

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

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I. COUNTRY REVIEWS

A. South Asia

Afghanistan

(April 27-May 10, 2015)

- **Giving Taliban a role in Afghan politics; Ghani urges afghans to put aside past differences; Peace talks between Afghan govt. and Taliban; No one can arbitrarily represent Afghans, govt in peace talks, says Sayyaf; Qatar talks are informal; Constitution recognition prerequisite for talks; Protest against Iranian interference; US to train ANSF, fight Al-Qaeda and Daesh; Taliban occupy Jawand district in Badghis.**

President Ashraf Ghani said in India that despite the Taliban and other insurgent groups being anti-government, they still had a right to be part of Afghanistan's organized political system. According to him, he is ready to speak to the Taliban and allow them to partake in the politics of the country within the framework of the constitution. He said he would not use his position to divide and conquer but to instead use it to unify all groups in Afghanistan. Ghani said that this applied not only to the Taliban but to any other group or person in Afghanistan that has been side lined due to differences of opinion politically. "What is the difference between Taliban and foreign terrorist groups? The difference is that foreign terrorists do not have a place in our politics. If they are from another country and are causing instability then we must act against them in accordance with the constitution of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's constitution has a place for all the citizens of this country. But foreign terrorist groups have challenged us all," says Ghani.¹

President Ashraf Ghani on May 2 urged the Afghans to put aside their past differences and work for the country's prosperity under the constitution. Speaking at a gathering marking the 23rd anniversary of the Mujahidin's victory over the former Soviet Union forces, the president pledged drastic administrative reforms to improve living condition of the countrymen in a short period of time. He said the government had adopted policies in cooperation with the international community to integrate Asia and Middle East economies through Afghanistan. The president said the cabinet would work on a 100-day plan to ensure that people felt positive change as a result of government policies. He said global terrorist networks were out destabilise Afghanistan and reached their targets by spreading fear and threatening people.²

Yousif Al Sada, Director of the Asian Department at the Foreign Ministry of Qatar confirmed that Doha is hosting peace talks between Afghan officials and Taliban representatives in order to end the war in Afghanistan. The dialogue "will be through open discussions about Afghan

¹ "Ghani Speaks of Giving Taliban a Role in Afghan Politics", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 2, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=12062

² "Ghani Urges Afghans to Put Aside Past Differences", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 3, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=12067

reconciliation between all parties in Afghanistan”, the *Qatar News Agency* quoted Yousif Al Sada as saying. He said that this dialogue Qatar is seeking is “to bridge the gap in viewpoints between all Afghan parties on all issues and topics that achieve security, peace and stability for the Afghan people”. The two-day dialogue between Afghan officials and Taliban is slated to begin in Doha on May 3. This comes after a 20-member Afghan delegation, led by Attullah Lodin, the deputy chief of Afghanistan’s High Peace Council, also confirmed that they would hold meetings with Taliban representatives at a meeting initiated by international peace initiators Pugwash. Their aim they said is to thrash out their perspective on political matters, especially that relating to peace in Afghanistan. A spokesman for President Ashraf Ghani, Ajmal Obaid Abidi has said that “these people were personally invited to the conference. The basis is that we have always said that when the peace talks begin we will not only inform the people but we will proceed based on the demand of the people.”³

Following a two-day talks between an Afghan delegation—not confirmed by the government yet—and a number of the Taliban representatives in Qatar, former Jihadi leader, Abdul Rab Rasoul Sayyaf, said that the government should not allow any country to arrange meetings and scorn matters that are highly important for the nation. Qatar hosted a two-day research conference titled ‘Afghan dialogue’ in Doha on May 2-3 organized by Pugwash Council, a Canadian-based international organization that brings together scholars and public figures to work against armed conflicts and seek solutions to global security threats. An eight-member Taliban delegation participated in the conference and sat together with Afghan officials and politicians. Sayyaf said in a statement that no group has the right to represent the people and the government of Afghanistan on their own behalf. “The ongoing war has been imposed on us. Its continuation is not in favour of anybody. Peace is the only solution and in interest of the nation, the region and the world,” he said. He added that the only group that has the authority to represent Afghans and Afghanistan is the one selected by the government—after discussion with representatives of people.⁴

Rejecting reports about direct talks between the Taliban and Afghan officials recently in Qatar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on May 5 that the delegation that participated in the Pugwash conference on May 2 wasn’t assigned by the government but was informal. The ministry’s spokesman Ahmad Shekib Mustaghni said the Doha talks were informal as the government officials who were invited had not participated in the conference. Speaking at a press conference here, he said that those people who participated from Afghanistan in the conference had gone there in a personal capacity and had nothing to do with the government. Only the High Peace Council is authorized to talk with the insurgent groups and pursue the process, he added. The spokesperson further said the government is trying to push forward the peace process. At a time when MoFA rejects participation of Afghan officials in the conference in Doha, the Taliban indirectly propound their suggestion to the government of Afghanistan regarding peace talks by releasing a statement. The statement was published on the Taliban’s website in which the group’s delegation after attending the conference offered conditions and suggestions for reaching peace in Afghanistan. The Taliban sought complete withdrawal of foreign forces, amendments in the

³ “Doha Confirms Hosting Peace Talks Between Afghan Govt. and Taliban”, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 4, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=12074

⁴ “No One Can Arbitrarily Represent Afghans, Govt In Peace Talks, Says Sayyaf”, *Afghanistan Times*, May 4, 2015, at <http://afghanistantimes.af/no-one-can-arbitrarily-represent-afghans-govt-in-peace-talks-says-sayyaf/>

Afghan constitution, removal of the Taliban leaders' names from the United Nations' black list, establishment of a political office for the group and carving of realistic peace strategy by the Afghan government.⁵

Terming the little known Daesh a threat to national security, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, the National Security Advisor (NSA), on May 7 made it clear the government would hold talks only with groups that accepted the constitution of Afghanistan. He expressed these views at a briefing to members of upper house. Atmar was summoned by the Mesharano Jirga to explain government position on Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), peace process, and presence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Afghanistan. He said BSA was being implemented and since last four months Afghan security forces spearheaded command of military operations in the country. In line with the agreement, he said, the US had been extending military, training and logistic support to the Afghan forces. "US has performed its responsibility in line with the BSA," he noted. He said the US and some other European countries had paid \$4.9 billion for equipment of the country's 352,000 security forces and 30,000 Afghan Local Police (ALP).⁶

Dozens of civil society activists staged a protest against "Iranian interference" in Afghan affairs in capital Kabul. Activists accused Iran for meddling in the educational, media, cultural and political affairs of Afghanistan. Protestor also blamed Iran for creating hate among Afghan tribes. They were giving the slogans "Death to Iran". The peaceful protest called by the Afghanistan Milli Ghorzang, a political party, was comprised of more than 100 people that ended in front of the embassy of Iran in Kabul. Protesters asked Iran to refrain from interfering in Afghan affairs and asked government to prevent Iran. Iran a neighbouring country like Pakistan is long-blamed for disturbance in Afghanistan.⁷

President Barack Obama on May 6 renewed his promise to continue training and supporting Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to fight Daesh and al-Qaeda militants. Announcing his selection of Gen. Joseph Dunford to succeed Gen. Martin Dempsey as the next Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Obama vowed to "remain relentless against al-Qaeda." "We have to keep training Afghan forces and remain relentless against al-Qaeda. We have to push back against ISIL [Daesh] and strengthen forces in Syria and build moderate opposition in Syria," Obama vowed. Addressing the media over Dunford's appointment, Obama said Dunford was one of the "most admired officers in our military", and someone whose decision-making he trusts. Gen. Dunford served as the Commander of American and Coalition Forces in Afghanistan in 2013 and 2014, and now serves as the Commandant of the U.S Marine Corps.⁸

⁵ "MoFA Terms Qatar Talks Informal", *Afghanistan Times*, May 5, 2015, at <http://afghanistantimes.af/mofa-terms-qatar-talks-informal/>

⁶ "Afghanistan's Constitution Recognition Prerequisite for Talks", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 6, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=12083

⁷ "Protest Held Against "Iranian Interference" In Afghan Affairs", *Khaama Press*, May 7, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/protest-held-against-iranian-interference-in-afghan-affairs-3299/>

⁸ "Obama Vows to Train ANSF, Fight Al-Qaeda and Daesh", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, May 7, 2015, at http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=12088

The acting provincial governor of northern Balkh province of Afghanistan Ata Mohammad Noor has said the bilateral security agreement between Kabul and Washington has proved to be useless for the country. Noor made the marks as a guest speaker in Russian Consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif city on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Russia's victory over Nazis. He also criticized the government of national unity for remaining reckless towards the deteriorating security situation in northern parts of the country and warned to take actions by joining the uprising forces if the situation further deteriorated. The bilateral security agreement between Afghanistan and United States was formally signed by the former US ambassador to Afghanistan James B. Cunningham and national security adviser Mohammad Hanif Atmar on September 30th last year. The Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) for the NATO forces was also inked during the signing ceremony on the same day.⁹

Taliban militants have occupied Jawand District in northwestern Badghis province. Bahauddin Qudosi, head of the provincial council of Badghis province says that Taliban occupied the district governor's office and police headquarters of Jawand last night. He said that the district governor, police chief and a number of other government officials have retreated from their offices to a nearby village. He said if government officials do not receive support on time they might be captured by militants. Jawand is one of the most populated districts in Badghis province. Taliban spokesman has not yet commented on the report. The attack is one of the strings of deadly attacks by militants in different parts of the country during the past two months.¹⁰

Pakistan

(April 27-May 10, 2015)

- **ISPR terms Altaf's remarks against army leadership disgusting; Military leadership part of govt; resolution for extraditing Altaf; Pakistan backs Track-II Afghan-Taliban talks; Corps commanders take notice of RAW's involvement; KP witnesses decline in terror acts; Balochistan CM concedes failure in tracing 'missing' persons.**

The Pakistan Army has termed Altaf Hussain's statement against it as disgusting and uncalled for while warning that such remarks won't be tolerated. Reacting to MQM Chief Altaf Hussain's speech to party workers, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Major General Asim Bajwa said: "Such reference to Army or its leadership as reaction to arrest of criminals, who may have links with any political party, won't be tolerated". The media wing of the army made it clear that the armed forces and law enforcement agencies will continue to execute operations assigned to them. Earlier, speaking to party workers Altaf Hussain said: "We are called RAW agents every other day. Those who surrendered are called patriots, while the founders of Pakistan are dubbed traitors." Hussain's remarks came hours after a senior Karachi Police Officer Rao

⁹ "US Security Pact Proved Useless For Afghanistan's Security", *Khaama Press*, May 10, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/us-security-pact-proved-useless-for-afghanistans-security-noor-1084>

¹⁰ "Taliban Occupy Jawand District in Badghis", *Khaama Press*, May 10, 2015, at <http://www.khaama.com/taliban-occupy-jawand-district-in-badghis-3310>

Anwar called for a ban against the MQM for its alleged links with the Indian secret agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).¹¹

A resolution has been submitted by Jamaat-i-Islami with the Punjab Assembly secretariat against the recent anti-army speech by MQM chief Altaf Hussain. The resolution submitted by JI MPA Syed Waseem Akhtar demands the federal government take notice of the alleged anti-state and anti-army speeches by Mr Hussain and banning the MQM to curb its "fascism". It also calls for extraditing Mr Hussain from UK and his trial under Article 6 in the country.¹²

Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid has said that the military leadership is also a part of the government and national security policies are made with its advice. Talking to the media after attending a literature conference at Arts Council Karachi, Rashid said, "PM Nawaz Sharif has directed Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) over Altaf Hussain's criticism of the army." He said Altaf Hussain has realised his mistake and hoped that no one will criticize national security institutions in the future. Reacting on PTI Chairman Imran Khan's reaction over Altaf Hussain criticism, the minister said the PTI Chief was always tries to get others involved in clashes. He added that Khan also tried to create rifts between the government and the Army and also issue statement to divide other countries.¹³

The corps commanders' conference on May 5 took serious notice of Indian intelligence agency RAW's involvement in whipping up terrorism in Pakistan. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif presided over the conference at the General Headquarters. Speaking to the forum, the army chief said with the overwhelming support of the entire nation, Operation Zarb-e-Azb had inflicted significant damage on terrorists. Emphasising the continued precision targeting of terrorists squeezed in isolated pockets in Fata, the COAS directed all concerned to intensify intelligence-based operations against the terrorists and their abettors in the urban areas for enduring peace in the country. General Raheel said a terror-free Pakistan was now a national resolve. He said thousands of innocent Pakistanis, including children, had been martyred by extremists. He said the law enforcement agencies and brave armed forces had made a lot of sacrifices in fighting these misguided and hardened criminals to safeguard a peaceful and better future for our next generation.¹⁴

Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry on May 3 said Pakistan supports Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process to ensure peace, security and development in the region. Talking to newsmen at Foreign Office, he said stability in neighboring Afghanistan is critical to peace in South Asia as a stable Afghanistan will ensure peace in the region. "We believe peace in Afghanistan would mean peace for the whole region," he said. The Foreign Secretary said Pakistan

¹¹ "ISPR Terms Altaf 's Remarks Against Army Leadership Disgusting" *The News*, May 1, 2015, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-183285-ISPR-terms-Altat-s-remarks-against-army-leadership-disgusting>

¹² "JI Resolution For Extraditing Altaf" , *Dawn*, May 4, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1179864/ji-resolution-for-extraditing-altat>

¹³ "Military Leadership Also Part Of Govt, Says Rashid", *The News*, May 3, 2015, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-183553-Military-leadership-also-part-of-govt,-says-Rashid->

¹⁴ "Corps Commanders Take Notice of RAW's Involvement In Pakistan", *The News*, May 6, 2015, at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-37336-Corps-commanders-take-notice-of-RAWs-involvement-in-Pakistan>

has repeatedly offered to facilitate reconciliation process to ensure peace and security in Afghanistan. Replying to a question about recent process of dialogue between representatives of Taliban and Afghan government in Qatar, the Foreign Secretary said it is “Track-II” dialogue and expressed the hope that it will prove successful creating way for formal talks. He said Pakistan fully supports this reconciliation process being held in Qatar. According to details a 20-member delegation from Afghanistan had reached Qatar to hold two-day talks with Taliban representatives aimed at ending Afghanistan’s long war. Qatar’s Foreign Ministry confirmed that it was hosting “reconciliation” talks to help try to deliver security, peace and stability to the Afghan people.¹⁵

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province witnessed a sharp decline in the incidents of terrorism in the first four months of the current year compared to the same period in previous years. According to official data, during the current year, 85 incidents took place compared to 183 in 2014, 173 in 2013 and 134 in 2012, respectively. The analysis showed that 37 IED blasts took place during the current year so far compared to 97 in 2014, 114 in 2013 and 83 in 2012, respectively. Similarly, there was a decline in vehicle borne IED and suicide incidents, as during the current year only two incidents of suicide bombings took place compared to six in 2014 and 10 in 2013. In hand grenade/target killing incidents, there was also a sharp decrease as only 13 incidents of hand grenades throwing and 33 of firing were reported in 2015 so far compared to 26 and 45 in year 2014. Similarly, casualty rate occurred during the current year was the lowest in the last four years, according to the data revealed at a meeting chaired by KP Inspector General of Police Nasir Khan Durrani on May 5.¹⁶

Balochistan Chief Minister Dr Abdul Malik Baloch conceded on May 9 that his government’s failure in locating the ‘missing’ persons of his province. Talking to reporters after a book launch, he said that his government was in talks with the angry Baloch. However, he admitted that success had not been achieved in finding out where the ‘missing’ Baloch persons were. He said that the people of Balochistan should not be kept in the dark on the issue of Gwadar. The chief minister was the chief guest at the launch of the book on the life and work of distinguished Baloch poet, journalist and politician Mir Gul Khan Naseer titled *Mir Gul Khan Naseer — Zindagi Aur Funn* compiled by Yar Jan Badeeni and Tahir Hakeem Baloch.¹⁷

Bangladesh

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Indian Parliament passed the land boundary agreement bill; Deputy High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Mumbai meets Chief Minister of Maharashtra; Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent claims responsibility for the murder of blogger Avijit Roy; Bangladesh to send one lakh tonnes of rice to Nepal.**

Seeking to settle decades-old border issues with Bangladesh, the Indian Parliament on May 7 unanimously passed a historic bill to operationalise the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its

¹⁵ “Pakistan Backs Track-II Afghan-Taliban Talks”, *The Nation*, May 4, 2015, at <http://nation.com.pk/national/04-May-2015/pakistan-backs-track-ii-afghan-taliban-talks>

¹⁶ “KP Witnesses Decline In Terror Acts”, *Dawn*, May 6, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1180286>

¹⁷ “Balochistan CM Concedes Failure In Tracing ‘Missing’ Persons”, *Dawn*, May 10, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1181054/balochistan-cm-concedes-failure-in-tracing-missing-persons>

2011 protocol. Minutes after the bill's passage, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to his Bangladesh counterpart and described the bill's passage as a "historic milestone" in bilateral ties between the two countries.¹⁸ Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina termed the passage of Land Boundary Agreement bill by Indian parliament a new milestone in the long-standing relationship between the two countries. "Through the passage of the bill, the commitment of two great leaders of the region as well as the world — Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shrimati Indira Gandhi — has been materialised," she said.¹⁹ BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia also praised the Narendra Modi Government for the passage of historic land boundary agreement in Indian parliament.²⁰

Expressing satisfaction over the existing relationship between India and Bangladesh, Chief Minister of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis has called for strengthening economic and trade relations with Maharashtra. He made the call when Deputy High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Mumbai Samina Naz paid a courtesy call on him at Shayadri State Guesthouse, Mumbai, on May 8.²¹

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has claimed responsibility for the murder of writer-blogger Avijit Roy, *AFP* reported citing a US website that monitors extremist groups. In a video posted on jihadist forums on May 2, AQIS leader Asim Umar said his organisation carried out the attacks on Avijit and "other blasphemers" in Bangladesh and Pakistan, according to the website of SITE Intelligence Group.²²

The government has decided to send one lakh tonnes of rice and adequate quantity of water for the quake-hit people in Nepal on an emergency basis. The decision came at the weekly cabinet meeting at the secretariat with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair on May 4, 2015. Sources said the rice would be transported to Nepal by road through northern borders of Bangladesh. Besides, cargo planes and rescue helicopters would carry adequate quantity of water for the quake-hit people. Meanwhile, four cargo trucks carrying 25 tonnes of relief materials left Dhaka for Nepal via Banglabandh-Fulbari-Panitanki-Kakarbhitta land route on May 4. The relief materials include 3,000 cartons of dry food, fruit juice, 5,000 pieces of blankets, tents, water bottles and torchlight, according to a press release of Bangladesh embassy in Nepal.²³

¹⁸ Bhattacharya, Pallab and Karim, Rezaul, "Indian Parliament Clears Land Swap Deal with Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, May 8, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/all-clear-land-swap-81069>.

¹⁹ "Bangladesh PM Hasina Hails Land Boundary Deal Ratification as Milestone in Indo-Bangla Ties", *The Daily Star*, May 8, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/milestone-indo-bangla-ties-81074>.

²⁰ "Khaleda Thanks Modi for LBA Bill Passage: Alleges that Salahuddin is in Rab's Hands", *The Daily Star*, May 10, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/khaleda-thanks-modi-lba-bill-passage-81464>.

²¹ "Maharashtra Seeks More Trade Ties with Dhaka", *The Daily Star*, May 9, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/maharashtra-seeks-more-trade-ties-dhaka-81301>.

²² "Al-Qaeda Branch Claims Responsibility for Murder of Writer-Blogger Avijit Roy", *The Daily Star*, May 4, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/qaeda-unit-behind-avijit-killing-80362>.

²³ "Quake-Hit Nepal: Bangladesh to Send 1 Lakh Tonnes Rice And Adequate Quantity Of Water For Quake-Hit People in Nepal", *The Daily Star*, May 5, 2015 at <http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/bangladesh-send-1-lakh-tonnes-rice-80524>.

Sri Lanka

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Sri Lanka's Defence industry is anticipated to grow by 2019; Australian delegation visits Sri Lanka; Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals rose 8.5 percent in April; Sri Lanka's trade deficit widens; Sri Lankan government decides to relocate a naval training centre from the East.**

Sri Lanka's defence industry, valued at US\$1.8 billion in 2014, is anticipated to record a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 8.06 per cent over the next five years to reach US\$2.6 billion by 2019, a recently released market report said. Dublin-based market analysts, Research and Markets in its latest report on Sri Lanka defence industry "Future of the Sri Lankan Defence Industry-Market Attractiveness, Competitive Landscape and Forecasts to 2019" expects Sri Lanka to strengthen its maritime security and surveillance to counter the problems of terrorism, piracy, oil pollution spills, and illegal drug and arms trafficking. Sri Lankan homeland security expenditure stands at US\$ 500 million in 2014 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 4.41 per cent over the forecast period, to reach US\$ 600 million in 2019.²⁴

A diplomatic delegation led by Australian Immigration Minister Peter Dutton currently in Sri Lanka on an official visit had held discussions with Sri Lankan officials on combating crimes at sea. The Australian Minister accompanied by his delegation met Commander of the Navy Vice Admiral Jayantha Perera at the Naval Headquarters in Colombo on May 5, and held discussions on key issues related to illegal migration by sea risking lives. The Navy Commander drew attention to the excellent relationships the Sri Lanka Navy has with the Australian authorities in combating crimes at sea and recalled the two fully refurbished Bay-class patrol boats gifted by the Australian Government as a capacity enhancement measure to combat human smuggling. The Navy Commander noted that the two boats have been of immense help to the Navy in combating maritime crimes. The Australian Minister expressed his appreciation of the cooperation extended by the Sri Lanka Navy for the joint efforts to prevent people smuggling. The Australian delegation also held discussions with the Sri Lankan Minister of Resettlement, Reconstruction and Hindu Religious Affairs D.M. Swaminathan.²⁵

Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals rose 8.5 percent in April this year compared to the same period last year, the data released by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) showed. The month recorded 122,217 tourists arriving in the country compared to the 112,631 arrived in April 2014. In the first four months of this year 601,055 tourists visited the island, an increase of 12.5 percent compared to the 534,132 recorded for the same period in 2014. Arrivals from North America rose 11.7 percent to 6,160 in April and the arrivals from US were up 6.4 percent to 3,296 during the month. Tourist arrivals from Western Europe declined in April by 6.4 percent with 34,964 arriving during the month, compared to the 37,369 tourists arrived in the same month last year. Reversing

²⁴ "Sri Lankan Defence Industry Expected To Reach Us\$ 2.6 Billion By 2019", *ColomboPage*, May 4, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May04_1430761194CH.php.

²⁵ "Sri Lanka, Australia Discuss Combating Maritime Crimes", *ColomboPage*, May 6, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May06_1430896422CH.php.

the dip from last month, arrivals from Eastern Europe increased 7.7 percent with the arrival of 11,675 tourists in April 2015. Arrivals from Middle East rose 3.4 percent with 5,484 visitors arriving in April 2015. Tourist arrivals from East Asia increased 31.9 percent as 24,292 visited the country compared to the 18,416 visited in April 2014. Arrivals from China compared to last year increased 72.3 percent with the arrival of 13,790 visitors. Arrivals from South Asia increased by 17.7 percent as 32,907 tourists visited the island in April 2015. Of those arrived from South Asia, 23,048 were from India corresponding to an increase of 34.1 percent.²⁶

Sri Lanka's trade deficit widened 10.4 percent to US\$ 638 million in February from US\$ 578 million a year earlier, according to the Central Bank data released in its External Sector Performance Review. In the first two months of 2015, the cumulative deficit in the trade account amounted to US\$ 1.41 billion. The Bank said the external sector remained stable during February 2015 with tourist earnings and workers' remittances continued to be main sources of inflows improving the current account balance of the Balance of Payments. Earnings from exports increased by 5.8 percent to US\$ 891.4 million in February 2015 year-on-year, led by industrial exports. Earnings from industrial exports, which represent about 77 percent of total exports, increased by 7.1 percent to US\$ 683.4 million in the month while Agricultural exports increased marginally by 0.8 percent registering US\$ 202.9 million. In the first two months of the year exports income increased by 3.1 percent to US\$ 1.8 billion. Expenditure on imports increased 7.7 percent, year-on-year, to US\$1.53 billion in February 2015, reflecting significant increase in consumer goods imports followed by investment goods. Cumulative import expenditure during the first two months of 2015 amounted to US\$ 3.21 billion with an increase of 4.4 percent.²⁷

The Sri Lankan government has decided to relocate a naval training centre from the East in order to return the land it was located back to the original owners. Addressing a media briefing Governor of Eastern Province Austin Fernando has said that the government has decided to relocate the Naval Training Centre from its present location in Sampur. He said the decision to shift the camp was taken on the approval of all stakeholders including the Navy Commander and the Defence Secretary. The government has taken the measure to release 237 acres of land, which was under the Sri Lanka Navy, back to its original owners. The governor in an earlier occasion has stated that an alternative land will be given for establishing the training centre again. The Sampur Naval Recruit Training Centre was first established on 15th October 2007 with the aim of catering to the growing needs of training naval personnel enlisted in the Navy.²⁸

²⁶ "Sri Lanka Tourist Arrivals Up By 8.5 Percent in April 2015", *Colombopage*, May 8, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May08_1431068652CH.php.

²⁷ "Sri Lanka Trade Deficit Widens 10.4% in February 2015", *ColomboPage*, May 7, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May07_1431006498CH.php.

²⁸ "Sri Lankan Government To Relocate Naval Training Centre from East", *ColomboPage*, May 8, 2015 at http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15A/May08_1431067804CH.php.

Maldives

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **President makes official visit to Pakistan; EU condemns the conflicts at the protest in Maldives on the May 1; President ratifies the Bill on Amendment to the Prison and Parole Act; Maldives' Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon speaks at the review of the UPR at the United Nations Human Rights Council; Foreign minister congratulates David Cameron.**

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom and First Lady Fathimath Ibrahim made a State Visit to Pakistan on May 6.²⁹ The President and First Lady were greeted on arrival at the Islamabad Airport, by Pakistani Prime Minister Mohamed Nawaz Shareef. In honour of President Yameen and First Lady Madam Fathimath, Pakistani Army fired a 21 gun salute as they alighted from the plane.³⁰ At the Official Talks held at the Prime Minister's house in Islamabad, President Yameen noted that, as fellow Muslim countries and neighbours in SAARC, the Maldives had strong and special affection for Pakistan. He emphasised that the two countries shared lots of commonalities and welcomed Pakistan's commitment to self-actualisation through prosperity by Trade and Commerce. In his statement President Yameen highlighted Pakistan's important role in the realisation of the long-held dream for strong regional bloc.³¹ President Yameen thanked Prime Minister Sharif and his Government for inviting him to conduct a visit to Pakistan, while extending an invitation to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to visit the Maldives to join the festivities of the Golden Jubilee independence celebrations during the year.³² Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sartaj Aziz, paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom on May 6. At the meeting, discussions were focused on maintaining good relations between the Maldives and Pakistan, and continuing support and cooperation in international forums.³³

President of Pakistan, Mamnoon Hussain hosted a State Banquet in honour of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom on May 6. Prior to the state banquet, President Yameen and President Hussain held one-to-one deliberations on the further development of Maldives-Pakistan bilateral ties. President Mamnoon Hussain also met with the Maldivian delegation accompanying President

²⁹ "President Yameen and First Lady Depart On a State Visit to Pakistan", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, May 6, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15525>.

³⁰ "President Yameen and First Lady Receive Warm Welcome On Arrival at Islamabad", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, May 6, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15527>.

³¹ "Pakistan Commits to Further Strengthening Bilateral Ties Based on Cordiality, Mutual Respect And Common Interests", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15536>.

³² "The State Visit to Pakistan Would Elevate The Ties Between The Two Countries To A Higher Plane - President Yameen", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15535>.

³³ "Advisor to the Pakistani Prime Minister on National Security & Foreign Affairs, calls on President Yameen", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, May 6, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15528>.

Yameen on his state visit. President Mamnoon Hussain assured Pakistan's close friendship and continued assistance to the Maldives. President Yameen extended an invitation to President Mamnoon Hussain to visit the Maldives at his earliest convenience. At the meeting, both the leaders deliberated on enhancing trade and cultural exchanges, as well as expanding the scope of investment opportunities. Discussions were also held on supporting each other in the global arena.³⁴ This is Mr Gayoom's first visit to Pakistan and the first by a Maldivian leader to Islamabad in 11 years.³⁵ Four agreements have been signed between the Government of Maldives and the Government of Pakistan on May 7, which includes: the MoU on cooperation in combating illicit trafficking and abuse of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors; the MoU on bilateral cooperation in the field of sports; and the MoU on health cooperation and the MoU on cooperation in the field of education.³⁶

European Union (EU) has called to the political parties of the country not to do anything that might heat up the political state of the country. The Norwegian ambassador to Sri Lanka leading the EU emissary to the Maldives issued a press release on May 4 saying that the EU condemns the conflicts at the protest in Maldives on the May 1. EU has asked the major political parties in the country to resolve the political issues by discussions. The European Parliament also passed a resolution against the Maldives on 30 April. The resolution called to the Maldives to stop impeding peaceful protestors and condemning the reintroduction of capital punishment in the Maldives.³⁷

The Bill on Amendment to the Prison and Parole Act, which disqualifies former President Mohamed Nasheed as the President of Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), has been ratified by President Abdulla Yameen. Following ratification, the bill has been published on the Government Gazette. This bill when first proposed by the government stated that a person executing a prison sentence cannot be a member of a political party. This was passed by the parliament, but not ratified. The President sent the bill back to the parliament for reconsideration. The clause was later changed to state that a person executing a prison sentence cannot be part of the leadership of a political party. The government has maintained that the purpose of the bill was not to disqualify Nasheed as the President of MDP.³⁸

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon has said that the economic cost of bringing the changes listed in the 2008 Constitution has been incredibly high. Dunya made this remark in her speech at the Maldives' review of the UPR at the United Nations Human Rights Council. She said

³⁴ "Pakistani President Hosts State Banquet in Honour of President Yameen", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, May 6, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15529>.

³⁵ "Maldives President Arrives on Two-Day Visit", *Dawn*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1180511/maldives-president-arrives-on-two-day-visit>.

³⁶ "Four Agreements Signed between the Maldives and Pakistan", *The Presidency, Republic of Maldives*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=15533>.

³⁷ "EU has Called to the Parties Not to Fuel the Heated Political State", *SunOnline*, May 4, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29542>.

³⁸ "Amendment Bill to Prison and Parole Act Ratified", *SunOnline*, May 5, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29561>.

that Maldives' achievements within a span of just ten years have been remarkable, but this fast pace of change brought with it new challenges - that the government and the society were not entirely accustomed to deal with. "Among the most daunting challenges is the incredibly high economic cost of bringing the systemic changes envisioned in the 2008 Constitution. Although categorised as a middle income country by the UN the total government revenue is less than \$1.5 billion a year. That figure is dwarfed by the astonishing cost of rights envisioned in the Constitution. Providing basic public services explicitly listed in the Constitution such as education, health, safe drinking water, sanitation, communication, electricity, and a healthy and ecologically balanced environment to a population of 340,000 dispersed across a 188 islands that are spread over an area of 90,000 sq km in the Indian Ocean, is incredibly expensive. These services, together with urgent defensive measures against the effects of climate change such as shore protection of the islands, take away more than three quarters of government revenue," said Maumoon.³⁹

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dunya Maumoon has congratulated David Cameron and the ruling Conservative Party on their parliament win. The tweet from the official Foreign Ministry says that the Foreign Minister sends her congratulations to Cameron on the win by the Conservative Party.⁴⁰

B. East Asia

China

(May 4-10, 2015)

- China opens its permanent mission to AU in Addis Ababa; China to relax its One-Child Policy soon; China sends record number of military personnel for relief work to Nepal; PM Modi's visit to China expected to increase ties; China open to cooperate with India for deep sea mining; China and EU mark 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties; Xi to visit Russia; Belarus and Kazakhstan.

In order to further strengthen its diplomatic relations with the African nations, China officially opened its permanent mission to the African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa on May 7, 2015. This makes China the first country to have a fully operational official mission to the African Union Commission. This mission will help in enhancing exchanges between China and the AU.⁴¹

The Chinese government is all set to relax the one-child policy. It is being argued by experts that all couples in China will be allowed to have a second child in the next few years. According to Yuan Xin, a professor of population studies at Nankai University, "I think most scholars in China

³⁹ "Dunya: Cost of Bringing Changes Listed In New Constitution Is Incredibly high", *SunOnline*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29603>.

⁴⁰ "Foreign Minister Congratulates Cameron and the Conservative Party", *SunOnline*, May 9, 2015 at <http://www.sun.mv/english/29654>.

⁴¹ "China Opens Permanent Mission to AU", *China Daily*, May 8, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-05/08/content_20656451.htm, accessed on May 8, 2015

agree with further relaxing the family policy so all couples can have two children if they want, and the focus of disputes on issue center on when and in what form the policy will be carried out"⁴²

After the Nepal earthquake the Chinese army sent a total of 1,088 military personnel and members of armed police forces to help with the relief work. This is the largest number of military personnel which China has ever sent to any foreign country, according to Zheng Weibo, director of the emergency response office of the PLA's General Staff Headquarters.⁴³

With respect to the upcoming visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to China, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said that, "We are ready to work with India, through Modi's visit, to enhance strategic trust, deepen practical cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, increase communication and coordination on major international and regional issues and make progress on building strategic partnership of cooperation oriented to peace and prosperity".⁴⁴ In addition to this there are also reports which indicate that China is willing to cooperate with India in the field of deep seabed mining. It is being argued that as developing countries both sides could cooperate and cut down on costs and risks.⁴⁵

On May 6 China hailed the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the European Union (EU). To mark the anniversary the Chinese President and the Chinese Premier exchanged congratulatory greetings with the European Council President and the European Commission President.⁴⁶

The Chinese Foreign Ministry announced on May 4 that the Chinese President Xi Jinping will be visiting Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus.⁴⁷

Japan

(May 4-10, 2015)

● US plans to sell seventeen Ospreys to Japan.

On May 5, the US Defence Security Cooperation Agency reported that Washington is currently planning to sell seventeen V-22 Osprey military transport aircraft along with its equipment, parts

⁴² Xiaodong, Wang, "All Couples May Be Allowed to Have a Second Child Soon: Experts", *China Daily*, May 8, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/08/content_20656243.htm, accessed on May 8, 2015

⁴³ "China Sends Record Military Personnel Numbers to Nepal", *China Daily*, May 7, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/07/content_20652513.htm, accessed on May 8, 2015

⁴⁴ "China Expects Indian PM's Visit to Build Stronger Partnership", *China Daily*, May 6, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/06/content_20640623.htm, accessed on May 8, 2015

⁴⁵ Yining, Peng, "China Seeks Cooperation with India for Sea Mining", *China Daily*, May 7, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/07/content_20642533.htm, accessed on May 8, 2015

⁴⁶ "China Hails 40th Anniversary of Ties with EU", *China Daily*, May 6, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/06/content_20639920.htm, accessed on May 8, 2015

⁴⁷ "Chinese President to Visit Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Attend WWII Celebration in Moscow", *China Daily*, May 4, 2015 at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015xiattendwwii/2015-05/04/content_20613621.htm, accessed on May 8, 2015

and logistical support worth \$3 billion to Japan. Japan is reportedly planning to deploy those aircrafts to the Ground Self Defence Force (GSDF) by 2018.⁴⁸

South Korea

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **South Korea launches a new submarine to deal with North Korean threat.**

On May 7, South Korea launched a new submarine to deal with growing maritime security threat from North Korea. The 214-class submarine that weighs 1800 ton is reportedly sixth submarine manufactured by South Korea. The South Korean navy reported that the submarine is equipped with anti-ship, antisubmarine and offensive mining operations capabilities. The submarine is to be commissioned in November 2016. It reportedly has maximum underwater speed of 20 knots (37 kilometres per hour).⁴⁹

North Korea

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **North Korea threatens to attack South Korea naval ships violating territorial waters; North Korea conducts test of submarine ballistic missile.**

On May 8, North Korea threatened South Korea that it would attack the latter's navy vessels if they violate the sea borders between the two Koreas. The Korean military's command in the southwest sector warned that it would strike South Korean vessels crossing the Northern Limit Line without prior warning. Pyongyang also claimed that between May 1 and 7 this year, seventeen South Korean vessels have violated North Korean waters in the Yellow sea.⁵⁰

North Korea reportedly conducted test of a submarine ballistic missile on May 8 near Sinpo South Shipyard. North Korean leader was present at the time of the test firing. The North carried out the test with a view to boosting its underwater missile capabilities. However, this could clearly pose a new security threat in the Korean Peninsula.⁵¹

⁴⁸ "US To Sell 17 Ospreys To Japan", *Yomiuri Daily*, May 7, 2015, at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0002133774>

⁴⁹ "Korea Unveils New Attack Submarine", *The Korea Herald*, May 7, 2015, at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150507001030>

⁵⁰ "N. Korea Threatens To Strike S. Korean Vessels Violating Sea Border", *Donga Ilbo*, May 9, 2015, at <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?biid=2015050969488>

⁵¹ "N. Korea Test-Fires Underwater Ballistic Missiles: KCNA", *The Korea Herald*, May 9, 2015, at http://www.koreaherald.com/common_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20150509000064&dt=2

C. Southeast Asia and Oceania

ASEAN

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **6th ASEAN-US JCC Meeting; European Union-ASEAN cooperation to improve higher education standard in ASEAN; ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement Forum held in Brunei; Republic of Korea's Envoy to ASEAN presented his credentials to ASEAN Sec-Gen; ASEAN-EU high-level dialogue on maritime security cooperation.**

The 6th ASEAN-US Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting was held in Jakarta on May 8. H.E. Min Lwin, Permanent Representative of Myanmar to ASEAN, and H.E. Nina Hachigian, Ambassador of the United States to ASEAN co-chaired the meeting while permanent representatives of all member states to ASEAN or their representatives attended the meeting. In the meeting, both sides reiterated their commitment to accelerate implementation of the five-year action plan which will be over by the end of 2015. Both sides also spoke about a new action plan for 2016-2020 which will be action-oriented, forward-looking and will take into consideration the new developments and priorities of the US and ASEAN. In the meeting, the US introduced the Mekong Workforce Development Programme under which the US assistance will be provided to the workforce in Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos with an aim to increase their productivity as well as number. America is involved in various forums like ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), Extended ASEAN Maritime Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) in the region. ASEAN also welcomed US involvement in maritime security including marine environment protection in the region. In 2017, ASEAN-US dialogue will reach its 40th year.⁵²

European Union has initiated a four year plan called 'European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region' (SHARE) along with British Council and five other partners. Colin Crooks, Acting Head of the EU Delegation to Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and ASEAN mentioned that the prime idea behind SHARE is to share the EU experience on higher education including standard and quality with the educational institutions in ASEAN. Mr. Crook also said,

"The programme will contribute to the harmonisation of ASEAN higher education standards, support the mutual recognition of learning and, hence, promote mobility of students. It will support further development of the ASEAN Qualification Framework and Quality Assurance, strengthening the ASEAN Credit Transfer System and ASEAN-EU Credit Transfer System. Under these new Credit Transfer Systems, SHARE will provide 500 scholarships to create new opportunities for international learning, leading to life changing experiences for ASEAN students."⁵³

⁵² "ASEAN, U.S. Reaffirm Commitment to Bring Partnership to New Heights", *ASEAN Secretariat News*, May 8, 2015, at http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/asean-us-reaffirm-commitment-to-bring-partnership-to-new-heights?category_id=27.

⁵³ "ASEAN, European Union Start New Programme on Harmonisation of ASEAN Higher Education", *ASEAN Secretariat News*, May 6, 2015, at http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/asean-european-union-start-new-programme-on-harmonisation-of-asean-higher-education?category_id=27.

A forum was organised at Brunei International Convention Centre to create awareness on ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) with the theme of *Transforming Investment in Brunei Darussalam Through ACIA*. The forum had discussions on potential of ACIA and it can have deeper impact on Brunei and other ASEAN countries. The forum was followed by another meeting between the government officials on the same topic. The ASEAN Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam and World Trade Institute, University of Berne, Switzerland joined hands together to organise this event. This was the fourth ACIA Forum held in ASEAN region. The first three forums were held in Kuala Lumpur in 2013, Manila in 2014 and Jakarta in 2015.⁵⁴

The Republic of Korea (ROK) which established its mission to ASEAN in 2012 recently appointed H.E. Suh Jeong as ROK's ambassador to ASEAN. H.E Suh Jeong presented his Letter of Credence to ASEAN Secretary General Le Luong Minh on May 8. Since the establishment of ASEAN-ROK strategic partnership in 2010, the relationship between ROK and ASEAN has seen improvements. Amb. Suh expressed his country's desire to get involved in ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit. He also reiterated ROK's interest in assisting ASEAN to achieve the target towards ASEAN community building by the end of this year. The ASEAN-ROK Plan of Action (2016-2020) needs to be implemented fully, both sides reiterated.⁵⁵

An ASEAN-EU high-level dialogue was organised on maritime security cooperation in Jakarta on May 4-6 in Kuala Lumpur. This was the second ASEAN-EU high-level dialogue on maritime security cooperation and themed as *Developing Inter-Agency and Regional Cooperation*. Ahmad Ramili Nor, Chairman of Maritime Institute Malaysia, mentioned that mutual trust and bilateral cooperation between ASEAN and EU is important to increase maritime cooperation in the region. The territorial disputes on South China Sea islands also got importance during the discussions attended by scholars, diplomats, experts and officials from EU and ASEAN.⁵⁶

Southeast Asia

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Myanmar ethnic rebels' demand for more autonomy; Indonesian detained in Brunei for illegal possession of ammunition; Myanmar-Laos Friendship bridge opened; Singapore-Malaysia annual retreat held.**

After holding a six-day summit at Pansang, headquarters of United Wa State Army near Myanmar-China border, the ethnic leaders of Myanmar urged the government to amend the existing

⁵⁴ "Forum on ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement held in Brunei", *ASEAN Secretariat News*, May 7, 2015, at http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/forum-on-asean-comprehensive-investment-agreement-held-in-brunei?category_id=27.

⁵⁵ "New Ambassador of ROK Presents Credentials; Pledges to Strengthen ASEAN-ROK Relations", *ASEAN Secretariat News*, May 8, 2015, at http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/new-ambassador-of-rok-presents-credentials-pledged-to-strengthen-asean-rok-relations?category_id=27.

⁵⁶ "VN Attends ASEAN-EU Maritime Talks", *Vietnam News*, May 7, 2015, at <http://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/269939/vn-attends-asean-eu-maritime-talks.html>.

constitution and give more autonomy to the ethnic groups. They said this will facilitate finalisation of the peace deal between the government and ethnic groups, a draft of which has already been signed by 16 representatives from the ethnic groups and the government. While the rebels want more autonomy and federalism in the country, the government prefers a centralised system, as set by the 2008 Constitution. The statement released by the rebel leaders after the summit mentioned, "Only if the government agrees to our claim to amend the 2008 constitution, (bringing) democratisation, racial equality and the right to self-administration, can we stay together in a federal union". Fights between the military on the one hand and the Kokang, Ta'ang and Arakan armies on the other are simultaneous to the efforts for the nation-wide ceasefire agreement. Therefore, the demands for more autonomy on part of the ethnic rebels may complicate the situation more. The government of Myanmar has also denied allowing these three groups in the peace process and any statement by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) (the Kokang rebel group) has been banned from media reporting. In the summit that ended on May 6, the ethnic rebels demanded that MNDAA, the Ta'ang National Army and Arakan Army have to be included in the ceasefire process by the government.⁵⁷

Another source said that the government would consider including these three groups in the peace process.⁵⁸ A total of 12 ethnic groups participated in Pansang Summit namely the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO/KIA), Karen National Union (KNU), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Pa-Oh National Liberation Organisation (PNLO), New Mon-State Party (NMSP), Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP/SSA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), United Wa State Army, MNDAA, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Arakan Army. Only nine of these 12 groups are parts of the National Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) which are involved with the government appointed Union Peace-Making Working Committee for the nation-wide ceasefire agreement.

Rustawi Tomo Kabul, a 63 year-old Indonesian was detained by the Brunei Police while he was trying to transit via Brunei International Airport with alleged possession of ammunition and other dangerous staff. Rustawi, along with his wife and the leader of their pilgrimage group, were detained by the Brunei Police as they were travelling to Saudi Arabia to perform *Umrah*, a minor *haj* pilgrimage. Rustawi can be put in jail for a maximum period of 15 years with 12 strokes of whipping, if proven guilty. The Indonesian government and embassy in Brunei have indirect access to Rustawi and they will provide him with legal support. Brunei's law however does not allow disclosing the secret information relating to such cases to anybody. Brunei's National Intelligence Agency's preliminary reports suggest that Rustawi has no connection with any terrorist cell.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ferrie, Jared, "Myanmar Rebel Leaders Want Greater Autonomy Before Signing Ceasefire", *Reuters, Firstpost*, May 6, 2015, at <http://www.firstpost.com/world/myanmar-rebel-leaders-want-greater-autonomy-before-signing-ceasefire-reuters-2231588.html>

⁵⁸ Zin, Pyone Moh Moh and Ei, Khin Khin, "Myanmar Would Consider Summit Request to Include Ethnic Belligerents in Peace Talks", *Radio Free Asia*, April 30, 2015, at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/summit-04302015163654.html>.

⁵⁹ Salim, Tama, "Indonesian National Could Face 15 Years in Brunei Prison", *Jakarta Post*, May 9, 2015, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/05/09/indonesian-national-could-face-15-years-brunei-prison.html>.

Myanmar-Laos Friendship Bridge was officially opened in the presence of Myanmar President Thein Sein and his Laotian counterpart Choummaly Sayasone on May 9 at Tachileik, Shan State in Myanmar. The 691.6 meter long bridge construction work was started in 2013 and this is the first ever bridge on Mekong River that will connect Myanmar and Laos. Laos's foreign minister Thonglin Sisoulith mentioned that this bridge will increase cross-border trade between Myanmar and Laos as well as increase connectivity with many other nations including China, India and Bangladesh. Laos and Myanmar share 230 km of international border and both countries established diplomatic relations with each other in 1955.⁶⁰

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his Malaysian counterpart Najib Razak met in Singapore as the annual two-day retreat of the two leaders started with a dinner on May 4. This retreat is the sixth in sequence and the main agenda of the retreat was the high-speed railway between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. This year also marks the 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The rail terminus in Singapore will be located either at Jurong East or Tuas West or city centre. Malaysia will construct its terminus at Sungei Besi area, 3 km. away from Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia and Singapore announced about this high-speed railway connecting both the countries in 2013 and once materialised, this will enable the travellers to cross the distance in just about 90 minutes. The project is expected to be finished by 2020.⁶¹

Oceania

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Australia recalled its Ambassador from Indonesia over the execution issue; Fijian Prime Minister wants a PIF free of Australia and New Zealand's influence.**

After the execution of Andrew Chan, in infamous Bali Nine case, Indonesia announced that it wants to pursue normalcy in its relationship with Canberra. However, Indonesia also announced that it is not concerned with the fact that Australia may cut down its aid towards Indonesia in consequence of the execution of its national. Indonesian foreign ministry spokesperson, Arrmanatha Nasir said that Indonesia does not need foreign aid and any aid by Australia to Jakarta is an attempt on their part to enhance partnership between the two countries. In the meantime, Australia has recalled its ambassador to Indonesia to discuss the implications of the execution on the future bilateral relations between Jakarta and Canberra. It signals a strong displeasure on part of Australia. Australia had tried vigorously to avoid execution of its national (for drug trafficking) in Indonesia; but, the later did not pay any attention to it. However, a poll conducted by the Lowy Institute for International Policy showed that most of the Australians are in favour of maintaining standard relationship with Indonesia.⁶²

⁶⁰ "Myanmar, Laos Open First Friendship Bridge", *Xinhua Net*, May 9, 2015, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-05/09/c_134224520.htm.

⁶¹ Chang, Rachel, "Singapore-Malaysia Leaders' Retreat Begins with Dinner", *The Straits Times*, May 5, 2015, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/singapore/more-singapore-stories/story/singapore-malaysia-leaders-retreat-begins-dinner-2015050>.

⁶² "Indonesia Wants To 'Look Ahead' And Cooperate with Australia after Bali Nine", *The Guardian*, May 7, 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/07/bali-nine-indonesia-wants-to-look-ahead-and-cooperate-with-australia-after-bali-nine>.

Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama continues his diplomatic battle with Australia and New Zealand. Earlier, Mr. Bainimarama announced that his country would not renew its membership in Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), as the forum is under strong influence of Australia and New Zealand, which are not even island countries and should serve as development partners in PIF. He also intended to form a new group of countries. However, recently, Mr. Bainimarama has slightly changed his position as he announced that Fiji will participate in the forum activities; but, he will not attend the leaders' summit at PIF until and unless Australia and New Zealand's memberships are suspended from the grouping. He said the Pacific Island countries are at the receiving end of Australia's industrial policy causing much change in the climate in the region. Some argue that Frank Bainimarama's recent demands are consequence of PIF's strong action against Fiji in the face of coup in 2006. But the Fijian prime minister denied this allegation. Australia and New Zealand are the largest members of the PIF in terms of economic power.⁶³

D. Russia

National

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Top ranking law enforcement officers have been dismissed; State Duma committee drafting proposals on updates to National Security Strategy; Russia's Strategic Missile Forces to get new division with railway-based missile system.**

President Vladimir Putin has, on May 8, dismissed a number of top-ranking officers of the Russian Interior Ministry, Emergencies Ministry, the Investigations Committee and the Federal Service for Drug Control.⁶⁴

State Duma committee for security and counteraction to corruption is drafting proposals for the Russian Security Council in order to update the National Security Strategy through to 2020. The rise of new threats to the country's security in the field of information, foodstuffs, biology and technologies has been given as the reasons for this move.⁶⁵

The combat strength of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces at the turn of 2019-2020 will be increased to 13 missile divisions by means of creating a joint formation with the Barguzin rail-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile systems. According to previous reports, a Barguzin battalion set is planned to comprise five missile regiments, each of which will be armed with six RS-24 Yars-

⁶³ Fox, Liam, "Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama To Shun Pacific Island Forum Over 'Undue Influence' of Australia, NZ", *News XX*, May 6, 2015, at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-06/fiji-prime-minister-frank-bainimarama-slams-australia2c-new-ze/6449514>.

⁶⁴ "Putin Dismisses Top-Ranking Law-Enforcement Officials", *Itar-Tass*, May 8, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/793750>

⁶⁵ "State Duma Committee Drafting Proposals On Updates in National Security Strategy", *Itar-Tass*, May 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/793333>

based intercontinental ballistic missiles. The new systems are expected to become operational no earlier than 2018 and will remain in service until at least 2040. Former Chief of the Strategic Missile Forces General Staff Viktor Yesin said previously that the creation of Barguzin was Russia's response to the deployment of the American global missile defence system. Barguzin's predecessors - Soviet rail-mobile missile systems - were removed from service in 2005. The New START Treaty does not ban the creation of such weapons.⁶⁶

International

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Russia celebrates 'Victory Day'; Russia and China sign key agreements during the visit of Xi Jinping to Moscow; Russia-China radio electronics cooperation helps bypass Western sanctions; Putin and UN Secretary general discuss UN role in resolving the Ukrainian conflict; Foreign ministers of Russia and Austria discuss bilateral and international issues; Putin urges Western countries to build global security system on non-aligned basis; Years of youth exchanges between Russia and Germany will be held in 2015; Putin says he is content with the progress of Eurasian integration project; Gazprom to start production of gas in Bolivia from 2016; Russia and Cuba discuss projects on energy, transport and healthcare; Russian and US foreign ministers discuss global and bilateral issues.**

Russia has celebrated the 70th anniversary of Soviet Union's victory over Germany in Second World War throughout the country on May 9 with the largest ever military parade in Russia's history being organised in Moscow's Red Square. It involved a contingent of 16,000 military servicemen, 194 units of military hardware and 143 combat aircraft. Military units from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, India, Mongolia, Serbia and China also participated in the parade. On the same day, Russian President Putin held discussions with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Presidents of India, Mongolia, Vietnam, Czech Republic, South Africa and Egypt.⁶⁷

Russian President Putin has held talk with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Moscow on May 8. The talks concluded with the adoption of a joint declaration on deepening comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation and promoting mutually advantageous ties, and also a joint declaration on cooperation in coordinating development of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt. Mr Putin and Mr Xi witnessed the signing of a substantial package of bilateral documents. These include documents on reciprocal operation of the Chinese BeiDou and Russian GLONASS navigation systems, cooperation on exchange of data from remote Earth probes, a project on a cutting-edge heavy helicopter, and cooperation in ensuring international information security. In the transport sector, agreements were signed on forms of cooperation and financing models for the Moscow-Kazan high-speed rail link, the Moscow-Beijing Eurasian high-speed transport corridor priority project, and projects to build a railway linking

⁶⁶ "Russia's Strategic Missile Forces To Get New Division With Railway-Based Missile System", *Itar-Tass*, May 7, 2015 <http://tass.ru/en/russia/793389>

⁶⁷ "Putin To Hold Talks with UN Chief; Indian, Vietnamese, Egyptian, Czech Presidents", *Itar-Tass*, May 9, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/793837>

Elegest, Kyzyl and Kuragino to the Far East port. In the financial sector, agreements were signed on expanding Chinese banks' possibilities for extending credit lines to Russian companies and on avoiding double taxation. The China Development Bank and Russia's Sberbank and Vnesheconombank and the Chinese Export-Import Bank signed agreements on providing credit lines. Russia's Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation signed an agreement on the basic conditions for gas supplies from Russia to China via the western route, and Polyus Zoloto and China National Gold Group Corporation signed a cooperation agreement. Other agreements include, promoting the Russian Sukhoi Superjet-100 plane on the Chinese market, strategic cooperation between Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation, cooperation between Rosseti and China's State Grid Corporation to establish a joint enterprise to carry out electricity grid projects, and a cooperation agreement between RusHydro and the Three Gorges Corporation. Vnesheconombank and China Development Bank signed a framework agreement on cooperation in joint support for developing the Far East. VTB Bank signed a cooperation agreement with Chinese export credit insurance corporation Sinosure, an agreement with China Development Bank on opening a credit line to finance trade operations between China and Russia, and an agreement with China Export-Import Bank on opening a credit line worth 3 billion yuan. Russia's MTS and China Development Bank also signed an agreement on opening a credit line in the yuan and rouble currencies for a total amount equivalent to \$200 million. Other agreements concern implementation of a project to produce electrolytic metallic manganese for producing special steels using ore from the Usinsky field, inter-regional cooperation in the timber industry, trade, finance, and investment, cooperation between Roselektronika and ZTE Corporation, as well as cooperation between Yug Energo and China Export-Import Bank and China National Chemical Engineering Company. A memorandum of intention on science and technology cooperation was signed between United Shipbuilding Corporation and Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd.⁶⁸

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has said, on May 8, that sanctions against the Russian electronic industry have lost sense after Russia and China launched cooperation in this sphere especially over development of receivers that are necessary for navigation systems. Referring to other projects, Rogozin said that China is interested in the supplies of Russian space engines for Chinese outer space exploration programmes. He added that Russia was ready to demonstrate working of a floating nuclear power plant to China since Moscow remains interested in constructing floating heat and power plants.⁶⁹

President Putin has held discussions, on May 9 in Moscow, with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on steps needed to resolve the Ukrainian conflict. The press release stated that 'the Secretary-General and President Putin discussed in depth the way forward on Ukraine, with both agreeing that full and good faith implementation by all sides of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk agreements' presented the best opportunity to bring forth a peaceful resolution to the conflict'. The two leaders also discussed the political process on Syria, Russia's contribution to peacekeeping and climate change.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Russian-Chinese Talks", *President of Russia*, May 8, 2015 at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49430>

⁶⁹ "Russia-China Radio Electronics Cooperation Help Bypass Sanctions — Deputy PM", *Itar-Tass*, May 8, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/793743>

⁷⁰ "UN Chief, Putin Discuss UN Role In Ukrainian Crisis Settlement", *Itar-Tass*, May 10, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/793920>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has met with his Austrian counterpart Sebastian Kurz in Moscow on May 5 wherein they discussed bilateral and international issues and anti-Russian sanctions. The Russian foreign ministry in a statement noted that 'Austria is among the opponents of long-term confrontation with Russia increasing sanctions pressure'.⁷¹

Russian President Vladimir Putin has, on May 10, urged, Western countries to 'build a system of global security on a non-aligned basis, on the basis of ensuring an equal approach for promoting security of all parties to international dialogue, to abandon the phobias of the past and look forward to the future.' He was commenting on a question about the apprehensions of a number of countries about the security system proposed by Russia.⁷²

After his talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, held on May 10, 2015 in Moscow, Russian President Putin has said that Years of Youth Exchanges between Russia and Germany will be held in 2016. He was quoted as saying 'a chill in bilateral relations has put on hold business relations but there are areas, which continue to develop. One of such areas is interregional cooperation'. He added that 23 Russian regions were maintaining stable relations with Germany's 13 states. A large-scale conference of twin cities is expected to be held in Germany in late June.⁷³

President Putin has expressed satisfaction at the progress of the Eurasian Economic Union project. He was quoted as saying 'it is important that all participants in the Eurasian Union have the desire for more profound integration, and closer trade and economic ties will undoubtedly contribute to further social and economic development of our countries, strengthen the competitiveness of our association and finally ensure the growth of well-being of our countries' population. Eurasian integration is proving its efficiency. Mutual trade of its participants has grown by almost \$20 billion, infrastructure has improved and the share of goods with high added value has increased while the proportion of raw materials has fallen considerably, from 40 per cent to 28 per cent.⁷⁴ In a separate development, Presidents of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia have signed, on May 8, documents on Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union. Fifteen decisions were also approved during the meeting. This includes agreements on Free Trade Agreement between the EAEU and Vietnam and initiation of talks on economic cooperation with China. Other agreements signed were EAEU common electricity market concept and phased liberalization of motor freight transportation in the EAEU for 2016-2025.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Foreign Ministers Of Russia, Austria To Discuss Bilateral And International Issues", *Itar-Tass*, May 5, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/792876>

⁷² "Putin Urges Western Countries To Build Global Security System On Non-Aligned Basis", *Itar-Tass*, May 10, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/794020>

⁷³ "Putin: Years Of Youth Exchanges Between Russia And Germany To Be Held in 2015", *Itar-Tass*, May 10, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/794008>

⁷⁴ "Putin Content With Eurasian Integration Project Advancing As Scheduled", *Itar-Tass*, May 8, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/793780>

⁷⁵ "Documents on Kyrgyzstan's Accession to the EEU Agreement Signed", *Itar-Tass*, May 8, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/793792>

The EAEU leaders also resolved to hold the next summit meeting of the Union in Kazakhstan's capital Astana in October.

Gazprom is planning to start production in Bolivia at Ipati and Aquio gas fields from 2016 onwards. At present the construction of the first phase of a complex gas treatment plant with a capacity of 6.5 million cubic meters per day is in progress. This is projected to be increased to 19.5 million cubic meters per day. Bolivia's natural gas reserves are the third largest in Latin America after Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago. Proven gas reserves are estimated to be around 296 billion cubic meters. Gazprom acquired the stake in Ipati and Aquio Blocks under the farm-out agreement with Total in 2010.⁷⁶

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Cuban President Raul Castro have discussed energy, transportation and healthcare projects during their meeting that was held in Moscow on May 6.⁷⁷

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had a telephone conversation on May 5 wherein they discussed 'tasks to promote settlement in Syria and Yemen, certain aspects of the situation in Donbas in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, as well as separate issues of bilateral relations'. The conversation was requested by the American side.⁷⁸

India-Russia Relations

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **President Pranab Mukherjee participates in Victory Day celebrations in Moscow; Refurbished Russian Ka-31 helicopters delivered to India; Russia plans joint Arctic oil and gas projects with India.**

Indian President Pranab Mukerjee has paid a 5 day visit from May 7-11 to Russia wherein he participated in the Victory Day celebrations. For the first time ever, an Indian Army contingent from the Grenadiers took part in the military parade held on 9th May in the Red Square in Moscow. In his key note address at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, the Indian President spoke about the importance that India attaches to ties with Russia. Some excerpts from the speech are 'India values her close and extensive cooperation with Russia in defence, nuclear energy and security. Russia is and will remain our most important defence partner. It is also a key partner for our energy security, building on its leading role in the development of nuclear power generation in India. There are evident complementarities that underlie our cooperation in hydrocarbons'..... 'India-Russia relations, shaped as they are by our respective historical experiences, cultural affinities, political convergences and economic opportunities, will not be affected by winds of transient global political trends. Russia has been a pillar of strength at difficult moments in India's

⁷⁶ "Gazprom Expects To Start Production in Bolivia in Q1 of 2016", *Itar-Tass*, May 5, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/economy/793031>

⁷⁷ "Medvedev, Castro To Discuss Projects In Energy, Transport, Healthcare", *Itar-Tass*, May 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/russia/793137>

⁷⁸ "Lavrov, Kerry Discuss Situations in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen — Russian Foreign Ministry", *Itar-Tass*, May 6, 2015 at <http://tass.ru/en/world/793120>

history. You have contributed to India's development, growth and security. India will always reciprocate this support. Across Indian society and the spectrum of its political structures, there is unanimity that friendship with Russia is an important pillar of India's foreign policy'. An agreement in science and technology was signed by the Department of Science and Technology and the Russian Science Foundation apart from eight MoUs between higher education institutions of the two countries. A biennial cultural Festival of India in Russia 'Namaste Russia' was inaugurated as well.⁷⁹

The Russian Helicopters Holding Company, part of the Rostec State Corporation, has delivered the first batch of refurbished Ka-31 helicopters to India, manufactured by the Kumertauskoye Aviation Production Enterprise (KumAPP). A total of 14 Ka-31 helicopters were manufactured for India. To service these machines, a special base was built in the state of Goa. Every year, experts from KumAPP come to India to service these helicopters.⁸⁰

Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov has said, on May 6, that Moscow plans to invite companies from India to jointly extract oil and gas from Russia's Arctic shelf deposits. In 2014, Russia's state-controlled oil company Rosneft had signed a memorandum of understanding with India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation.⁸¹

E. Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Gulf

Iran

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Khamenei says we will not negotiate under 'spectre of threats'; Rouhani urges expansion of Tehran-New Delhi ties; Iran says piping gas to Europe not its priority.**

During his speech on May 6, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei responded to comments by US officials about the possibility of a military confrontation should the nuclear negotiations between Iran and members of the UN Security Council fail. The comments were some of the harshest yet by the supreme leader, who has the final say on the nuclear programme. "I've repeatedly spoken about the nuclear talks. What we've needed to say we've said, but everyone should pay attention – our Foreign Ministry officials, various officials, the elite of society: If a nation cannot defend its identity and greatness against foreigners, certainly it will be struck. There is no return; it has to know the value of its character," Khamenei said.⁸²

⁷⁹ "Keynote Address of the President at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, Moscow (May 08, 2015)", *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*, May 8, 2015 at <http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25212>

⁸⁰ "Refurbished Russian Ka-31 Helicopters Delivered To India", *Russia and India Report*, May 7, 2015 at http://in.rbth.com/economics/2015/05/07/refurbished_russian_ka-31_helicopters_delivered_to_india_42993.html

⁸¹ "Russia Plans Joint Arctic Shelf Oil, Gas Projects With India – Kremlin Aide", *Sputnik*, May 6, 2015 at <http://sputniknews.com/business/20150506/1021779704.html#ixzz3ZuOyw4if>

⁸² Karami, Arash, "Khamenei: We will Not Negotiate Under 'Spectre Of Threats'", *Al-Monitor*, May 6, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/iran-khamenei-nuclear-threats-us-officials.html>

In a meeting with Indian Minister of Shipping, Road Transport, and Highways Nitin Gadkari in Tehran, Rouhani hailed the friendly and historical relations between the two nations, saying that bilateral ties would definitely increase every day. The Iranian president urged the expansion of trade exchange between the two countries, saying that the economies of Iran and India can complete each other. He also referred to the Iran-India joint project to develop Chabahar port in south-eastern Iran, and described it as the opening of a new chapter in bilateral relations.⁸³

Iran's Petroleum Minister Bijan Zangeneh said the priority for Iran at the current juncture is to export gas to Asia. Zangeneh - who on a visit to Germany to discuss energy issues - said gas prices are too low in Europe, adding that transporting gas there from Iran faces legal obstacles and costly fees. He further said another option for Iran's gas - liquefying it and exporting by ship - had been set back by sanctions, which prevented western technology from reaching his country.⁸⁴

Iraq and Syria

(May 4-10, 2015)

● Scores killed after Iraq prison break; Suicide attacks on Iraqi Shiite Mosques kill 22 worshippers; US begins training Syrian rebels to fight ISIL group.

Scores of prisoners have been killed during a jail break organised by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) armed group in eastern Iraq, in which 40 inmates managed to escape, officials have said. Police officials said that at least 50 inmates and 12 police officers were killed at the Al-Khalis prison during a riot. There were conflicting accounts over the cause of the incident in the Diyala province. In a statement carried on pro-ISIL websites, the local chapter of the armed group claimed a completely different account of the incident, describing it as a coordinated operation involving the use of multiple explosives outside the prison. The statement claimed that 30 ISIL members were among those who escaped.⁸⁵

Militants in Iraq carried out a series of suicide attacks, hitting Shiite mosques in the country's northeast and killing at least 22 worshippers. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombings but they bore the hallmarks of the Islamic State extremist group, which has carried near-daily attacks — along with other Sunni militant groups — against the Shiite majority, Iraqi officials and security forces. The IS considers Shiites heretics and has, since last year, captured large chunks of territory in western and northern Iraq, plunging the country into its worst crisis since U.S. troops left at the end of 2011.⁸⁶

⁸³ "Rouhani Urges Expansion of Tehran-New Delhi Ties", *Tehran Times*, May 7, 2015 http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=246565

⁸⁴ "Iran Says Piping Gas To Europe Not Its Priority", *Presstv*, May 9, 2015 <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/05/09/410243/Iran-Zangeneh-gas-Europe-Russia-Putin-Moscow-nuclear-sanctions-talks-nuclear-talks-nuclear-deal-nuclear-agreement-Zarif-Kerry-Obama-Rouhani-senate-congress-p51-UNSC-geneva-New-York-UN-US-Iran>

⁸⁵ "Scores Killed After Iraq Prison Break", *Aljazeera*, May 10, 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/150509095103216.html>

⁸⁶ "Suicide Attacks on Iraqi Shiite Mosques Kill 22 Worshippers", *ABC News*, May 8, 2015 <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iraq-double-suicide-bombing-kills-12-worshippers-30896595>

The United States has begun training moderate Syrian rebels as part of an effort to build a force capable of fighting against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group. Ash Carter, the US defence secretary, said that the US military had begun training around 90 Syrian fighters in Jordan. "Combat training has begun for a company-sized group from the new Syrian forces," Carter told reporters. "This programme is critical and a complex part of our counter-ISIL efforts."⁸⁷

The Gulf

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Gulf: Houthis accept Riyadh's five-day truce in Yemen.**

Houthis accepted a five-day humanitarian ceasefire proposed by their adversary Saudi Arabia but said they would respond to any violations, according to *Reuter's* news agency. On May 8, Saudi Arabia had said that the ceasefire could begin on May 12 if the Houthi militia agreed to the pause, which would let in badly needed food and medical supplies. Colonel Sharaf Luqman, spokesperson for the Houthi-allied army, said that Yemeni forces agreed to the truce but would confront any attacks by President Abdrabbu Mansour Hadi loyalists on battlefronts which stretch across much of the impoverished country.⁸⁸

F. The United State of America

National

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **US tightens security at military bases; US lawmakers worry over IS social media success; Carter lauds choice of Dunford, Selva for top posts; Carter urges senators to support stable defence budget; Dempsey: U.S. aspirations exceeding DoD's resources; Hillary Clinton appears holding steady in Presidential polls; Obama salutes 'greatest generation' on V-E Day anniversary; Thousands attend funeral of slain New York policeman; UN shines spotlight on US rights record; US appeals court finds NSA phone record gathering 'excessive'; How effective are US rewards for information on terrorists?**

The U.S. military has increased security at bases across the country, after the FBI expressed concern that Islamist militants could target troops or police officers. The U.S. Northern Command said the move was due to "recent events" but stressed that the "change is not tied to a specific, credible threat." The command also said it shares FBI concerns about "potential threat posed by home-

⁸⁷ "US Begins Training Syrian Rebels To Fight ISIL Group" , *Aljazeera* , May 7 , 2015 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/begins-training-syrian-rebels-fight-isil-group-150507210127041.html>

⁸⁸ "Houthis Accept Riyadh's Five-Day Truce in Yemen" , *Alarabia* , May 10 , 2015 <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/05/10/Houthis-accept-Saudi-five-day-truce-in-Yemen-.html>

grown violent extremists." On May 7, FBI Director James Comey said there might be thousands of Islamic State (IS) followers online in the U.S.⁸⁹

FBI Director Comey also pointed out that setbacks on the battlefield seem to be doing little to dent the success the Islamic State (IS) is having in the world of social media. Comey said, "Hundreds, maybe thousands of people across the country who are receiving recruitment overtures from the terrorist group or directives to attack the United States". And that's prompting a new outcry from U.S. lawmakers, who say Washington's online strategy is off-base.⁹⁰

The officers selected by President Barack Obama to serve as the next chairman and vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are "exemplary leaders," Defence Secretary Ash Carter said on May 5. Obama announced on May 5 that he will nominate Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. to be the 19th chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Air Force Gen. Paul J. Selva, commander of U.S. Transportation Command, to serve as the 10th vice chairman. They will succeed Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey and Navy Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr., respectively, if the Senate confirms their nominations. In a statement released after the president's announcement, Carter noted that Dunford has been an infantry officer at every level and that Selva has been an innovator throughout his career.⁹¹

Slashed budgets and high worldwide demand for U.S. military forces have created an unbalanced defence programme that is taking on increasingly greater risks, Defence Secretary Ash Carter told a Senate panel on May 6. The secretary testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee's defence subcommittee on the Defence Department's fiscal year 2016 budget request. Joining him was Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Over the past three fiscal years the Defence Department has taken more than three-quarters of a trillion dollars in cuts to its future-years defence spending," Carter said. The frequently sudden and unpredictable timing and nature of the cuts and continued uncertainty over sequestration have made the stresses greater, he added, forcing DoD to make a series of incremental, inefficient decisions.⁹²

America's global aspirations "are exceeding our available resources," the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told Congress on May 6. At a hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee's defence subcommittee, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said the world is in the most uncertain global security environment he has seen in his 40 years of service. The military understands it must make fundamental changes to get costs under control, the general said. Still, he added, that cannot take second seat to protecting the nation. Dempsey told the senators he believes President

⁸⁹ "US Tightens Security at Military Bases", *VOA News*, May 8, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-tightens-security-at-military-bases/2760073.html>

⁹⁰ Seldin, Jeff, "US Lawmakers Worry Over IS Social Media Success", *VOA News*, May 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-lawmakers-worry-over-is-social-media-success/2759661.html>

⁹¹ "Carter Lauds Choice of Dunford, Selva for Top Posts", *DoD News*, May 5, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128735>

⁹² Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter Urges Senators to Support Stable Defence Budget", *DoD News*, May 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128748>

Barack Obama's fiscal year 2016 budget request does fund today's readiness and ensures the resources needed for the future.⁹³

It has been a challenging few months for Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, but the latest polls suggest she has weathered the storm for now, at least among Democrats. Polls by *the Wall Street Journal*/NBC News and the *New York Times*/CBS News show that Clinton's trustworthiness has taken a hit following the controversy over her use of a private email account as secretary of state and questions about the fundraising practices of the Clinton Foundation. But the surveys also suggest that the controversies have not cost Clinton support among Democrats and she remains the prohibitive favourite for the Democratic Party nomination. Her only official challenger at the moment is Vermont independent Senator Bernie Sanders.⁹⁴

"The world rejoiced in the hope of peace" upon the Allies' acceptance of the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany's armed forces during World War II, President Barack Obama said on May 8, marking the 70th anniversary of the victory in Europe during his weekly address. "On V-E Day, after the Nazi surrender, people swarmed the streets of London and Paris and Moscow, and the cloud of fear that had hung for so many years finally lifted," Obama said in his address. "Here at home, from small towns to Times Square, crowds gathered in celebration, singing and dancing with joy. "There would still be three more months of deadly fighting in the Pacific," he continued. "But for a few hours, the world rejoiced in the hope of peace." Those who served to secure Allied victory during World War II, the president said, also included the "women who stepped up in unprecedented numbers, manning the home front, and — like my grandmother — building bombers on assembly lines."⁹⁵

Thousands of police officers from around the United States attended the funeral on May 8 of a New York City police officer who was killed on patrol, making him the third officer killed in the city since December. Police arrived from all parts of the country to show their solidarity during a time of strong scrutiny of police departments around the nation, following the death of a number of unarmed black men at the hands of officers. Security was heavy for the funeral of Brian Moore, which took place at a Catholic Church on Long Island, 60 kilometres east of Manhattan. The 25-year-old policeman died on May 4, two days after he was shot in Queens while trying to question a man during a patrol. Moore, who had followed his father and uncle into the NYPD, was promoted posthumously to the rank of detective.⁹⁶

A country that considers itself a human rights champion will have its record reviewed by the United Nations on May 11. The United States will experience the Universal Periodic Review that all 193 U.N. member countries must undergo every four years. The U.S. is likely to face tough

⁹³ Garamone, Jim, "Dempsey: U.S. Aspirations Exceeding DoD's Resources", *DoD News*, May 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128750>

⁹⁴ Malone, Jim, "Clinton Appears Holding Steady in Presidential Polls", *VOA News*, May 8, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/clinton-appears-holdin-gsteady-in-presidential-polls-/2759949.html>

⁹⁵ "Obama Salutes 'Greatest Generation' on V-E Day Anniversary", *DoD News*, May 8, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128767>

⁹⁶ "Thousands Attend Funeral of Slain New York Policeman", *VOA News*, May 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/thousands-attend-funeral-slain-new-york-policeman/2760366.html>

scrutiny in Geneva, including questions about the recent string of police killings of unarmed African-American men. Other issues likely to emerge in the meeting include the widespread incarceration of illegal immigrants, including children, as well as conditions in U.S. prisons, including long-term solitary confinement and the continued use of the death penalty. The mass surveillance U.S. citizens have been subjected to in recent years will undoubtedly come up for discussion, too. The so-called "U.S. Patriot Act," under which many of the surveillance activities have taken place, is up for debate in Congress ahead of a June first deadline for renewal. Washington's legacy from the "war on terror" – alleged CIA torture and the failure to close the Guantanamo Bay detention centre in Cuba – will also likely be examined.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, a U.S. appeals court in New York ruled on May 7 that the clandestine National Security Agency's massive collection of phone records of Americans is illegal, far exceeding the scope of what Congress authorized. "Congress cannot reasonably be said to have ratified a programme of which many members of Congress - and all members of the public - were not aware," a three-judge panel of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals said in a 97-page opinion. The decision came in a suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) contesting the NSA's collection of what the spy agency calls "metadata" — millions of records of phone calls, including the numbers called and the times the calls were made, although not the content of the calls. The surveillance was unknown to almost all Americans until two years ago when former NSA contractor Edward Snowden leaked a trove of documents about NSA spying before he fled overseas, eventually to asylum in Russia.⁹⁸

Twenty million dollars — that is the latest total of the rewards being offered by the U.S. State Department to anyone who mails, emails or calls in information on four Islamic State commanders leading operations in Iraq and Syria. Information on Abd al-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli, an al-Qaida in Iraq leader before leading the Islamic State, is worth \$7 million. Rewards for Abu Mohammed al-Adnani and Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili are \$5 million each. And information on the whereabouts of Tariq Bin-al-Tahar Bin al Falih al-'Awni al-Harzi is worth \$3 million. The State Department's Rewards for Justice programme is not a kill list. It is a list used to capture and prosecute terrorists. But how can such captures be made? Even if the objective of the State Department's programme is not to kill those it identifies, Roggio said, the reality is that it looks like a kill list from a CIA and Special Operations forces perspective. The State Department says that since the programme started in 1984, it has paid more than \$125 million to more than 80 people who provided "actionable information" that put terrorists behind bars or prevented acts of terrorism.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ "UN Shines Spotlight on US Rights Record", *VOA News*, May 10, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/un-us-human-rights/2761792.html>

⁹⁸ Bredemeier, Ken and Bowman, Michael, "US Appeals Court Finds NSA Phone Record Gathering 'Excessive'", May 7, 2015, *VOA News*, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-appeals-court-finds-nsa-phone-record-gathering-excessive/2753756.html>

⁹⁹ Behn, Sharon, "How Effective Are US Rewards for Information on Terrorists?", *VOA News*, May 06, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/how-effective-united-states-rewards-information-terrorists/2753194.html>

International: Asia

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **US Inspector: Weak data hurting Afghan reconstruction; Pakistan urges Afghanistan's Taliban to join in peace talks; U.S. aircraft land in Nepal to assist earthquake recovery; Joint Task Force activates for Nepal earthquake relief; US effort in Nepal shifts from rescue to relief; US Senate approves congressional review of Iran nuclear deal; Carter: Combat training begins for new Syrian forces; Chairman: U.S. Stands Ready After Iranian Waterway Actions; Date set for 'pause' in Yemen fighting; US expresses concern over Myanmar religious bills; US calls for speedy inquiry into Thai mass grave; DoD releases military, security developments in China report.**

A U.S. government oversight official has again expressed concern about the absence of accurate information about how many personnel are serving in Afghanistan's army and police, warning it makes it difficult for Afghan military leaders and their American advisers to clearly determine the strength and capabilities of national security forces. John Sopko, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, is digging out facts and identifying weaknesses, failures, uncertainties, corrupt acts and delusions connected to the more than \$100 billion the United States has committed to rebuilding and developing Afghanistan. In a speech on May 6 at Weill Cornell College of Medicine in New York, Sopko said that sorting "fact from fantasy" in Afghanistan can be a challenge.¹⁰⁰

Pakistan has urged Afghanistan's Taliban to cease its annual spring offensive and instead engage in peace talks with the Kabul government. The statement to VOA by a top Pakistani official comes as Afghan and Taliban officials together with other stakeholders have gathered in Qatar for an unofficial dialogue. Representatives of the Taliban-led warring factions, government peace negotiators and Afghan peace activists are among the delegates attending the two-day "open discussions" in Qatar's capital, Doha. Pakistan has long been accused of fuelling the insurgency in Afghanistan by secretly supporting the Taliban and allowing it to use Pakistani territory for planning and executing its attacks against Afghan government installations and U.S.-led foreign forces.¹⁰¹

U.S. military aircraft landed in Kathmandu, Nepal, on May 3 to assist in recovery efforts following a magnitude 7.8 earthquake that struck there April 25, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters on May 4. The Defence Department's primary contribution to the recovery work involves rotary-wing assets, Warren said. Five U.S. Marine Corps aircraft — a UH-1Y Huey helicopter and four MV-22 Ospreys, began arriving in Nepal on May 3rd morning, he said. "These aircraft will help emergency responders access [Nepal's] remote areas, which are home to the earthquake's poorest and most vulnerable [people]," Warren said.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Gul, Ayaz, "US Inspector: Weak Data Hurting Afghan Reconstruction", *VOA News*, May 06, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-inspector-general-afghanistan-reconstruction-sigar/2752519.html>

¹⁰¹ Gul, Ayaz, and Hunter, Bruce, "Pakistan Urges Afghanistan's Taliban to Join in Peace Talks", *VOA News*, May 3, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/pakistan-urges-afghanistans-taliban-to-engage-in-peace-talks/2746520.html>

¹⁰² Cronk, Terri Moon, "U.S. Aircraft Land in Nepal to Assist Earthquake Recovery", *DoD News*, May 4, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128728>

Joint Task Force 505 has been activated to support the government of Nepal by conducting humanitarian disaster relief operations to limit further loss of life and suffering in response to the devastating earthquake that struck central Nepal on April 25. Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III, commander of U.S. Pacific Command, has designated Marine Corps Lt. Gen. John Wissler, commanding general of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force, as the joint task force's commander, effective on May 6.¹⁰³

Peter W. Bodde, the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal, said in Kathmandu on May 5 that America was now shifting focus in relief efforts more than a week after the country was struck by the worst earthquake in 80 years. The Himalayan nation has asked foreign countries to wrap up search and rescue operations 10 days after the devastating April 25 quake that killed more than 7,500 people and injured at least 14,500 people. Nepal now needs help keeping the survivors alive and rebuilding. Ambassador Bodde said the U.S. was acting in close cooperation with the Nepalese government and other donors. Many countries have pledged money that will be necessary to rebuild homes, hospitals and historic buildings.¹⁰⁴

The U.S. Senate has approved legislation giving Congress the right to review, and possibly reject, any eventual international agreement aimed at restraining Iran's nuclear development programme. The Senate voted 98 to 1 for the measure, which now heads to the House of Representatives, where it could be considered next week. President Barack Obama at first opposed congressional review of the pact the United States and five other world powers are negotiating with Tehran to limit its ability to develop a nuclear weapon. But he has said he will sign the current bill if Congress gives its final approval. The legislation would give Congress 30 days to review the pact, and if it decides to, reject it. Republican Senator Bob Corker, who co-authored the bill, praised passage of the legislation.¹⁰⁵

Defence Secretary Ash Carter announced on May 7 that combat training has begun for nearly 90 fighters from the new Syrian forces and that a second group will begin training in the next few weeks. Carter spoke alongside Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey during a briefing to the Pentagon press corps in Washington. "The programme is a critical and complex part of our counter-ISIL efforts," Carter said, referring to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The training for what the secretary called "highly vetted individuals" is led by very experienced trainers and taking place in a secure location, he said.¹⁰⁶

While the Strait of Hormuz appears calm in the aftermath of two reported Iranian acts of aggression toward commercial ships, U.S. military resources can respond quickly, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said in a press briefing with Defence Secretary Ash Carter

¹⁰³ "Joint Task Force Activates for Nepal Earthquake Relief", *DoD News*, May 6, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128744>

¹⁰⁴ "US Effort in Nepal Shifts from Rescue to Relief", Reuters, *VOA News*, May 5, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-effort-in-nepal-shifts-from-rescue-to-relief/2750063.html>

¹⁰⁵ Bowman, Michael, "US Senate Approves Congressional Review of Iran Nuclear Deal", *VOA News*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-senate-approves-congressional-review-of-iran-nuclear-deal/2754203.html>

¹⁰⁶ Pellerin, Cheryl, "Carter: Combat Training Begins for New Syrian Forces", *DoD News*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128760>

in Washington on May 7. U.S. Navy ships began accompanying U.S.- and British-flagged commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz after four Iranian navy patrol boats approached a U.S.-flagged merchant ship, April 24, and a Marshall Islands-flagged cargo ship, April 29. Both incidents were reported as acts of aggression, officials said. "The government of Iran stated [it acted] to resolve a long-standing financial dispute," Dempsey said in the briefing. "There was reason to believe that was true." While the strait is part of Iranian territorial water, it also contains internationally recognized commercial shipping lanes, DoD officials said.¹⁰⁷

The United States and Saudi Arabia have announced a May 12 start date for a five-day humanitarian pause in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is waging an air campaign against advancing Houthi rebels. The conflict has left thousands of people in Yemen in need of basic supplies. Secretary of State John Kerry and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al Jubeir announced the plan at a news conference in Paris. The humanitarian pause would take effect at 11 pm Yemen time on May 12. Kerry urged the entities that support the Houthis to encourage the rebels to accept the pause. The Shi'ite rebels are allied with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and are believed to be backed by Iran.¹⁰⁸

The United States has expressed concern over four proposed religious bills in Myanmar, which critics say could be used against religious minorities. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken "raised concerns regarding the four draft bills" during a meeting in Washington on May 4 with the speaker of Myanmar's parliament, Shwe Mann, according to State Department spokesperson Jeff Rathke. The Myanmar government last year submitted four bills covering marriage, religious conversions, monogamy, and population controls based on religion. Activists and human rights groups have condemned the proposals, saying they would violate international standards on freedom of religion and women's rights. Blinken on May 4 also stressed the importance of implementing durable solutions to human rights challenges in Myanmar and asked for a transparent and independent investigation into the use of force against protesters.¹⁰⁹

The United States, which has censured Thailand for failing to act against human trafficking, called on May 4 for a speedy and credible inquiry into the discovery of a mass grave containing more than two dozen bodies thought to be of ethnic migrants. Police and volunteers exhumed 26 bodies recently near a suspected trafficking camp deep in the southern Thai jungle near Malaysia that held as many as 400 trafficked migrants, mainly Muslim Rohingyas from Myanmar and Bangladesh. A spokesperson for the U.S. State Department said the United States was in contact with the Thai government, the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration over the discovery and understood that Thai authorities were actively investigating reports of other camps.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Cronk, Terri Moon, "Chairman: U.S. Stands Ready After Iranian Waterway Actions", *DoD News*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128764>

¹⁰⁸ Dockins, Pamela, "Date Set for 'Pause' in Yemen Fighting", *VOA News*, May 08, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/kerry-holds-constructive-talks-with-yemen-president/2753385.html>

¹⁰⁹ Smith, Jennifer, "US Expresses Concern Over Myanmar Religious Bills", May 05, 2015, *VOA News*, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-expresses-concern-over-myanmar-religious-bills/2750346.html>

¹¹⁰ "US Calls for Speedy Inquiry Into Thai Mass Grave", *Reuters*, May 4, 2015 at <http://www.voanews.com/content/reu-us-calls-for-speedy-inquiry-into-thai-mass-grave/2749495.html>

The Department of Defence released the “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China” report, according to a DoD news release issued on May 8. This annual report informs Congress of DoD’s assessment of military and security developments involving China, the release said. As stipulated by law, the report is a DoD product and is transmitted to Congress by the secretary of defence, according to the release. The report is coordinated with other agencies and departments across the U.S. government and is the authoritative assessment from the United States government on military and security developments involving China, the release said.¹¹¹

India-U.S. Relations

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Indian Ambassador Arun Kumar Singh assumes charge; India-America relations going through momentous phase, says Indian envoy to the US; India-US ties receiving high-level attention from Barack Obama, PM Narendra Modi: US Official; As Natural Allies, India, US Should Work Together: Modi; Left shouldn’t have snapped ties with UPA over n-deal: Yechury; India to sign port deal with Iran, ignoring U.S. warning against haste; US sounds caution as India inks port deal with Iran; Indian nuclear arsenal an asset in maintaining Asian power balance: US report.**

Arun Kumar Singh assumed charge as the 24th Indian ambassador to the United States on April 30. The envoy, who served as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the embassy in Washington DC, from October 2008 to April 2013, succeeds S. Jaishankar, who was named Foreign Secretary, the top diplomatic position, in January. Until recently, Singh was India’s ambassador to France, a position he held since April 2013. A 1979 batch Indian Foreign Service officer, Singh also served in New York at the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations Office from 1993 to 1997 as Counsellor. From April 2005 to September 2008, he served as India’s ambassador to Israel.¹¹²

With two back-to-back heads of the State visit in less than a year after the formation of the new government, it is a “very momentous” phase of India-US relationship, top Indian envoy to the United States has said. “We are in a very momentous phase of our relationship. India is moving quickly on its commitment to reform, throwing up tremendous opportunities for working together,” the new Indian Ambassador to the US, Arun Kumar Singh, told members of the US India Business Council (USIBC) in Washington on May 6. Selecting the American business community for his first major public interaction after arriving in the US capital, the new Indian Ambassador exuded confidence that the US business and industry will continue to seize the potential. “Our cooperation will reinforce our strategic ties in a long-term framework,” he said.¹¹³

¹¹¹ “DoD Releases Military, Security Developments in China Report”, *DoD News*, May 8, 2015 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128770>

¹¹² “Indian Ambassador Arun Kumar Singh Assumes Charge”, *The American Bazar*, May 2, 2015 at <http://www.americanbazaaronline.com/2015/05/02/indian-ambassador-arun-kumar-singh-assumes-charge/>

¹¹³ “India-America Relations Going Through Momentous Phase, Says Indian Envoy To The US”, *firstpost.com*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.firstpost.com/world/india-america-relations-going-momentous-phase-says-indian-envoy-us-2232096.html>

The relationship between the US and India has been receiving high-level attention from President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a senior American official has said. "The relationship between the US and India...has been receiving high level attention from the President, from Prime Minister Modi," State Department Deputy Acting Spokesman Jeff Rathke told reporters at his daily news conference.¹¹⁴

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said India and the US were natural allies and instead of asking what one can do for the other, they should look at what they can do together for the world. "If I have to describe the India-US relationship in a single word, I will say we are natural allies," he said in an exclusive interview with Time magazine for next week's cover feature titled "Why Modi Matters". With a picture of the prime minister in a light saffron kurta and white churidar on the cover, the magazine says "The world needs India to step up as a global power" as it asks: "One year in can Prime Minister Narendra Modi deliver?" "I think the relationship between India and US, and the two countries in themselves, have played an enormously important role and continue to play an important role in strengthening democratic values all over the world," Modi said.¹¹⁵

The Left parties should not have withdrawn support to UPA-I government on the issue of India-US nuclear deal, says CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury on a dramatic political event of 2008 that led to snapping of ties with the Congress and the steep decline of the communists ever since. Instead, they should have withdrawn support on issues like price rise as the people could not be mobilised on the nuclear deal issue in the 2009 general elections. However, Yechury asserts that the party's decision to oppose the nuclear deal was correct. Yechury was replying to a question on the decline of the Left forces including CPM after the 2009 elections and whether snapping ties with UPA on the Indo-US nuclear deal was a mistake.¹¹⁶

India will push ahead this week with plans to build a port in southeast Iran, two sources said, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi keen to develop trade ties with Central Asia and prepared to fend off U.S. pressure not to rush into any deals with Iran. India and Iran agreed in 2003 to develop a port at Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman, near Iran's border with Pakistan, but the venture has made little progress due to Western sanctions on Iran. Now, spurred on by Chinese President Xi Jinping's signing of \$46 billion of energy and infrastructure deals with Pakistan, Modi wants to swiftly sign trade agreements with Iran and other Gulf countries. "Shipping Minister Nitin Gadkari will travel on a day-long tour to Iran to sign a memorandum of understanding for development of Chabahar port," a Shipping Ministry source with direct knowledge of the matter told *Reuters*.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ "India-US Ties Receiving High-Level Attention from Barack Obama, PM Narendra Modi: US Official", *PTI*, May 8, 2015, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-05-08/news/61947561_1_india-us-ties-pm-narendra-modi-good-relations

¹¹⁵ "As Natural Allies, India, US Should Work Together: Modi", *IANS*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/As-Natural-Allies-India-US-Should-Work-Together-Modi/2015/05/07/article2802307.ece>

¹¹⁶ "Left Shouldn't Have Snapped Ties with UPA Over N-Deal: Yechury", *PTI*, May 10, 2015, at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Left-shouldnt-have-snapped-ties-with-UPA-over-n-deal-Yechury/articleshow/47221994.cms>

¹¹⁷ Verma, Nidhi and Kumar, Manoj "India To Sign Port Deal With Iran, Ignoring U.S. Warning Against Haste", *Reuters*, May 6, 2015 at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/05/05/india-iran-port-idINKBN0NQ0VY20150505>

Meanwhile, in a deal of significant strategic importance, India and Iran on May 6 signed an inter-Governmental Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding India's participation in the development of the Chabahar Port in Iran. This was signed by Abbas Ahmad Akhouni, Minister for Transport and Urban Development of Iran, and Nitin Gadkari, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister, during his visit to Iran. "With the signing of this MoU, Indian and Iranian commercial entities will now be in a position to commence negotiations towards finalisation of a commercial contract under which Indian firms will lease two existing berths at the port and operationalise them as container and multi-purpose cargo terminals," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. To a question on the deal, Richard Verma, U.S. Ambassador in India, cautioned against "rushing in" with investments as the nuclear deal being negotiated was not final and said there was need "to maintain the international solidarity that has brought this hard fought diplomatic victory, but we are not over the finish line yet."¹¹⁸

A recently released report by two influential US scholars calls for accelerated military cooperation with India and terms the Indian nuclear weapons arsenal an "asset in maintaining the current balance of power in Asia. 'Revising US Grand Strategy towards China' authored by Robert D Blackwill, former US Ambassador to India and Ashley J Tellis, an analyst intimately involved in negotiating the 2008 Indo-US nuclear deal, says the US 'benefits from the presence of a robust democratic power that is willing to and capable of independently balancing Beijing's rising influence in Asia'. The report, which some analysts term nothing less than an agenda for war with China, calls for the US to 'vigorously support India's 'Act East' policy to strengthen its power projection into South East Asia and East Asia, far beyond India's current sphere of influence from the Gulf of Aden to the Malacca Straits.'¹¹⁹

II. DEFENCE REVIEWS

National

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Forward Operating Base of Indian Navy INS Sardar Patel commissioned at Porbandar; 20 Immediate Support Vessels of the 23 ISVs planned have been commissioned.**

The latest naval establishment of Indian Navy '*Sardar Patel*' was commissioned at Porbandar, Gujarat on May 9. The event marked yet another important milestone in the Navy's efforts to augment the security infrastructure in the coastal states and islands. The commissioning of INS *Sardar Patel* at Porbandar would enable the Indian Navy to qualitatively augment its infrastructure

¹¹⁸ "US Sounds Caution As India Inks Port Deal With Iran", *The Hindu*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/us-sounds-caution-as-india-inks-port-deal-with-iran/article7178309.ece>

¹¹⁹ "Indian Nuclear Arsenal An Asset In Maintaining Asian Power Balance: US Report", *India Today*, May 6, 2015 at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/nuclear-weapons-asian-power-balance-india-china-pakistan-us/1/435090.html>

and organizational effectiveness in the State of Gujarat, which would improve coordination and synergy with other maritime agencies of the Government. This Forward Operating Base (FOB) of Indian Navy in Gujarat and the Headquarters of the Naval Officer-in-Charge (Gujarat, Diu & Daman) would also enhance the logistic support being provided to the Indian Navy units deployed in the Northern Arabian Sea, including along the International Maritime Boundary Line with Pakistan.¹²⁰

The Defence Minister has informed the Lok Sabha that 20 Immediate Support Vessels (ISVs) of the 23 ISVs planned have been commissioned in batches from January 2014 to March 2015 at Mumbai and Vishakhapatnam to patrol the off-shore development areas off the west and east coast respectively. The ISVs have been procured by M/s ONGC and transferred to Indian Navy. As these ISVs have been purchased by ONGC, no funds have been spent by the Indian Navy. The ISVs are armed with Heavy Machine Guns (HMGs) and are fitted with state of the art radar and navigation equipment. These ships are capable of carrying out day and night surveillance and can be used for rapid insertions/extraction of MARCOS for military intervention. The induction and deployment of these ships will augment the ongoing efforts to bolster coastal security and provide protection to our offshore assets from asymmetric threats. These ships would enhance Indian Navy's capability in furthering its mandate of maritime safety and security over the Offshore Developmental Areas on the Eastern sea board.¹²¹

International

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Israel signs a deal to buy four navy patrol boats from Germany; Turkish government signs \$ 1 billion deal to produce the country's first Landing Platform Dock.**

Reports say that Israel has signed a deal to buy four navy patrol boats from German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems to protect its offshore gas installations. The deal, valued at €430 million (\$480 million), will significantly improve the Israeli navy's ability to protect natural gas fields in the Mediterranean. Germany would finance €115 million of the transaction by means of a grant — around a quarter of the cost. ThyssenKrupp had also committed to carry out reciprocal purchasing in Israel to the tune of 700 million shekels (\$181 million/€162 million). The acquisition would enhance Israel's ability to protect its strategic assets and put its navy on a par with the world's leading navies.¹²²

Meanwhile, according to reports, the Turkish government has signed a nearly \$ 1 billion deal with a local shipyard to produce the country's first Landing Platform Dock (LPD). Turkey's procurement agency, the Under Secretariat for Defence Industries (SSM), said SSM and Sedef, a Turkish shipyard, agreed on the deal after contract negotiations. SSM announced in December

¹²⁰ "Naval Base at Porbandar Commissioned as INS Sardar Patel by Chief Minister of Gujarat," *PIB*, May 09, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=121503>

¹²¹ "Immediate Support Vessels," *PIB*, May 08, 2015, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=121463>

¹²² "Israel To Buy 4 German Patrol Boats," *Defence News*, May 11, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/mideast-africa/2015/05/11/israel-buy-german-patrol-boats/27131701/>

2013 that it selected Sedef for the ambitious naval programme. In the LPD contract, Sedef is partnered with Spain's Navantia. The planned amphibious assault vessel will carry a battalion-sized unit of 1,200 troops and personnel, eight utility helicopters, three unmanned aerial vehicles and transport 150 vehicles, including battle tanks. It also will have an aircraft platform for vertical take-off and landing. A ski jump at the front of the deck can be used to launch fighter aircraft. SSM said the 231-meter-long vessel will be completed by 2021. Turkey will be the third operator in the world of this type of ship after Spain and Australia.¹²³

III. INTERNAL SECURITY REVIEWS

Jammu & Kashmir

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **No separate colonies for KPs: Centre; Hurriyat (G) gains 8 more members; 16 injured in Shopian grenade explosion.**

Replying to a question put forward by nine MPs whether there is any proposal to create separate zones for Kashmiri Pandits, Minister of State for Home Haribhai Parathibhai Chaudhary on May 5 said, "No proposal to create separate zones exclusively for the Kashmiri pandits in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is under consideration." This puts to rest the controversy surrounding recent reports that government was planning to build composite townships for Kashmir pandits in the Valley. The opposition National Conference in the state as well as separatists groups have opposed building of exclusively township for Kashmiri pandits. However, the state government had said that the township will have mixed population of pandits, Muslims, Sikhs as well as Buddhists from Ladakh.¹²⁴

Eight pro-freedom organisations joined the Hurriyat Conference led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani on May 7, making it the most powerful pro-resistance group in the state in terms of the number of constituents. Jammu Kashmir Peoples Movement (Jammu), Kashmir Freedom Front, Muslim Khwateen Markaz, Muslim League (Abdul Rashid), Islamic Political Party, Tehreek-e-Mazahamat Jammu Kashmir, Gujjar Pahari Forum, Pairvan-i-Villayat Jammu Kashmir joined the group. The first five were earlier part of the Hurriyat Conference led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and had quit it in the past one year citing various reasons. In a statement, Hurriyat (G) spokesman said the new members vowed to continue the resistance till "the return of the last Indian soldier from Kashmiri soil" at any cost. "They said nothing less than complete freedom will be acceptable to Kashmiris," the statement said.¹²⁵

¹²³ "Turkey Signs \$1B Deal for Landing Platform Dock," *Defence News*, May 10, 2015, at <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/industry/2015/05/10/turkey-signs-1b-deal-for-landing-platform-dock/27091441/>

¹²⁴ "No Plans To Build Separate Colonies for Kashmiri Pandits: Centre", *Greater Kashmir*, May 5 2015 at <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/national/no-plans-to-build-separate-colonies-for-kashmiri-pandits-centre/185514.html>

¹²⁵ "Hurriyat (G) Gains 8 More Members", *Kashmir Reader*, May 8, 2015 at <http://www.kashmirreader.com/hurriyat-g-gains-8-more-members/>

At least 16 civilians were injured when an unidentified person lobbed a grenade at a busy market place in Shopian district of south Kashmir on May 9. According to the police, the attack was aimed at a police party but missed its mark. Jammu and Kashmir police spokesperson Manoj Pandita said the attack occurred at 2.45 p.m. "Sixteen people were injured in the blast, including two minors," Mr. Pandita told *The Hindu*.¹²⁶

Northeast India

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **NSCN (K) ambush kills 8 security personnel in Nagaland; United NE rebel front worries Assam; MHA reverses decision declaring all Arunachal districts as 'disturbed'; Parliament approves bill to settle 41 year-old border issue with Bangladesh.**

Eight security personnel were killed on May 3 in an ambush by underground militants in Mon district of Nagaland, defence sources said. Seven Assam Rifles personnel and a Territorial Army jawan lost their lives as they were fired upon by underground militants when they had gone to Changlansu in Mon district with water tankers to fetch water. The Assam Rifles personnel also fired back and one underground militant was killed while some others were injured in the ensuing encounter, they added.¹²⁷ According to reports, the NSCN (K) has claimed responsibility for the attack. The reports said the NSCN (K) also claimed that its cadres managed to take away three guns from the Assam Rifles party after the ambush. It also denied that anyone from its side suffered any casualty or injury.¹²⁸

Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on May 4 said the state is worried over the coming together of North East militant groups under one platform to launch attacks. He added that the Centre should take serious notice of this development. The new militant platform, United Liberation Front of West South East Asia comprises the anti-talks faction of Uifa, NSCN (K), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Songbijit) and Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO). These militant groups are based in Myanmar. NSCN (K) chairman SS Khaplang is the chief of this new platform.¹²⁹ However, MHA sources played down the security threat that might be posed by the militant groups. Sources pointed out that coming together on a common platform would only give the militants a psychological advantage, but their striking power and capability to indulge in acts of violence to create disturbance in the region would not increase.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Rafiq, Zahid, "16 Injured In Shopian Grenade Attack", *The Hindu*, May 10, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/14-injured-in-grenade-attack-in-shopian/article7188376.ece>

¹²⁷ "8 Security Personnel Killed In Nagaland Militant Ambush", *The Hindu*, May 4, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/8-security-personnel-killed-in-nagaland-militant-ambush/article7167462.ece>

¹²⁸ "NSCN (K) Claims Responsibility For Mon Killing", *The Assam Tribune*, May 5, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=may0515/oth055>

¹²⁹ "United Rebel Front Worries Assam", *The Times of India*, May 5, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/United-rebel-front-worries-Assam/articleshow/47161022.cms>

¹³⁰ Choudhury, R Dutta, "Centre Foresees No Security Threat From NE Ultras' Unity Move", *The Assam Tribune*, May 4, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=may0415/at050>

In a U-turn, the Centre has denied having extended the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) to all districts of Arunachal Pradesh. In order to control the anti-national and criminal activities of various militant groups including NDFB(S), ULFA(I) and NSCN(K), various districts of Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam were declared as disturbed areas under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 for a brief period, said Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju. "Now, only the areas falling under the jurisdiction of 16 police stations in various districts of Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam have been declared as disturbed areas along with the whole of Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts, for a period of six months," Rijiju said in a Rajya Sabha reply.¹³¹

Parliament on May 7 unanimously passed a historic bill to operationalise the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh which provides for exchange of territories and settles a 41-year-old border issue. The Lower House, showing rare unanimity, passed the Constitution (119th Amendment) Bill to allow the 1974 India-Bangladesh Land Boundary agreement to become operational. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, while responding to members' questions whether India will lose some territory said that India will get 510 acres while Bangladesh will get 10,000 acres. "But these are notional figures as these areas are deep inside territories of the two countries. Our borders are not getting contracted," she said. Swaraj also added the measure, apart from demarcating the boundaries, would also help checking illegal immigration.¹³²

Left-Wing Extremism

(May 4-10, 2015)

- **Police arrest Kerala's most wanted Maoist couple; Salwa Judum leaders form new body to counter the rebels; PM visits Maoist hotbed, MoUs worth Rs 24,000cr signed; Sukma hostages: Maoists kill one, release others; Central committee member of the CPI (Maoist) nabbed by Maharashtra ATS.**

Maoist couple Roopesh and P A Shyna, wanted in connection with at least 30 cases in Kerala, were arrested along with three other suspected Maoists by the Andhra Pradesh police from Coimbatore on May 8. Roopesh, in-charge of the Western Ghats zone of the Communist Part of India (Maoist), had been leading the Maoist movement in Kerala along with his wife. According to officials, the intelligence bureaus of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Telangana joined forces to make the arrests. Roopesh and Shyna were believed to be preparing for an armed struggle in the Kerala-Tamil Nadu-Karnataka tri-junction. Police said that with the arrests, they had busted the entire Western Ghats Committee of the CPI (Maoists), which was operating on the Tamil Nadu-Kerala border.¹³³

¹³¹ "'All Arunachal Districts Not Disturbed Areas'", *The Assam Tribune*, May 7, 2015 at <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=may0715/oth051>

¹³² "Parliament Passes Bill To Settle 41-Year-Old Border Issue With Bangladesh", *The Telegraph*, May 7, 2015 at http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150507/jsp/frontpage/story_18786.jsp#.VVdw_LmqpHw

¹³³ "Top Maoist Couple Roopesh And Shyna Arrested in Tamil Nadu", *The Indian Express*, May 5, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/five-maoists-including-leader-roopesh-arrested-in-kerela/>

Few days ahead of PM Narendra Modi's visit to Dantewada, several leaders associated with Salwa Judum, on May 4, came together and formed Vikas Sangharsh Samiti to counter the rebels in the Maoist-hit district of Chhattisgarh. Chhavindra Karma, son of Salwa Judum architect Mahendra Karma, presided the meeting which was also attended by leaders Sattar Ali, P Vijay and Sukhram Dadi. They all feature in the Maoists' hit-list and carry elaborate police protection. Claiming his initiative as "Salwa Judum Part-II, Chhavindra said that they would launch an anti-Maoist padyatra on May 25 — the second death anniversary of his father.¹³⁴

Taking his "make in India" battle cry to the war zone of Naxalite violence, Bastar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 9 initiated the process of investment of Rs 24,000 crore in the region and promised India that insurgency would not last for long in Chhattisgarh. Addressing a well-attended public meeting at Dantewada, the hotbed of insurgency, Modi, in whose presence MoUs for setting up of ultra-mega steel plant at Dilmili village and the extension of the second phase of 140km of Rowghat-Jagdulpur railway line to Dantewada were signed, said, "there is no future of violence". Saying extremism had ended in Punjab and Maoism had been buried in Naxalbari, Modi said it is only a matter of time that violence would too end in Chhattisgarh.¹³⁵

Coinciding with PM Narendra Modi's rally in Dantewada, Maoists killed one villager in neighbouring Sukma district for supporting construction of a bridge. The Maoists had allegedly taken away hundreds of villagers into the forest in the early hours on May 9 from Merenga, Tikanpal, Tahakwada and Junpani villages of Sukma. "The Maoists held a jan adalat [people's court] in the Gaadem and Munga forest. Sadaaram, a villager of Marenga was killed but other villagers are returning with his body. The deceased was looking after the construction of a bridge near Marenga village," Bastar range Inspector-General of Police S.R. Kalluri told *The Hindu*. According to Mr. Kalluri, five to six people were "abducted" by the Maoists and 500 villagers went inside the forest to secure their release. However, according to Sukma Additional Superintendent of Police Harish Rathod, the Maoists had "forcibly" taken hundreds of villagers inside the forest.¹³⁶

The Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has arrested an alleged top Maoist leader, identified as K Muralidharan alias Thomas Joseph alias Skaria alias Gopi Alias Raghavan alias Ajith (62), and his close aide as Ismail Hamaza Chiragpilli alias Pravin alias James Mathew (29), from Talegaon Dabhade area, located about 30 km from Pune city. A native of Ernakulam in Kerala, Ajith was the national secretary of the banned Communist Party of India (ML) Naxalbari, which merged with the banned CPI (Maoist) on May 1, 2014. Ajith then became the central committee member of the CPI (Maoists), said police sources. ATS sources said Ajith, who was among the top Maoist leaders in the country, has been part of various Maoist operations in south India and other states.

¹³⁴ "Salwa Judum Leaders Form New Body Against Maoists", *The Indian Express*, May 5, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/salwa-judum-leaders-form-new-body-against-maoists/>

¹³⁵ Jaiswal, Anuja, "PM Visits Maoist-Affected Areas Of Chhattisgarh; MoUs Worth Rs 24,000cr Signed", *The Times of India*, May 9, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/PM-visits-Maoist-affected-areas-of-Chhattisgarh-MoUs-worth-Rs-24000cr-signed/articleshow/47212980.cms>

¹³⁶ Dahat, Pavan, "Maoists Abduct 400 Villagers", *The Hindu*, May 10, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/maoists-abduct-400-villagers/article7187870.ece>

Ajith and Ganapathy, the general secretary of CPI (Maoist), had jointly signed the merger declaration document between the two parties on May 1, 2014. He is thus considered as a close aide of Ganapathy too.¹³⁷

IV. UNITED NATIONS REVIEWS

United Nations

(April 27-May 10, 2015)

- **UN immerses in Nepal relief; Second NPT Review Conference rolls off; UN manages a truce in CAR, loses more personnel in DRC, pulls out of South Sudan amidst rising violence; Suspected chemical attack in Syria even as most of its arsenal taken to Germany is destroyed; Iran still engaged in nuclear procurement?; Saudis-Houthis agree to ceasefire in Yemen; North Korea tests submarine missile; UNESCAP meet for Asia-Pacific discusses post-2015 development agenda; UN reports released.**

The UN Central Emergency Response Fund (UNCERF) provided \$15 million as emergency relief aid for Nepal as it reeled under the after-effects of a massive earthquake.¹³⁸ While the WHO distributed medical supplies, the WFP made an assessment of other requirements of aid.¹³⁹ The UNHCR and the UNICEF are also pitching in the relief efforts.¹⁴⁰ A \$415 million flash appeal was also made.¹⁴¹ The UN Resident Commissioner in Nepal however said that customs check of the relief supplies at the airport was delaying their delivery to the needy. The Nepalese government though insisted on the need for thorough checking of the supplies.¹⁴² The WHO set up a field office in the Gorkha district to ensure medical supplies to survivors in the area closer to the epicentre of the earthquake.¹⁴³ The ILO will renew its efforts to provide employment and social

¹³⁷ Haygunde, Chandan Shantaram and Rashid, Atikh, "Top Maoist Leader From Kerala, Aide Held Near City", *The Indian Express*, May 10, 2015 at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/maharashtra/maharashtra-ats-claims-to-have-arrested-senior-maoist-leader/>

¹³⁸ "United Nations Releases US \$15 Million Emergency Aid for Nepal", April 28, 2015, <http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-united-nations-releases-us-15-million-emergency-aid-for-nepal-2081521>

¹³⁹ "UN Preparing 'Massive' Aid Operation In Quake-Hit Nepal", *The Daily Star*, April 27, 2015, at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/World/2015/Apr-27/295906-un-preparing-massive-aid-operation-in-quake-hit-nepal.ashx>

¹⁴⁰ "Nepal: UN Agencies Rush Supplies To Earthquake Survivors Amid Powerful Aftershocks", *UN News Centre*, April 27, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50697#.VUtAIY6qqko>

¹⁴¹ "UN and Partners Launch \$415 Million Appeal To Aid Quake-Stricken Nepal", *UN News Centre*, April 29, 2015, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50725#.VUtLB46qqko>

¹⁴² "U.N. Official: Customs Holding Up Nepal Relief Supplies", *The News Week*, May 2, 2015, at <http://www.newsweek.com/nepal-quake-relief-blocked-customs-327844>

¹⁴³ "Nepal: Opening First Field Hub, UN Health Agency Expands Support to Areas Cut off by Quake", *UN News Centre*, May 03, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50756#.VUygKY6qqko>

protection to those affected by the earthquake.¹⁴⁴

The 2nd NPT Review Conference rolled off on April 27, 2015 and will conclude on May 22, 2015. The message of the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to the opening plenary was to be cautious of increasing modernisation that is entrenching nuclear weapons further in countries' military arsenals, rather than the signing of the CTBT and FMCT.¹⁴⁵ Speaking on behalf of the NAM countries, the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif argued that there must be no curbs on transfer of nuclear technology to NPT signatories. 117 NAM countries are signatory to the NPT and are concerned about nuclear doctrines of nuclear weapon states.¹⁴⁶ Austria launched an initiative to ban the bomb, which was supported by majority of the countries excluding the P5, NATO countries, Israel, North Korea, India and Pakistan.¹⁴⁷ The EU representative met the CTBT Organisation's Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo to discuss the possibility of EU hosting a CTBTO's Group of Eminent Persons's (GEM) meeting in 2016 on the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the CTBT for signatures.¹⁴⁸

The UN raised its concern regarding the lack of adequate funding for relief and rehabilitation of nearly 90,000 people in the Central African Republic (CAR).¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, armed groups in CAR agreed to free upto 10,000 child soldiers in the ongoing negotiations in National Reconciliation Forum on resolving the conflict.¹⁵⁰ On May 10, the groups decided to lay down arms and strive for peace.¹⁵¹ CAR was also in the news as a UN report that became public revealed that during the setting up of the UN mission in 2014 French troops had allegedly sexually abused young boys.¹⁵² The UN has denied covering up the incident.¹⁵³ The whistle blower in the incident, Andreas

¹⁴⁴ "Nepal: UN Labour Agency Set To Ramp Up Operations In Quake-Hit Country", *UN News Centre*, May 06, 2015, at http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50781#.VVA_Zo6qqko

¹⁴⁵ "At Meeting On Nuclear Disarmament, UN Chief Warns Of 'Dangerous Return' To Cold War Mentalities", *UN News Centre*, April 27, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50701#.VUtArI6qqko>

¹⁴⁶ "FM Zarif calls Upon Nuclear-Weapon States To Cease Their Plans To Further Invest In Modernizing And Extending The Life Span Of Their Nuclear Weapons", April 27, 2015, at <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iran-slams-Israel-nuclear-powers-at-UN-atomic-treaty-meeting-399349>

¹⁴⁷ "Austria, Backed By 159 Nations, Calls for Ban on Nuclear Weapons", *Reuters*, April 29, 2015, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/29/us-nuclear-un-austria-idUSKBN0NJ21220150429>

¹⁴⁸ "United Nations: Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Review Conference", April 30, 2015, at http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/300415_non-proliferation_en.htm

¹⁴⁹ "UN Warns Central African Republic Is Becoming Largest Forgotten Humanitarian Crisis", *UN News Centre*, April 27, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50700#.VUtAuY6qqko>

¹⁵⁰ "C. Africa Armed Groups Pledge To Free Thousands Of Child Soldiers: UN", May 05, 2015, <http://www.nguardiannews.com/2015/05/c-africa-armed-groups-pledge-to-free-thousands-of-child-soldiers-un/>

¹⁵¹ "Central African Republic Ends Two-Year Fight with Militant Groups", May 11, 2015, at <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/central-africa-republic-ends-fight-militant-groups-article-1.2217564>

¹⁵² "France Promises to Act After Leaked UN Report Says Its Soldiers Abused Children", *The Guardian*, April 29, 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/france-promises-act-leaked-un-report-soldiers-child-abuse-claims>

¹⁵³ "Central African Republic Child Abuse: UN Denies 'Cover Up'", *BBS News*, May 01, 2015, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32546206>

Kompass, the head of the Department of Field Operations in CAR had been suspended for leaking the report. However, he was sought to be reinstated by order of an appeal tribunal.¹⁵⁴

Expressing concerns regarding the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, the Secretary General urged for a more compassionate response from the EU.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, security analysts have raised a note of caution regarding giving shelter to thousands of migrants fleeing conflicts in Africa and Syria.¹⁵⁶

The mandate of the UN mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO) has been extended until April 2016.¹⁵⁷ However, the African Union's request for the mission to undertake human rights monitoring and conduct a referendum, were not included in the extended mandate.¹⁵⁸

There was yet another bout of violence in Mali, by GATIA and MAA-Plateforme in the town of Ménaka, which is currently held by elements of the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA).¹⁵⁹

The draft political agreement for the political factions in Libya was discussed by the head of the UNSMIL at the Security Council. The draft agreement is based on the principles of inviolability of the democratic process and a clear separation of powers between the executive and legislative authorities. It is hoped that the agreement would be inked before the beginning of Ramadan in June.¹⁶⁰

The Boko Haram released 200 of the 276 girls it had abducted in April 2014.¹⁶¹ The UNFPA later reported that 214 of the girls released were pregnant and undergoing medical tests to check for

¹⁵⁴ "UN Suspension Of Sexual Abuse Report Whistleblower Is Unlawful, Tribunal Rules", *The Guardian*, May 06, 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/06/un-suspension-of-sexual-abuse-report-whistleblower-is-unlawful-tribunal-rules>

¹⁵⁵ "Aboard Italian Navy Ship, Ban Urges Collective Action to Ease Plight of Migrants Crossing Mediterranean", *UN News Centre*, April 27, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50704#.VUtBC46qqko>; Also see, "In Paris, Ban Discusses Mediterranean Crisis and Climate Change with President Hollande", *UN News Centre*, April 29, 2015, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50731#.VUtLg16qqko>

¹⁵⁶ "UN Plan To Settle 1M Refugees An Invitation To Terror, Critics Warn", *Fox News*, April 27, 2015, at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/04/27/un-plan-to-settle-1m-refugees-invitation-to-terror-warn-critics/>

¹⁵⁷ "Security Council Extends UN Western Sahara Mission Through April 2016", *UN News Centre*, April 28, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50715#.VUtFz16qqko>

¹⁵⁸ "UN Renews Western Sahara Force without Changes Africans Wanted", *Reuters*, April 28, 2015, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/28/us-westernsahara-un-idUSKBN0NJ29620150428>

¹⁵⁹ "Mali: Senior UN Official Urges Parties To 'Immediately Cease Hostilities'", *UN News Centre*, April 28, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50721#.VUtH616qqko>

¹⁶⁰ "Draft Political Deal for Libyan Parties Is 'Work In Progress,' UN Envoy Tells Security Council", *UN News Centre*, April 29, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50730#.VUtLeY6qqko>

¹⁶¹ "UN Envoy Gordon Brown Welcomes Release of 200 Nigerian Girls Held Captive by Boko Haram", *UN News Centre*, April 29, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50732#.VUtLm46qqko>

various infections.¹⁶² The UN and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) will attempt to rehabilitate the victimised girls.¹⁶³ The World Food Programme (WFP) has highlighted the challenge of lack of food for several thousand women and children in Chad, Niger and Cameroon who have been displaced as a result of Boko Haram violence.¹⁶⁴

The UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) reported that in the week ending April 26, 33 cases of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) were reported in West Africa.¹⁶⁵ Later, Liberia was declared as being free of the Ebola virus as no case was detected over the past forty-two days.¹⁶⁶

The Secretary General has warned of sanctions against South Sudan if its leaders do not agree to a compromise to end the civil war in the country.¹⁶⁷ Meanwhile, 200,000 South Sudanese have taken refuge in Ethiopia since violence broke out in mid-December 2003.¹⁶⁸ UN relief works have evacuated South Sudan due to rising violence.¹⁶⁹ Amidst the disturbance, South Sudan ratified the Convention on the Rights of Child.¹⁷⁰

Russia and China refused to give consent to a Security Council statement sponsored by France calling for following the democratic norms set up during the Arusha peace accord of 2005 in the run-up to the Presidential elections in Burundi.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, 40,000 people have fled Burundi in violence that erupted to protest the nomination of President Pierre Nkurunziza for a third term as President.¹⁷²

¹⁶² "214 Nigerian Girls Rescued From Boko Haram Pregnant: UN", *Presstv*, May 05, 2015, at <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/05/05/409518/Nigeria-Boko-Haram-girls-UN-pregnant>

¹⁶³ "NEMA, UN Pledge To Support Reintegration Of Women And Children Rescued From Boko Haram Captivity", May 10, 2015, at <http://www.informationng.com/2015/05/nema-un-pledge-to-support-reintegration-of-women-and-children-rescued-from-boko-haram-captivity.html>

¹⁶⁴ "'Gruelling' Lean Season Ahead For Areas Of Sahel Impacted By Boko Haram Violence – UN Agency", *UN News Centre*, May 07, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50795#.VVbZVo6qqko>

¹⁶⁵ "New UN Special Envoy on Ebola Response Makes First Visit to Sierra Leone", *UN News Centre*, April 29, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50734#.VUtLpl6qqko>

¹⁶⁶ "Ebola Virus Transmission Ends in Liberia – UN Health Agency", *UN News Centre*, May 09, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50811#.VVb5Go6qqko>

¹⁶⁷ "UN Chief Warns South Sudanese Leaders of Sanctions If No Peace", *The Sunday Tribune*, May 01, 2015, at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article54806>

¹⁶⁸ "Amid Spike in Arrivals, Number of South Sudanese Refugees in Ethiopia Passes 200,000 – UN", *UN News Centre*, May 01, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50746#.VUtSlo6qqko>

¹⁶⁹ "South Sudan: Heavy Fighting And Reported 'Atrocities' In Northeast Force UN to Evacuate Staff", *UN News Centre*, May 11, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50818#.VVGLQo6qqko>

¹⁷⁰ "South Sudan ratifies Convention on the Rights of the Child", *UN News Centre*, May 04, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50759#.VUyjjl6qqko>

¹⁷¹ "Russia: U.N. Security Council Should Stay Out Of Burundi Dispute", May 01, 2015, at <http://news.yahoo.com/russia-u-n-security-council-stay-burundi-dispute-182312661.html>

¹⁷² "Almost 40,000 Flee Burundi Amid Political Crisis: United Nations", May 06, 2015, at <http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-almost-40000-flee-burundi-amid-political-crisis-united-nations-2083726>

A UN helicopter was shot down in the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹⁷³ The following day in the Kivu region in eastern Congo, a UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) convoy was ambushed and 2 UN peacekeepers from Tanzania were killed.¹⁷⁴ 13 were injured and four were missing in an attack suspected to be carried by the Islamist rebels of Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).¹⁷⁵ In the fight against a radical Rwandan rebel group FDLR, the UN mission has decided that it would act on its own if the Congolese Army does not cooperate with the UN troops.¹⁷⁶

A summit of the African Union's Committee of 10 (C10) held in Addis Ababa called for reform of the UN and a place for Africa in the UNSC.¹⁷⁷

There has been another suspected chemical attack by government forces in the Idlib province of Syria.¹⁷⁸ While, in a heartening development, the German government reported that it has successfully destroyed a large number of chemical weapons brought from Syria.¹⁷⁹ A few days later, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said that it had received reports of air strikes and fighting near the Yarmouk camp housing Palestinians.¹⁸⁰ The UN initiated the third round of talks aimed at bringing peace in Syria. The Government of Syria, 40 Syrian groups, and 20 regional and international actors will participate in the talks.¹⁸¹ The Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura met with a Saudi minister as Saudi Arabia was a key player in the region.¹⁸²

A British confidential report to the UN panel that monitors the sanctions on Iran since 2006 has suggested that Iran may have an active nuclear procurement network associated with Iran's

¹⁷³ "DR Congo: UN Official Condemns 'Intolerable' Attack on Mission Helicopter", *UN News Centre*, May 04, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50767#.VUykEY6qqko>

¹⁷⁴ "UN Deplores Deadly Attack on 'Blue Helmets' in DR Congo", *UN News Centre*, May 06, 2015, at http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50780#.VVA_Ml6qqko

¹⁷⁵ "Two Tanzanian U.N. Peacekeepers Killed In Congo Ambush", May 06, 2015, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-3069468/Two-Tanzanian-U-N-peacekeepers-killed-Congo-ambush.html>

¹⁷⁶ "Official: UN Planning to Act on Its Own against Congo Rebels", May 07, 2015, at <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2015/may/07/official-un-planning-to-act-on-its-own-against/>

¹⁷⁷ "UN Security Council Reforms a Must", May 11, 2015, at <https://www.daily-mail.co.zm/?p=29011>

¹⁷⁸ "Syrian Opposition, Activists Report Chemical Attack in Idlib", April 29, 2015, at <http://www.sunherald.com/2015/04/29/6202247/syrian-opposition-activists-report.html>

¹⁷⁹ "Press Release: Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister Von Der Leyen on the Completion of the Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons in Germany", May 04, 2015, at http://www.new-york-un.diplo.de/Vertretung/newyorkvn/en/__pr/press-releases/2015/20150504-steinmeier-and-von-der-leyen-on-destruction-of-syrian-chemical-weapons.html

¹⁸⁰ "Amid Reports Of New Attack On Yarmouk Camp, UN Agency Urges Syria To Halt Military Operations In Civilian Areas", *UN News Centre*, May 02, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50754#.VUyfVI6qqko>

¹⁸¹ "UN Envoy Announces Start of Talks Aimed at Achieving Return to Political Track on Syria", *UN News Centre*, May 05, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50773#.VVA9z46qqko>

¹⁸² "UN Envoy On Syria Meets Saudi Minister; Stresses Need To Involve Regional Actors In Consultations", *UN News Centre*, May 07, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50795#.VVBzVo6qqko>

Centrifuge Technology Company (TESA) and Kalay Electric Company (KEC). There are also media reports regarding Iran's supply of weapons to various friendly groups across the Middle East and supply of oil to Syria.¹⁸³

In Yemen, violence continued with the Security Council failing to agree on a humanitarian ceasefire. While Russia pushed for the ceasefire, US said it agreed to such a ceasefire and was attempting to convince Saudi Arabia of the same.¹⁸⁴ The casualties in the fighting have risen to 646 deaths of civilians and 1343 soldiers injured.¹⁸⁵ On May 10, the Houthis agreed to a Saudi proposal for a humanitarian ceasefire, and to holding talks under the auspices of the UN. The truce requires Houthis to halt violence in all provinces of Yemen.¹⁸⁶

North Korea tested a submarine missile in violation of the UN Security Council resolutions prohibiting it from developing and testing ballistic missile technology.¹⁸⁷

Under the aegis of the UNESCAP, 200 participants, including 50 ministers, deputy ministers, central bank governors and deputy governors, and senior policymakers of the Asia Pacific countries met to devise a development agenda for the region. The action plan includes investment in social sectors, making financial markets more effective and efficient, mainstreaming climate considerations into national budgets and addressing the special needs of least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).¹⁸⁸

A UN internal report on the July-August 2014 war between Israel and HAMAS in Gaza said HAMAS used some UN schools to store weapons, but Israel wrongly targeted seven schools to which led to 44 civilian casualties.¹⁸⁹ UN Women published a report entitled *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*. The report studies the status of women as part

¹⁸³ "Exclusive - Britain Told U.N. Monitors of Active Iran Nuclear Procurement: Panel", *Reuters*, April 30, 2015 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/30/us-iran-nuclear-idUSKBN0NL09220150430>

¹⁸⁴ "Russia Assails West over Yemen", *The New York Times*, May 01, 2015, at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/world/russia-assails-west-over-yemen.html?_r=0

¹⁸⁵ "Yemen Conflict Death Toll Nears 650, With UN Rights Office Spotting Plight of 3 Million Disabled", *UN News Centre*, May 05, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50769#.VVA9dI6qqko>

¹⁸⁶ "Houthis Agree To Yemen Cease-Fire, Urges Return To UN Talks", *Middle East Monitor*, May 10, 2015, at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/18517-houthis-agree-to-yemen-cease-fire-urges-return-to-un-talks>

¹⁸⁷ "South Korea Says North Missile Launch a Serious Concern", *VOA News*, May 11, 2015, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/south-korea-urges-north-to-stop-testing-submarine-launched-missiles/2762649.html>

¹⁸⁸ "Asia-Pacific To Pursue Action-Oriented Financing Strategy To Transform Development", May 01, 2015, at <http://www.unescap.org/news/asia-pacific-pursue-action-oriented-financing-strategy-transform-development>

¹⁸⁹ "United Nations: Israel Responsible for Deaths at Gaza Schools", *The News Week*, April 27, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/united-nations-israel-responsible-deaths-gaza-schools-325668>. Also see "U.N. Says Israeli Military Actions Killed 44 Civilians in Schools in Gaza War", *The New York Times*, April 27, 2015, at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/28/world/middleeast/un-says-israeli-military-actions-killed-44-civilians-in-schools-in-gaza-war.html?_r=0

of the formal and informal labour force and suggests ways to improve their economic condition and rights as workers.¹⁹⁰ A WHO report has claimed that the health cost (premature deaths and disease) of pollution in Europe is approximately \$1.6 trillion.¹⁹¹ A report of the University of Queensland and UNODC titled *Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges* has highlighted that migrant smuggling usually happens within Asia though small numbers also occur from and to Asia. The study highlights the problems of migrants who are smuggled.¹⁹² A report of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) titled *Irregular Maritime Movements in South-East Asia* has revealed an alarming increase in illegal migration of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi to Thailand.¹⁹³

India and the UN

(April 27-May 10, 2015)

- **India pitches for reform in election of SG; Yoga Day celebrations commence; UN support for the girl child in Rajasthan; Anti-AFSPA voices at the UN Indigenous Peoples' Forum; India raises Lakhvi release issue at the Al Qaeda sanctions committee; UN award for Nadia.**

At a meeting of the Ad Hoc working group on the Revitalisation of the General Assembly, India's Permanent Representative (PR), Asoke Mukerji, re-emphasised the need for regional rotation and favourable consideration of women candidates for the post of the next Secretary General. He also suggested that the Security Council put forth a panel of names for the consideration of the General Assembly and that the Assembly itself elect the candidate based on a two-third majority.¹⁹⁴

A series of curtain raiser events are being organised by the Indian Embassy in Washington ahead of the first commemoration of the International Day of Yoga by the UN on June 21, 2015. Sri Ravi Shankar, the founder of the Art of Living movement, gave a talk on 'Nurturing Peace through Yoga and Meditation' in which is said that wars occur when communication breaks down and yoga helps in communication.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ "UN Agency Unveils Alternative Policy Agenda to Transform Economies, Make Gender Equality a Reality", *UN News Centre*, April 27, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50698#.VUtATl6qqko>

¹⁹¹ "Air Pollution in Europe Costs \$1.6 Trillion A Year In Deaths And Diseases, UN Study Shows", *UN News Centre*, April 28, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50716#.VUtHel6qqko>

¹⁹² "UQ and UN team up on Asian migrant smuggling report", May 05, 2015, at <http://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2015/05/uq-and-un-team-asian-migrant-smuggling-report>

¹⁹³ "New UN Refugee Agency Report Documents Alarming Surge In Bay Of Bengal Crossings", *UN News Centre*, May 08, 2015, at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50800#.VVB3gl6qqko>

¹⁹⁴ "India Calls For Two-Third Majority Of General Assembly To Appoint UN Secy General", *The Economic Times*, April 28, 2015 at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-28/news/61616280_1_un-charter-secretary-general-secretary-general

¹⁹⁵ "Indian Embassy Begins Series Of Yoga Events in United States", *The Economic Times*, April 30, 2015, at http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-30/news/61689359_1_yoga-and-meditation-ancient-indian-practice-indian-embassy

The UN Foundation's Girl Up programme will support UNFPA's *Action for Adolescent Girls* initiative in Rajasthan. The programme aims to reach out to women in remote areas and raise their awareness regarding public services available for them, health, nutrition, hygiene and reproduction.¹⁹⁶

Secretary General of the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), Neingulo Krome, called for the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) at the 14th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held on April 30, 2015.¹⁹⁷

India made a written request to the Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee to take up the issue of the release of Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi, the mastermind of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in 2008, by a court in Pakistan. Since Lakhvi is a 'listed' terrorist, his release has raised concerns in US, UK, Russia, France and Germany.¹⁹⁸

Nanda district in West Bengal, which became the first district in the country to be free of open defecation under the "Nirmal Bangla" campaign, was awarded the prestigious United Nations Public Service Award for 2015.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ "UN Campaign to Support Adolescent Girls in Rajasthan", *The New Indian Express*, May 02, 2015, at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/UN-Campaign-to-Support-Adolescent-Girls-in-Rajasthan/2015/05/02/article2793805.ece>

¹⁹⁷ "NPMHR Makes AFSPA Repeal Cry At The United Nations", May 2, 2015, at <http://www.easternmirrornagaland.com/2015/05/npmhr-makes-afspa-repeal-cry-at-the-united-nations/>

¹⁹⁸ "United Nations Assures India Of Taking Up Zaki-Ur-Rehman Release Issue", *Zee News*, May 03, 2015, at http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/united-nations-assures-india-of-taking-up-zaki-ur-rehman-release-issue_1589114.html

¹⁹⁹ "Bengal's Nadia Wins United Nations Public Service Award 2015 for 'Nirmal Bangla' Project", May 07, 2015, at <http://aitcofficial.org/aitc/bengal-wins-united-nations-public-service-award-2015-for-nirmal-bangla/>