered a bullet injury to his leg on February 20 and was still in Gumla. Arvindji and his team were reportedly moving from Chhattisgarh to Latehar, when they were ambushed by members of another Left-wing extremist group Jharkhand Jan Mukti Parishad. The JJMP allegedly retains good relationship with the Intelligence Bureau, which did not keep the state police in the loop about the ambush.<sup>107</sup>

With TPC, a splinter group of CPI (Maoist), threatening to indulge in more violence and Maoists' well-known eye-for-eye principle, the ongoing turf war between the different sects of the "gun religion" is going to be bloodier in the days to come. On March 11, TPC squad gunned down Jaglal Ganju, said to be an area commander of the CPI (Maoists). Virtually throwing an open challenge to the parent organization, the TPC left behind a hand note near the slain's body. Besides owning the killing of the Maoist area commander, the TPC note threatened more such killings. Acknowledging Jaglal's assassination as a retaliatory action, the TPC note said the score was yet not fully settled and the Maoists will have to pay for their acts through the lives of its cadre. Maoists, on their part, allege that TPC enjoyed police patronage as the forces engaged in anti-Naxal operation encouraged and helped TPC to engage in a proxy war with the Maoists. Though senior police officers formally deny the Maoist allegation that TPC enjoyed police support, the war within the extra-large Naxal umbrella brings good news to the forces engaged in anti-Naxal operations as it weakens the enemy.<sup>108</sup>

Police have arrested a hardcore Maoist and seized 3,000 gelatin rods, 7,000 detonators, some carbines and a big consignment of ammonium nitrate on March 14 from near a village in Bihar's Rohtas district, an officer said. Rohtas Superintendent of Police Sandeep Lande said that police were tipped off that some Maoists had gathered at Chunhatta village under Nauhatta police

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<sup>106</sup> Drimi Chaudhuri, Drimi, "Maoists Regrouping In Bengal's Junglemahal", *Deccan Herald*, March 12, 2015 at <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/465239/maoists-regrouping-bengals-junglemahal.html#>

<sup>107</sup> Edmond, Deepu Sebastian, "Five Maoists Killed In Encounter, Claim Jharkand Police", *The Indian Express*, March 14, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/at-least-one-maoist-killed-in-encounter-with-security-forces-in-jharkhand/>

<sup>108</sup> Qadir, Abdul, "Turf War Among Maoists Likely To Turn Bloodier", *The Times of India*, March 14, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/Turf-war-among-Maoists-likely-to-turn-bloodier/articleshow/46567374.cms>

station and planning for a big operation in the district. When a police team raided the identified place, armed Maoists opened fire. The exchange of fire continued for over an hour. One Maoist was arrested while others managed to escape.<sup>109</sup>

Jharkhand state will raise a dedicated police team for waging psychological warfare against Maoists, a top official said, indicating a proactive policy shift in the Raghubar Das government's tactics against left-wing rebels. Besides, the state will also set up special investigation teams (SITs) – both at state and district/range levels – for dealing with important extremism-related cases, according to an order issued by the state director general of police DK Pandey.<sup>110</sup>

At least 11 Maoists, including a female cadre, surrendered to security forces in Chhattisgarh on March 14. Among the surrendered Maoists many carried rewards on them. "It is a matter of joy that by the collaborative effort of Telangana police and Bijapur police at least 11 Maoists have decided to leave Naxalism and adopt the mainstream lifestyle," said Inspector General, S.R.P. Kalluri. Meanwhile, a hardcore Maoist was killed in two-hour long encounter with police in Jharkhand's Sargaon region. The killed Maoist is suspected to be a senior cadre, but his identity is yet to be known. A semi-automatic rifle, 110 bullets, hand-made grenade, walky-talky and mobile have been recovered from the Maoist.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> "Maoist Arrested, 3,000 Gelatin Rods Seized in Bihar", *Business Standard*, March 14, 2015 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/maoist-arrested-3-000-gelatin-rods-seized-in-bihar-115031400633\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/maoist-arrested-3-000-gelatin-rods-seized-in-bihar-115031400633_1.html)

<sup>110</sup> Sarkar, Debashish, "State to Wage Psychological Warfare Against Maoists", *Hindustan Times*, March 14, 2015 at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/ranchi/state-to-wage-psychological-warfare-against-maoists/article1-1326257.aspx>

<sup>111</sup> "11 Maoists Surrender In Chhattisgarh", *Business Standard*, March 15, 2015 at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/11-maoists-surrender-in-chhattisgarh-115031500081\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/11-maoists-surrender-in-chhattisgarh-115031500081_1.html)