

ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 01-15 OCT 2017

CHINA (CONTINENTAL)

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

China: After Mao and Deng, Xi may be named mentor in Communist Party's statute.



China's Communist Party is set to mention President Xi Jinping as a mentor in the party constitution, an honour reserved so far for Communist stalwarts Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Two past presidents, Jiang Zeming and Hu Jintao, who jointly ruled for two decades, have not been mentioned by name in the party constitution.

The party is holding its five-yearly congress, which will elect the new generation of leaders, from October 18. Xi is widely expected to be confirmed as party general secretary and the country's president for a second five-year term. A communique issued after the seventh plenary session of the party's 18th central committee, which met for four days till October 14, mentioned the philosophies propounded by past presidents, such as Jiang's concept of "Three represents" and Hu's idea of adopting a "scientific outlook" towards development. But they have not been mentioned by name, as in the cases of Mao and Deng. The rare honour has now gone to Xi.

The latest move feeds speculation that Xi might even be declared the party's "chairman" for life, which has been Mao's special position. Analysts are divided on whether this will happen during the next party congress, scheduled to begin on October 18, or at a much later date. At the same time, it is now clear that Xi has largely suppressed small pockets of resistance within the party and emerged much stronger.

The move comes days before the first Asian tour by US President Donald Trump, who will also spend three days in China discussing hotspot issues like the South China Sea and trade differences. China confirms will amend party constitution, likely to include Xi's theories.

Beijing: China's ruling Communist Party has agreed to amend the party constitution, expected to embed President Xi Jinping's political thought, ahead of next week's five-yearly party congress in which Xi will further tighten his grip on power.

The party's Central Committee, the largest of its elite ruling bodies, on Saturday passed a previously announced proposal to amend the constitution which will now be put to the Congress for formal approval. A lengthy communique released by the party via state media offered praise for the past five years under Xi's leadership, especially success in the fight against corruption, but did not say what wording would be inserted into the party constitution.

A key measure of Xi's power will be whether he manages to have his name "crowned" in the party constitution, elevating him to the level of previous leaders exemplified by Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory. Xi's more recent predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, both had the party constitution amended to include their guiding thoughts, but without their names directly attached.

Jiang has his "Three Represents," which embraced private entrepreneurs, written in, while Hu, Xi's immediate predecessor, had his economic doctrine of "scientific development" included.

The party has been pushing Xi's "Four Comprehensives," which refer to China working "comprehensively" to build a moderately prosperous society and strengthen reforms, rule of law and party discipline, as well as the "Four Greats", which focus on party building and national rejuvenation.

The four-day Central Committee plenary meeting also approved reports by the party's corruption watchdog of investigations into several former senior officials who have been sacked or jailed for graft, including Sun Zhengcai, once a contender for top leadership who was expelled from the party last month.

VIETNAM

Col Harpreet Singh

New Tibet Highway. China has recently opened a major expressway connecting Lhasa and Nyingchi — the two most important cities in Tibet. The 409-km toll-free expressway cuts Lhasa-Nyingchi travel time from eight to five hours at a speed limit of 80 km per hour. It has been built at a cost of \$5.8 billion.



Comments. While the move is ostensible to add to the "tourist attractions" to the region, it could easily serve as a strategic advantage for China, which could use the expressway to transport military personnel and equipment closer to Indian borders, especially near Arunachal Pradesh. It could also be viewed as the newest move by China to ramp up its presence along its border with India, where it might be looking to employ salami tactics to gain more ground from India. The new expressway was inaugurated barely a couple of weeks after China talked of a highway and a proposed railway line in Tibet. These, combined with the newly-unveiled expressway could mean India may be staring at yet another standoff along this border.

Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of the Naval Staff visits Vietnam. Admiral Sunil Lanba, PVSM, AVSM, ADC, Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of the Naval Staff visited Vietnam on a bilateral visit from 04 to 07 October 2017. The visit aimed to consolidate cooperation between the Armed Forces of India and Vietnam and also to explore new avenues of defence cooperation.

During his visit, the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of the Naval Staff held bilateral discussions with His Excellency, Mr Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Hon'ble Prime Minister of Vietnam, His Excellency, General Ngo Xuan Lich, Hon'ble Defence Minister of Vietnam, Senior Lieutenant General Phan Van Giang, Chief of General Staff and Vice Minister of National Defence, Vietnamese Armed Forces, and Rear Admiral Pham Hoai Nam, Commander-in-Chief of the Vietnam People's Navy. In addition to holding important bilateral discussions, the Admiral will also visited the National Defence Academy of Vietnam, where he interacted with student officers and faculty members and delivered a talk on the 'Importance of Maritime Power'. He also visited Vietnam People's Navy 'Naval Region 4' and Vietnam Naval Academy.

Giang said that the Indian Admiral's visit is a vivid symbol of Vietnam-India comprehensive strategic partnership, contributing to fuelling the friendship and promoting mutual understanding between the two armies and peoples. He stressed that this visit is particularly important as both sides are celebrating the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the 10th anniversary of strategic partnership. For his part, Sunil Lanba affirmed that defence cooperation is one of the significant pillars in the comprehensive strategic relations between the two countries.

Both sides evaluated bilateral defence collaboration in the past years. They said that fields of cooperation have been extended and deepened like delegation exchange, education and training, peacekeeping activities of the United Nations as well as coordination in regional and international forums. They agreed that the two armies need to maintain and enhance delegation exchange to effectively carry out inked agreements, which include a joint vision statement on bilateral defence relations in the 2015-2020 period. Defence dialogue mechanism at the deputy ministerial level, defence industry and training cooperation should be paid due attention, they underlined. They expressed their belief that the bilateral defence relations will be deepened, bringing benefit for the two people and for peace, sustainability, cooperation and development in the region and the world.

Comments. India has historical linkages with Vietnam that dates back many centuries, though the countries established formal diplomatic relations in 1972. Defence cooperation between India and Vietnam has been robust with the primary focus being Maritime Cooperation. India signed a Protocol on Defence Cooperation Agreement in 1994. The partnership was thereafter elevated to Strategic Partnership in 2007 and a MoU on Defence Cooperation between the countries was signed on 05 November 2009. A 'Joint Vision Statement for 2015-20' was signed by the respective Defence Ministers in May 2015 and the Strategic Partnership was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2016, during the visit of the Hon'ble PM to Vietnam.

The Indian Navy cooperates with the Vietnam People's Navy on many issues, which include operational interactions, training and exchange of Subject Matter Experts in various fields through the medium of Staff Talks. The Vietnam People's Navy also participates in the 'MILAN' inter-Navy interactions organised at Port Blair by the Indian Navy. Warships from Indian Navy have been regularly visiting ports at Vietnam. The Vietnamese Navy ship Dinh Tien Hoang, a Gepoard Class Frigate, also visited Visakhapatnam in February 2016, for participation in the 'International Fleet Review - 2016'. The Indian Army and Air Force also maintain robust cooperation with the Vietnamese Army and Air Force. Officers from the Vietnamese Army and Air Force undergo training at various Indian defence training institutes including National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College. Both the Services also carryout exchanges of Subject Matter Experts and pursue a structured cooperation mechanism through the medium of Staff Talks of their respective Services. The visit will further strengthen Indo-Vietnam ties.

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

North Korea crisis: Tillerson says diplomacy will continue: 16 Oct 2017



US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has insisted President Donald Trump wants to resolve the confrontation with North Korea through diplomacy. Sanctions and diplomacy, he said, had brought unprecedented international unity against North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. Last month, Mr Trump told Mr Tillerson not to waste time seeking talks with Kim Jong-un.

In recent months, North Korea has defied international opinion by conducting its sixth nuclear test and launching two missiles over Japan. Analysts say the secretive communist state is clearly set on developing a nuclear-capable missile, able to threaten the continental US, despite UN sanctions. At the end of last month, **Mr Tillerson disclosed that the US was in "direct contact" with the North** and looking at the possibility of talks.

China backs Pakistan, wants US to recognise Islamabad's efforts to combat terrorism. Amid mounting US pressure on Pakistan to rein in terror groups, China backed its all-weather ally and said Washington should "give full recognition" to Islamabad's "active efforts" to combat terrorism.

"Pakistan is at the forefront of the fight against terrorism," the Chinese foreign ministry said, reacting to Chairman of the **US Joint Chiefs of Staff** Gen Joseph Dunford's remarks that Pakistan's spy agency **ISI** has connections with terrorist groups and Islamabad should change its behaviour. Over the years, Pakistan has made active efforts to combat terrorism and made huge sacrifices to combat terrorism, the ministry said in a written response to a question from PTI about Gen Dunford's comments. US Defence Secretary **James Mattis** told a **House Armed Services Committee** that the US has asked Pakistan to change its behaviour and Washington will "try one more time" to work with Islamabad to end its support for terrorists.

CHINA (MARITIME)

Capt Ranjit Seth

South China Sea Situation is Cause of Concern: Navy Chief. Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sunil Lanba while speaking at a maritime conference in Goa Integrated Ocean Governance and the Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region, expressed concern over the situation in the South China Sea. He stated that 'territorial sovereignty' of island states and nations had been ignored by some nations. He emphasised that oceans should remain "free and secure for legitimate use" by countries if economic growth was to continue. "Shared ownership cannot be loosely interpreted into unquestioned resource plundering. Preserving the fragile ecosystem, ensuring its sustenance for the common good and respecting the territorial sovereignty of all littorals is also a collective responsibility that may be conveniently ignored by a few."

He pointed out that India's strategic positioning in the Indian Ocean Region was a "tremendous opportunity", but also meant that India had a greater role to play in the region. He also stated that there was a need for oceans to remain free and secure for legitimate use by all nations and that when conflicts between maritime states arose they should be resolved through established conflict resolution mechanisms. "However, narrow, over-nationalistic attitudes at times tend to undermine such mechanisms as seen in part in the South China Sea or the Korean peninsula. This remains a cause of concern for all of us. A sinister nexus also appears to be emerging between various forms of maritime crime such as terrorism, piracy, drug smuggling, gun running and large scale illegal fishing".

INS Kiltan Commissioned at Visakhapatnam. The third of four indigenously built Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) stealth corvettes 'INS Kiltan' under Project 28 (KAMORTA Class) was commissioned into the Indian Navy by Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam on Monday. The ship derives its name from one of the islands in Aminidivi group of Islands in Lakshadweep.

It is the second ship with the same name. The first INS Kiltan was of the erstwhile Petya Class built in USSR, and had an illustrious service from 30 October 1969 to 30 June 1987. It had participated as Task Force Commander in 'Operation Trident' during 1971 Indo-Pak war.

The new INS Kiltan is indigenously designed by the Indian Navy's Directorate of Naval Design and built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata. It is 109 meters in length and 14 meters at the beam and is powered by four diesel engines that give it a speed in excess of 25 knots and an endurance of 3450 nautical miles. The propulsion and auxiliary systems generate very low radiated underwater noise, a *sine qua non* for anti-submarine warfare. Enhanced stealth features have been achieved by 'X' form of Hull, full beam superstructure, inclined ship sides and use of Infra-Red Signature Suppression (IRSS) system for cooling the Engine exhausts. About 81% of the ship is indigenous and it is well equipped to fight in Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) warfare conditions.

The ship is manned by 13 officers and 178 sailors with Commander Naushad Ali Khan at the helm as her first Commanding Officer. Upon commissioning, the ship would join the Eastern Fleet.

PAKISTAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

[Hafiz Saeed Sends Khawaja Asif Defamation Notice](#). A legal team on behalf of the chief of the banned Jamaatud Dawa (JuD), Hafiz Saeed sent a Rs100 million defamation notice to Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif for his remarks at the Asia Society forum in New York. Asif, who told the forum that Pakistan was not to blame for militant outfits in the country, had said: "Don't blame us for the Haqqanis [the Haqqani Network] and don't blame us for the Hafiz Saeeds [referring to the head of banned Jamaatud Dawa]. These people were your darlings just 20 to 30 years back. They were being dined and wined in the White House and now you say 'go to hell Pakistanis because you are nurturing these people'."

Comments. Saeed was put under house arrest at his residence in Lahore's Johar Town earlier this year in what Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) termed "a policy decision". The ministry said that Saeed was put under house arrest under the anti-terrorism laws to keep him from collecting funds which is a violation of various resolutions of the United Nations. The ministry pointed out that various cases were registered against members of JuD for collecting hides during the three days of Eidul Azha in contempt of the ministry's orders. The ministry also mentioned in its reply that the Election Commission of Pakistan had asked the JuD's political wing Milli Muslim League's (MML) NA-120 by-poll candidate to remove Saeed's pictures from the promotional posters.

The CPEC Plan for Pakistan's Digital Future. A radical overhaul of Pakistan's communications framework appears to be on the cards as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The plan envisioned to span up to 15 years, starting in 2016 and concluding in 2030. includes intentions for a revamped communications framework, which includes components such as a fibre optic cable connecting Pakistan and China, a new submarine landing station for internet traffic flow, and digital TV for all. The most critical component is a new, upgraded fibre optic cable network which spans Pakistan and crosses the border to connect directly with China. The cross-border optical cable will start from China's Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County and travel 135km to connect to Pakistan. It will then pass through Khunjerab and travels 125km to the town of Sust in Gilgit-Baltistan. The cable then further travels 650km to link to Islamabad from where the new cable could link to Pakistan's existing network.

Comments. The new network is likely to be beneficial to Pakistan by improving internet penetration and increasing speed, especially in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, regions where internet connectivity has ranged from poor to non-existent. Additionally, linking with the rest of the world through China, it will help reduce Pakistan's dependence on undersea cables that carry the country's internet traffic.

Intelligence Bureau Accused of 'Protecting' Terrorists by One of its Own Spies. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) of Pakistan has been accused by one of its own spies of "protecting" terrorists. A serving assistant sub-inspector of IB, ASI Malik Mukhtar Ahmed Shahzad, has accused his senior officers of not taking action against terrorism suspects and filed a petition before the Islamabad High Court (IHC) requesting it to refer the matter to the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) for a thorough probe. The petitioner has claimed that certain high officials of the IB themselves are directly involved with the terrorist organizations having linkages with hostile enemy intelligence agencies. The petitioner has also said that the senior IB officials also facilitate Afghan nationals in getting Pakistani nationality.

Comments. As expected the IB regretted that information about the bureau's secret targets and missions could not be disclosed, since it would become a public document if brought to court. It however appears to be a case of a tug of war between ISI and IB as earlier also during the conduct of a probe against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, an interim report submitted to the apex court by the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) had hinted that military-led intelligence agencies were not on good terms with IB, and alleged that the bureau was hampering their investigation.

Pakistan Attempts to Restart Afghan Peace Process. Pakistan is trying to restart the quadrilateral peace process for ending the Afghan war and has asked the group members to meet in Muscat, Oman, on Oct 16. Afghanistan, the United States, China and Pakistan are members of the group. The Quadrilateral Cooperation Group first met in January 2016 and has had five sessions so far, the last being held in May 2016 in Murree.

Comments. The process was plagued by problems from the beginning. First the Taliban refused to join it unless given the same status as the Afghan government. When they were persuaded to attend, relations between Kabul and Islamabad strained. Despite these concerns, all four members of this group want some peace in Afghanistan and are likely to participate in the Muscat meeting. But instead of sending their senior officials, as they did to the last five meetings, they are likely to send mid-level officials to prepare for future talks.

IRAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra_

United States President Donald Trump launched a tougher strategy to check Iran's regime and warned that a landmark international nuclear deal could be terminated at any time. Trump stopped short of withdrawing from the 2015 accord, but decertified his support for the agreement and left its fate in the hands of Congress. Trump ordered tougher sanctions on Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps and on its ballistic missile programme. Legislators now have a non-binding 60-day period to debate the accord and decide whether to re-impose sanctions, which would put the deal at risk. Trump had already recertified the deal twice since his inauguration in January. But his move on Friday means that Congress can now restore sanctions withdrawn under the 2015 agreement, or introduce new ones within 60 days of the current certification expiring. The threat of new sanctions has drawn criticism from Iran, which has threatened to withdraw partially or completely from the deal if new penalising measures were imposed. Trump's speech put him at odds with US allies in Europe, as well as Iran and Russia, with leaders saying they would stick by the landmark pact.

Comments. Trump's move does not immediately pull the US out of the deal but pushes action to the Republican-controlled US Congress. Trump stopped short of designating the powerful military faction a global terror organisation, but his announcement of targeted sanctions is still likely to trigger an angry Iranian

response. Trump's tough-guy approach could yet risk undoing years of careful diplomacy and increasing Middle East tensions.

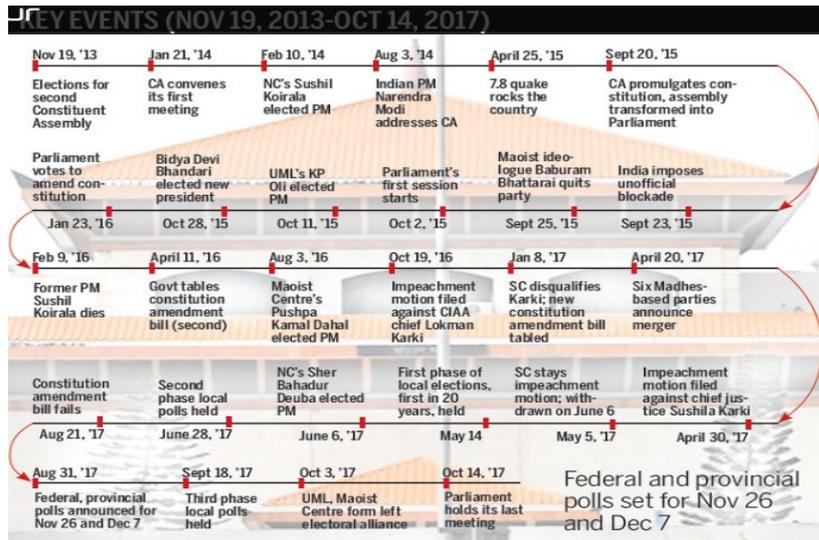
Iran and Iraq to Hold Joint Border Drills. The Iranian and Iraqi armies will hold joint drills at several crossings on Iran's border with the autonomous Iraqi Kurdish region, according to officials. The announcement came amid rising tensions in the wake of a controversial secession referendum in Iraq's Kurdish region, where almost 93 percent of voters backed a split from Baghdad. The Iraqi defence ministry has said it planned to take control of the borders "in coordination" with Tehran and Ankara, without indicating whether Iraqi forces were to move towards the external border posts controlled by the KRG from the Iranian and Turkish side. Iraq also imposed a ban on international flights into its Kurdish region, ordering foreign airlines to suspend travel to the airports in the cities of Erbil and Sulaimaniyah.

Comments. The poll was strongly opposed by Iraq and its powerful neighbours Iran and Turkey amid fears it would provoke separatists among their own Kurdish population. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has refused to hand over control of its border crossings to the Iraqi government, as demanded by Iraq, Iran and Turkey in retaliation for the referendum.

NEPAL

Brig HS Cheema

Nepal Constituent Assembly – Turned Parliament Completes Term. The Legislature-Parliament held its last meeting on 14 Oct, four years after it was elected as the Constituent Assembly in a precursor to the country's journey towards federal democracy, which is expected to complete after the two polls in November and December. Key Events of Nepal Parliament is given below:-



India Imposes GST on Nepali Ginger. Ginger worth Rs5 million has been stranded in Mechi Customs Office after Indian customs officials imposed goods and services tax of 5 percent on the Nepali spice. Nepali traders have long been exporting fresh ginger to India. Fresh ginger is exempt from goods and services tax introduced by India in June. But Nepal has long been exporting fresh ginger as ‘dry ginger’, which attracts goods and services tax in India. If India decides to impose the tax on Nepali ginger, the entire sector will collapse; India is the major market for Nepali ginger. Almost 94 percent of the spice exported to India is fresh and the rest is processed ginger. Ginger is grown on more than 23,800 hectares of land across the country. As per the statistics of the Ministry of Agricultural Development, the country produced 242,546 tonnes of ginger in the fiscal year 2015-16, 60 percent of which was exported. If India continues to create these kinds of barriers, exports of Nepali agricultural products to India will suffer.

Long-time Adversaries Form a Leftist Coalition Altering the Pre-election Landscape. In a most unexpected development, the Communist Party of [Nepal](#) (Unified-Marxist Leninist), the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist-Centre) and the Naya Shakti Party (NSP) have agreed to form a Left coalition to contest provincial and federal elections later this year. They have also formed a coordination committee that will work towards their unification into a single leftist party after the elections. This marks a major shift in Nepal’s polity because the status-quoist UML and the radical Maoists have been at loggerheads for decades and have differed on significant issues — in particular, state restructuring after the Constituent Assembly elections of 2008 and 2013. While these parties worked together along with other political forces in the run-up to abolishing the monarchy, there has been little love lost between them over the past decade.

But the Maoists have also undergone a series of splits during this period. Hard-line sections led by Mohan Baidya ‘Kiran’ and Netra Bikram Chand branched off to form their own parties, while Baburam Bhattarai, who preferred greater parliamentary engagement and was unflinching on the state restructuring demand, also left the parent party. So far the UML has been steadfast in opposing greater federalisation, basing its argument on the principle of national unity, while the Maoist-Centre has changed positions depending on the prevailing power equations to suit its chairman, and ex-Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’.

For the Nepali Congress, the new Left alliance will be a difficult adversary to overcome, and it would have to strive to bring other centrist forces under its own “democratic” alliance. The Madhesi parties, however, may well be left in the lurch.

Expedite Nationality Verification, India Tells Bangladesh. India has urged Bangladesh to expedite verification of nationality for early repatriation of Bangladeshi nationals found staying in India illegally. Bangladesh was also requested to launch a crackdown against Indian insurgent groups. India’s request was conveyed by BSF to BGB during the 45th DG-level talks between the two border guarding forces. The

BSF is under pressure from the Border States to push back illegal migrants caught on the Indian side. The 25-member BGB delegation, led by Maj Gen Abul Hossain, interacted with their Indian counterparts on issues related to border management and other affairs for the 4,097-km Indo-Bangladesh border. The BSF delegation was led by Director General KK Sharma.

MYANMAR

Brig HS Cheema

Rohingya Crisis. All Myanmar refugees to be shifted to mega camp: Bangladesh on 05 Oct announced it would build one of the world's biggest refugee camps to house all the 800,000-plus Rohingya Muslims who have sought asylum from violence in Myanmar. The arrival of more than half a million Rohingya Muslims from Buddhist-dominated Myanmar since August 25 has put an immense strain on camps in Bangladesh where there are growing fears of a disease epidemic. Hard-pressed Bangladesh authorities plan to expand a refugee camp at Kutupalong near the border town of Cox's Bazar to accommodate all the Rohingya. Two thousand acres (790 hectares) of land next to the existing Kutupalong camp were set aside last month for the new Rohingya arrivals. But as the number of newcomers has exceeded 500,000 -- adding to 300,000 already in Bangladesh -- another 1,000 acres has been set aside for the new camp. The human tragedy unfolding in southern Bangladesh is staggering in its scale, complexity and rapidity, it is tuning into the world's fastest developing refugee emergency.

Refugees Fleeing Myanmar say Myanmar Army Redoubling Push to Clear Villages. Rohingya refugees arriving in Bangladesh amid a fresh exodus from strife-torn Myanmar have described whole villages being emptied and thousands marching to the border as security forces redouble efforts to drive remaining Muslims from their homes. More than 500,000 Muslim Rohingya have fled ethnic bloodshed in Myanmar in the past month and numbers are again swelling, with Bangladesh reporting 4-5,000 civilians now crossing the border each day after a brief lull in arrivals. An estimated 10,000 more have reportedly massed in Myanmar near a crossing point into Bangladesh. The spike in new arrivals -- prompted by what Rohingya say is a fresh drive to purge Muslims still in westernmost Rakhine state -- casts doubt on a Myanmar proposal aired in second week of Oct to start repatriating the persecuted minority. Rakhine has been emptied of half of its Rohingya population in weeks, and more are on the move as insecurity presses them to leave villages that have so far been spared the worst of the violence ripping through the state.

US on Myanmar: 'Crackdown Could Draw int'l Terrorists' Myanmar's military crackdown that has caused a half-million Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh could destabilise the region and invite international terrorists, the US State Department. Addressing the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Patrick Murphy, a senior US official for Southeast Asia, said security forces were to blame for a "disproportionate response" to Rohingya insurgent attacks six weeks ago. He equivocated on whether it amounted to ethnic cleansing, preferring instead to describe the situation as a "human tragedy." That drew objections from lawmakers. "We identify this as full-fledged ethnic cleansing," said Rep. Ed Royce, the Republican committee chairman. Senior UN officials have used similar language. "Burma's nascent democracy is at a turning point and a heavy-handed response invites international terrorists and challenges for other neighbours," He said the Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief of Myanmar's armed forces, "has enormous responsibility to stop the violence" and address security threats in a "proper manner." But he added that there are other contributors to the violence, including Rohingya militants and vigilantes -- a reference to Buddhist thugs who have also attacked Rohingya. Engel said satellite imagery and witness accounts indicate that Myanmar's military and security forces "have

been carrying out an intentional, systematic policy to drive Rohingya from their homes in Burma and to burn their villages to the ground.”

ISRO to Set up Research Centre in Guwahati: CM Sonowal. ISRO would set up a research centre in Guwahati for start-ups, academicians, environmentalists and entrepreneurs. The CM made this assertion after holding a meeting with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman A.S. Kiran Kumar at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in the city. ISRO is setting up such an exclusive research facility in Assam to explore the possibility of using geospatial technology, which includes data generated through Global Positioning System (GPS), Geographical Information System (GIS) and Satellite Remote Sensing for expediting development of Assam and using the remote sensing technology for accurate flood warning system, prevention of soil erosion and landslide besides others.

AFGHANISTAN

Brig Deepak Malhotra

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has decided to "drastically reduce" its presence in Afghanistan after a series of deadly attacks on its staff this year in which seven ICRC staff were killed and three others were kidnapped. Officials from the charity say the assessments are ongoing and could not say how many of its 1,800 staff would be affected. Monica Zanarelli, the head of delegation for the ICRC, said that the decision will affect mostly the northern part of the country, where facilities in Kunduz, Faryab, and Balkh provinces would be closed or downsized.

Comments. The ICRC has been working in Afghanistan for the past three decades, but attacks against them have escalated, with seven killed this year so far. It reaches to tens of thousands of vulnerable people in remote areas. The announcement underlines the deteriorating security for aid groups in Afghanistan, with the rise of **Taliban** and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, known as ISIS).

RUSSIA

Col Harpreet Singh

Kaspersky Hacking. An Israeli security agency hacked into Russian antivirus firm Kaspersky Lab in 2015, providing the crucial evidence required to ban the company from providing services to the US government. While the Israeli spies were inside Kaspersky's systems, they observed Russian spies in turn using the company's tools to spy on American spies. That information, handed to the US, led to the decision in September to end the use of the company's software across the federal government by December.

Kaspersky vehemently denies any involvement in Russian state-sponsored hacking. “Kaspersky Lab was not involved in and does not possess any knowledge of the situation in question. Kaspersky Lab has never helped, nor will help, any government in the world with its cyber-espionage efforts, and contrary to erroneous reports, Kaspersky Lab software does not contain any undeclared capabilities such as backdoors as that would be illegal and unethical”.

Israel’s hacking of Kaspersky reportedly occurred in the same period Kaspersky publicly acknowledged that it had been targeted by a “state actor”. Kaspersky said the malware used in the attack was derived from the Stuxnet virus.

Comments. The revelation answers some questions about the unfolding saga around Kaspersky Lab, a previously well-regarded information security firm founded in 1997 by Russian national Eugene Kaspersky. It seems to demonstrate why the US believes Kaspersky Lab software was involved in the hacking of an NSA contractor in 2015, as well as narrows down the nature of Kaspersky Lab’s supposed involvement in the Russian operation. But it still leaves many further questions unanswered. Crucially for Kaspersky, the Israeli hack apparently failed to provide enough information to determine whether it was a willing, or even knowing, participant in the Russian espionage.

The Russian government exercises tight control over domestic and foreign high-tech industries operating within its borders. In June 2017, it began demanding the source code for certain software imported, ostensibly to search for “backdoors” inserted by foreign intelligence agencies. In practice, it’s widely believed that the Russian security agency scans the source code for undisclosed vulnerabilities it can use to improve its own hacking prowess.

In the tangled web of spies spying on spies, it can be difficult to take any statement at face value. The Israeli security community has long had a tense relationship with Kaspersky Lab, dating back to the company’s research on Stuxnet, a specialised piece of malware created by the US and Israel to harm Iran’s nuclear industry. In fact, the highly sophisticated Israeli hacking operation that targeted Kaspersky appears to have used the same malware that was used to spy on the Iran nuclear negotiations in 2014 and 2015. At the time Kaspersky researchers disclosed that dozens of machines in its networks had been infected by the Duqu 2.0 spyware, which appeared to be attempting to access research and information, and which Kaspersky staff described at the time as being a “generation ahead” of anything they had seen before. Although there was no concrete proof until now, Kaspersky suspected Israel of being behind the attack, not least because the same malware was being used to target the P5+1 talks on Iran’s nuclear programme. Kaspersky researchers also found that the work schedules of the Duqu attackers suggested they were physically located in or near to Israel.

The latest revelations over Israel’s electronic espionage activities appear to have come closer to joining the dots linking a series of Israeli cyber-spying and cyberwar operations dating back to at least 2011, beginning with the use of Stuxnet.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

President Trump's State Address on Iranian Nuclear Accord. On 13 Oct 17, President Trump announced US strategy on the Iran's nuclear accord (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) which was signed by Iran with P5+1 nations in 2015 after very hectic and lengthy negotiations. Now, it has fallen foul with America which claims that accord is heavily biased towards Iran and has not succeeded in curtailing Iran's aggressive and hostile designs. Trump as per US laws is required to certify every 90 days to the US congress that Iran is scrupulously following the provisions of the accord to continue with the relief from US sanctions. Trump has decided to withhold this certificate.

President Trump in his state address has told that he has decided to impose sanctions on Iran once again as Iran has not mended its ways and despite the accord has continued to support the terror groups in the Middle east, follows an aggressive missile programme, has been encouraging the strife in Yemen and Syria, has on two occasions violated the accord by producing more than 130 tons of heavy water which is barred by the accord and not only has Iranian regime intimidated the IAEA inspectors and it even collaborated with North Korean regime which is now threatening the US and its allies with nuclear strike.

President Trump has decided to authorize the treasury department to impose sanctions on the Iranian Islamic Guards, its officials, agents and affiliates whom he alleges have links with the terrorists and terror regimes. Now as per US laws, Congress is to consider and decide on the issue in next 60 days.

As is seen from the above, that much is due to President Trump's own sensitivity to the issue. But, it is not supported by the facts. IAEA inspectors who routinely carry out the inspection of the Iranian Nuclear installations has categorically held several times that Iran is following the provisions of the nuclear accord therefore, for American president to think differently is preposterous when it is supported with evidence. Iran's claims that its missiles are for self defence and as far as Iran's opposition to US ally Israel and its support to Hamas or Hezbollah is concerned, this was known even when the nuclear deal was negotiated, similarly it had possessed missiles even before the accord which could target Israel. Hence, no new evidence against Iran has surfaced thus the American stand on Iran's nuclear deal is not justified.

In view of wider criticism of the Trump's plan, It is felt that congress which has 60 days to decide on the issue will not accede to President's view and may decide contrary to his position particularly as none of the other participants of the nuclear deal has concurred with the Trump's view.

India is in precarious situation. We have close and historical relations with Iran. It is one of the major source of energy import as well as it has given access to its Char Bahar port which India is developing to gain access to strategically important Central Asian region and Afghanistan. It is hoped that US congress takes the divergent view which will help to maintain a peaceful environment in the West Asia and not push Iran to take aggressive posture which probably is one of the cause for the North Korean pursuing the dangerous nuclear path now.