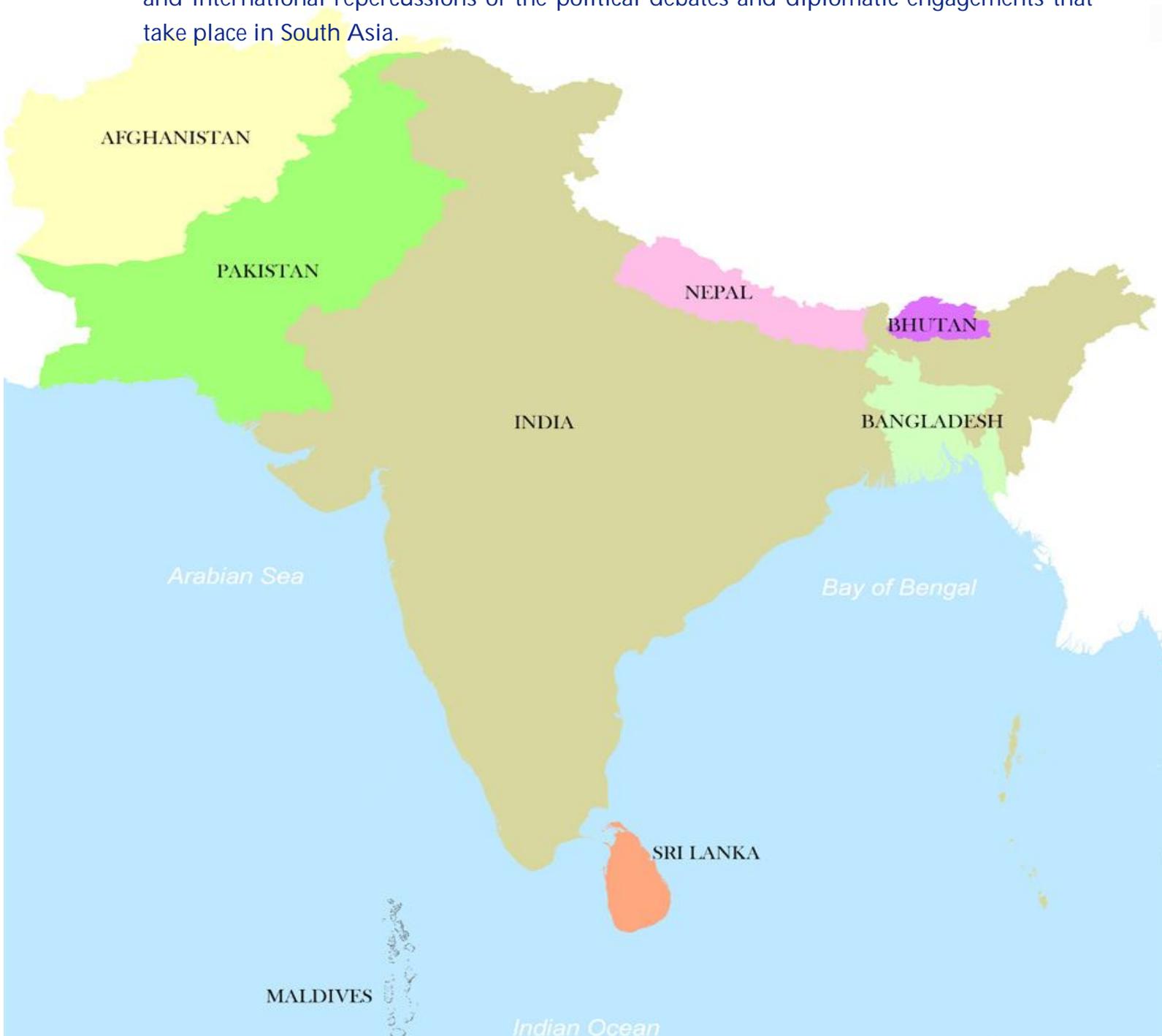


# ***SOUTH ASIA TRENDS***

**April 2016**

South Asia Trends is a monthly newsletter on South Asian affairs. The purpose of the newsletter is to provide a panoramic view of important events that shape and impact the politics of the subcontinent. The effort would be to inform our readers of the domestic, regional and international repercussions of the political debates and diplomatic engagements that take place in South Asia.



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## Editor's Note

All the South Asian countries became part of the 174 signatories of the Paris climate agreement on April 22, 2016. The agreement, which was adopted at the Paris Climate Conference in December 2015, sets out a global action plan to put the world on track to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°centigrade. By signing the accord, the countries ensured full support and commitment for an active engagement with the international community for successful implementation of the accord. The signing ceremony was the initial step toward bringing the Paris agreement into force. The agreement can enter into force 30 days after 55 countries accounting for 55 per cent of global emissions deposit their instruments of ratification. Successful implementation will require political will, better policy decisions, and adequate resources available to the countries to implement the accord. However, in most cases government tends to ignore the environmental issues in order to attain other political and economic problems. As most of the South Asian countries are entangled with politico-economic issues, it is to see how well they stick to their commitment to the reduction of emission level.

To know more about the developments in the South Asian countries in the month of April, read this issue of *South Asia Trends*.

## Afghanistan

### **28 dead, 327 wounded in Kabul suicide attack<sup>1</sup>**

At least 28 people were killed and 327 others wounded in a coordinated attack on the VIP protection unit in Kabul on April 19, 2016. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the assault that came a week after the insurgent group announced the launch of its spring offensive. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Kabul and called for a united international effort to fight against terrorism. In a statement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also condemned the attack in Kabul. The day Kabul was rocked by a devastating terrorist attack, the White House urged the Taliban to sit across the negotiating table with the Afghan government for the sake of peace in Afghanistan.

### **HPC optimistic over peace talks with Hizb-e-Islami<sup>2</sup>**

The Presidential Palace on April 13, 2016 welcomed the Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) participation in talks, saying the security forces would continue fighting against the militants opposed to the peace process. The High Peace Council (HPC) on April 17, 2016 said that after another round or two of talks, peace negotiations with Hizb-e-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, could yield results. The HPC admits differences in viewpoints between the two sides and that everyone is looking to benefit, but said that the negotiations should eventually yield results. Bringing about reforms in the election system, paving the ground for repatriation of refugees from Shamsha to camp in Peshwar, Pakistan and the release of Hizb-e-Islami's prisoners are the main conditions set by the party for peace. Representatives of Hizb-e-Islami said that out of the 25-article proposal for peace they have reached an agreement on 18 articles and progress has been made over the remaining articles. However, they are still to reach an agreement over electoral reforms, giving political parties the pivotal role in elections, the repatriation of refugees from Shamsha to camp, the release of their prisoners and the removal of the party's leaders from the blacklist. This optimism regarding peace talks with Hizb-e-Islami comes at a time that efforts by Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and United States to bring the Taliban to the negotiation tables has failed to yield results.

### **President Ghani urges religious clerics to speak against terrorism<sup>3</sup>**

24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mujahideen's victory against the Soviet-backed Communist regime was commemorated in Kabul. In his remarks during the commemoration President Ghani said that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are still waging Jihad as they defend the country, region and the world against the menace of terror. "The war that murderers and smugglers wage on us is not Jihad at all." He called on religious clerics to speak against the wrong actions of the terror groups, urging the anti-government armed militant groups to renounce violence and join peace process. President Ghani further added that Afghanistan is not favoring war but will stand against those willing to pursue violence.

### **ANSF committed to human rights laws: Afghan Government<sup>4</sup>**

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released a report on April 17, 2016 that said 1,943 civilian casualties (600 deaths and 1,343 injured) took place in the past three months, showing a significant decrease from the same period last year. However, the mission noted a spike in the number of the civilians

wounded. According to figures from UNAMA, civilian deaths fell by 13 per cent, compared to the first quarter of 2015. But the number of civilians wounded went up by 11 per cent. Reacting to a UN report that held pro-government forces responsible for 127 civilian deaths during the first quarter of 2016, the Afghan government said Afghan security forces were committed to domestic and international human rights laws.

### **U.S. Secretary of State Kerry makes an unannounced trip to Afghanistan<sup>5</sup>**

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made an unannounced trip to Afghanistan on April 9, 2016 to show support for the government and to try to defuse a political crisis fuelled in part by a national unity deal he brokered in 2014. Kerry met Nicholson and spoke to a small number of U.S. troops at the heavily guarded NATO headquarters in Kabul. Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani had the Bilateral Commission meeting with John Kerry. Kerry also met with President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah during his one-day visit to Kabul.

### **President Ghani meets US envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan<sup>6</sup>**

President Ashraf Ghani met the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Olson on April 9, 2016, and discussed security issues and the peace process, according to a Presidential Palace statement. According to the statement, both sides discussed preparations for the bilateral commission, regional issues, security cooperation, peace process and the upcoming Brussels and Warsaw conferences.

### **UN agencies to repair damaged schools, clinics in Nangarhar<sup>7</sup>**

United Nations (UN) secretary general's special deputy representative for Afghanistan Mark Bowden said the world's body would help reconstruct damaged hospital and school buildings in conflict-hit areas of eastern Nangarhar province. The envoy made the pledge during a meeting with Governor Salim Khan Kunduzi in Jalalabad on April 7, 2016. UNAMA provincial chief and heads of RCO, OHCHR, UNMAS, FAO, UNDP, UNCTAD, UNOPS, WFP, UNODC, UN women, IOM, UNHCR, UN Habitat, UNFPA, and UNESCO were also present at the meeting.

### **Tokyo to provide Kabul \$22 million grant for development<sup>8</sup>**

Tokyo would provide 2.4 billion yen (approximately \$22 million) for the economic and social development programme in Afghanistan, the Embassy of Japan announced on April 10, 2016. A contract for the assistance was signed between Japan's Ambassador Hiroshi Takashashi and Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani in Kabul. The grant would be used for purchasing materials necessary for economic and social development of the Afghan government, including procurement of necessary items such as fuels and gas.

### **Kabul, Islamabad to collaborate in higher education<sup>9</sup>**

Afghan and Pakistani officials, agreeing on collaboration in the area of higher education, have signaled their intention to work on a joint venture that will be

finalised with the approval of both countries. Afghan Ambassador Omar Zakhilwal and Higher Education Commission Chairman Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed reached the agreement during a meeting in Islamabad on April 10, 2016.

### **EU to support Afghan Government's economic programmes<sup>10</sup>**

The European Union (EU) has said it is committed to supporting the Afghan Government's economic programmes and priorities to be presented at the NATO summit in Brussels this year. The assurance came at a meeting between Afghan National Security Advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar and EU External Action Service Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific, Gunnar Wiegand, and EU special representative in Afghanistan Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin in Kabul. A statement from the National Security Council (NSC) said the meeting conferred on Afghanistan's preparations for the Brussels Summit, the international war against terrorism and the situation of Afghan refugees in Europe.

### **CEO Abdullah attends the thirteenth OIC summit<sup>11</sup>**

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah went Turkey on April 13, 2016 to attend the thirteenth Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in Istanbul. On the sidelines of the Summit, Abdullah Abdullah met with President Hassan Rouhani, where the Iranian President said that Iran would always side with Afghan nation and government.

### **Dushanbe, Kabul discuss regional power transmission project<sup>12</sup>**

Tajikistan's First Deputy Foreign Minister, Nizomiddin Zohidi, met with Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister for Finance and Administrative Affairs, Nasir Ahmad Andisha. According to the Tajik ministry of foreign affairs information department, the two discussed state and prospects of further expansion of bilateral political, economic and humanitarian cooperation between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. They, in particular, discussed preparations for an official ceremony of the launch of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade (CASA-1000) Project.

### **Iran, Afghanistan agree to implement alternative livelihood scheme<sup>13</sup>**

Iranian Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli visited Afghanistan Minister of Counter Narcotics, Salamat Azimi on April 21, 2016. During the meeting both sides agreed on launching the pilot project of alternative livelihood scheme with the contribution of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the world society.

### **Afghan parliament speaker participates at a conference for Eurasia speakers of parliament<sup>14</sup>**

Afghan parliament speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy visited Moscow to participate at a Conference for Eurasia Speakers of Parliament. The two-day Eurasia parliamentary meeting was attended by Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan Republic, Belarus, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Cambodia, Mongolia, Pakistan, South Korea, Russia, Thailand, the Philippines

and Czech Republic last week. Ibrahimy held talks with Iran's Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani on the sidelines of the Eurasia parliamentary meeting, where he said that Afghan parliament attaches great importance to expand parliamentary ties with Iran.

### **Afghan minister for refugees and repatriation visits Pakistan<sup>15</sup>**

Afghan Minister for Refugees and Repatriation Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi visited Pakistan to discuss problems facing the Afghan refugee population such as harassment at the hands of local police, forced deportations and illegal detentions during counterterrorism crackdowns. His Pakistani counterpart, Abdul Qadir Baloch, says the visiting Afghan minister has been assured the complaints are being addressed through certain steps. He insisted that mainly Afghans living illegally as economic migrants and not the registered refugees, are facing the problems. Baloch says that to address the issue, Pakistani authorities, with the help of the Afghan Government, will start within a month a registration process for an estimated 1.5 million undocumented Afghans. Minister Baloch says that there are around one-and-a-half-million registered Afghan refugees in the country and he will soon submit a request to the federal cabinet to extend their stay in Pakistan until the end of 2017. The current deadline for the Afghan refugee population to legally stay in the country ends on June 30 of this year. During the visit, Minister Balkhi met Pakistani Foreign Policy Chief Sartaj Aziz.

### **Ministry of foreign affairs summons Pakistani ambassador<sup>16</sup>**

Deputy Foreign Minister in Administrative Affairs Nasir Ahmad Andisha summoned the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Syed Abrar Hussain and, by giving him an objection note, told him the concerns Afghanistan about heavy weapon and artillery attack of Pakistani militants on Laal Poor and Goshta Districts of Nangarhar Province. Condemning these attacks as a result of which one border police lost his life and two others were seriously injured, the deputy minister said that these attacks take place while the people of Afghanistan are mourning the deaths of those who were killed in the recent terrorist attack in Kabul. The deputy minister wanted Pakistan to put an end to such violations in order to avoid further harm to the relations between the two countries. While expressing his grief for this occurrence, the Pakistani Ambassador to Kabul assured the deputy minister about conveying the concerns and the Afghan Government's note to the responsible Pakistani authorities.

### **Prime minister of Czech Republic visits Kabul<sup>17</sup>**

Czech Republic Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, during his visit to Kabul, met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on April 24 and discussed mutual relations and cooperation between the two countries. During the meeting the Afghan leader sought the Czech Republic's help with the Afghan Air Force in repairing helicopters and sending a technical team to Afghanistan. Sobotka said his country has decided to expand relations with Afghanistan, establish a consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif and train Afghan pilots. At the end of their meeting, the premier invited President Ghani to visit Czech Republic and his invitation was accepted, the statement said. According to another report, The Czech Government has approved a plan to keep

troops in Afghanistan until at least 2018. The current mandate for Czech servicemen in NATO's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan expires by the year's end. According to the Defense Ministry proposal, which still needs parliamentary approval, up to 290 Czechs will be deployed in Afghanistan next year, and up to 270 in 2018.

### **Afghan deputy minister of foreign affairs visits India<sup>18</sup>**

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Hekmat Khalil Karzai participated at the first senior officials meeting (SOM) of the Heart of Asia process on April 26, 2016.

### **Deputy foreign minister participates in the fifth ministerial meeting of CICA<sup>19</sup>**

Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai participated in the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Beijing, China. Karzai appreciated in his speech the support of the people and the government of China in the peace process of Afghanistan. He counted terrorism as a regional threat, and besides emphasising the need for regional cooperation and partnership for countering effectively this phenomenon, described CICA as a significant platform in this regard.

### **Afghan, Turkmen foreign ministers meet<sup>20</sup>**

Turkmenistan expressed its readiness to enhance bilateral cooperation with Afghanistan in various spheres including trade and education. This was stated by Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov during a meeting with his Afghan counterpart Salahuddin Rabbani on April 25, 2016. For his part, Rabbani referred to mutual bonds like religious, geographical, economical and political between the two countries and said increased cooperation with Turkmenistan was a key pillar of Afghanistan's foreign policy. Rabbani said the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project would pave the way for peace, stability, security and trade in the region. He said mutual trade between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan especially exports from Afghanistan like marble stones and others needed to be improved. Rabbani thanked Turkmenistan for awarding Afghan students educational scholarships in fields of railroad, petroleum and electrical engineering.

### **TAPI shareholders sign agreement to kick start construction<sup>21</sup>**

Shareholders of TAPI Pipeline Company Limited (TPCL) have signed an Investment Agreement at a ceremony attended by petroleum ministers and senior government officials from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and India, as well as senior Asian Development Bank (ADB) officials. According to a press release issued by ADB, the agreement will pave the way for the delivery of a long-term supply of natural gas, supporting Afghanistan's energy needs and helping it rebuild links with neighboring "Silk Road" countries. The Investment Agreement provides an initial budget of over US\$ 200 million to fund the next phase of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline. This includes funding for detailed engineering and route surveys, environmental and social safeguard studies, and procurement and financing activities, to enable a financial investment

## Bangladesh

decision, after which construction will begin. It is estimated that construction will take up to three years.

### **Foreign missions, cross section condemn RU professor murder<sup>22</sup>**

Foreign missions in Dhaka and cross-section of people stoutly condemned the heinous murder of A.F.M. Rezaul Karim Siddiquee, professor of English at Rajshahi University, who was found with his throat slit in Shalbagan area in Rajshahi city on April 25, 2016. They also called for quick probe and bringing the perpetrators to book.

### **Xulhaz-Tonoy Murder: Ansar Al Islam claims responsibility<sup>23</sup>**

Ansar Al Islam or Bangladesh branch of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has claimed responsibility for the murder of LGBT magazine editor Xulhaz Mannan, and his friend Khandaker Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy, according to US-based monitoring agency SITE Intelligence Group. The United States strongly condemned the brutal killing of USAID official Xulhaz Mannan at his Dhaka home. US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat has urged the government of Bangladesh to apprehend the criminals behind the murders. Two representatives of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) met a team of the Detective Branch of police in Dhaka on April 28, 2016 to know about the investigation into the gruesome double murder in Kalabagan. The FBI representatives offered their support to the detective branch particularly to carry out DNA tests on samples collected from the crime scene and a bag left by the killers. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said he was not aware of whether the FBI made any written proposal for helping the branch in the investigation. "If they want to extend support, we'll welcome them," he told The Daily Star. US Secretary of State John Kerry in a press statement on April 25 said, "We offer our full support to the government of Bangladesh as they investigate these murders and bring the perpetrators to justice." US Secretary of State John Kerry also phoned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and requested her to take necessary steps to bring to book the killers of Xulhaz. Amnesty International and Committee to Protect Journalists has also condemned the murders.

### **\$101 million cyber heist from Bangladesh Bank account<sup>24</sup>**

Cyber criminals stole \$101 million from the Bangladesh Bank (BB) account with the Federal Reserve Bank in February. The incident came to light several days later. The Criminal Investigation Department claims to have identified 20 foreign nationals involved in cyber theft from the Bangladesh Bank account with the New York Federal Reserve Bank. In its probe, the CID also found evidence of negligence by Bangladesh Bank officials, Additional Deputy Inspector General Shah Alam of CID (Organised Crime) told reporters at the CID headquarters on April 18, 2016. The CID official came up with the statement a couple of days after two CID teams returned from the Philippines and Sri Lanka with their findings on the cyber heist.

### **Indian oil minister visits Dhaka<sup>25</sup>**

Dharmendra Pradhan, Indian minister of state for petroleum and natural gas, reached Dhaka on April 17, 2016, the Indian High Commission said in a statement. His three-day visit was aimed at following up on the ambitious agenda set between the countries during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh in June 2015. Pradhan called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and discussed issues pertaining to hydro-carbon sector between the two countries. He was accompanied by the CEOs of major public sector oil and gas companies and senior officials of his ministry.

### **Dhaka, Delhi to set up LPG plant in Chittagong<sup>26</sup>**

Dhaka and New Delhi signed an agreement to set up a liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) handling plant in Chittagong to meet the growing energy demand in Bangladesh and north-eastern India on April 18, 2016. Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) inked a memorandum of understanding at the Radisson Blu hotel in Dhaka. New Delhi had made the proposal for the LPG plant. Reportedly, Indian government had sought Bangladesh's help in supplying LPG to eastern India through pipeline.

### **125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar celebrated in Dhaka<sup>27</sup>**

High Commission of India and Bangladesh-India Friendship Society jointly organised a programme to celebrate 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on April 15, 2016 where Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh, HT Imam, political adviser to prime minister, Prof. Dr. Shah Alam, member of Law Commission, and Prof. Emeritus Dr. A.K. Azad Chowdhury were present.

### **China's banking regulator seeks help from Yunus to promote microcredit<sup>28</sup>**

The China Banking Regulatory Commission (CBRC) sought help from Nobel Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus to promote microcredit in China to help the country's efforts to reduce poverty and support entrepreneurship among rural people. Guo Ligen, vice-chairman of the commission, led a high powered delegation to meet Prof Yunus at the Yunus Centre in Dhaka to discuss the policy to promote microcredit in the world's second largest economy, Yunus Centre said in a statement. Ligen invited the microcredit pioneer to set up a Grameen programme in China on an experimental basis in collaboration with the CBRC.

### **State minister for foreign affairs meets the Chinese foreign minister in Beijing<sup>29</sup>**

Md. Shahriar Alam, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, who went to Beijing to attend the fifth ministerial meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), met the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China Wang Yi on April 27, 2016 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China to discuss the issues of mutual interest. Bangladesh Ambassador to China M. Fazlul Karim was, among others, present at the meeting. Expressing satisfaction over the existing state of bilateral relations between the two countries, both sides reiterated firm commitments to further deepen the existing close comprehensive partnership.

### **Prime Minister Hasina seeks more Chinese investment<sup>30</sup>**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sought more Chinese investment in the country's various sectors to accelerate the development efforts. The prime minister came up with the call when visiting Chinese Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Kong Xuanyou met her at her office on April 13, 2016.

### **Foreign Minister Mahmood participates in the thirteenth OIC summit<sup>31</sup>**

Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali participated in the thirteenth OIC Summit Conference in Istanbul, Turkey on April 15, 2016 as the leader of the Bangladesh delegation. Earlier on April 12-13, the Bangladesh foreign minister attended the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Meeting. On April 12, A.H. Mahmood Ali also attended a meeting of the OIC Ministerial Contact Group on Rohingya Muslim Minority of Myanmar. He discussed within the group the future course of action and plan of engagement with the new government in Myanmar.

### **Prime Minister Hasina pushes for SAARC food bank<sup>32</sup>**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stressed the need for speedy implementation of the initiatives taken for setting up SAARC Food Bank and SAARC Seed Bank. "Since it is essential for tackling any kind of disaster, I would like to urge the South Asian leaders to take necessary steps to establish the SAARC Food Bank as soon as possible. Let the SAARC Food Bank be a friend of need so that no one dies of starvation in our region," she said. The prime minister was addressing the inaugural session of the third Meeting of SAARC Ministers of Agriculture on April 7, 2016.

### **Dhaka signs Paris Climate Agreement<sup>33</sup>**

Bangladesh signed the historic Paris Climate Agreement, aiming to take various measures to save the world from the disastrous consequences of climate change. The Bangladeshi minister also had a bilateral meeting with Fatma Guldemet Sari, Minister for Environment and Urbanisation of Turkey. The two ministers agreed to work together during the lead-up to UNFCCC COP22 in Morocco in November this year to promote the issues of common interests, with focus on climate-vulnerable LDCs.

### **Bangladesh Prime Minister Hasina made member of UN panel on water<sup>34</sup>**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been appointed as a member of the United Nations High-Level Panel on Water. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim formally announced the appointment of 10 heads of state and government, as well as two special advisers, to the panel on April 21, 2016, says a UN News Centre report.

### **Foreign office consultation between Bangladesh and Germany held in Berlin<sup>35</sup>**

The foreign office consultation between Bangladesh and Germany was held in Berlin on April 25, 2016. Bangladesh side was led by Foreign Secretary Md. Shahidul Haque, while State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany Dr. Markus Ederer led the German side. Both Foreign Secretaries discussed all aspects of existing bilateral relations and agreed to work closely to further strengthen

mutual cooperation between the two countries. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary also met with the Parliamentary State Secretary for the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany Hans-Joachim Fuchtel during the visit.

### **Dhaka offers condolences after Ecuador quake<sup>36</sup>**

Bangladesh expressed deep shock at the casualties and destructions following the recent devastating earthquake that shook Ecuador. "Our sympathies and prayers are with all those affected... We stand by your government and the friendly people of Ecuador at this difficult time," Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali said in a message to his Ecuadorian counterpart Charles Flanagan on April 18, 2016.

### **Prime minister condoles loss of lives in Japan<sup>37</sup>**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at the tragic loss of human lives and massive destructions, following the very recent earthquake in Kumamoto and southern parts in Japan. "I convey our deepest condolences to you and to your bereaved nation for the loss of lives, and I offer our prayers for the salvation of the departed souls," said Hasina in a letter sent to her Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe on April 17, 2016.

### **"Bangladesh government sometimes fail to protect press freedom": US human rights report<sup>38</sup>**

The Bangladesh government has "sometimes failed" to protect the freedom of speech and media, the US said in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 released on April 13 in Washington DC by Secretary of State John Kerry. Asked to comment, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told The Daily Star that the report on Bangladesh was "not based on facts". But he declined to elaborate.

### **Global energy index: big leap for Bangladesh<sup>39</sup>**

The Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF) in its "Energy Architecture Performance Index (EAPI) 2016" put Bangladesh at 106, up from 112<sup>th</sup> position of last year. The country also achieved a higher overall score for better energy management towards economic growth and development and environmental sustainability. This year the country earned a total score of 0.50 on a scale from 0-1 against last year's score of 0.45. Progress has also been made in economic growth and development (from 0.52 to 0.63), environmental sustainability (from 0.39 to 0.44) and energy access and security (from 0.44 to 0.45).

### **Bangladesh moves two notches up in press freedom index<sup>40</sup>**

Bangladesh has moved two notches up to the 144<sup>th</sup> place among 180 countries in this year's World Press Freedom Index. Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), in its flagship annual report released on April 20, however, voiced serious concern over the state of freedom of expression in the South Asian country. Despite the two-notch elevation, Bangladesh's position is the lowest, except Pakistan's, in the South Asian scene. The index has placed Pakistan in 147<sup>th</sup> position, Sri Lanka in 141<sup>st</sup>, India in 133<sup>rd</sup>, Afghanistan in 120<sup>th</sup>, Nepal in 105<sup>th</sup> and Bhutan in 94<sup>th</sup>.

### **Bangladesh gets \$217million from World Bank to upgrade power plant<sup>41</sup>**

The government signed a \$217 million financing agreement with the World Bank (WB) to upgrade Ghorasal power station, more than doubling the generation capacity of one of its units on April 7, 2016. A repowering project will transform a gas-fired steam unit, which is currently generating 170 megawatts, into an energy-efficient 409 MW plant. Such a conversion to combined cycle technology will increase the plant's overall efficiency from an existing 30 per cent to 54 per cent while requiring only 18 per cent more natural gas, the WB said in a statement.

### **Project revised to connect Bangladesh with trans-Asian railway<sup>42</sup>**

The Government of Bangladesh has revised a project to lay a 129-km rail track from Dohazari to Gundum near Myanmar border via Cox's Bazar at a cost of Tk 18,034 crore. The original project launched in 2011 saw little progress over the last five years. The revised project would connect Bangladesh with the Trans-Asian Railway, a network across Europe and Asia, and boost the country's trade with Myanmar, China and Thailand. The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) approved the project titled "Construction of Single Line Dual Gauge Railway Track from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar via Ramu, and Ramu to Gundum near Myanmar" on April 19, 2016. The Asian Development Bank will provide Tk 13,115 crore for the country's largest railway project, and the rest will come from the government funds. The tenure of the revised project has been extended to 2022.

### **Forex reserves cross \$29 billion<sup>43</sup>**

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves crossed the \$29-billion mark mainly due to a dearth of investment. The amount stood at \$29.1 billion on April 25, which is sufficient to meet the country's import bills for 9.41 months, an official of Bangladesh Bank said.

## **Bhutan**

### **Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visits Bhutan<sup>44</sup>**

The visit to Bhutan by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge of the United Kingdom, which took place at the invitation of Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, concluded on April 16, 2016. During the two-day visit, the royal couple received an audience with The King and The Gyaltsuen. Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck hosted an archery match and other traditional sports at Changlimithang, which the Duke and Duchess participated in. They also interacted with students from Ability Bhutan Society and the Draktsho Vocational Training Centre for Special Children and Youth at Changlimithang and met with Bhutanese who have studied in the United Kingdom.

### **UK to open visa application centre in Thimphu<sup>45</sup>**

Following the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's successful visit to Bhutan, the UK has announced the opening of a new Visa Application Centre (VAC) in Thimphu to further strengthen ties between the two countries. The new VAC is a joint venture with Australia and VFS Global, UK Visas and Immigration's commercial partner. It is planned to open mid-May in Thimphu, and will provide

customers the opportunity to apply for their UK visas in Bhutan rather than having to travel to India.

### **“Bhutan’s energy market in India is secure”: Pradeep Kumar Pujari<sup>46</sup>**

India’s drive to augment its power generation capacity by three-folds to 800 gigawatts (GW) by 2030 and emerge as a power surplus country will not distress Bhutan’s energy market in India, the Secretary for the Ministry of Power, Pradeep Kumar Pujari has assured. The Indian power secretary, who visited Bhutan to take stock of the progress on hydropower projects, said there is a huge latent demand for power in India. The SAARC framework for inter-regional grid connectivity is in favour of Bhutan, when the country has the potential to generate as much as 30,000MW of hydropower. Of late, Bangladesh has been keen on importing power from Bhutan. “Talks are already in progress and technical experts from Bhutan, Bangladesh and India, have to sit together and discuss,” he said. Another area of such tri-lateral cooperation is the Kuri-I or the Rothpashong hydropower project in Bhutan.

### **Indian embassy marks 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar<sup>47</sup>**

The wisdom of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chairman of the Indian Constitution drafting committee, inspired many articles of the Bhutanese Constitution, former Chief Justice Sonam Tobgay said on April 5, 2016 at the lecture “Transcendental Wisdom and Wisdom of Dr. Ambedkar” at the Royal Institute of Management in Thimphu to mark the 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr Ambedkar. Sonam Tobgay was the chairman of the Constitution drafting committee of Bhutan. He said that one of the direct influences of Dr Ambedkar’s wisdom in the Bhutanese Constitution was that Bhutan’s prime minister should be a natural born citizen. Present at the programme were Foreign Minister of Bhutan Damcho Dorji, Finance Minister Namgay Dorji, Chief Justice Tshering Wangchuk and former Chief Election Commissioner Dasho Kunzang Wangdi. Ambassadors Jishnu Roy Chaudhary and Jaideep Sarkar of Bangladesh and India respectively were also present.

### **India hands over Nu 1.97 billion for 11<sup>th</sup> Plan<sup>48</sup>**

The Government of India handed over Nu 1.97 billion to the Royal Government. Indian ambassador Jaideep Sarkar handed over the cheques to the Gross National Happiness Commission Secretary Sonam Wangchuk on April 1, 2016. Of that, Nu 414.32 million is for Government of India Project-Tied-Assistance projects and Nu 1.5 billion for small development projects (SDP). The release of funds include, among others, the preparation of the detailed project report (DPR) for Kuri-Gongri, which will be the largest hydroelectric project in the country with an estimated generation of 2,640MW. Besides the project, there are eight other projects including a government data centre for the Department of Information Technology and Telecom, strengthening of agriculture marketing and trade, and Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS). The budget also includes the construction of a rehabilitation centre and the final budget for the construction of the Election Commission of Bhutan office. Projects like the Government to Community (G2C) and Government to Business (G2B) and government to government (G2G) are also covered by the fund. For the small development projects,

this is the second installment for the second batch of projects. The fund is 60 per cent of the total budget for the projects. Government of India has committed Nu 45 billion in the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. Nu 28 billion for Project Tied Assistance (PTA), Nu 8.5 billion for Program Grant (PG) and Nu 8.5 billion for SDP. In this financial year, during April 2015–March 2016, the Indian government released Nu 11.2 billion. Of that Project Tied Assistance was Nu 5,889.659 million, SDP was Nu 3.6 billion and Programme Grant (PG) Nu 1.7 billion. As of April 1, 2016, India released Nu 10.8 billion for PTA projects, Nu 4.2 billion for Program Grant and Nu 4.5 billion for SDP. In total, India has released Nu 19.5 billion which is 43.43 per cent of the total committed assistance in this Plan.

### **India approves revised cost of Mangdechhu hydropower project**<sup>49</sup>

The Mangdechhu hydropower project (MHP) may start power generation by the end of next year but with a cost overrun of about 39 per cent of the approved investment of INR 28.96 billion. According to the revised cost estimate, it will cost around Rs 40.2 billion to complete the 720MW project based in Trongsa. The total cost escalation for the project is INR 11.24 billion. The revised cost estimate was approved on March 23 by the union cabinet of Government of India. Any significant cost escalation will increase the loan burden on the government as the project is funded by India with 70 per cent loan. Thirty per cent of the project cost is grant. Based on the initial estimation, the loan amount will come to INR 20.27 billion. However, with the revised cost estimate, Bhutan will have taken a loan of INR 28.14 billion by the time the project is complete. The loan is to be paid back in 30 equated semi-annual instalments at the rate of 10 per cent annually.

### **Bhutan's minister for agriculture and forests wants collaboration with BRRI**<sup>50</sup>

Bhutan's Minister for Agriculture and Forests Lyonpo Yeshey Dorji stressed more collaboration with Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) to have a surplus of rice in his country. The emphasis came while the minister visited BRRI in Gazipur on April 6, says a BRRI press release. Welcoming the visiting minister, BRRI Director General Dr. Jiban Krishna Biswas discussed ways and means to strengthen collaboration at a views exchange meeting.

### **"Economy is now stable": Prime Minister Tobgay**<sup>51</sup>

"The economy is now stable", Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay said at the mid-term review (MTR) meeting for Haa on April 1, 2016. However, the country's trade balance is in deficit of more than Nu 32 billion. During the MTR Lyonchoen said the trade balance is an important indicator and to reverse it the country should increase domestic production. Lyonchoen said the government is considering rural development to further stabilise the economy, which he believes is the key to successfully implementing the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. He said that budget allocation to the local government in the first fiscal year of the Plan could not happen as expected because the Plan could not be finalised instantly and funds had to be sought. However, in the third fiscal year (2015-16), Lyonchoen said funds more than the planned budget would be disbursed. The economy at the beginning of the planned period, he said, was mired with issues like the rupee crisis, external debt, and loan and import restrictions. In 2014, the economy grew by 5.5 per cent to Nu 119.5 billion from Nu 105.3 billion. The convertible currency reserve improved from US\$ 726 million

to US\$ 815 million. The Indian rupee position has also improved, solving the unofficial exchange rate along the borders, Lyonchoen said. However, the country's external debt today stands at Nu 128.7 billion which was Nu 95.5 billion at the beginning of the Plan. Lyonchoen said most of the debts are on account of hydropower, which are safe because it is not only self-liquidating in nature but also brings revenue simultaneously. "Non-hydro debt is a concern and the government has been able to reduce it," he said, pointing out that non-hydro debt dropped from Nu 40.9 billion to Nu 34 billion. The 11<sup>th</sup> plan has a budget of Nu 213 billion, of which Nu 140 billion is estimated to derive from domestic revenue, Nu 56 billion from grants and the remaining Nu 17 billion from loans. India alone committed Nu 45 billion in grant, of which the government received 42 per cent. Lyonchoen said other countries and organisations have now committed Nu 10 billion additional grant from the initial estimate. Total grant would now be Nu 66 billion. While the estimate was to generate Nu 42.1 billion of domestic revenue in the last two fiscal years, the actual achievement was 2.8 billion more than the target. The Opposition Party has however, claimed that the government's 11<sup>th</sup> Plan mid-term review reports are misleading, distorted and inflated.

### **Bhutan signs Paris Agreement<sup>52</sup>**

Ambassador Kunzang C. Namgyel, Bhutan Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York signed the Paris Agreement on behalf of the Kingdom of Bhutan at the United Nations Headquarters on April 22, 2016. Following the signing ceremony, Ambassador Kunzang Namgyel delivered Bhutan's national statement in which she highlighted Bhutan's vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change and stated that the Paris Agreement provides the best hope to collectively meet the challenges of climate change. She assured Bhutan's commitment to contribute to the global fight against climate change and urged all countries to support Bhutan in its national endeavours.

## **Maldives**

### **President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom visits India<sup>53</sup>**

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom made a two day official visit to India, on the invitation of the Government of India. On arrival at Indira Gandhi International Airport, the President was received by India's Minister of Tourism and Culture and Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Dr. Mahesh Sharma. During this visit, President Yameen called on the President of India Pranab Mukherjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. During the meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, discussions were held on a wide-range of subjects concerning both nations. Some of the topics of discussions included trade and economic cooperation, defence and security, human resource development, health sector development, social issues and tourism sector projects. President Yameen invited Prime Minister Modi to visit the Maldives at his convenience. Six agreements were exchanged between Maldives and India during the visit, which includes: agreement for avoidance of double taxation of income derived from international air transport; agreement for the exchange of information with respect to taxes; memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the area of conservation and restoration of mosques and joint research and exploratory surveys in Maldives; bilateral agreement related to orbit frequency coordination of 'South Asia Satellite' proposed at 48E; memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of tourism; and agreement on defence action plan.

### **President Yameen conferred “Dr. Kalam Puraskar for excellence in governance”<sup>54</sup>**

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom was conferred the first “Dr Kalam Puraskar for Excellence in Governance” award at a special ceremony held on April 27, 2016. President Yameen thanked the Government of India and the members of Dale View Group of Institution for conferring him with the Award and expressed his gratitude towards India and its people for standing by the Maldives and her people, both in “good times and bad; unwavering, undeterred and uncompromising in extending its generosity as a good neighbour.”

### **Maldives-India youth exchange program<sup>55</sup>**

Maldives-India Youth Exchange Program, under Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two countries in October, 2015 – on Cooperation in Sport and Youth Affairs, was held from April 22 to April 30. The program, held with the purpose of strengthening ties between the two countries, and providing the opportunity for Indian young men and women to get first-hand experience about the daily lives of Maldivian youth.

### **Commonwealth deputy secretary-general meets Foreign Minister Dunya<sup>56</sup>**

Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Dr. Josephine Ojiambo, who was on a visit to Maldives, met with Maldivian Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon on April 9, 2016. According to Foreign Ministry, Dunya briefed Ojiambo regarding the latest work being carried out by government, including President Abdulla Yameen’s National Master Plan for strengthening governance in Maldives. Meanwhile, Ojiambo, during her meeting with Dunya noted that Commonwealth was very keen on working with Maldivian Government to strengthen the country’s fledgling democratic system. The meeting was also attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Fathimath Inaya and Senior Desk Officer for Foreign Ministry Leesha Mohamed.

### **Swire says Maldives has until September to follow through on recommendations before sanctions<sup>57</sup>**

Minister of Foreign Affairs for Commonwealth Office, Hugo Swire said that Maldivian Government had time until September to follow through on recommendations by Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to rectify issues in six areas, before the organisation takes up sanctions against the country. Despite the decision to remove Maldives from CMAG agenda, the organisation said in a press statement that there had been no improvement in the country regarding the basic rights and freedom of civilians. The government needed to draw up a roadmap in which to achieve the civil rights and freedom, as well as show evidence of progress being made in government discussions with opposition political parties. In answer to a question posed by Commonwealth parliamentarian Julie Cooper on April 28, 2016, Swire said that sanctions would be taken up against the country if there was no improvement by September.

### **Maldivian politicians in UK meet with Commonwealth secretary general<sup>58</sup>**

The opposition party leaders of the Maldives met with the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Patricia Scotland in the UK. Deputy Leader of the Jumhooree

Party, Ameen Ibrahim tweeted on April 15, 2016 that rekindling democracy in the Maldives was discussed in the meeting. Patricia Scotland was a legal adviser to the Maldivian Government during the Presidency of Dr. Waheed during the CMAG (Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group) pressure. She was also on the Council of the Omnia Strategy law firm advising the Maldivian government during President Nasheed's case at the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

### **American ambassador pays courtesy call on President Yameen<sup>59</sup>**

The Ambassador of America to the Maldives, Atul Keshap paid a courtesy call on President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom on April 4, 2016 at the President's Office. During the meeting the President and the Ambassador held discussions about further strengthening of ties between the Maldives and America. The American Ambassador was accompanied at the meeting by Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Manpreet Singh Anand

### **American Senate passes resolution to get justice for Nasheed and other political prisoners<sup>60</sup>**

The American Senate passed a resolution calling to get justice for the former President Mohamed Nasheed, who has been sentenced to 13 years in prison after being convicted of terrorism, and other political prisoners in the Maldives. The resolution that passed with the support of Republicans and the Democrats on April 7 says that they are concerned about the proceedings of the unjust trial of the former president. It called the Maldivian government to take the necessary steps to find justice for President Nasheed and free all the political prisoners. The resolution was presented at the senate by the ranking member of the Appropriation Subcommittee, Senator Patrick Healy and the Chairman of the Senate Armed Service Committee, Senator John McCain.

### **Special Envoy of the UN Samuel Tamrat visits Maldives<sup>61</sup>**

Special Envoy of the UN, Senior Advisor to the UN Department of Political Affairs Samuel Tamrat made a visit to the Maldives on April 16, 2016 to assist the government with the political party talks initiated by President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. During his visit, Tamrat met with President Yameen, Cabinet Ministers, representatives of the government in the all-party talks, and members of the political parties involved in the talks. He also made a visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka, and met with the foreign diplomats designated to the Maldives.

### **Deputy commander of the Chinese PLA Navy visits Maldives<sup>62</sup>**

The Deputy Commander of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Navy, Vice Admiral Tian Zhong made an official visit to the Maldives. Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) said that the purpose of the Vice Admiral's visit to the Maldives was to build the relationship between the military of the two countries. A delegation of seven officials arrived in the Maldives for the visit. Vice Admiral Zhong was welcomed at the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport (INIA) by the Commander of the Aviation Security, Brigadier General, Zakariya Mansoor.

### **Japan provides US\$ 5.4 million grant to the Maldives<sup>63</sup>**

Japanese Government has provided Maldivian government a grant of US\$ 5.4 million to promote further social and economic development in Maldives. The exchange of notes was signed by Maldivian Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon and Japanese Ambassador to Maldives Kenichi Suganuma, in a ceremony held at Foreign Ministry on April 6, 2016. Foreign Ministry said that the grant money would be utilised to procure related equipment and materials for disaster risk management such as warning system to share disaster information and disaster response, as well as disaster restoration items such as drainage pumps.

### **Foreign Minister of Sweden Wallstrom meets Foreign Minister Dunya<sup>64</sup>**

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margot Wallstrom came to the Maldives on April 23, 2016 on an official visit. Foreign Minister of Sweden was received at Ibrahim Nasir International Airport by Foreign Secretary Dr. Ali Naseer Mohamed. During the visit, Margot Wallstrom met with Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon. Both Ministers discussed ways of further strengthening the existing ties between the two countries. Foreign Minister Dunya also hosted a dinner in honour of Foreign Minister Wallstrom and visiting delegation from Sweden.

### **Head of IFRC & Red Crescent Societies calls on Foreign Minister Dunya<sup>65</sup>**

Head of the Country Cluster Asia, International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and Red Crescent Societies, Leon Prop paid a courtesy call on the Minister of Foreign Affairs Dunya Maumoon on April 23, 2016. Minister Dunya welcomed Prop to the Maldives and expressed her appreciation for the work of IFRC and the active role of the Maldivian Red Crescent in the country. Minister Dunya was accompanied at the meeting by Additional Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Marium Jabyn and Senior Desk Officer of the Foreign Affairs Laila Shareef.

### **President sends message of sympathy to the Ecuadorian President<sup>66</sup>**

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom sent a message of sympathy to the President of the Republic of Ecuador Rafael Correa following the deadly earthquake which hit the western coastal area of Ecuador causing the loss of many lives.

### **President sends message of sympathy to the Prime Minister of Japan<sup>67</sup>**

President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom sent a message of sympathy to the Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe, following the earthquake that hit Kumamoto prefecture.

### **President ratifies bill to establish a religious fatwa council<sup>68</sup>**

President Abdulla Yameen ratified the amendment to Religious Unity Act, which will allow the government to establish a religious fatwa council. President's office said in a statement that the amendment would address challenges concerning religious unity among Maldivians at a national level and will seek to provide a legal basis, and opportunity, to study Islamic fiqh and facilitate timely and constructive religious counsel. The bill was proposed to parliament on behalf of government by Isdhoo MP Ahmed Rasheed Ibrahim. The amendment says that

the council would consist of five members, and that the authority to appoint a president and vice president to the council would be given to the head of state. The council would consist of a member chosen by Islamic Ministry, a member chosen by Chief Justice, two members chosen by President and one academic from National University or Islamic University – chosen by President and approved by People’s Majlis. The bill says that symposiums of religious scholars would be held to discuss and settle religious disputes which could affect society. Rules regarding administration of the council, requesting council for counsel, and standards that published religious fatwas need to uphold need to be established within six months after the amendment takes effect. The amendment has been published in Government Gazette.

## Nepal

### **Madhesi, Janajatis announce tactical alliance for struggle<sup>69</sup>**

Madhesi parties and fringe Janajati forces have announced a tactical alliance to launch a joint struggle against the constitution that, in their words, curtails the rights of indigenous and marginalised communities. The parties, which plan to start a nationwide protest under the banner of Sanghiya Samabesi Gathabandhan (SSG), have also put a 26-point demand before the government. The SSG, which primarily constitutes allies of the Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha and other Janajati groups affiliated with the Adivasi Janajati Rastriya Andolan (Ajra), also unveiled a common framework for joint struggle on April 18, 2016. There are 26 political and civil society groups in the Gathabandhan. “This alliance is sure to take identity movement to a new height. Our fight will not stop until the government agrees to rewrite the constitution in accordance with the past agreements signed with the Madhesi, Janajati, Dalit, Khas, Muslim and other communities,” Saghya Samajbadi Forum Nepal Chairman Upendra Yadav said during an interaction organised in Kathmandu on April 18. The tactical alliance of agitating Madhesi and Janajati groups, had announced that it would centre its protests in Kathmandu against the government. But with a crack in the alliance over forms of agitation, the new force decided to take protests down to the districts.

### **Maoists against courts handling war-era cases<sup>70</sup>**

A meeting of six Maoist parties decided to press the government to address all war-era cases through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons. Both the commissions have started collecting complaints from conflict victims. The meeting held at the party headquarters of the UCPN in Parisdanda on April 20, 2016 concluded that “a conspiracy is being hatched to derail the peace process” by taking war-era cases to regular courts. The meeting also decided to demand that the cases being handled by police and courts be brought to these commissions. According to a press statement issued after the meeting, the six parties decided to establish a “joint legal desk” to study the war-era cases and offer recommendations to the government.

### **Reconstruction project in 11 districts<sup>71</sup>**

The National Reconstruction Authority formally took its house rebuilding project to 11 severely quake-affected districts on April 24, 2016, on the first anniversary of

the devastating earthquake. The NRA announced the names of 300,981 beneficiaries in 11 of the 14 worst-hit districts. Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli reached Chautara in Sindhupalchok—the worst-hit district in terms of casualties—to lay the foundation stone for the house of Sarbe Tamang.

### **Govt. forms committee to implement deals signed with India and China<sup>72</sup>**

Amid criticism that the government has failed to pay serious attention to implementing deals signed with India and China during Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's visits in February and March, the government has formed a high-level committee to expedite the implementation. The panel, headed by the foreign secretary, will keep tabs on the progress made in the implementation of the deals signed with the neighbouring countries. The decision to form the panel was taken during a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Thapa, and secretaries of various ministries.

### **EU stands by its position on Nepal's new constitution<sup>73</sup>**

European Union (EU) Ambassador to Nepal Rensje Teerink has said the EU stands by its position on Nepal's new charter and that it has not reversed the position following the EU-India Summit in Brussels. "We stand by our earlier position," Teerink told media following her meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Thapa. A EU statement on September 18 had hailed Nepal's constitution as a "historic step". The text of the statement is in no way a 180-degree reversal of EU stance, said Teerink. "The text of the statement doesn't seek to question the constitution itself." The joint statement issued at the end of the thirteenth EU-India Summit in Brussels on March 30 said the two sides "agreed on the need for a lasting and inclusive constitutional settlement in Nepal that will address the remaining constitutional issues in a time bound manner, and promote political stability and economic growth." Taking serious exception to the EU-India statement, Nepal issued a statement expressing reservations on two points: Reference of Nepal in a bilateral statement and comments on Nepal's new constitution. Teerink said during her meeting with Minister Thapa she sought to clarify both points. Arguing that Nepal was mentioned in previous EU-India joint statement as well, the EU ambassador disagreed with Nepal's assertion that this was a breach of UN charter and violation of Nepal's sovereignty. On references to Nepal's charter, Teerink pointed out that the EU was among first few countries to welcome Nepal's new constitution.

### **Deuba, Swaraj discuss Nepal's political situation<sup>74</sup>**

Nepali Congress President and former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba met Indian Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi on April 21, 2016, during his private visit to India and discussed Nepal's political situation and post-quake reconstruction efforts among other issues. Chief of Nepal Desk at India's Ministry of External Affairs Abhaya Thakur, and other officials were present during the thirty minute meeting.

### **India pledges Rs116 million to Kaski institutes<sup>75</sup>**

The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has extended financial pledge to build infrastructure for three educational institutes in Kaski district. According to a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the District Development Office, Kaski, and the Embassy in Kathmandu on April 7, 2016, a campus building will be constructed for Gupteshwor Mahadev Multiple Campus in Pokhara at an estimated cost of Rs 40 million. Likewise the embassy will fund the construction of school buildings for Saraswati Tika Higher Secondary School in Bharatpokhari. The school building will cost an estimated Rs 37 million. The Indian mission in Nepal has also pledged Rs 37 million to construct the school building of Arba Bijaya Secondary School and Dhand Bensi. India has extended financial assistance worth nearly Rs 501.53 million towards restoration, and upgradation of various religious, educational, cultural and historical sites in Nepal.

### **US to provide monetary assistance for Bhutanese refugees<sup>76</sup>**

The United States has pledged \$1 million as food assistance to Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. The amount will be delivered by USAID to the World Food Programme to help it provide basic food for nearly 17,000 Bhutanese refugees residing in Nepal, the WFP said. "USAID's contribution to WFP is part of our global effort to respond to protracted crises. The United States has contributed almost US\$34 million to provide food assistance to refugees from Bhutan in Nepal between 2006 and 2016," the Acting Mission Director for USAID Nepal Amy Tohill-Stull said.

### **Deputy Prime Minister Thapa holds high level political meetings in London<sup>77</sup>**

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Thapa held a meeting with British Minister of State Hugo Swire at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom on April 28, 2016. During the meeting, matters pertaining to bilateral relations, development support from the United Kingdom, reconstruction process, and exchange of high-level visits were discussed. Minister Thapa also held meeting with Minister of State at the Department for International Development (DFID) Desmond Swayne at House of Commons, during which they discussed about the development cooperation between the two countries, especially, in the context of Nepal's ongoing reconstruction process. Thapa was accompanied by Tej Bahadur Chhetri, CDA at the Nepali Embassy in London and Bharat Kumar Regmi, Under Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whereas the British Ministers were accompanied by other high-level officials. Kamal Thapa had arrived in London on April 27, 2016.

### **Nepal signs Paris Agreement<sup>78</sup>**

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Thapa signed on the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change during the historic high-level signature ceremony convened by Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on April 22, 2016. The Signature Ceremony was followed by two parallel sessions for national statements of the State Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), during which Thapa delivered Nepal's national statement. Later, the Deputy Prime Minister also co-

chaired one of the sessions for national statements, together with the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden. On the sidelines deputy prime minister met with Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

### **UNESCO Director General Bokova visits Nepal<sup>79</sup>**

UNESCO Director General Irina Gueorguieva Bokova visited Kathmandu on April 17, 2016 on the invitation of Nepal Government to observe post-earthquake recovery process and visit Lumbini—the birthplace of Lord Buddha during her three-day stay.

### **Oli calls Modi, condoles Kerala temple deaths<sup>80</sup>**

Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli held a telephone conversation with his Indian Counterpart Narendra Modi on April 12, 2016. According to aide to Prime Minister Oli, he rang up his Indian counterpart to express his sadness over the loss of lives and property in a massive fire at Puttingal Devi Temple in Kerala. Sources close to PM Oli said no political issues were discussed. This was the first telephone conversation between the two prime ministers after Oli's visits to India and China.

### **Prime Minister Oli expresses grief over loss of life and property in Japan<sup>81</sup>**

Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli has expressed deep condolences and sympathy to his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe over the loss of lives and destruction of property due to the devastating earthquakes that hit Kyushu island and Kumamoto prefecture of Japan on April 14 and 16, respectively.

### **International rights bodies criticise government for intimidating NHRC<sup>82</sup>**

International human rights organisations have asked the government of Nepal to immediately stop the intimidation and harassment of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and respect its independence in line with international standards. The call comes in reference to Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's act of "summoning" NHRC office bearers "to seek clarification" over a statement by NHRC Commissioner Mohna Ansari during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the human rights at UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in mid-March. "The attempts to intimidate the NHRC are a direct contradiction of the United Nation's Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (the Paris Principles) as well as Nepal's constitution," Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) said in a statement on April 14, 2016. PM Oli on April 3 had summoned NHRC Chief Commissioner Anup Raj Sharma, Commissioner Ansari and other office bearers to seek clarification over the NHRC statement during the UPR. In the statement delivered at the UPR, Ansari had highlighted a host of issues including discriminatory citizenship provisions in the new constitution, continued failure to properly investigate into alleged unlawful killings and excessive use of force during protests in the Tarai in 2015, violations of the economic, social, and cultural rights of earthquake victims and the need for credible transitional justice for conflict victims. Ansari had also stated that deaths of 55 people during the Tarai protest were due to excessive use of force. During his meeting with NHRC officials, PM Oli had objected to Ansari's statement, saying "it was a biased statement and it defamed the state".

## Pakistan

### India-Pakistan hold foreign secretary level meeting in New Delhi<sup>83</sup>

The foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan met on April 27, 2016 in New Delhi. During the meeting, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, raised the issues of Jammu and Kashmir and the capture of an Indian intelligence officer in Balochistan. Indian Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar underscored the importance of speeding up the Pathankot investigations and arresting the culprits New Delhi had identified. India raised the issue of Masood Azhar, who it describes as the mastermind behind the January 2 attack on an Indian air force base in Pathankot, and now wants listed as an international terrorist at the UN. Jaishankar conveyed to his Pakistani counterpart that there was need for an early progress in the Pathankot investigation and the trial of suspects behind the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai. According to Indian media reports, he also firmly rebutted Islamabad's allegations of New Delhi's involvement in Balochistan and other areas. According to the Pakistan High Commission, the meeting provided a useful opportunity to exchange views on recent developments in the bilateral context. The Pakistan foreign secretary conveyed concern over efforts by the Indian authorities for the release of the prime suspects of the Samjhauta Express blasts of 2007 in which 42 Pakistanis had lost their lives.

### Two fishermen held over 'RAW links' in Karachi<sup>84</sup>

The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of police claimed on April 16, 2016 to have arrested two fishermen over their alleged links to the RAW. Acting on a tip-off, the police detained Saddam Husain and Mohammed Bachal in the Shah Bander area in Thatta, said CTD Investigation SSP Naveed Khowaja. He added that the suspects revealed that they had been persuaded by another Pakistani fisherman, Mohammed Khan, to work for RAW in return for permission to fish in Indian waters and money. The two suspects entered India through Shah Bander and met RAW operatives, Kiran and Arjun, at the Bhuj police station. They were provided a camera and tasked to take pictures of sensitive installations of Pakistan Navy and Coast Guards in Thatta and Karachi. SSP Khowaja said that between 200 and 300 employees of the local government department had links with the Indian intelligence agency. Police had written a letter to the LG department to provide details of such employees, he added.

### Arab, ASEAN diplomats briefed on "RAW's work"<sup>85</sup>

Continuing its diplomatic offensive against India on spy agency RAW's involvement in Pakistan, the Foreign Office of Pakistan briefed diplomats from Arab and Asean countries on April 15, 2016 and called upon New Delhi to stop interference for regional peace and stability. Immediately after disclosure about Jadhav's arrest, the FO had briefed diplomats from European Union countries and five permanent members of the UN Security Council. During the briefing, the FO statement said, "it was emphasised that in order to achieve regional peace and stability, it was imperative that India immediately stops its interference in Pakistan and resolves all contentious issues, including the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, through the process of sustained dialogue". The diplomats were also reminded of "RAW using Iranian soil" for its activities in Balochistan.

### **“India violates LoC ceasefire”<sup>86</sup>**

According to the Pakistani media, Indian troops violated ceasefire along the Line of Control on April 9, 2016 by resorting to heavy firing and shelling, said a press release issued by the Inter Services Public Relations on April 10, 2016. “Indian troops on the LoC resorted to heavy unprovoked firing and shelling in Neza Pir sector last night,” the ISPR said. However, no loss of life or injury was reported in the firing which continued for about five hours. “Pakistan Army troops befittingly responded to Indian unprovoked firing and shelling,” the ISPR said. The director general of military operations of the Pakistan Army contacted his India counterpart on hotline on April 10 against the backdrop of the ceasefire violation, the ISPR said. “Issues relating to the ceasefire violation across the LoC were discussed” during the hotline contact.

### **Spy’s body handed over to India<sup>87</sup>**

The body of an Indian spy, who died in Jinnah Hospital on April 11, was handed over to Indian authorities at Wagah on April 19, 2016. According to the Pakistani media, Kirpal Singh, 50, had crossed over to Pakistan on February 29, 1992, and was arrested on charges of involvement in a bomb explosion and spying. He was sentenced to death by a court of law. Later, the Lahore High Court (LHC) acquitted him of the bomb explosion charges but didn’t commute the death sentence. Singh was admitted to the hospital on April 11, after he reported severe chest pain. He died there later.

### **India’s N-submarine test to impact region’s strategic balance: Pakistan FO<sup>88</sup>**

The government has expressed concern over the latest Indian test of a submarine capable of firing nuclear ballistic missiles, saying the “act will impact the delicate strategic balance in the region”. At a weekly press briefing on April 21, 2016, Foreign Office spokesman Nafees Zakaria said that the test of the nuclear-propelled submarine was a “serious development” resulting into “nuclearisation of Indian Ocean”. As such, the event is a “worrisome development” for the region and the international community. The spokesman pointed out that the ballistic missile test conducted by the submarine was not notified to Pakistan.

### **Pak-China partnership to ensure regional peace: Sartaj Aziz<sup>89</sup>**

Member of the Politbureau of the Communist Party of China Zhang Chunxian made a visit to Pakistan and met Prime Minister’s Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif. Enhancement of cooperation between the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Pakistan, including at the provincial level, was discussed at the meeting between Zhang and Aziz. Matters of mutual interest, regional stability and measures to enhance defence and security collaboration were discussed during the meeting between the Chinese leader and the COAS. Zhang also met National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq.

### **Adviser Sartaj Aziz meets Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing<sup>90</sup>**

Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on April 27, 2016. He visited China to attend the fifth

Foreign Ministers Meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). During the meeting Sartaj Aziz and Wang Yi reviewed the Pakistan-China bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international developments. They expressed satisfaction at the pace of progress on implementation of agreed projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). They agreed that CPEC is an economic game changer for the region and would contribute to the objective of evolving a community of shared destiny by bringing benefits to not only Pakistan and China but to the entire region.

### **President of Mauritius visits Pakistan<sup>91</sup>**

President of Mauritius Dr. Bibi Ameenah Firdaus Gurib-Fakim made a four-day official visit to Pakistan on an invitation of President Mamnoon Hussain. She was accompanied by a nine-member delegation.

### **Pakistan and Turkey to broaden bilateral cooperation<sup>92</sup>**

President Mamnoon Hussain joined leaders of the Muslim world at opening session of the thirteenth summit of the 56-member OIC, being hosted by Turkey, from April 14 to 15, 2016. On the sidelines of the Summit, President Hussain met Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on April 14. During the meeting both the leaders agreed to enhance cooperation between Pakistan and Turkey in diverse areas, including defence, economy, energy, infrastructure and science and technology. They noted that terrorism was a huge threat and there was a need for a joint strategy to tackle this menace. They were unanimous that the countries from Muslim world should address their differences through talks. The similar view on the threat of terrorism was also expressed during the meeting between Turkish parliamentary delegation led by Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) Ismail Kahraman and President Mamnoon Hussain in Pakistan on April 12, 2016

### **Italy offers cooperation in fight against terrorism<sup>93</sup>**

Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni said that Italy was prepared to extend cooperation to Pakistan in counter-terrorism efforts because both countries were on the same page in the fight against terrorism. At a joint press conference with Adviser to Prime Minister Sartaj Aziz at the Foreign Office of Pakistan on April 21, 2016, Gentiloni said that Italy and Pakistan had a defence agreement in place since 2009 and were exchanging expertise and sharing information about the fight against terrorism.

### **Second round of bilateral consultations between Pakistan and Algeria<sup>94</sup>**

The second round of bilateral political consultations between Pakistan and Algeria was held in Islamabad on April 28, 2016. Mohammad Waheed-ul-Hasan, Special Secretary for Middle East and Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led the Pakistan side while Boumediene Guennad, Head of Asia and Oceania Bureau of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed the Algerian delegation. The two sides reviewed the entire gamut of Pakistan-Algerian bilateral relations.

### **IMF wants Pakistan to curtail development spending by Rs 360 billion<sup>95</sup>**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Pakistan to curtail its overall development budget by Rs 360 billion (almost 24 per cent) of allocations to limit

the fiscal deficit. According to documents released after approval of Pakistan's tenth quarterly review by its executive board, the IMF expected the government to limit its overall development programme to Rs 1.155 trillion against Rs 1.513 trillion allocation approved by parliament and the four provinces. The latest IMF estimates are based on discussions between its officials and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar in the first week of March in Dubai. The estimates are in line with disbursements reported to have been made by the Planning Commission.

### **Pakistan Navy hands over command of counter-piracy force to Singapore<sup>96</sup>**

Pakistan Navy (PN) has handed over Command of Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151), Counter-Piracy Force to Singapore Navy at change of command ceremony held at Combined Maritime Forces HQs, Bahrain. According to a press release of Pakistan Navy issued on April 1, 2016, Rear Admiral Zahid Ilyas handed over the command to Rear Admiral Cheng Kwok Chien. The command handing over ceremony was attended by Chief of Singapore Navy and ambassadors from various countries.

### **Anti-ship missile tested<sup>97</sup>**

Pakistan Navy conducted a successful test launch of a shore-based anti-ship missile, Zarb, in the Arabian Sea on April 9, 2016. The weapon launched from the coastal site successfully engaged the target.

### **Pakistan to get six medical aircraft from US<sup>98</sup>**

Pakistan will receive six new medical evacuation aircraft from the United States, the US Department of Defence has announced. The department issued a \$14.9 million, fixed-price contract to Cessna Aircraft Company on April 21, 2016 for making two Cessna 208B Grand Caravan EX aircraft and four Cessna T-206H Stationair aircraft for Pakistan. The contract includes sustainment support and associated training. The aircraft will be modified for aeromedical evacuation. The aircraft will be built at Wichita, Kansas, and delivered by December 30. This contract is 100 per cent foreign military sales to Pakistan.

### **Pakistan urges world community to do more to counter drug menace<sup>99</sup>**

Pakistan has called upon international community to do more to counter the menace of narcotics in all its forms, saying it is possible through better coordination and cooperation between the member countries. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly's special session on 'World Drug Problem', Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan decried the emerging trend of legalising drug use and said it would "give a fillip to drug demand thus igniting the supply chain having direct fallout on our region."

### **Afghan Taliban says team in Pakistan not for peace talks<sup>100</sup>**

Afghan Taliban formally confirmed on April 27, 2016 that a delegation from their political office in Qatar was visiting Pakistan and promised "fruitful results", but rejected the impression that the group was there to discuss participation in peace talks with Kabul. Muhammad Naeem, a Qatar-based spokesman for the Taliban,

told journalists that Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour had instructed the group to visit Pakistan. He said the visit “would be in the interest of both countries and would have fruitful results”. This was first official confirmation by the Taliban of the visit of a three-member delegation from their Doha office, whose arrival was earlier reported by the media. The delegation includes Shahabuddin Dilawar, Jan Muhammad and Mullah Abbas. The arrival of the group, which coincided with the visit of US Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Jonathan Carpenter, led to speculations that the Taliban leaders had come to talk about the start of the peace dialogue. The Taliban spokesman, however, said that the delegation was in Pakistan for talks on wide-ranging issues, including refugees’ matters, problems in Helmand, Nangarhar and Paktia provinces of Afghanistan, and seeking an end to restrictions on the movement of Taliban leader Mullah Baradar. Meanwhile, Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhry, responding to a media question about the visit of Taliban leaders from their Qatar office, said he had no information about the trip.

### **Pakistan signs Paris Agreement<sup>101</sup>**

Pakistan is strengthening its institutional structures to step up action to stave off the most drastic effects of climate change, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan told the international community at the United Nations. Speaking after the signing of the Paris climate agreement at the UN General Assembly, he said Pakistan would establish a climate change council and climate change authority, adding that more than five per cent of its annual budget was allocated to climate change activities.

### **“Pakistani media among freest in Asia”: Reporters Without Borders<sup>102</sup>**

Journalists in Pakistan are targeted by extremist groups, Islamist organisations and the country’s feared intelligence agencies, according to a report released on April 20, 2016. But Reporters Without Borders, which formulated the report, also noted that media in Pakistan were “among the freest in Asia” in covering “political squabbles”. The group, which is better known by its French acronym RSF, ranked Pakistan 147<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in its latest world rankings for press freedom. This is a 12-place gain from the previous year, when Pakistan was ranked 159<sup>th</sup>.

## **Sri Lanka**

### **Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe visits China<sup>103</sup>**

At the invitation of Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, Ranil Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, paid an official visit to the People’s Republic of China from April 6-9, 2016. During the visit, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe called on Xi Jinping, the President of the People’s Republic of China. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe held talks with Li Keqiang, and met with Zhang Dejiang, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress. The leaders of the two countries had an in-depth exchange of views in a warm and friendly atmosphere and reached broad consensus on China-Sri Lanka relations as well as on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

### **US - Sri Lanka trade and investment framework council adopts action plan to boost bilateral trade<sup>104</sup>**

Sri Lanka's Minister of Development Strategies and International Trade Malik Samarawickrema led a delegation to the 12<sup>th</sup> US-Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council Meeting on April 28, 2016 in Washington DC. The meeting was Co-chaired by United States Trade Representative Michael Froman and Sri Lanka Minister of Development Strategies and International Trade Malik Samarawickrama. United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Samantha Power participated as well, encouraging the Sri Lankan government to continue its vital progress on democracy, accountability, and human rights. With a goal of significantly increasing two-way trade and investment between the United States and Sri Lanka, the two governments adopted a U.S.-Sri Lanka Joint Action Plan to boost trade and investment. During his visit to Washington, Minister Samarawickrama met with several US investors and addressed a business roundtable discussion hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce. Minister also met with several members of US Congress, including Representative David Price, Representative Steve Chabot and Representative Joe Crowley. Prior to the commencement of the US-Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Framework Council Meeting, Minister Samarawickrama held a bilateral meeting with Ambassador Michael Froman, US Trade Representative.

### **IMF reaches staff level agreement with Sri Lanka on US\$ 1.5 billion EFF<sup>105</sup>**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on April 28, 2016 that it has reached a staff level agreement with Sri Lanka on a three-year US\$ 1.5 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). Todd Schneider, IMF mission chief for Sri Lanka, announced that following discussions held between IMF staff and the Sri Lankan delegation led by Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake during the 2016 Spring Meetings in Washington, a staff-level agreement was reached on a three-year program to be supported by the IMF's EFF. The agreement will be subject to completion of prior actions and approval by the IMF's Executive Board, which is expected to consider Sri Lanka's request in early June. Formal approval of the EFF is expected to catalyse an additional US\$ 650 million in other multilateral and bilateral loans, bringing total support to about US\$ 2.2 billion (over and above existing financing arrangements).

### **EU lifts ban on Sri Lanka's fish exports<sup>106</sup>**

The European Commission lifted the ban it imposed on Sri Lanka's fish exports last year after evaluating the progress made in complying with the European Union requirements Sri Lanka needs to fulfill to get the ban lifted on April 21, 2016.

### **Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Harsha de Silva visits Japan<sup>107</sup>**

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Harsha de Silva made an official visit to Japan. During the visit, the deputy minister had bilateral discussion with his counterpart Hitoshi Kikawada, Parliamentary vice Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Deputy Minister also met with Takayuki Ueda, Vice-Minister for International Affairs, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) of Japan. Madam Yuko Obuchi, Secretary General of Japan-Sri Lanka Parliamentary League called on the

deputy minister during the visit and they discussed on the areas of mutual interest. The deputy minister also met with Hideaki Domichi, Senior Vice President of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Satoshi Shimomura, Executive Vice President, and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and Norihiro Kono, President of Japan Information Technology Services Industry Association (JISA) and briefed on the favorable investment climate in Sri Lanka and invited foreign direct investments. Deputy Minister attended the meeting arranged by Haruo Tanabe, Managing Director of Hitachi Corporation. The discussion was focused on advancing the metro transportation and connectivity in the country.

### **Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera meets his Australian counterpart<sup>108</sup>**

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera reaffirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to further consolidate the longstanding and enduring relations with Australia for mutual benefit, when he met Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop on April 6, 2016 in Sydney. Minister Samaraweera was in Australia from April 4-6, 2016 on an official visit as a guest of the Australian Government. This was the first visit to Australia by a Sri Lankan Cabinet Minister since the new government was appointed following parliamentary elections in 2015. During his visit to Australia the Foreign Minister also met the Australian Minister for Trade and Investment Steven Ciobo and the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton.

### **Swedish foreign minister visits Sri Lanka<sup>109</sup>**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margot Wallström made a three-day official visit to Sri Lanka from April 24-26, 2016 at the invitation of her Sri Lankan counterpart Minister Mangala Samaraweera. During the meeting with the President at the Presidential Secretariat on April 25, Minister Wallström discussed in detail ways to strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. In the meeting Wallström assured President Sirisena to provide her government's assistance to Sri Lanka to regain the GSP+ facility.

### **American official visits Sri Lanka<sup>110</sup>**

Special Coordinator for the US Department of State Office of Global Criminal Justice Todd Buchwald and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Manpreet Anand concluded a visit to Sri Lanka, during which they met with government and political leaders and civil society from across the country to hear their thoughts on the reconciliation process, the US Embassy in Colombo said on April 6, 2016.

### **Harsha de Silva meets members of German-South Asia parliamentary friendship group<sup>111</sup>**

Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Harsha de Silva, received Members of German-South Asia Parliamentary Friendship Group at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 7, 2016, who were on an official tour from April 6-9, 2016 in Sri Lanka. The delegation comprised of parliamentarians representing the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Union.

### **Chief of defence staff of Sri Lanka visits New Delhi<sup>112</sup>**

Chief of Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Kolitha Aravinda Gunatilleke came to New Delhi on April 4, 2016 on a four-day official visit as he looks to deepen bilateral ties between both countries.

### **India, Lanka exchange letters on housing for Central, Uva provinces<sup>113</sup>**

India and Sri Lanka exchanged letters on April 1, 2016 to construct 4000 houses in the Central and Uva Provinces under a community driven-model as the third phase of the Indian Housing Project in Sri Lanka. The letters were exchanged by Y.K. Sinha, High Commissioner of India and P. Thigambaram, Minister of Hill Country New Villages, Infrastructure and Community Development. As per the agreement, 4000 houses will be constructed through the Estate Workers Housing Cooperative Societies (EWHCS).

### **The Ceylon Chamber leads delegation to South Africa, Zambia and Rwanda<sup>114</sup>**

A nine member Sri Lankan business delegation, led by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, visited South Africa, Zambia and Rwanda from April 3-13, 2016 to explore commercial opportunities in those countries. The mission was supported by the Sri Lanka High Commission in South Africa, the Durban Chamber of Commerce, Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce, ANC-PBF South Africa, Honorary Consul General for Sri Lanka in Zambia, Finance Bank PLC of Zambia, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Zambia, Zambia Development Agency, Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry of Zambia, Private Sector Federation of Rwanda, High Commission of Rwanda in New Delhi and the Honorary Consul General for Rwanda in Sri Lanka.

### **Sri Lanka signs the Paris Climate Accord<sup>115</sup>**

Sri Lanka joined 170 other countries in the world in signing the landmark Paris climate accord to set in motion a plan to reduce global warming on April 22, 2016. Sri Lanka's Minister of Science, Technology and Research Susil Premajayantha signed the agreement on behalf of the Sri Lankan Government.

### **Speaker Karu Jayasuriya leads delegation to Pakistan<sup>116</sup>**

Speaker of the Sri Lanka Parliament Karu Jayasuriya, who led a 40-member delegation of parliamentarians, monks, civil servants and academicians on a week-long cultural visit to Pakistan, called on the Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain on April 21, 2016 at his official residence in Islamabad.

### **Minister Ratnayake participates at the UNGASS on 'World Drug Problem'<sup>117</sup>**

Sri Lanka's Minister of Law and Order and Southern Development Sagala Ratnayake addressing the UN General Assembly on April 20, 2016 highlighted the need for all international actors to come together to combat the world drug problem. Assuring Sri Lanka's fullest cooperation to all international efforts to combat the world drug problem, the Minister briefed the Assembly on the steps that Sri Lanka has taken in its national capacity to address this issue. Minister Ratnayake led the Sri Lanka delegation at the UN General Assembly Special Session

(UNGASS) on 'World Drug Problem', which was in Session from April 19 to 21, 2016 at UN Headquarters in New York. Minister Ratnayake was also a lead speaker in a side event organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). On the sidelines of the event, Minister Ratnayake held discussions with Arun Jaitely, Minister of Finance of India, K. Shanmugam, Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Minister of Interior and Narcotics Control of Pakistan and Salamat Azimi, Minister of Counter Narcotics, Afghanistan. Dr. Rohan Perera, Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations and Prof. Ravindra Fernando, Chairman of the National Dangerous Drugs Control Board of Sri Lanka participated at the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on 'World Drug Problem' and also accompanied the Minister at the bilateral meetings.

### **Sri Lanka warns lethal autonomous weapons threat to global stability<sup>118</sup>**

Sri Lanka has cautioned that the potential military advantages of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) would risk proliferation and thereby lower the threshold of the rules of warfare, undermining regional as well as global stability. Sri Lanka also alerted on the risk of non-state actors gaining access to such weapons and the potential breach of cyber security in the autonomous technology used in weapons systems. Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Ravinatha Aryasinha, made these observations during an intervention by Sri Lanka at a five day Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) which commenced on April 11, 2016 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

### **UK, Sri Lanka discuss opportunities for defence engagement activities<sup>119</sup>**

The newly appointed UK non-resident Defence Advisor for Sri Lanka, Captain Stuart Borland, visited Sri Lanka in the third week of April. At the invitation of the Sri Lanka Navy, he and Deputy High Commissioner Laura Davies toured the Naval and Maritime Academy (NMA) in Trincomalee. In Colombo, Captain Borland accompanied the High Commissioner to Sri Lanka James Dauris, to meetings with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the Commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Captain Borland also accompanied a delegation from the UK Ministry of Defence, led by Deputy Head of International Policy and Plans (Military) Patricia Parkin, to meetings with representatives from the ministry of defence, civil society and the diplomatic community.

### **Sri Lanka to set up fisheries and aquatic research development center with China's support<sup>120</sup>**

Promoting China- Sri Lanka cooperation, China has offered assistance to establish a Fisheries and Aquatic Research Development Center associated with the Matara-Mirissa Fishery Harbor in the south, Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development Mahinda Amaraweera said. A five- member delegation from China led by the Deputy Administrator of State Oceanic Administration of China, Zhang Hongsheng recently visited Sri Lanka in order to make observations regarding the proposed facility.

### **Sri Lanka, India navies hold 26<sup>th</sup> IMBL meeting<sup>121</sup>**

The Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) in a statement said the 26<sup>th</sup> International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) meeting between the representatives of Navies and Coast Guards of Sri Lanka and India was held onboard SLNS Sagara at the Indo-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Line off Kankasanthurai on April 28, 2016. The Sri Lankan delegation headed by Commander Northern Naval Area, Rear Admiral Piyal De Silva comprised Deputy Director General of Sri Lanka Coast Guard Commodore Kassapa Paul and nine naval officers. The Indian delegation was headed by Rear Admiral Alok Bhatnagar along with eight Indian naval officers. Both delegations consisted of officers specialised in diversified fields.

### **Sri Lanka discusses maritime security with Malaysia<sup>122</sup>**

At the invitation of Prime Minister of Malaysia Dato Seri Mohamed Najib Bin Abdul Razak, a Sri Lankan defence delegation led by the State Minister of Defence, Ruwan Wijewardene participated in the 15<sup>th</sup> Defence Service Asia Exhibition and Conference held in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia on April 21, 2016. During the visit, Rear Admiral Travis Sinniah and Commander Chathura Gamage, who represented the Sri Lanka Navy, called on the Deputy Chief of Malaysia Navy, Vice Admiral Ahmad Kamarulzaman and held discussions on matters of bilateral importance and maritime security related issues pertinent to both countries. The Sri Lankan delegation also comprised of Chief of Defense Staff, Air Chief Marshal Kolitha Gunathilaka and senior officers from the tri-forces.

### **French naval ship arrives at Sri Lankan port on goodwill visit<sup>123</sup>**

The French Navy frigate 'Aconit' arrived at the Port of Colombo on April 29, 2016 on a goodwill visit. The Commanding Officer of the Ship, Captain Laurent Machard De Gramont paid a courtesy call on the Commander Western Naval Area, Rear Admiral Jayantha De Silva at the Western Naval Command headquarters in Colombo.

### **High ranking US Navy official visits Sri Lanka<sup>124</sup>**

Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, Pacific (SOCPAC) Rear Admiral Colin J. Kilrain concluded his four-day visit to both the Maldives and Sri Lanka, from April 20-23. During his visit, Rear Admiral Kilrain discussed the future role both the Maldives and Sri Lankan security forces could play in humanitarian assistance, responding to natural disasters, and increased security cooperation operations.

### **Bilateral meeting between Sri Lanka and the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet<sup>125</sup>**

Sri Lanka and the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet have enhance bilateral cooperation following talks between senior military leaders from the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet and the Sri Lanka Navy and Air Force, the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet said in a statement. Both sides met to discuss operational topics aboard the fleet's flagship USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) during its visit to Sri Lanka. Sixteen officials from Sri Lanka Navy and Air Force attended the bilateral meeting hosted by 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, designed to share knowledge and discuss lessons learned within the Indo-Asia-Pacific.

### **Sri Lanka Navy divers training with U.S. Navy in Guam<sup>126</sup>**

A twenty member Sri Lanka Navy diving squad underwent diving training with the US Navy sailors from the Explosive Ordinance Disposal Mobile Unit (EODMU) 5 in Guam. The ten day combined military to military Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) training commenced on April 7, 2016.

### **Indian Navy's first training squadron arrives at the Port of Colombo<sup>127</sup>**

Sri Lanka Navy in accordance with naval traditions welcomed the arrival of Indian Navy's first training squadron comprising Indian Naval Ship (INS) Tir, INS Sujatha and Coast Guard Ship ICGS Varuna, at the Port of Colombo on April 15, 2016 on a training visit. Indian Naval officials, Captain C.R. Ayyar, Commander S. Muthukrishnan and Commandant ICGS Varuna, B. Ranjan called on the Deputy Area Commander Western Naval Area, Commodore Senarath Wijesuriya at the Western Naval Command Headquarters in Colombo and held discussions on matters of mutual interest and bilateral importance.

### **Sri Lanka conveys condolences over earthquake in Ecuador<sup>128</sup>**

The Sri Lankan Government extended condolences to the family members of those killed in the devastating earthquake in Ecuador on April 17, 2016. "The Government and people of Sri Lanka are deeply saddened by the tragic loss of many lives caused by the sudden earthquake in Ecuador on April 17," the Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

### **Sri Lankan President condoles with Japanese earthquake victims<sup>129</sup>**

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, in a message to Emperor Akihito of Japan expressed his deepest condolences and sympathies to the victims of the earthquake that struck the Kumamoto Prefecture in Japan on April 14 and 16, 2016.

### **Widespread impunity continued in Sri Lanka: US human rights report<sup>130</sup>**

While the Sri Lankan government arrested a number of military and police personnel and other government officials implicated in human rights violations, widespread impunity continued last year for the crimes committed during the armed conflict and other crimes committed following the end of the conflict, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices published by the U.S. Department of State said.

### **UK commends improvement in the overall human rights situation in Sri Lanka<sup>131</sup>**

While Sri Lanka continues to be named within the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Annual Human Rights Report as one of the 30 'Human Rights Priority Countries' (HRPCs), the report released on April 21, 2016 commended the improvement in the overall human rights situation in Sri Lanka in 2015. While commending the improvements, the report also noted that some concerns still remain in Sri Lanka, where the UK has serious human rights concerns and hopes to engage positively to develop human rights performance.

### Sri Lanka improves significantly in press freedom last year<sup>132</sup>

The annual World Press Freedom Index for 2016 compiled by Paris based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and released on April 20, 2016, ranked Sri Lanka 141<sup>st</sup> out of 180 countries. Sri Lanka's rank improved 24 notches from 165<sup>th</sup> place it earned in 2015 as the score declined from 60.28 in 2015 to 44.96 this year, on a 0-100 scale with 100 being the worst.

### Former LTTE leaders arrested in relation to the discovery of suicide kits<sup>133</sup>

Defence Secretary Karunasena Hettiarachchi said that a group of former LTTE leaders were arrested in relation to the investigations into the discovery of a stock of explosives and a suicide jacket in the North in March. Speaking to the BBC, the defence secretary said Police Terrorist Investigation Division arrested the former LTTE leaders based on the investigations conducted into the discovery of the suicide kits. When asked whether there is a threat of LTTE resurging, the official said he cannot make any comment on that until the investigations are finished. However the defence secretary stressed that Sri Lanka's national security has not been threatened under any circumstance. "We currently do not have such a threat but if there is such a situation we will be vigilant," he said. The police during a raid on a house in Chavakachcheri in the northern Jaffna peninsula last month, found a suicide kit, four claymore mines, three parcels containing around 12kg of TNT, 2 packets of 9mm ammo (100 bullets) and 2 battery packs used to detonate the claymore mines.

### Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial Council passes resolution on federalism<sup>134</sup>

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) controlled Northern Provincial Council (NPC), with a majority vote passed a bill on April 22, 2016, which called for the merger of the North and East into a federal Tamil speaking unit.

### Sri Lanka's economy grew 4.8 per cent in 2015<sup>135</sup>

Real economic growth in Sri Lanka marginally declined in 2015 registering a growth rate of 4.8 per cent, compared with 4.9 per cent in 2014 while the budget deficit increased from 5.7 per cent of GDP in 2014 to 7.4 per cent of GDP in 2015, significantly overshooting the government's original target of 4.4 per cent of GDP. "The economic growth declined due to a slowdown in the growth of demand in Sri Lanka's traditional export markets impacting the growth of the export sector while a strengthening US economy prompted short term capital outflows", the Central Bank said in its Annual Report for the Year 2015.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "28 Dead, 327 Wounded in Kabul Suicide Attack", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 20, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=15040](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=15040). "UN Chief Calls for Unified Global Response to Terror Threat", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 21, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=15051](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=15051). "Come to Negotiating Table, White House Urges Taliban", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 21, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=15050](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=15050).
- <sup>2</sup> "HPC Optimistic Over Peace Talks with Hizb-E-Islami", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 18, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=15018](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=15018). "Ghani Aide Warns Anti-Peace Rebels of Decisive Action", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*,

- April 14, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=14983](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=14983).
- <sup>3</sup> "ANSF Still Waging Jihad, Defending Afghanistan, Region, World against Terror: Ghani", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 28, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=15107](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=15107).
  - <sup>4</sup> "ANSF Committed to Human Rights Laws: Govt", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 18, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=15016](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=15016).
  - <sup>5</sup> "Foreign Help Needed to Advance Peace Talks: Rabbani", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 10, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=14940](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=14940). "Kerry Aims to Ease Crisis over Unity Pact", *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, April 10, 2016, at [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=14941](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=14941).
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